

# BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

## Expository Sermon

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### WHAT IF.....NO RESURRECTION?

#### Scripture Reading – 1 Corinthians 15:12-28

#### Introduction

The glory of the Christian faith is that “it never views life as being complete in this world. The Bible talks about all of the difficulties we face while on our brief journey on this planet. It emphasizes that life is as a vapor which appears for a little while and then disappears. But Christianity looks beyond this “little while” and always has its eyes lifted to the morning and gazes out on eternity, recognizing that we belong to eternity as well as to time.” (Campbell Morgan p.192). We are built for eternity. The Word says that God has set eternity in our hearts. (See Ecclesiastes 3:11). Suffice it to say that this is a truth about which we do not spend much time thinking.

The Easter season is a good time for us to stop amid the frenzied rush of modern life to think about what the season means for each of us. How does the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ touch us? Is it that important? What if Jesus never rose from the dead? This is a thought too horrible to contemplate. While the resurrection of Jesus touches our lives in time, it most certainly and more importantly touches our life to be, in eternity. The great truth of the risen Christ is the heart beat of the Gospel. It is the pulse of the Christian faith. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians 15:3-4, “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 and was raised on the third according to the scriptures.” Two thoughts strike me in these words.

**First** is that the death and resurrection of Jesus were **“of first importance.”**

**Second**, Paul twice confirms that these two events took place **“according to the scriptures.”** This is a phenomenal truth. This new sect called the Christians really believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. It is easy to accept the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, but what about all this talk of His resurrection. This is the more difficult idea to accept because it is not common for men to rise from the dead. It is true that

Lazarus did and Dorcas did! But it was not a common event. Jesus Christ's resurrection was distinct. The resurrection of Jesus was different in that He was the Son of God who chose to lay down His life and take it again. Many have pointed out that we must look at the record Christ's resurrection appearances in the New Testament. The message is clear. They confirm that Jesus Christ rose from the grave. The truth is emphasized that there is no evidence that someone snatched His body and hid it. Feel the excitement of the followers of Jesus who found the tomb empty. Read about those who saw Him after His death on Calvary. Read about Thomas, Christ's own disciple who would not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, "Except," he said, "I shall see in His hands the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." And then Jesus appeared to Him one day and that meeting brought Thomas to his knees acknowledging the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ, as he confessed "My Lord and My God." (See John 20:25.) "And in this chapter, part of which we read, the Apostle Paul brings to the witness stand as least six different witnesses or groups of witnesses. In v.5 He writes that Jesus was seen by Peter, and then by twelve disciples. In verse 6, five hundred brethren saw Him. In v.7 James and all the Apostles saw Him, and lastly in verse 8 the Apostle Paul Himself saw him. There was one thing of which they were sure, that Jesus was alive and they were willing to die for that truth. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8). One has pointed out that "men do not persist in a lie or even a delusion, if every time they insisted on its truth; they are driving nails into their coffins. Men do not invent a story so that they would be crucified upside down. Like Peter, or have their heads chopped off like Paul outside of Rome, or stoned to death like Stephen. An allusion may sustain them for a time but not for long. These men and women were convinced that their Lord was alive, and they were willing to die for that conviction.

Stanley Jones observed that, "the early disciples are radiant and irresistible. They laugh their way through persecution, sing their way through prisons, and smile their way through death. For what? A hoax? Well hoaxes don't produce hallelujahs, nor does body snatching produce transformed lives." There is not a single pessimistic note in the New Testament anywhere after the resurrection. The death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was the gospel the early disciples preached. Paul himself clearly testified that this was his gospel. In the great resurrection chapter, the death of Jesus on the Cross and His resurrection from the grave he presented as of "first importance." (1 Cor. 15:3.) He then expounds on what the resurrection of Jesus means and its importance to the human race. In the midst of his discussion he makes a disturbing statement "If there is no resurrection there is faith is in vain and there is no forgiveness of sins, and eternal life is fiction. If this is so the world is plunged into despairing darkness. It is a statement so terrible to contemplate. What would be the consequence for souls if Christ did not rise from the dead?" Is this question really important to us? Would it make any difference if the grave had held Him in its grip? Paul answers this question. His words tell us what would be if this was so. There are three words which get to the heart of the matter and they get our attention. "What if....there was no resurrection? If there was no resurrection what would be the consequences? The first word is,

## **1. FUTILITY. 1 Corinthians 15:12-17.**

Paul says it clearly, **“If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile.....”** The word means vain, void and empty. There is no value in it, no meaning in it and no truth in it. It is useless – fruitless – to no purpose at all and certainly it has no foundation. I suggest to you that this is,

**a. A Ghastly Thought. 1 Corinthians 15:17.** If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile. The whole atmosphere surrounding this thought is one of dark despair. What Paul is doing here, is forcing us to think about the ultimate consequences of this, in order to impress upon us the deep significance and the absolute necessity of the resurrection of Jesus in the eternal destiny of the human race. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, faith is futile. We have nothing on which to hold. If this is true then it is designed to throw the soul into utter despair. It is a ghastly thought, a hideous idea and devastating suggestion. It something to terrible to think about! If Christ has not been raised it invalidates and nullifies the whole Christian gospel. The fact of the resurrection of Jesus is basic to the Christian faith and message. It is the rock bed of our faith.

This is what Paul is teaching in this passage of scripture.

James Stewart writes that there is a shudder in this statement and goes on to say that John Henry Newman imagined what it would feel like to look out on the world and see no trace of God at all. “That would be,” he says, “Just as if I were to look into a mirror and not see my face.” Think of it. That sudden most terrifying moment- looking straight into the mirror and seeing only a blank. It is that same shudder of the soul that Paul’s words create. “If Christ has not been raised then your faith is futile.” What a ghastly thought! It is a ghastly thought because it assumes,

**b. An Anchorless Faith. 1 Corinthians 15:17.** Paul raises this thought when he talks about the futility of faith. If Christ has not been raised then faith is in vain because there is no soil in which to root itself. A dead Christ means that faith does not have a foundation on which to anchor itself. A dead Christ means that faith has nothing on which to hold. If there is no resurrection, faith flounders in the frustration of futility. Paul said it clearly “your faith is futile, it is empty, it is vain.” Faith has no reason to exist.

Paul writing to young Timothy in his second letter encourages the young man of the importance of keeping his faith. This is what he says, “you my son, be strong in the grace that is Christ Jesus. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier. Compete as an athlete. Work as a farmer. Reflect on what I am saying, he writes, “Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my Gospel for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.” (See 2 Timothy 3:3-8.) Paul is saying something extremely significant here. The reason, he says, to persevere, to hold on, to continue and to endure to the end, is the fact Jesus has been raised from the dead. This is my Gospel for which I am suffering. If Jesus did not die and rise again, there is no reason to struggle through life holding on to a foundationless hope. In one translation Paul asks reverently, “If there be no resurrection why should I live a life of hourly danger? I assure by the certainty of Jesus that we possess, that I face death everyday of my

life.” What is the use of suffering persecution and humiliation, if my faith has no meaning? For I believe, I have faith that I will live in the hereafter, but if there is no resurrection there is no eternal life. Faith is gone, life is meaningless, hope is an illusion, endurance futile. If there be no resurrection then death closes the door on life forever. If Christ has not been raised our faith is futile. The first word that arises out of Paul’s statement is futility. The second word,

## **2. FALLACY. 1 Corinthians 15:17.**

**Paul makes a sobering statement in v.17.** “If Christ has not been raised.....you are still in your sins. It means all of this talk about salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life is a fallacy. This means that our sins would be held against us. The shadow of guilt would still hang over us. Its chains would still bind us. Heaven would not be ahead for us. This would be the sad condition if we were still in our sins. And Paul is right if Christ had not been raised...we are still in our sins.” If this is true what does this mean? It means that Jesus is,

**a. A Powerless Savior. 1 Corinthians 15:17. If “Christ has not been raised then sin has overcome him and death is more powerful than He is.” His death has no meaning without His resurrection.** Jesus claimed to be sinless. He hated sin. He flung all His might and power against it. He made men ashamed of their sin. They blushed in His presence and Peter fell to his knees and cried out “depart from me Lord for I am a sinner. They blanched with fear as His scathing denunciations exposed their hypocrisy. But this is not enough for the force of sin to be defeated and the power of sin to be destroyed. It would take more than denunciations to do that. And it is not enough to parade against sin, for if Christ has not been raised, sin is still uncontrollably rampant in our world and the march of evil has not stopped. If Christ has not risen it means that sin has smitten Him to death. It has laid its deadly grasp on Him and has put Him in a tomb forever. It means that the forces of darkness have completely overpowered and mastered Him. If this is true, what hope is there for you and me? How can He break my bondage or set me free or blot out my transgressions and give eternal life. How can He do all of this if He is still in an eastern grave that will not let Him go? Paul makes quite clear that if this has happened there is no Gospel of Christ and our preaching is useless. What we are left with is the fragrant memory of a good man, but a powerless Savior - in truth He is no Savior at all. If Christ has NOT been raised...you are still in your sins.” This means that Jesus is a powerless Savior. But for us it also means,

**b. A Continuing Guilt. 1 Corinthians 15:17. Paul writes that if Christ did rise from the dead “you are yet in your sins.”** This would not just be a global problem. Paul is being personal here. The gravity of this thought is brought home to us. Notice “You” and “Your” are the personal pronouns he uses. Sin is a personal thing, and Paul writes that if the tomb had kept its grip on the Lord Jesus Christ we would still be burdened by guilt. It is true that if Jesus had not been raised from the dead, sin as a universal evil world force would have not been defeated. But Paul brings this truth down to the personal level. It is easy to pinpoint global evil not so easy to admit to sin that is personal. It is uncomfortable to confess to our

personal sin and the burden of guilt incurred by those sins. But the resurrection of Jesus guarantees the forgiveness of personal sin and the removal of guilt. Paul puts this horrendous thought to us personally. If Christ has not been raised “YOU are still in YOUR sins.” You are held by them! Haunted by them! Bound by them! Mastered by them and damned by them. If Christ has not been raised then there is no hope of forgiveness of sins committed and cleansing from sin inherent. In other words the disease of sin still infects us to the core of our being. For it is only as He has mastered sin, that He can master sin in our lives. It is only as He is victor over sin that He can bring victory into our lives. It is only as He defeated death that He can give me eternal life. He Himself declared, “Because I live you shall live also.” Jesus attacked sin. He made devastating denunciations of it, but His greatest work was the destruction of its power. The Apostle John wrote, “The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil.” ( 1John 3:8.) He did that at Calvary, convincingly, powerfully and finally and it was made effective, dynamic and valid by His resurrection from the dead. Otherwise the Cross is an impotent symbol revealing a martyrs death and a historical event without redeeming power. “If Christ has not been raised.....you are still in your sins.” Forgiveness, then, is a fallacy. Not only do the words FUTILITY AND FALLACY come out of Paul’s dismal statement but also the word

### **3. FANTASY. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19.**

Paul writes that if Christ has not been raised from the dead then “those 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.” This would mean that eternal life would be an allusive hope, an empty vision and the impossible dream. If this be true then heaven is but a wistful longing, and ends up being a floating fantasy! We would end up meandering in the dimensions of a dream world.

There are two responses that result from this disturbing statement made by the Apostle Paul. The first is summed up in the word,

**a. Hopelessness. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19. “IF Christ has not been raised.”** These words mean the end of all hope. There is no light at the end of life’s tunnel. They give birth to spirit of hopelessness. The reasons are clear.

- i. A dead Christ means those who have fallen asleep (died) in Christ are lost forever. v.18. v.19.**
- ii. “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” As one has pointed out** those who we had hoped to see one day - obliterated! Annihilated! Blown out of existence as you would blow out a candle. One has put it so well, “life would be like a bird flying of the dark into a brilliant banqueting hall, flying across that brilliance for a moment, then out the other window, out into the night again, into the darkness forever.” If Christ has not been raised, life would be just like that. Faithless, fruitless and futile! Forgiveness a fallacy and the future life a fantasy! Back in the early sixties, when I was in college in the British Isles, there was an insidious doctrine which emerged from the pen of Dr. J. Robinson a Bible scholar. In a book titled, “Honest to God,” which my pastor in London said was neither

honest nor to God. The author proclaimed that God was dead. I am not sure who killed Him. Amazingly there were people who accepted it. The shock waves of this announcement flooded every pew and pulpit in the church. Out of this came a piece of choral music written on the death of God, and I recall watching a choir of young adults singing that piece of music. The television camera's showed this university choir taking part in the death of God. The main theme of this funeral dirge climaxed in what was literally shout, "God is dead! God is dead!" As they sang the camera's moved across the faces of those young people. There was no play acting – no sham – no facade just a revelation of sad bitter reality. Hopeless and despair was etched in the lines of those young faces. Tears streamed down many of their cheeks. You see, in their minds God was dead. And nothing is left when God is dead. Everything is darkness. Paul lays it out before us "If Christ has not been raised we only have hope in this world and consequently we are to be pitied more than all men." That is the way it is IF Jesus did not rise from the grave. It throws men into total hopelessness. It also means,

**b. Lostness. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19. "If Christ be not raised,"** we are lost forever. Our Faith is futile – forgiveness is a fallacy and the future life is a fantasy. If Christ be not raised, to whom could we turn? Where would we find redemption from the bondage of sin? What would lie before us beyond the grave? Everywhere we look there is only darkness and despair. We are lost without the risen Christ. If our hope is only confined to this life when it comes to an end so does our hope. A dead Christ cannot give us hope. Paul was aware of this when he wrote in verse 19, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." There is a dreadful passage in Carlyle where he imagines a man trying to run away from his own shadow; again he turns around, and it still is there, that black thing, dogging him; on and on, flinging himself wildly away from it – he turns around again, and it is still there; he is panting now, and dead-beat. He cried out, God, God I can't get away from it." That is sin – if there is no forgiveness. We are lost and we cannot get from it. Paul poses this terrible thought to impress upon us the deep significance and meaning of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Paul does not linger long here. He moves on to proclaim what the central message of Easter is. He moves out of the darkness of the possibility of a dead Christ, into the breaking dawn of the risen glory and power of Jesus. "But" he wrote "Christ has indeed risen from the dead." Therefore faith is not futile, nor is forgiveness a fallacy and certainly eternal life is not a fantasy. "For as in Adam all die so in Christ all will be made alive." See 1 Cor. 15:22)

A missionary had just finished preaching in the market place in Northern India, when a Muslim stepped up to him and said, "You must admit we have something you do not have and it is better than anything you have." "And what is it you have." asked the missionary. "When we go to Mecca." said the Muslim, "We at least find a coffin. But when you Christians go to Jerusalem, your Mecca, you find nothing but an empty tomb." The missionary smiled and replied, "That is just the difference. Mohammed is dead and lies in his coffin, but Jesus is alive and seated on the right Hand of God."

## Conclusion

Dr Barnhouse tells a story of when he visited Winchester, England, famous for its college and its cathedral. The verger of the cathedral used to show people around the beautiful building. He had been there for many years, and loved to tell the story how the news of the Battle of Waterloo came to England. There were no telegrams in those days, but everyone knew that Wellington was facing a great battle with the French. A sailing ship semaphored news to a signalman on top of Winchester Cathedral. He signaled to another man on a hill and thus the news of the battle was relayed, by semaphore, from station to station to London and all across London. When the ship came in, the signal man on board semaphored the first word – Wellington.” The next word was “defeated.” And then the fog came down and the ship could not be seen. The words “Wellington defeated,” went across England and there was fear and gloom all over the land. After two or three hours, the fog lifted, and signal came again, “Wellington defeated the enemy.” And sadness was transformed into gladness and England rejoiced in their great victory. Jesus fought a critical battle on the Cross. A vast array of evil forces was launched against Him and they were determined to destroy Him forever. He died on that Cross and was buried in a tomb sealed with a Roman seal and guarded by a Roman soldier. It seemed that the message that came from all of this darkness and despair was that Jesus was defeated and destroyed. And the fog settled in for about three days. And hope had gone. But when the fog lifted on the third day the complete message came through. The tomb was empty! The crucified Christ had risen from the grave Jesus had defeated Satan. It was impossible for the death to keep its hold on Him! He is alive forevermore and He holds in His Hands the keys of death and Hades. (See Revelation 1:18.) Jesus Christ is raised from the dead! Rejoice for He is indeed alive!!!