

OUR TEXT

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 *Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.*

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in our sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

IS IT REASONABLE?

Let's face it – to claim that someone actually died, was buried and then came back to life just a few days later defies credibility. We have nothing with which to compare it and no scientific evidence to show it would even be possible. It makes a nice story, but it falls better into the realm of fiction than of fact.

It should not surprise us that Corinthians of two millennia ago, or Americans of today, would consider the claim of Christianity that Jesus rose from the dead as implausible, if not impossible. Nor should it surprise us that most feel that those who believe such a claim have been handed a load of spiritual antiseptic that less needy people should wisely disregard.

Paul speaks to this in verse 12. He had preached to them that Christ had risen from the dead, and on the basis of this preaching, those now in the church had put their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Yet they were questioning whether resurrection from the dead was possible. To this, Paul says you can't have one without the other – you can't be a Christian and yet deny that resurrection from the grave can happen!

THE TESTIMONY OF RENEWAL

I maintain, along with Steven Um who wrote a commentary on 1 Corinthians called “The Word of the Cross”, that even if one does not believe in the resurrection, one would want it to be true. He writes: *“Believing in the resurrection provides the context and understanding for desiring a greater or better world. If this life is all there is, what incentive or motivation would one have to try to work for a greater or better world. The message of the resurrection is that this world matters.*

We love the resurrection of our earth every spring from a wintry wasteland to a burst of new life. And we appreciate every morning the resurrection of a dark night to a bright day of opportunity. We might mourn the burial of a seed, but we celebrate the new growth of a seedling. A fire or flood destroy, but from the ashes and the muck always comes fresh growth. You see, the miracle of resurrection is all around us in nature, shouting and assuring with inaudible voice that something once dead and gone can be brought back to life again. And in this never-ending cycle of seasons, days and life we find hope for renewal.

IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED

Paul goes on to correctly reason in verse 13 that if there is no possibility of resurrection, then Christ has not been raised. And from this follows an avalanche of accompanying results. Here they are in v. 14-19: If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then ...

1. Our preaching is a waste. Every sermon on hope in Christ has been an effort in futility.
2. Your faith is in vain. Every belief in hope of sins forgiven and hope of heaven is shattered.
3. You are false witnesses of God – since you are sharing what is untrue.
4. Your sins are unforgiven. Christ did not keep his promise so you are bound for hell
5. Dead Christians have perished. All Christian memorials of hope were full of lies.
6. You are most to be pitied – for your life has been wasted in believing a lie

You see, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave was indeed a spectacular confirmation of His Deity and almighty power. But it was so much more than that. If Christians fail to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, everything falls apart – preaching, our faith, missions work, forgiveness of sins, hope of heaven and a life of that has any credibility. Timothy Keller describes the resurrection as “the hinge upon which the story of the world pivots.” No resurrection – no hope beyond this life.

IF CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED

But ... if God in Christ has indeed orchestrated and accomplished the seemingly impossible of His resurrection, then the opposite is true ...

1. Bible preaching is essential
2. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world
3. Our missionary sharing changes lives for eternity
4. Our sins are indeed washed away
5. There is heavenly life beyond this life, and
6. Our Christian lives are God’s critical voice in the wilderness of this broken world

THE BIGGER PICTURE – OUR RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is far more reaching than even many believers understand. Included in the doctrine of Jesus’ resurrection is that all believers will be raised bodily in the future. Our faith in the resurrection essentially “hangs on to the coattails of Jesus” and our bodily resurrection is assured when Jesus comes back for his own, at the time commonly called “the rapture.” The Apostle’s Creed declares: “I believe in ... the resurrection of the body.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16 *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout; with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*

We will learn about our bodily resurrection later in this 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians. But also in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians we learn that we will receive a body in the afterlife.

2 Corinthians 5:1-3 *For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.*

God’s intention for our future in heaven is not that we would be disembodied souls floating about, but that we would live with Him forever as whole persons – whole in body, mind and spirit. And this belief has profound implications for how we should live our lives today – caring for body, mind and spirit because our body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own. For you have been bought with a price; Therefore glorify God in your body.*

William Barclay, in his 1 Corinthians commentary, notes rightly four things that the resurrection proves, which should influence the way we live our lives.

1. **Truth is stronger than falsehood.** Jesus came to speak the truth, and for this He was killed (John 8:40). But His resurrection shows that God preserved the truth and did not allow it to die in the grave.
2. **Good is stronger than evil.** Jesus was good (God) incarnate, but good could not be killed. Rather, evil was defeated that day and the moral force of the universe swung in full favor of God’s eternal goodness.
3. **Love is stronger than hatred.** The resurrection is the triumph of love over all that hatred could do. “God so loved the world ...” and that love triumphed the day that Christ rose.

4. **Life is stronger than death.** If Jesus had died, never to rise, it would have proven that death could take the best that ever lived and silence that life forever. But life conquered death – forever.

THE BIGGER PICTURE – OUR CHANGED WORLD

Science fiction writers love telling stories about time travel into the past. And the storyline often goes that something fairly insignificant is changed in the past, and there are huge ripple effects for the future. And if time travel were possible, we could see how this would be true. Imagine now if a hugely significant event, such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ, were eliminated – how that would change the course of history dramatically.

In 2007, an ardent Christian author named Dinesh D'Sousa wrote what became a New York Times bestselling book for months. It was called What's So Great About Christianity? – written for a large audience of skeptics and believers alike. In regards to our topic and Scripture of today, it might have just as well have been titled, “What If There Was No Resurrection?”

To summarize briefly, he argues that if there was no resurrection, thus no Christianity, then ...

1. The present major religious force in the world would not exist
2. Faith in anything intangible would be declining and atheism would be on the rise
3. Liberty, human rights and democracy would no longer be the benchmark of our civilization
4. The idea that fallible people matter and deserve dignity would have died under oppression
5. Science alone would be telling us who we are and from where we have come
6. Philosophy would teach all that miracles are impossible and that truth is relative, not absolute
7. We would grow up believing that God, if existing, could not be found or known in relationship
8. Slavery of all kinds would be globally accepted as the norm, and acceptable behavior
9. Females would be forever in subjection to the male species
10. Survival of the fittest and removal of the weak would become the norm

This horrible picture of our world without the intervention of Jesus Christ and His resurrection should motivate and even scare you to seek and serve God and His Son Jesus, even if nothing else will.

SUMMARY

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead has profound rippling implications, both theologically, morally and sociologically. In our passage of the day, Paul argues that the entire basis of the Christian faith collapses if there was no resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, our hope of anything beyond this life collapses. And further yet, the moral and sociological fabric of our world changes into something totally foreign to what we now know.

The Holy Spirit living in the millions of believers around the globe for centuries has held back the forces of darkness from totally devastating the moral fabric of our society. Hear what Paul, speaking to the Thessalonian church about the “Man of Lawlessness” who we take to be the devil himself, says:

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 *And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.*

We take “he who now restrains” to be none other than the Holy Spirit living in each believer. Thus the effects of “if no resurrection” and its potential consequences have been restrained and minimized.

Believe in the resurrection – that of Jesus and that of yourself as a believer. Know that the power of the resurrection extends into the fabric of your life and into our society far more that you might ever have imagined. Praise God for the improbable, implausible, incredible but absolutely miraculously true RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE GRAVE. Because if no resurrection . . .