

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

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He is Risen

He is Risen Indeed

Introduction:

The passage is in the first letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church – a church that was, for want of a better word, in a mess. There was a lot happening that Paul was not happy with and so he wrote to them about these various issues, and in among those issues is the one we have just read. Some people were saying there is no resurrection from the dead. Paul, in his usual way, attacks this head on and doesn't mince his words but rather points out the illogicality of their argument.

Christianity is interesting amongst the various religions in its heavy emphasis on using your ability to think, the ability to reason about things. In one sense we have Paul to blame for this. All of Paul's letters are logical, reasoned letters. That is not to say there is no emotion in Paul's letters. There is a lot of emotion, but that emotion is carried in the logical way he takes an argument and shows the fallacy of not believing correctly. What you believe is important to Paul. Coming myself from a scientific background it may explain why it is his letters that resonate the most with me personally.

The Central Tenant:

You may also be wondering why I have chosen to choose this passage for an Easter sermon. I chose it because the resurrection of Christ is the central cornerstone of what we believe. Without it, we are, as Paul says, to be pitied above all other men and women on Earth. Without it, our entire faith crumbles to the ground. Without it we are found to be liars about God. And I don't know about you but I find that pretty serious.

Let's look at the passage in a bit more detail. So there were some in the Corinthian church who were saying the dead do not rise. So what does Paul have to say to this?

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that is no resurrection from the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is our faith. (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)

That's pretty blunt. What we don't know is why some people were saying there is no resurrection from the dead. Paul doesn't tell us. Given the Greek duality between the physical, which was considered evil, and the spiritual, which was considered good, it may have been that some thought physical resurrection was too material and so were denying it. We don't know.

But we do know that if there is no resurrection of the dead then the following three things follow:

1. Christ Was Not Raised From the Dead

If there is no resurrection of the dead then Christ was not raised either and he was just another good man who died. Well actually, he wasn't a good man. He was a liar as he said he would rise again on the third day. And so were the disciples for that matter. And if there is no resurrection of the dead then there is no hope for us either that we will be raised from the dead. And if we don't rise from the dead then we don't go to be with Christ when we die. It also means Christ is not at God's right hand interceding for us. It almost means we don't have the Holy Spirit because Jesus said that He would



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send the Comforter only if He went to the Father. And so everything we believe starts to fall apart like a house of cards.

2. My Preaching is Useless

Secondly my preaching is useless and a waste of your and my time. Actually, not only is my preaching useless but I'm lying to you as well. As Paul says in verse 15:

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:15)

So that means it is not Good News I'm preaching to you. What we preach is the gospel, the good news. Paul talks about the gospel at the beginning of Chapter 15. Paul there writes:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 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, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

Notice what Paul does here. He doesn't say he was buried according to the Scriptures. Rather, he says he was raised according to the Scriptures and that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures. The dying bit was easy. We all die. The other two, not so much. But if he didn't rise from the dead then the Scriptures are found to be false. So that means you can throw out the Bible. It's a lie. A really well put together one, but a lie none the less.

Most people who are not Christians tend to have this idea that Jesus was a good person, a good teacher but not to be taken any more seriously than Buddha, or Confucius.. The Muslims revere him as a prophet but say that he didn't die on the cross but was rather raised to heaven and another person was made to look like Jesus and that person died on the cross, though there are descending views about this. Either way, it's the resurrection from the dead that they all stumble over. From a modern scientific point of view it's something which does not follow any of the scientific laws we know and is certainly not an experiment that can be repeated. Interestingly virgin births do happen in the animal kingdom so it is within the realms of scientific possibility, even if very remote, for a woman to become pregnant without sexual intercourse. But unless you are talking mere minutes after death, resurrection is not possible or even probable. And certainly not after three days.

I wonder if Paul was thinking of this when he penned in the beginning of the epistle to the Corinthians the following words:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;

The intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ



crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

I wonder if Paul was writing this today whether he would say that the believers (remember, the Jews were the believers of Christ's day) demand miraculous signs and the unbelievers look for scientific proof? We don't know. But what we do know is that the resurrection is the major stumbling block for most people.

So the question therefore needs to be asked – how do we know Jesus was raised from dead? And it is a very good question to ask. Unfortunately that particular topic requires a least a whole sermon or three of its own so I'm going to have to put that particular topic to one side. But for now let's read from Romans 8:9-11 which gives us a small part of the answer:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Spirit who lives in you. ... ^{15b}And by him we cry "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:9-11,15b-17)

And so by the Spirit of Christ living within us testifies that we are God's children. And if we know that then we can work backwards to the fact that Christ must have been raised from the dead otherwise we wouldn't have the Holy Spirit.

And also we need to read the next verse in this passage as well – 1 Corinthians 15:20:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20)

I love the but of scripture. BUT Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. And it is because of that that we can stand here this Easter Sunday and say:

He is Risen

He is Risen Indeed

OK. So if Christ was raised from the dead then not only am I wasting your time but...

3. Your Faith is Useless

Yep, I'm afraid to say your faith is useless too. You are, as many people say, just believing something to make yourself feel better. Your sins have not been cleansed. When you die, you die and we have no way of knowing what is going to happen. There is no hope for a better life. It's all a lie really. This life is all there is. How you live is largely irrelevant. There are social norms to conform to but there is no moral basis on which to live your life. You are not going to be remembered. You will be just another one of the countless millions who will disappear into the black hole of history. If you are of a pessimistic frame of mind like I tend to be then that is quite



depressing.

So do you see why the resurrection is so critical to what we believe? We tend to focus on Christ dying for our sins and just add as a footnote almost that he rose again on the third day. And in one sense that is how it should be. For Christ, God's only Son, to die on a cross, to take the wrath of God upon himself for us, must have been incredible hard for him and is such an incredible show of love towards us that it should take our breath away. Rising from the dead I suspect for Christ was the "easy" bit. But without that finally step everything crumbles and falls apart. That is why Easter Sunday is so important and why we celebrate it year after year. It is one of the cornerstones of our faith. And so we rejoice and say:

He is risen

He is risen indeed.

Conclusion:

And so we come now to a time of communion, of taking together the Lord's Supper. As we are in 1 Corinthians it seems appropriate to read from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed onto you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Given that it's Easter I thought people might like a time of quiet reflection while they take the communion elements so I've asked the musicians not to play immediately. It will also give them time to participate in communion as well.



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