

What If There Had Been No Resurrection?

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[0:00] And since it is Resurrection Sunday coming, then I thought it would be good for us to focus on the subject of the resurrection.

! Now that's a big subject. Obviously the doctrine of the resurrection, not just the resurrection of Jesus, but by extension the doctrine of the resurrection. As it applies to all believers. So it's a big subject, big doctrine, but I want to focus on this question, what if there had been no resurrection? And, you know, over the years we've covered this ground before. I know you have. Pastors before me and, you know, over the almost three years I've been here, I'm sure I've touched on the subject a little bit here and there, but it's good for us to revisit that and remember that resurrection is absolutely crucial to Christianity.

It's not one of those lesser doctrines that's part of the gospel. You know, it's the cross, you know, Jesus died on the cross, shed his blood for us, but, you know, the resurrection, I believe in it, but it's not quite as important as the other. But you take the resurrection out and you don't have anything. And that's what we're going to consider tonight. And, of course, the definitive passage in the Bible for this subject is 1 Corinthians 15.

[1:37] This is Paul's subject here in really pretty much in the better part of this chapter. He certainly begins with the gospel and then he's going to give us some proofs.

And then he's going to argue for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, of course, linking that not only with our own faith as Christians, but he's also going to, though we're not going to so much get into this tonight, he's going to link it also with our resurrection.

And I'm not going to get into the occasion, the reason why he wrote what he wrote. There was some problem at Corinth, some misunderstanding, some doctrinal misinterpretation and error, and he was addressing some of that in relation to the resurrection and so forth.

But what I want to do is, again, answer this question, what if there had been no resurrection? Now, I mentioned that even in the opening verses of the chapter, the Apostle Paul reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is vital.

Vital and, I would say, foundational doctrine for Christianity. Though I don't know that I'll care about likening Christianity to a house of cards.

[3:03] But if you could imagine that Christianity is a house of cards, you take the resurrection out and it would collapse just like a house of cards would collapse.

So, in the first few verses, Paul tells us that the resurrection is an essential component, part of the gospel.

Now, this part, not in your notes, is kind of by way of introduction. Let me just read the first several verses. Paul writes, More, O brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, and in which you stand, by which also you are saved.

I mean, it's just, you know, his way of writing here just builds and builds and builds. By which also you were saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you.

That is, if you really truly believed it. Unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you, first of all, that which I also received. And what was that? Well, if we could put it under the word gospel.

[4:08] What he's about to articulate in probably the simplest, most concise way is the gospel. The essence of the gospel. This is what he delivered.

That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. And that he was buried. And that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. All right, now there you have the gospel.

He died for our sins. Was buried. Because that's what you do with dead people. He didn't just swoon or faint or something. He really was dead. That buried him. And he was raised from the dead on the third day just like the scriptures said.

And said he would. And predicted that he would. All right. So there's the gospel. Those crucial, essential elements. And so what is a part of it?

The resurrection. All right. So it's an essential component. And then having stated the basic elements of the gospel, which we just saw there in those few verses, Paul now proceeds to offer some proof.

[5 : 11] Some proof of that Jesus indeed, did indeed come back alive or was raised from the dead. And this is what he does for us in verses 5 through 8.

So look at that real quickly. That he was seen. See, he's proving it now. Now, when Jesus came back to life, was raised from the dead, the proof was he was seen.

All right. He was seen by a number of people. Seen by Cephas. That's, of course, to Simon Peter. Then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by over 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remained to the present, but some had fallen asleep.

All right. So Paul is writing here and saying, here's the proof he was seen. And by the way, a lot of these people are still alive. So go ask them about it. That's pretty substantial proof. And after that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

Then last of all, he was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God, and so forth.

[6 : 20] All right. So he's presenting some proof. What's the best proof? That Jesus is alive from the dead. He was seen. A lot of people saw him. And, of course, you know, again, some of those same people were still alive when Paul wrote this.

And, you know, they could just come forward and say it's a bunch of bunk. I didn't see him, like he said. You know. So, this is pretty good proof. All right. Now, then, after that, and for a number of verses on into the chapter, Paul attempts to convince the Corinthian believers of the importance of the resurrection.

It's very important. It's crucial. It's vital. And it's interesting that he does so by using a negative argument, kind of arguing from the negative, a negative standpoint.

And so he, in essence, what he does is paint a pretty dismal picture of what life would be like if Jesus had not been raised from the dead.

That is what our life as believers would be like. And I guess we could say what a farce our lives would be if Jesus had not been raised from the dead.

[7 : 33] That's what we want to consider. What if there had been no resurrection? And so I'm going to answer that question of the next several verses here in chapter 15.

First, again, just like Paul did, from the negative. And then we're going to conclude with the positive because he does then, very quickly, make an argument from a positive standpoint.

All right. So, divided into two parts. And the first one is a bitter assumption. A bitter assumption. I could even call it an unthinkable scenario.

It's kind of Paul's approach here in verses 12 through 19. So, we're just going to kind of follow Paul's argument. Again, which is stated in the negative. And he's saying if there was no resurrection from the dead, Jesus was not raised from the dead, then we have, first of all, no foundation for our belief.

No foundation whatsoever. Look at verses 12 and 13. 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?

[8 : 46] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. So, no resurrection. Christ is not resurrected.

This takes away, then, this takes away, then, out from underneath us, the very foundation of our faith. If Jesus died on the cross, and we certainly believe that, and he was buried, because they buried dead people.

And if he is still dead in that grave today, somewhere over there in the Middle East, in some unmarked grave, or maybe some tomb where they built a Catholic church, you know, or wherever. If his body is still there, then everything we believe in, as believers, just simply crumbles. There is no basis for it, no foundation.

If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Jesus himself is no better than the tens of thousands of others who have come along and said that they were from God.

[9:52] And there have been many other than Jesus, of course. He'd be no better than them. And we might even go so far as to say that he was a raving, maniacal madman because of what he claimed, what his followers claimed while he was alive and after he died.

It's ridiculous. And so the system of belief that we have as believers, that we believe and cherish so deeply, is then nothing more than just one among the thousands of other world religions and beliefs.

So we can just number ourselves with them. We're just one of many others. You believe what you believe, and you believe what you believe, and we believe what we believe, and we're all kind of on the same level, same plane.

You can just take your choice who you want to believe. That just relegates us to then equal footing with every other world religion. We would number ourselves among the other religions that offer life and hope to no one.

That's what we would have, no foundation. And so if Jesus is still in that tomb today, then our way of life, as I said a while ago, is a farce. It really is.

[11:09] And I would say that we're among the greatest fools that have ever walked the planet. Because we claim that our Savior was raised from the dead.

You know, that's unique among all the world religions. That's what sets us apart. Now, there are some other things as well. I think, personally, I think Christianity has the only answer for sin.

All the other religions, they have no answer for the sin problem. But the most glaring difference between Christianity and all the other world religions, some that are dead and gone now and some that are still struggling on, the difference is that our Savior was raised from the dead.

And he lives. And he's coming back again. All right, so we would have no foundation of belief if Jesus was not raised from the dead. Second, we would have no faith.

We would have no faith. Verse 14. And if Jesus is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

[12:14] Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up, if, in fact, the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

All right? Very clear. In fact, there are several things that we can identify in those few verses about our, quote, faith, our body of belief.

In the first place, Paul says that if there's no resurrection of the dead, that means Jesus was not raised from the dead, and that means our preaching of the faith is worthless.

I ought to go find another job. If Jesus is dead, and he may have been a good man, taught a lot of good things, maybe, okay, he performed some miracles, sacrificed himself, okay, died on the cross, he was a great guy, but he's still dead.

If that's the case, then all the preachers of the gospel that have ever lived, including those who are still preaching today, have wasted their lives, are wasting their lives.

[13:29] Their words have all been meaningless. Now think of all the sermons that have been preached since Jesus walked this earth over the last more than 2,000 years.

Think of all the preachers who have been called, preached, lived, and died, and I mean multiplied, probably millions of preachers, and certainly multiplied millions of sermons.

And all those words that have been preached about Christ, and about salvation, about our faith, all those words are meaningless. and worse than lies.

That is pretty serious. The resurrection is very serious. I started with Peter, Peter, then Paul, then Spurgeon. We can jump a few years. Spurgeon, and Wesley, and Whitfield, and Billy Graham, and Dwight L. Moody, and I don't know how many others I can name.

W.A. Criswell, and one of my favorites, Adrian Rogers, and one guy that struggles a little bit, Don Coleman. I mean, and multiplied millions of others.

[14:38] Wasted effort, wasted words, wasted lives, if Jesus is still dead. That's what Paul is saying. I mean, this is pretty serious.

And second, not only our preaching of faith is worthless, but our life of faith, this is where we're all included here, our life of faith is a waste of time.

It's a waste of time. That's kind of what he's saying. It is what he's saying in verse 14. If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain. And it says, your faith is also empty.

It's vain. Worthless. Waste of time. If Jesus is still dead, then we're wasting our time serving Him. I made a mistake last week, saying you'd just give it all up and not do it.

Let the preacher do everything. You know, I didn't mean that. Likewise, I don't mean that your serving is a waste of time, because I believe Jesus is a lot.

[15 : 42] And so our serving, serving Him is not a waste of time. But if He's dead, it's a waste of time. And we're wasting our time worshipping Him. In fact, it's silly, isn't it, when you think of it.

I mean, if He's dead, then what's the point of any of it? That we would be worshipping a dead, martyred, you know, good preacher, good man.

If Jesus is still dead, then you would be just as well off worshipping a rock. You ever had a pet rock?

Yeah. A rock would demand a lot less than God does. That's true. That's true. And you can just make it up as you go, too, you know. You know, alright, if not a rock, then how about a tree?

I mean, we do have people who worship trees today. You know, chain themselves to the tree. Or just pick your own image. Make a God of your own.

[16 : 44] And there are, of course, world religions today that do that. You know, they just create gods every day. This is my God now, my family idol, you know, and so forth.

That makes us no different. And so you could just worship whatever you wanted. If Jesus is still in the grave, then everything we do in the name of Christ is false.

phony, foolish. And, you know, you could add to that prayer. All of our praying. All of our serving.

All of our witnessing. All of our church attendance. All of your tithing. You know, all of that has been a waste of your time. Now think about it.

And we're talking, you know, Paul's arguing from the negative. He's painting a pretty distant picture of what it would be like if Jesus had not been raised from the dead.

[17 : 43] If he's not, then, you know, really, the bottom line is you and I are the victims of the most cruel folks that has ever been perpetrated.

Seriously. didn't Hal Lindsey many, many years ago write a book where he used the word lunatic as he was defining whether Christ really rose from the dead or he was leaving everybody on.

Yeah. Yeah, he did. I remember that. It wasn't original with him. Yeah. Yeah, Josh McDowell. Okay, that's what I would think. Yeah. Josh McDowell, yeah.

And, yeah, because he would have been a lunatic if, you know, if he was not truly the Christ and if he died and was not raised from the dead.

All right, so, no faith. If Jesus is dead, our preaching of the faith is worthless. Our living the life of faith is a waste of time. And then third, we are false witnesses of the faith, of a faith that's not true.

[18 : 49] I guess it's kind of a twisted logic. It's not true in the first place, but we're preaching it as if it was true and living it as if it were true and so we're false witnesses of a faith that is worthless that's not true.

Verse 15, he says, yes, and we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ whom he did not raise up if in fact the dead did not rise.

We're false witnesses. So every time we open our mouths to sing a chorus or a hymn, every time, you know, we witness to a friend or give a testimony of our faith to someone, every time we testify that, every time a preacher stands and preaches and Sunday school teachers gather in their rooms with their classes and they teach and all of that, whatever we speak in his name, in the name of Christ, we're liars.

That's what Paul's saying. If Jesus did not rise from the dead. You know, Paul's writing here, you ought to consider Paul here. Paul very likely was a man of wealth.

Very educated man. Very influential man. had a social standing. Pharisee of Pharisees. He was a very influential man of his day.

[20 : 19] He'd been selected, you know, to take the letters to, you know, basically warrants to have Christians arrested. And he was, he was, he was a pretty influential man.

And he was, I think, privileged to be very educated. and on and on we might go. Probably came from a very well and upstanding family. And yet Paul, of course, was willing to throw all of that away for the cause of Christ.

In fact, he did throw all of that away. And for that, for his stand for Christ, his commitment to Christ, he was beaten a number of times. He was imprisoned a number of times and for long periods of time assaulted, you know, in the streets.

He was stoned several times and whipped and left for dead and we could go on and on. Paul does. He gives us, you know, all that he's endured.

And he all, he did it all for the, for the name of the resurrected living Jesus. Now think about it. For Paul to turn his back on everything he loved, everything he possessed, tangible and intangible, and then devote his life to spreading a lie is just, I was just too hard to believe that he would do that.

[21:42] If Paul did this, then he was absolutely crazy. And so am I. And so are you. If Jesus did not rise from the dead.

All right, so this is kind of Paul's logic. He's coming from the negative, but it's very logical. If Jesus is dead, if there is no resurrection, then there is no foundation for our Christianity, no faith, no system of faith that's true or of any worth.

And third, no forgiveness. No personal forgiveness. Verse 17, And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. You're still in your sins.

Exclamation mark. It didn't have punctuation in the Greek text, but they had ways in their grammar that revealed that it was to be punctuated in that way.

You're still in your sins, he said. And so, as if things could get worse, any worse, Paul now says that if Jesus is dead, not raised from the dead, then we're still lost.

[23:03] It's essentially what he's saying. Lost right now. Every one of us. We're lost. Right here today, we're bound for hell because we have no Savior.

We're still bearing the guilt of our sin. And that's the, you know, the heart of the gospel message that Jesus left heaven, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, for my sin, your sin, and rose again the third day for our justification.

This is what Scripture tells us. Romans 4.25, Jesus was delivered for our offenses, our sins, and raised again for our justification. And so if Jesus is still dead, then we're not justified before God.

And we're, that is, we're still lost. Lost in sin and under condemnation. If he is dead today, then we should be looking for a Savior still because we don't have one.

And in the meantime, we're all headed to hell. Headed for hell. So no foundation, no faith, no forgiveness. And then, number four, no future. I mean, this is very logical.

[24:23] No future, verse 18. And also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

Most pitiable. Yes. Interesting verse there. We're to be pitied. If, if only in this life we have hope. Now, do we have hope in this life?

Yeah, we do. But if that's all we have, if it's only in this life, then we're to be pitied. And, of course, the point is, our hope is not just in this life because we have believed in and we're followers of and have placed our hope in the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christ. But, all that is vain and a big lie if Jesus is still dead. His body is, you know, body is long gone, turned to dust and whited bones somewhere, who knows where.

If that's the case, then we have no, no future whatsoever. There's no hope for the future at all. You know, and Paul says, our loved ones who have gone before us are gone forever.

[25:46] Think about that. That's what he's saying in verse 18. All those who have fallen asleep in Christ is thinking they were secure and saved and we're thinking that they were.

They've perished. That means they're gone. It's all over. And we've lost them forever is the argument here. And, you know, one of the blessings of the Christian life is that we have this knowledge that one day there will be a great reunion in heaven for all of our friends and loved ones who have died in Christ.

Great reunion in heaven. Reunion with all those that we have known and who have died believing in and loving Jesus. But if Jesus is dead, not raised from the dead, then everyone who dies is forever lost.

Forever lost. Either, you know, they're like dogs and they just go to the grave and rot and that's all there is to it. Which is what some people believe by the way.

Or, they've gone to hell and forever separated from God. And if this is true, then there will be no heaven. There will be no reunions on the other side.

[27:05] There will be no hope, no future if Jesus is still dead. If Jesus is still dead, then we are all the dust.

And that's all there will be to it. And someone has said that heaven then is a cruel joke. Mom and dad are gone forever.

Your spouse is gone. Sons and daughters are gone. Brothers and sisters are gone. Grandparents are gone. If there is no resurrection, aren't you glad? I mean, that's a, you know, a secondary gracious part of the resurrection.

The greatest part is that we'll see Jesus one day. But we'll also see our dead loved ones who died in Christ. But we won't if there's no resurrection. And so this is, you know, he's approaching it from the negative.

And also he says we've lived our lives in vain. This is kind of a repeat of what he's already said in verse 19. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men and women most to be pitied. [28:17] All right? So you can see then how important the resurrection is. We knew it before. Not that somehow before you got here tonight, you weren't sure about this thing.

I'm sure you were sure about how important the resurrection was. But it's good for us to look at what Paul has written here and to fortify even stronger our understanding of how essential, how crucial is the resurrection.

Because without it, no foundation, no faith, no forgiveness, no future. that's a bitter assumption. Now, Paul concludes this section with an argument that would be on the positive.

And not so much an argument, but a bold proclamation. He says, and I would call this a blessed assurance. So we have a, you know, a bitter assumption that we would have to assume that if Jesus was not raised from the dead, that everything is vain.

So that's a bitter assumption. But then we have a blessed assurance. Verse 20, but now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

[29:40] You see, the Corinthians were concerned about their dead loved ones in Christ who have already died, you know, and what's going to happen to them and so forth. They're going to miss something or we lost them forever or whatever.

They had believed in a few lies and, you know, and such. So he's setting them straight, but then he says very boldly, now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, those who have fallen asleep in Christ.

Christ is raised from the dead and all those who believe on him will follow him in resurrection as well.

so, we could say then that all the negatives that Paul has kind of laid out for us here, all of those negatives then become positives.

So Paul didn't have to reissue the argument now in the positive. He can just make this statement that now Christ is risen from the dead and he's the first fruits of all those who will come after him.

[30:50] He doesn't have to put it now in the positive. We can just turn all the negatives to positives. So our foundation is firm. It's firm. We don't have to worry about it, wonder about it.

It's firm. Our faith is genuine. It's real. And therefore, you know, we're not just one among many other religions.

We're the only true religion. our faith is genuine because our faith is in a risen Lord Jesus Christ. And our forgiveness is accomplished.

It's been accomplished through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and so then our future is secure. Praise the Lord.

Thank you.