

WHAT IF THERE HAD BEEN NO EASTER?

What if there had been no resurrection?

I Corinthians 15:12-20

Can it really be less than three months since we gathered to celebrate Christmas? Celebrating the birth of the baby *Jesus...Emmanuel...God with us*. Celebrating His *first advent...His first coming*.

Now, we will be celebrating **Easter** in just a couple of weeks, as we reflect on how that beautiful little babe in the manger came to fulfill a mission...a horrendous, yet glorious mission! God *coming to earth...He becoming a human being...to live as one of us...to call us to repentance...to call us to love God* with our whole *heart, minds, and souls...* and to *love our neighbors as ourselves*.

According to God's purposed and predetermined plan, Jesus was nailed to the cross for the expressed purpose to die...receiving the just punishment for your sins...for my sins...for the sins of the world.

"...Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

~Philippians 5b-11

Harry Houdini was a master escape artist. There wasn't a box, bag, or barrel from which he couldn't escape. That is, until **October 31, 1926** when death knocked at his door. **Houdini** met his match when death clenched him in an ironclad grasp. At that point there was no escape for him. He died of *peritonitis*, poisoning of his blood due to a ruptured appendix.

Death put Jesus in a rock-hewn tomb...and all the world thought that there was no escape. But *on the third day*, He left the grave clothes that had been wrapped around Him much like a butterfly would forsake its cocoon. The stone was rolled away...it wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out...it was rolled away to let the disciples and others in to see that Jesus had come back from the dead. And Jesus Christ is alive today!

But suppose (as many will argue) death still had its grip on Jesus. What if He had not been resurrected. We would be faced with many tragic consequences. And those consequences come directly from **I Corinthians 15**.

I. CHRIST WOULD BE CAPTIVE: (vs. 12-13, 16)

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...For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised (vs. 12-13, 16)...

If Christ had not been raised from the dead, *there would be no victory over death*. Christ would have died and that would have been the end of it. When we die...that would be the end of it. Death would hold us captive. But He did rise from the dead!

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

~I Corinthians 15:3-4

After Jesus was raised from the dead and when He appeared to the disciples that first **Easter** evening, they were dumbstruck...thinking that they had seen a ghost (**Luke 24:36-38**).

The resurrection transformed **Peter**...who the night before the crucifixion was so afraid, that *three times* he denied that he even knew Jesus. But when he saw an empty tomb...when he saw Jesus resurrected...he became as bold as a lion. Some **50 days** later...he preached a sermon at **Pentecost** that established the Church.

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know...this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. For David says of Him, 'I saw the Lord always in my presence; for He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue

exulted; moreover my flesh also will live in hope; because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.’ Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.”

~Acts 2:22-32

II. PREACHING WOULD BE POINTLESS: (vs. 14)

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, (vs. 14a)...

Without the resurrection, the Gospel is an *empty, hopeless message* of nonsense. Unless our Lord triumphed over sin and death...there is no **“Good News”** to proclaim.

“But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

~I Corinthians 15:54-57

III. FAITH WOULD BE FOOLISH: (vs. 14b, 17a)

Your faith also is vain...and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless... (vs. 14b, 17a)...

What would be the purpose of putting one’s faith in Jesus if He was still dead? The difference between Christianity and other religions is that their leaders lived and died! Jesus lived, died, and rose again. There is no need to follow someone that is dead...but Jesus conquered death!

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

~Hebrews 11:1, 6

IV. DISCIPLES WOULD BE DECEIVERS: (vs. 15)

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 (vs. 15)...

Paul did not say that if Christ were still in the grave, we would be *mistaken* or *misguided*. He said if Christ has not been raised, we are, **“false witnesses.”** In the courtroom, a *false witness* is someone who knowingly, willingly, and even deliberately *perjures* himself. He is a liar.

Hypocrites and martyrs are made of different stuff. A man may live for a lie...but few will knowingly die for one. The disciples were neither...they were eye witnesses giving testimony to truth.

V. SIN WOULD BE SOVEREIGN: (vs. 17b)

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins (vs. 17)...

If Christ were still in the grave...it would mean that God has not accepted the payment for our sin. It means that our sin hasn’t been atoned for. But when God raised Jesus, it was His acceptance that full payment had been made. Complete restitution had been made.

Tetelestai...It is finished...a common commercial word which means *paid in full...the debt is paid*. Receipts for taxes found on the papyri have written across them this single Greek word. The price for our redemption from sin...was paid in full by our Lord’s death.

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

~II Corinthians 5:21

Think about why He came and died.

He came because He knew that mankind was lost and couldn’t save himself.

He knew that we would kill our own babies in the womb by the millions. And that many would call this horrible evil choice and a personal right.

He knew that hatred would drive men and women to strap bombs to themselves to kill innocent people in the name of religion.

He knew that man would deny that God was his creator. That man would seek to remake himself in his own image, tamper with the genetic code, and treat human life as mere test-tube material.

And He knew that His own bride, the Church, would grow cold and distant, forgetful of the faith given once for all. Comfortable with the world and its ways. Seeking relevance instead of love...pleasure instead of holiness.

And He knew that you and I, covered with sin, could never stand before God, our all-holy Father, without His supreme sacrifice.

This is why He came and died.

VI. DEATH WOULD HAVE DOMINION: (vs. 18)

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (vs. 18)...

From the beginning of creation, it has never been the intention or the design of our loving God for it all to end at the grave. That is why there was the **Tree of Life** in the **Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9; Genesis 3:22)**...and that is why, when **Adam** and **Eve** sinned, that He had to put them out of the garden where they could not eat of the fruit of that tree and live eternally in a perpetual state of sin.

“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’.”

~Genesis 3:22

That’s why Jesus said that He would come and receive us to Himself.

“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.”

~I Thessalonians 4:16

“...Our Savior Christ Jesus, abolished death and brought life and immortality...through the gospel...”

~II Timothy 1:10

VII. FUTURE WOULD BE FUTILE: (vs. 19)

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (vs. 19)...

The only thing that people without Jesus have to look forward to when they die...is a hole in the ground. But what awaits them is hell.

Praise the name of Jesus! He has taken the sting out of death. He has taken the gloom out of the grave. He has given us a **hope**...an ***anxious anticipation***...that is steadfast and sure. He is not ***behind us in a tomb***. He is ***before us on a throne!***

Examine your life...and ***repent!*** Repent of your ***sin***...repent of your ***coldness of heart***...repent of your ***hard heart***. Ask God to grant you the desire ***to come to know Him...experience Him...obey Him***. Ask God to be your Lord and Master...***desire Him*** and ***seek Him*** with all your heart and with all your strength.

And then, ask God for a ***spirit of repentance*** and for ***revival*** to sweep down upon **the Church**...upon **Jerusalem Baptist Church**...and upon the ***nations of the world***. It is our only hope in these terrible, dark times.

And since He did rise from the dead...

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep (vs. 20)...Jesus was the **first fruit of those who are asleep**...but everyone who ***believes in Him as Savior*** are the ***continuation of fruits*** that follow.

First fruits...symbolized the ***consecration of the entire harvest to God***...it was an ***earnest, or pledge, of the full harvest yet to be gathered***. Christ’s resurrection is a pledge or prototype of all the resurrections to come...the harvest yet to be gathered.

Indeed, if the ***joy of Christmas*** and the ***glory of Easter*** are the ***light*** by which we see all reality, then the ***cross*** is the ***lens*** through which we see it.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- **Because of the resurrection we have victory**. Victory over death...victory over sin...victory over temptation.
- **Because of the resurrection we have hope**. An anxious anticipation of heaven...an anxious anticipation of seeing Jesus...and anxious anticipation of being with God eternally.
- **Because of the resurrection we have expectation**. Expectation that He is coming again.