

WHAT IF THERE HAD BEEN NO RESURRECTION?

I Corinthians 15:12-20

Billy Graham once said, *“If I were an enemy of Christianity, I would aim right at the resurrection because it’s the heart of Christianity.”*

The British philosopher C.E.M. Joad was once asked, *“If you could ask one question, and be sure of getting the right answer, what would it be?” Without a moment’s hesitation he responded, “Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead?”* That indeed is *the question of all questions!*

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*.

“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.”

~Acts 2:22-24

“...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

Death put Jesus in a tomb. And *all* Jerusalem...*all* the political and religious leaders...even the disciples and those closest to Jesus...*thought that was the end*. But *on the third day*...He left those 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 overcome death...that He rose from the dead...that He was resurrected. 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) Christ would still be in the grave.

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*. Yes, He would have been a *good man*...yes, He may have even been a *prophet* as many proclaimed. But when He *died*...that would have been the *end of it*. And when we *die*...that would be the *end of it* too. Death would hold us *captive*. But *He did rise from the dead!*

“Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

~Romans 1:4

“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...they thought 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) Our preaching would be *without meaning...meaningless...empty*.

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

Vain...Gk. *kenos*, means *empty* or *hollow...useless*.

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.

“And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus...”

~Acts 13:32-33a

“We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.”

~I Corinthians 1:23

III. FAITH WOULD BE FOOLISH: (vs. 14b, 17a) Our personal faith would be *worthless...empty*.

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

Faith...is a compound word. Gk. *stasis*, means *to stand*. Gk. *hupo*, means *under*. Literally means *to stand under*. It's a picture of a *foundation*. **Faith** is *the deliberate choice to have confidence and trust in the character of God*, whose ways we may or may not understand at times.

Worthless...Gk. *mataios*, means *no purpose...futile...pointless*.

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

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”

~Romans 10:17

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...And without faith it is impossible to please Him...”

~Hebrews 11:1, 6a

IV. DISCIPLES WOULD BE DECEIVERS: (vs. 15) Our *testimony* would be *misleading*...our *witness* would be a *lie*.

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 didn't 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's a *liar*.

Frauds 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) We would still be in our sin.

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*. They have found receipts for taxes on papyri that 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

“...If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

~I John 2:1b-2

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

~I John 4:10

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 we would worship the creation instead of the Creator.
- *And He knew that His own bride, the Church, would grow cold and distant, forgetful of the faith given once for all.* That the church would become comfortable with the world and embrace its ways. That it would seek relevance instead of love...pleasure instead of holiness.
- *And He knew that you and I, covered with sin, could never stand before God, our holy Father, without His supreme sacrifice.*

This is why He came and died.

VI. DEATH WOULD HAVE DOMINION: (vs. 18) Those former believers who have preceded us...would have *eternally perished*. Peter, James, John, Paul...*our family members...eternally perished*.

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*.

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) As believers we would be most *pitied*.

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 actually 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, confident, anticipation*...that is steadfast and sure. He is not *behind* us *in a tomb*. He is *before* us *on a throne*!

“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

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 Him...to know Him...to experience Him...to obey Him***. Ask God to be your Savior...your Lord and Master. ***Desire Him*** and ***seek Him with all your heart*** and with all your strength.

And then ask God for a ***spiritual awakening***...a ***spirit of repentance***...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 the 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*** and ***confident anticipation*** of ***heaven***...an ***anxious*** and

confident anticipation of ***seeing Jesus***...and an ***anxious*** and ***confident anticipation*** of ***being with God eternally***.

- **Because of the resurrection we have EXPECTATON**. ***Expectation*** that He is ***coming again***. **Maranatha**...come quickly Lord Jesus!