"WHAT IF CHRIST NEVER AROSE?"

I Corinthians 15:5-20

1-28-2024

INTRODUCTION: (v. 1-11)

***We should greatly appreciate the resurrection of Christ!**

We will gain a greater appreciation for His resurrection when we consider what our life would be like if He never arose.

If Christ never arose, there would be:

I. No Substance to Our Faith (v. 14)

If Christ never arose, there would be:

II. No Truth to Our Message (v. 15)

If Christ never arose, there would be:

III. No Forgiveness of Our Sins (v. 17)

If Christ never arose, there would be:

IV. No Hope for Our Future (v. 18)

If Christ never arose, there would be:

V. No Purpose to Our Life (v. 19)

CONCLUSION: (v. 20)

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III. No _____ of Our _____ (v. 17)

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IV. No _____ for Our _____ (v. 18)

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CONCLUSION: (v. 20)

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The occasion which sparked Paul's defense of the Resurrection in I Cor. 15 was not that the Corinthians were denying Christ's resurrection, but that some at Corinth were denying the reality of a resurrection, period (i.e. the reality of the possibility of resurrection itself).

They, living in Corinth - a Greek city, were swallowing the liberal Hellenistic (Greek) philosophy (cp. v. 33) that there was no such thing as the resurrection of the dead (cp. Athens - Acts 17:32).

v.5

God does not have to prove anything to anyone. But He does list authenticating witnesses to Christ's resurrection.

In the Law, God established that two or three witnesses could authenticate a fact (Dt. 19:15; cp. Mt. 18:16). Here, He lists more than that!

"The twelve" - With Judas having committed suicide, and with Peter (*"Cephas")* already having been mentioned as having seen the resurrected Christ [leaving the 10 other disciples], who were the other two who witnessed His resurrection? Answer: One possibility is that it was the two people on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-43), or the other two could have been Joseph (calls Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus) and Matthias (Acts 1:22-23).

V. 7

"James" - the Lord's half-brother who didn't believe that Jesus was the Christ until after his resurrection (cp. Jn. 7:5; Acts 1:14).

V. 8

"Last of all" - Paul was the last one to visibly see Jesus Christ.

(We today walk pure *"by faith, not by sight"* [II Cor. 5:7], *"whom having not seen, ye love..."* [I Pet. 1:8])

"One born out of due time" - Paul became an apostle several years after Jesus had ordained the twelve and commissioned them.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is one of the biggest proofs of Christ's resurrection. He was an enemy of Christ who witnessed His resurrection, and was forced to believe by the undeniable evidence which he saw with his eyes and heard with his ears (Acts 9:3).

V. 9

"I persecuted the church of God" - Paul had persecuted the same church he was now part of (cp. Gal. 1:23).

V. 10

The grace that came to Paul was not a wasted investment; he brought forth good dividends.

Note: Paul's humility

Christ's resurrection is fact, not hallucination or deception.

Jesus appeared to:

--Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:9)

--The two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mk. 16:12; Lk. 24:13-35) and ate with them in their home (Lk. 24:30)

--Peter (Lk. 23:34)

--The eleven disciples (Mk. 16:14). They also handled Him, saw His hands and feet, and saw Him eat in their presence (Lk. 24:36-43).

* At His first appearance, Thomas was missing (Jn. 20:19-25), then again He appeared with Thomas present (Jn. 20:26-31)

* Then to seven of the disciples up in Galilee (Jn. 21:1ff)

--Then to over 500 brethren at once (SEE: I Cor. 15:1-8)

--Then to Stephen (Acts 7:55-56)

--Then to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:5)

**Christ's resurrection is an irrefutable fact of history!*
(a fact which has practical ramifications for you!)

Evidences for Christ's resurrection:

1. The FACT of His BURIAL — Matthew 27:57-61
2. The GUARDING of His TOMB — 27:62-66
3. The TESTIMONY of an ANGEL — 28:1-8
4. The PHYSICAL APPEARANCE of CHRIST — 28:9-10
5. The BRIBE of the JEWS — 28:11-15

Other proofs of Christ's resurrection:

6. The grave clothes were left behind (Jn. 20:5-7)

(If Christ's body had been stolen, there is no way they would have wasted the time to unwrap Him)

7. The cowardly disciples were transformed and were even willing to all die as martyrs for their faith
8. Even Saul of Tarsus, an enemy of Christ, was compelled to believe in Him when he saw the resurrected Savior
9. Jesus is transforming people today, as He has for nearly 2,000 years

Hymn: "You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart"

After Paul gave three factual proofs validating the authenticity of Christ's resurrection (#1 - their salvation (v. 1-2); #2 - the O.T. Scriptures (v. 3-4); #3 - the many witnesses (v. 5-11)) (cp. Wiersbe, p. 617), he now proceeds to answer the unthinkable question: "What if Christ never arose?"

Can you imagine what would be altered for the Christian if Christ never arose? Can you imagine the effect this would have on our beliefs, practices, and hopes for the future?

*We should greatly appreciate the resurrection of Christ!

We will gain a greater appreciation for His resurrection when we consider what our life would be like if He never arose.

If Christ never arose, there would be:

I. No Substance to Our Faith (v. 14)

"Preaching" (Kerygma) does not refer to oral technique, but rather to the words of the proclamation (Gromacki, p. 186).

"Vain" - hollow, empty, void of real substance.

Faith is always based on fact. You do not trust a blind faith - a faith with no reality.

If no resurrection, our faith would be like a shell without the kernel, like husk without the corn, just full of hot air.

"Empty" = "Take out the resurrection, and there is nothing left" to Christianity.

If Christ never arose, there would be:

II. No Truth to Our Message (v. 15)

To be a "false witness" is among the most serious of crimes. It is a breach of the ninth commandment - "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." (Ex. 21:16).

If being a false witness about another human being is bad, can you imagine how bad it is to be a false witness about God!

If telling a lie about man is wicked, the most hideous sin would be saying that God said something He did not say.

"There is a subtle difference between a liar and a false witness. A liar tells as true what he knows is false. A false witness tells as true what he believes is true, when really it is false" (Gromacki, p. 186).

Note of interest:
"God . . . raised up Christ."
The Bible declares that the entire Trinity was involved in the resurrection:
1. The Father - Ro. 10:9; Acts 2:24
2. The Spirit - I Pet. 3:18
3. The Son - Jn. 10:17, 18

"Vain" - a different word than in v. 14. This word means "useless," "futile," "purposeless," "fruitless."

"A dead Christ cannot do anything for anyone" (Gromacki, p. 187).
A dead Savior is no Savior at all!

If Christ never arose, there would be:

III. No Forgiveness of Our Sins (v. 17)

"Ye are yet in our sins" -

No only does God say "All have sinned" - i.e. that sin is in us, but that all are born in sin (Ps. 51:5).

Sin is that which no only infects the core of unregenerate man's inmost being, but he is overwhelmed by it. It surrounds his whole life. Sin, like quicksand, has man trapped.

Apart from the resurrection of Christ, no one would have life, but would be abiding in the sphere of death.
(NOTE: how our new resurrection life is contrasted with being dead in sin - SEE Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13)
One is either "in Christ" or "in sin and death".

If Christ did not arise, then no one could be joined to His life; hence, all would still be shackled to sin and death.

Christ's resurrection is what justifies (Rom. 4:25 - "Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.")

If Christ never arose, there would be:

IV. No Hope for Our Future (v. 18)

"Fallen asleep" = a euphemism for being dead; a softer way of referring to death (cp. v. 6).

When someone dies, they have the appearance of being asleep. God only uses the euphemism of "sleep" in reference to believers, never the lost. The reason is: the believer never dies (Jn. 11:26 - "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die").

Death is not the end,b ut the beginning; it is a mere departure; a transfer of residence; a promotion!

"Asleep in Christ" - SEE I Thes. 4:15, 16
The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the believer cannot be separated.
To Paul, "they were Siamese twins or two sides of the same coin" (Gromacki, p. 185).

If Christ didn't arise from the dead, we would never see our loved ones again.

If Christ never arose, there would be:

V. No Purpose to Our Life (v. 19)

"Most miserable" = most to be pitied.

If there was no resurrection, the world should feel sorry for us, because we sacrificed, served, witnessed, attended church, prayed, read our bibles, lived pure lives . . . all for nothing!

We would have believed in Christ and hoped for a future eternal life of bliss, only to find it to be a mirage or "pipe dream."

"The conclusion is obvious: why be a Christian if we have only suffering (and a false hope) in this life, and no future glory to anticipate?" (Wiersbe, p. 618).

(SEE Paul's mention of suffering in vv. 29-32).

Paul and his associates gave up "everything (position in life, including prestige, conveniences, and status) to travel all over the Roman world proclaiming a falsehood. They had gambled everything on Him and had lost!" (Gromacki, p. 187).

If Christ never arose, then Easter would be the most meaningless holiday of the year.

CONCLUSION: (v. 20-23)

NOTE: the parallel between the Jewish celebration of firstfruits and the resurrection of Christ as firstfruits (SEE Lev. 23:9-14).

The celebration of firstfruits began on Sunday, 7 days after Passover (typifying His blood shed and death) and unleavened bread (symbolizing how Christ's body did not undergo decay [corruption] in the tomb).

v. 20

"Firstfruits" - referred to the first ripe crops, etc., that were given to God with a promise of a greater harvest yet to follow (Prov. 3:9-10).

Christ being the firstfruits of the dead (cp. Rev. 1:5) is the first portion, first installment, pledge, or guarantee of resurrections yet to come (SEE: I Cor. 15:23).

v. 22

The resurrection is vitally important because Christ does not merely give us life, He is our life!

(Col. 3:4; cp. Gal. 2:20 - "Christ liveth in me.")

Jesus said: "I am the . . . life" (Jn. 14:6).

He proclaimed, "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25).

John testified, "In Him was life (Jn. 1:4); "...We are in him that is true, even in His son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." (I Jn. 5:20).

The resurrection of Christ "is like the backbone of the body, for not only is it needed, but it is an absolute essential" (Welsh, "Conduct Becoming Saints" - RBP, p. 102)

If Christ never arose, there would be:

No substance to our faith

No truth to our message

No forgiveness of our sins

No hope for our future

No purpose to our life

Because Jesus arose from the dead. . .

1. He is proven to be the Son of God
   (Rom. 1:4 - *"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead"*)

2. His promises are trustworthy
   (Jn. 10:18 - *"No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have i received*

of my Father.") (cp. Mt. 12:40, 16:21, 17:9, 23)

3. He has power over life and death
(Rev. 1:18 - *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."*)

4. He can now give eternal life to all who believe
(Jn. 10:28 - *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."*) (cp. Rom. 10:9-10)

5. He can intercede as our High Priest
(Heb. 7:25 - *"Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them")*

6. He can empower us to live victoriously
(Rom. 6:4 - *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life")*

7. Our labor for Him is not in vain
(I Cor. 15:14 - *"And if Christ is not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain"*) (I Cor. 15:58 - *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord")*

8. We are assured that we, too, shall rise from the dead
(Jn. 11:25 - *"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"*) (Jn. 14:19 - *"Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also"*)

9. He is coming back again
(I Th. 4:13-18)

10. He will one day judge the world
(Acts 17:31 - *"Because He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he ordained;; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead"*)

At the University of Chicago Divinity School each year they have what is called "Baptist Day". It is a day when all the Baptists in the area are invited to the school because they want the Baptist dollars to keep coming in. On this day each one is to bring a lunch to be eaten outdoors in a grassy picnic area. Every "Baptist Day" the school would invite one of the greatest minds to lecture in the theological education center.

One year they invited Dr. Paul Tillich.

Dr. Tillich spoke for two and one-half hours proving that the

resurrection of JESUS was false. He quoted scholar after scholar and book after book. He concluded that since there was no such thing as the historical resurrection the religious tradition of the church was groundless, emotional mumbo-jumbo, because it was based on a relationship with a risen JESUS, who, in fact, never rose from the dead in any literal sense. He then asked if there were any questions.

After about 30 seconds, an old, dark skinned preacher with a head of short-cropped, woolly white hair stood up in the back of the auditorium. "Docta Tillich, I got one question," he said as all eyes turned toward him. He reached into his sack lunch and pulled out an apple and began eating it.

"Docta Tillich..." CRUNCH, MUNCH... "My question is a simple questio," CRUNCH, MUNCH..."Now I ain't never read them books you read... " CRUNCH, MUNCH... "and I can't recite the Scriptures in the original Greek... "
CRUNCH, MUNCH... "I don't know nothin' about Niebuhr and Heidegger..." CRUNCH, MUNCH...he finished the apple. "All I wanna know is this apple I just
ate...was it bitter or sweet?"

Dr. Tillich paused for a moment and answered in exemplary scholarly fashion: "I cannot possibly answer that question, for I haven't tasted your apple."

The white-haired preacher dropped the core of his apple into his crumpled paper bag, looked up at Dr. Tillich and said calmly, "Neither have you tasted my JESUS."

The 1,000 plus in attendance could not contain themselves. The auditorium erupted with applause and cheers. Dr. Tillich thanked his audience and promptly left the platform.

Have you tasted Jesus? In Psalms 34:8 we read,
"Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in HIM." If you have, rejoice in the hope of the
resurrection that your faith in HIM brings!