

“THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST”

“What If There Had Been No Easter?”

Scripture Reading – I Corinthians, 15:3-8; 12-22

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born...

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’

I Peter, 1:3, NIV

Have you ever heard of the escapologist Harry Houdini?

His claim to fame was that he was a magician who specialised in spectacular escapes. He was so good that he laughed at locks and sneered at chains. They said of Harry that he had the flexibility of an eel and the nine lives of a cat. They did all kinds of things to try to trap him. They sealed Houdini in a coffin, but he escaped. They riveted him into a boiler, but he escaped. They sowed him up inside canvas bags, but he escaped. They locked him in a large milk churn, but he escaped. They sealed him in an empty beer barrel, but he escaped. They even put him in a maximum-security prison, but Harry Houdini managed to get out.

On 31 October 1926, death finally laid its hands on Harry Houdini.

C:\ My Documents\Word\Ministry\David Ellison\
Festivals\Easter\The Resurrection of Christ\What If There Had Been No Easter?

They put him in a grave – from where he is yet to escape. He told his wife before he died that if there was any way out of the grave he would find it and would return to her on the anniversary of his death. For ten years she kept a candle burning under his portrait in their home, but on the tenth anniversary of his death, she finally turned out the light. Death had firm hold of Harry Houdini, and he could not escape.

The Bible tells us that death laid its hands on the Lord Jesus Christ.

They placed Jesus in a tomb. A large stone was rolled in front of the mouth of the cave, and the seal of the Roman government secured it. But on the third day, death no longer had any hold over Jesus, and he arose from death. He left the grave clothes that were wrapped around him like a butterfly would forsake a cocoon, and Jesus passed through the walls of that tomb and out into the sunrise of an Easter morning. The stone was not rolled away to let Jesus out. It was rolled away to let the disciples in to see that Jesus Christ was no longer bound by death.

Jesus Christ is alive!

He is not in a tomb in history. He is before us sitting on a throne. But suppose that had not happened. Suppose death still held on to Jesus like it holds on to Harry Houdini. Then what?

“IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED”

What if there had been no Resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Apart from the fact that there would be no Easter eggs, unless Cadbury's and the other manufacturers found another way to sell us over-priced decorated chocolate, Paul gives us six tragic consequences if there had been no Easter – no Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ...

PREACHING WOULD BE PROFITLESS

‘If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless.’

I Corinthians, 15:14, NIV

The word Paul uses for ‘USELESS’ is ‘KENOS’, it means ‘IN VAIN’ or ‘EMPTY’.

If there was no Easter back then, then we are all wasting our time by being here today. If there was no Resurrection, I have wasted many a long Friday (morning, afternoon, and evening) and sometimes some of Saturday (supposedly my day off) preparing sermons for preaching to you. If there was no Resurrection, you are wasting your time listening to me, and we really should go and do something of value instead of wasting all this precious time.

Why would preaching be profitless if there was no Easter?

The purpose of preaching is to preach the Gospel. Whilst most Christians are aware that the Gospel is good news, if you asked some Christians, they could not tell you what the Gospel is. Paul tells us that we cannot preach the Gospel if we do not preach about the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those preachers who stand up today and express their doubts that Jesus was raised from the dead should get out of the pulpit and find another job. If you do not believe that Jesus Christ came out of the grave, your Gospel is empty, futile, worthless.

'For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.'

I Corinthians, 15:3-5, NIV

FAITH WOULD BE FOOLISH

'If Christ has not been raised... your faith [is useless].'

I Corinthians, 15:14, NIV

You are putting your trust in something that does not deserve trust.

The difference between Jesus Christ and the founders of other religions is that they lived, they died, and they are still dead. Only the Christian can look at the founder of his faith and say that Jesus lived, he died, and he rose again! Personally, I would not want to follow a loser! Jesus is the only one who was victorious over death.

'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.'

Romans, 10:9-10, NIV

We do not serve a dead Saviour – a dead Saviour saves no one!

To trust someone who has not triumphed over death is to trust in someone who cannot give us any assurance whatsoever that there is life eternal and there is a heaven.

'The teacher gave her students an assignment to write an essay on the world's greatest living man. Some children wrote about members of the Royal Family. Some wrote about the Prime Minister and other leading politicians. Some wrote about people in entertainment, philosophy, science, or sport. One young boy wrote about Jesus. When the teacher read his essay, she quietly asked him if he had not understood the instructions she had given. But he said, "Jesus is alive. That is what the minister said in Church on Easter Sunday morning).'

THE DISCIPLES WOULD BE DECEIVERS

'More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.'

I Corinthians, 15:15, NIV

The word Paul uses is 'PSEUDOMARTUS'.

'PSEUDO' means FALSE' and 'MARTYR' means 'WITNESS'. If Jesus has not been raised, the disciples are false witnesses. A false witness is someone who goes into a court of law and deliberately, knowingly, willingly, tells lies. A false witness is someone who knows the truth but instead tells a lie.

Paul is convinced that he is not a 'PSEUDOMARTUS'.

When the apostles testified to the Resurrection of the Christ, they knew that their testimony was based on a sure and firm experience. They testified to what they knew to be true. Jesus had appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. Jesus appeared to more than five hundred believers at the same time. He appeared to James, then all the apostles, and last of all to Paul himself (on the Road to Damascus). Paul was not a false witness, he was an eyewitness. He had met with the Risen Lord Jesus.

'We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.'

I John, 1:3, NIV

'PSEUDOMARTUS' and 'MARTUS' are not made of the same stuff.

Hypocrites and witnesses do not have the same experience – and their testimony is also different. It is said that a man may live for a lie, but very few of them will die for one! Most of the apostles sealed their testimony with their lives. Was the apostle Paul duped? Was Peter a liar? Was John a rascal? Did these men pull off the world's greatest conspiracy? Common sense says "NO", but it is a "YES" if you do not believe in the Resurrection.

SIN WOULD BE SOVEREIGN

'If Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins.'

I Corinthians, 15:17, NIV

If Jesus was still in the grave, the penalty for sin would not be paid.

The Bible states that our sin and iniquity was placed on Jesus. We understand that when Jesus cried out on the cross, "IT IS FINISHED". The penalty for sin had been "PAID IN FULL" – the Greek word 'TELESTAI'. But what if the payment had not been accepted or credited to your account? When God raised Jesus up, it was proof positive to us that full payment had been made and accepted by the righteousness of a Holy God.

The Resurrection was heaven's stamp of approval.

That Jesus died for us is unimportant unless he also rose from the dead. If there is no Resurrection then there is no Saviour. If there is no Saviour, there is no forgiveness. If there is no forgiveness, there is no justification. If there is no justification, there is no cleansing. If there is no cleansing, we are still under the penalty for sin which means we are destined for death and hell. The Resurrection was God's stamp of approval and authenticity upon the full payment for our sins. It assures us that we are justified.

'He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.'

Romans, 4:25, NIV

Living, he loved me; dying, he saved me. Buried, he carried my sins far away.

Rising, he justified, freely for ever. One day he's coming, O glorious day!

J Wilbur Chapman, SACS 185

DEATH WOULD HAVE DOMINION

‘Those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.’

1 Corinthians, 15:18, NIV

Without the Resurrection, death has won and life means nothing.

This would mean that your mother, your father, your children, your loved ones, they are all dead and gone. You have no hope of ever seeing them again. They would be in the grave to rot and decay. We would be people who lived life without hope, for what hope can there be if we get sicker and sicker until we die and then are placed in the grave to decay?

Without the Resurrection, there can be no comfort at the grave.

If God's plan was for us to be born crying, to live complaining and then to die disappointed, then what could we possibly say to anyone at the graveside who is weeping and mourning the loss of a loved one? There would be absolutely nothing we could say that could bring comfort and hope to the grieving.

Christians and pagans were buried side-by-side in Rome.

In the famous city catacombs, you can read some of the inscriptions on the tombs of those dead and departed loved ones. On the tombs of pagans, you read, LIVE FOR THE PRESENT HOUR SINCE WE ARE SURE OF NOTHING ELSE'. Another reads, 'I WILL LIFT UP MY HANDS AGAINST THE GODS WHO TOOK ME AWAY AT THE AGE OF TWENTY, THOUGH I HAD DONE NO HARM'. Another reads, 'ONCE I WAS, NOW I AM NOT'. Still another reads, 'TRAVELLER, CURSE ME IF YOU PASS, FOR I AM IN DARKNESS AND CANNOT ANSWER'.

The inscriptions on the tombs of Christians read differently.

One reads, 'HERE LIES MARY, PUT TO REST IN A DREAM OF PEACE'. Another reads, 'LAWRENCE, TO HIS SWEETEST SON, CARRIED AWAY BY THE ANGELS'. Another reads, 'HE WENT AWAY IN PEACE'. Still another reads, 'VICTORIOUS IN PEACE AND IN CHRIST'.

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

1 Corinthians, 15:55-57, NIV

THE FUTURE WOULD BE FUTILE

‘If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.’

1 Corinthians, 15:19, NIV

If this is all there is, we may as well 'EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY'.

Without the Resurrection, the author of the catacomb inscription, 'LIVE FOR THE PRESENT HOUR SINCE WE ARE SURE OF NOTHING ELSE', would have everything right. This would mean that the good times are for a moment, and it is just going to get worse. Some disease will gnaw away at your body until nothing of you is left. Ernest Hemmingway's analogy would be right: 'IT IS AS THOUGH WE ARE A COLONY OF ANTS LIVING ON ONE END OF A BURNING LOG'.

*Because he lives I can face tomorrow,
Because he lives all fear is gone,
Because I know he holds the future,
And life is worth the living just because he lives.*

Gloria Gaither & William J Gaither, H&H 7

“BUT CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED”

‘But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.’

1 Corinthians, 15:20, NIV

Because Jesus Christ has risen and lives for evermore, preaching is profitable; faith is not foolish, it is feasible; the disciples are not deceivers, they are dependable; sin is not sovereign, it is subdued; death does not have dominion, it is defeated; and the future is not futile, it is fabulous, all because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead.

Why did Paul regard a belief in the Resurrection of Jesus as so essential?

It proves four great facts, which makes all the difference to our view of life here and hereafter...

TRUTH IS STRONGER THAN FALSEHOOD

Jesus came with the true idea of God and of goodness.

His enemies procured his death because they did not want their own false view destroyed. If they had succeeded in finally obliterating him, falsehood would have been stronger than truth. The Resurrection is the final guarantee of the indestructibility of the truth.

On one occasion the Earl of Morton, Regent of Scotland, sent for Andrew Melville, the great Reformation leader. "There will never be quietness in this country till half a dozen of you be hanged or banished [from] the country", said Morton. "Sir", Melville replied, "threaten your courtiers in that fashion. It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground. Yet God be glorified, it will not lie in your power to hang nor exile his truth!"

GOOD IS STRONGER THAN EVIL

The forces of evil arranged the crucifixion of Jesus.

If there had been no Resurrection these forces would have been triumphant. If the Resurrection had not taken place, we could never be certain that goodness is stronger than evil.

‘One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness, that the world is built somehow on moral foundations, that in the long run it is well with the good, and in the long run it is ill with the wicked’.

J A Froude

LOVE IS STRONGER THAN HATRED

Jesus was the love of God incarnate.

On the other hand, the attitude of those who procured his crucifixion was virulent hatred, so bitter that in the end it was capable of ascribing the loveliness and graciousness of his life to the power of the devil. If there had been no Resurrection, it would have meant that the hatred of man in the end conquered the love of God. The Resurrection is the triumph of love over all that hated could do. The Resurrection is the final proof that love is stronger than hate.

LIFE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH

If Jesus had died never to rise again, it would have proved that death could take the loveliest and best life that ever lived and finally break it.

'During the second world war a church in London was all set out for harvest thanksgiving. In the centre of the gifts was a sheaf of corn. The service was never held, for, on the Saturday night, a savage air raid laid the church in ruins. The months passed and the spring came, and someone noticed that, on the bomb site where the church had stood, there were shoots of green. The summer came and the shoots flourished and in the autumn, there was a flourishing patch of corn growing amidst the rubble. Not even the bombs and the destruction could kill the life of the corn and its seeds. The Resurrection is the final proof that life is stronger than death.'

As far as Paul was concerned, if you take away the Resurrection, you destroy both the foundation and the fabric of the Christian faith.

**I heard two soldiers talking, as they came down the hill,
The sombre hill of Calvary, bleak and black and still
And one said, "the night is late, these thieves take long to die".
And one said, "I am sore afraid, and yet I know not why".**

**I heard two women weeping, as down the hill they came,
And one was like a broken rose, and one was like a flame.
One said, "Men shall rue this deed their hands have done".
And one said only through her tears, "My son! My son! My son!"**

**I heard two angels singing, e'en though the dawn was bright,
And they were clad in shining robes, robes and crowns of light.
And one sang, "Death is vanquished", and one in golden voice
Sang, "Love hath conquered, conquered all, O heaven and earth rejoice!"**

Living, he loved me; dying, he saved me; buried, he carried my sins far away.

Rising, he justified, freely for ever; one day he's coming, O glorious day!

J Wilbur Chapman, SACS 185