

EASTER SUNDAY

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20

THE WORST "IF" IN THE BIBLE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
APRIL 12, 2020 (AM)

INTRODUCTION

Problems

We live at a time when problems are multiplying and morphing. We have the world problem of the Coronavirus pandemic. We have the church problem of trying to maintain worship and witness in a lockdown. We have personal problems such as loss of jobs, income, mental health. All these are serious problems with serious consequences.

That may not seem to be a serious problem to you. But in 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul explains how serious a problem it is for the world, for the church, and for ourselves. He focuses on the consequences of this "if." As we look at it, we'll see it is the worst "if" not only in the Bible, but in the world.

Greatest Problem

However I want to speak to you today about the greatest problem the world is facing, the church is facing, and we personally are facing. It's a much more serious problem than coronavirus and it has much more serious consequences. It's this: **What if Christ is not risen from the dead?**

Solution?

But I want to assure you that we will also be looking at the best "but" in the Bible and that gives us all hope. So, let's look at the worst "if" in the Bible and see what a problem this is if this "if" is true. Follow me for a few minutes into a dark hole.

CONTEXT

Among many problems the Corinthian church was facing (division, disorder, discipline), there was none greater than the denial of the resurrection by some in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul argues for the historical facts and the theological significance of the resurrection. In verses 12-20 he highlights what's lost when the resurrection is lost.



What, then, is lost by a denial of the resurrection?



1. IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN (14-19)

If Christ is not risen...Awful thought isn't it. Unthinkable, actually. Yet the Apostle Paul considers the possibility in 1 Corinthians 15, and he also thinks through five terrible consequences...if true.

Preaching is Pointless (14)

If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty (14).

Christ's resurrection was the most important event in the New Testament. Christ preached about it frequently before it happened (Matt. 12:39-40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:19), and the Apostles preached it relentlessly afterwards (Acts 1:22; 2:24,32; 4:10,33; 13:30,33; 17:31, etc.). Take it out of the Gospel message, and you have nothing left. It's like trying to build a house without cement; it's pointless and vain. It has no substance or content.

A preacher without Christ's resurrection is a preacher without a message. He has nothing useful to say and nothing he does say will result in anything good. He's just wasting his time preparing sermons and preaching them. And we're wasting our time hearing them.

In fact, such a preacher is a liar, a false witness (15), because he is misrepresenting God by saying he did something he didn't do – that is, saying that God raised Christ from the dead.

Our faith is futile (17)

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile (17).

If our faith is in Christ, and Christ lies dead and still under a Middle Eastern sky, then our faith is in a pile of human dust. The thief was right, if He could not save Himself, He can't save us. Christ rested the validity of all His teaching and claims upon his resurrection. Without it, the foundation cracks, crumbles, and turns to dust – as does our faith.

Christ's death was a remarkable proof of His **love** and **willingness** to save, but without His resurrection, there's no proof of his **power** and **ability** to save. All hopes of salvation lie dead with Him. Our faith clings to a decaying skeleton. Such faith is futile.

We are still in our sins (17)

And if Christ is not risen, you are still in your sins (17).

If Christ's work is incomplete, unfinished, unsatisfying, and unaccepted, our sins have not been removed from our account. They still exist, charging and condemning us before God. If Christ was not raised, then we can rip many pages out of our systematic theologies. There goes the chapter on the atonement together with expiation, propitiation, reconciliation. There goes justification and adoption. There goes heaven.

Moreover, if sin has not been removed from our account, it cannot be removed from our nature. There goes sanctification too. If Christ remained under sin's power, how can He deliver us from it? We are just like any other pagan, trying to be good in our own strength. We remain unfit for heaven and unprepared to meet God.



The Dead are Damned (18)

Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished

Paul beautifully describes a believer's death as simply and quietly falling asleep in Jesus' arms (1 Thess. 4:1). Their souls are immediately perfected in heaven, and "their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection" (Shorter Catechism 37). It's magnificent, isn't it!

But then Paul introduces an ugly note that mars the chords of hope. If Christ is not risen, those who have fallen asleep in Christ "have perished." It's so violent, so hideous. Their souls are perishing in hell and their bodies are perishing in the grave.

They turned up at heaven's gates, but when they looked for their advocate, they were told, "Oh, he died long ago." All hope dies. Death can separate us from the love of Christ. The dead are damned. Therefore, let us mourn as those who have no hope.

We are the most pitiable of people (19)

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (19).

Think of all the spiritual stress, strains, and sufferings that Paul went through to testify to the risen Christ. What self-denial, what self-sacrifice! And what kept him going as he faced beasts and beastly men? The hope of the resurrection (30-32).

But if Christ didn't rise, then neither would Paul. He has no life here, and he has no life hereafter. "Pity me!" says Paul, "more than anyone else in the world." Anybody is better off than the Christian. Better to be a Muslim, a Buddhist, or even a devil worshipper. Better to be anything than a Christian without resurrection hope.

NO APPLICATION

 If there's no resurrection, there's no truth to apply.

NO RESURRECTION MEANS
NO APPLICATION.



It's a terrible "if" isn't it? Are we left in this deep, dark hole?
No, because there's a "but" that changes everything.



2. BUT NOW CHRIST IS RISEN

Imagine the Corinthian believers as this letter was read to them. How the darkness must have settled on the congregation as Paul explored the black-hole consequences of a still-dead Christ in verses 14-19.

But then, just as despair was about to overwhelm them, the sun breaks through the storm: “But now is Christ risen from the dead” (20), Paul emphatically asserts. He brought us to the edge of the abyss of hell...only to endear the risen Christ to us all the more.

Don't despair, He is risen – He is risen indeed! Therefore all the consequences are reversed.

Preaching is Powerful

Preaching is the most momentous activity in the world. It is the primary way that God has chosen to tell the world about Christ's resurrection. It is what makes preaching preaching, and not just lecturing or teaching. It's not merely the transfer of information, it's a proclamation of resurrection life and eternal life. The central message of the Gospel is, “Christ is risen from the dead,” and therefore we will too. As the preacher declares the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God gives life to the spiritually dead, and promises eternal life to the spiritually alive.

Faith is Firm

Faith is only as strong as its object. You can have 100% faith in thin ice, but your faith will only be as strong as the ice. You can have 1% faith in concrete, but your faith is as strong as concrete. Faith is only as strong as what it believes in.

If our faith is in human dust, then our faith is as strong as dust. But if our faith is in the risen Christ, that's concrete faith. No, that's granite faith. Christ's resurrection stamped “Verified” all over his teaching. Every time you're tempted to doubt Christ's claims, return to the empty tomb and it will stamp all over the Gospels: “Certified! Endorsed! Corroborated! Proven! Ratified! Confirmed!” Our faith is well-grounded.

Sins are Scrubbed

The resurrection tells us that Christ's work has been accepted by God. It's proof of purchase. It says “Complete! Finished! Satisfied!”

Children, when you make a mistake in your schoolbooks, what do you do? You get an eraser, don't you, and scrub it out. But, it's impossible to remove it entirely isn't it, especially if you were pressing down hard when you wrote in your book. Well, Christ's resurrection removes all the mistakes we've made, all our sins. It doesn't matter how many, how deep the imprint, how dark the ink. You can take a microscope to look for your sins, and you won't find one of them. They are gone without a trace. They no longer exist in the eyes of God the Judge.

Christ's resurrection means we still have theology. Because the tomb is empty, our theology is full. Christ's resurrection means that the pages on atonement return. And here come the pages on expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, justification, adoption, heaven, and GRACE! Our sins have been wiped off our records and are being worked out of our hearts.



The dead are blessed

Of the dead we can say with Jesus, "They are not dead but living" (Mark 12:27). When Christians turn up at heavens gates, they find an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. The gates are raised because Christ was raised.

Now their souls are more alive than they have ever been. They know love, joy and peace in unimaginable quality and quantity. No wonder, the apostle John says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." If we could grasp how happy they are, it would change our mourning.

We are to be envied

If you are not a Christian, if you do not put your faith in Christ alone for salvation, you probably look at Christians and pastors with a degree of pity. You feel sorry for us, that we give so much of our lives to a dead person. You feel sorry for us that we sometimes have to suffer mockery or loss for our faith in a living Savior.

But I can say to you in the words of Jesus, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." How can I say this? Because Christ is risen from the dead. That makes all the service and suffering worth it. We look past it all to the great hope of our resurrection life because of Christ's resurrection life.

Don't pity us, friend. Envy us. We believers are of all people to be envied. This is a good jealousy. I want to make you jealous in this way. We have enviable hope. What's yours? What basis for hope do you have? Do you see how central, vital, essential, and imperative Christ's resurrection is for you?

APPLICATION

♥ **Believe the resurrection.** "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

♥ **Defend the resurrection.** Never give up this truth. Never weaken on this truth. Find out how to argue for it.

♥ **Proclaim the resurrection.** At the end of the day, God blesses the simple proclamation of the resurrection. We can argue all day, but ultimately God calls us to declare it.

♥ **Rejoice in the resurrection.** O praise the name of the Lord our God!

O Praise the Name

His body bound and drenched in tears
They laid Him down in Joseph's tomb
The entrance sealed by heavy stone
Messiah still and all alone

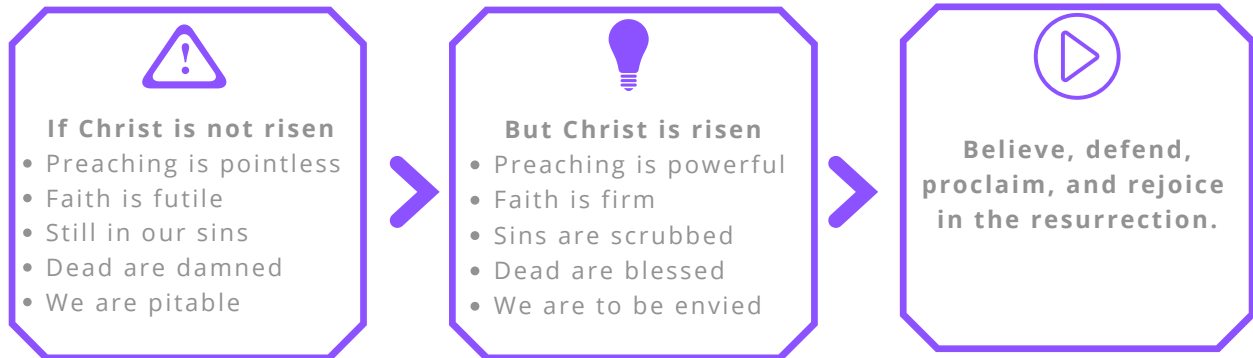
O praise the name of the Lord our God
O praise His name forever more
For endless days we will sing Your praise
Oh Lord, oh Lord our God

Then on the third at break of dawn
The Son of heaven rose again
O trampled death where is your sting?
The angels roar for Christ the King

THE RESURRECTION CHANGED HISTORY.
HAS IT CHANGED YOUR ETERNITY?



CONCLUSION



FURTHER STUDY

Online Articles

- [It's Friday but Sunday's Comin'](#) by S. M. Lockridge. (Audio)
- [Those who sleep in the dust shall awake](#) by Nancy Guthrie.
- [The Resurrection of Christ in the Old Testament](#) by Matthew Barrett.
- [10 Ways Easter Changes Everything.](#)

Books

- [Risen: 50 Reasons Why the Resurrection Changed Everything.](#) by Steven Mathewson
- [Alive: How the Resurrection of Christ Changes Everything by](#) Gabriel Fluhrer
- [Raised?](#) by Jonathan Dodson (good book for skeptics and doubters)
- [The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus](#) by William Craig

Discussion Questions

1. How would you answer someone who denied the resurrection? What evidence would you present?
2. What would you say to someone who said they were a Christian but doubted the resurrection?
3. What role does the resurrection have in your evangelistic witness to others?
4. How is the resurrection connected with the forgiveness of sins?
5. How is the resurrection connected with sanctification?
6. Where is the resurrection taught in the Old Testament?
7. What are your favorite songs that celebrate the resurrection?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Dr. David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.prts.edu

EASTER SUNDAY

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20

THE WORST "IF" IN THE BIBLE



Coronavirus is big problem for world, church, us.

Christ not risen is bigger problem for world, church, us

Biblical answer?



If Christ be not risen

- Preaching is pointless
- Faith is futile
- Still in our sins
- Dead are damned
- We are pitiable

NO RESURRECTION MEANS
NO APPLICATION

Left in deep dark hole?

HIS BODY BOUND AND DRENCHED IN TEARS
THEY LAID HIM DOWN IN JOSEPH'S TOMB.
THE ENTRANCE SEALED BY HEAVY STONE
MESSIAH STILL AND ALL ALONE

THEN ON THE THIRD AT BREAK OF DAWN,
THE SON OF HEAVEN ROSE AGAIN.
O TRAMPLED DEATH WHERE IS YOUR STING?
THE ANGELS ROAR FOR CHRIST THE KING

"IF JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD, THEN YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT ALL THAT HE SAID; IF HE DIDN'T RISE FROM THE DEAD, THEN WHY WORRY ABOUT ANY OF WHAT HE SAID? THE ISSUE ON WHICH EVERYTHING HANGS IS NOT WHETHER OR NOT YOU LIKE HIS TEACHING BUT WHETHER OR NOT HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD."
TIM KELLER



Believe, defend,
proclaim, and rejoice
in the resurrection.



But Christ is risen

- Preaching is powerful
- Faith is firm
- Sins are scrubbed
- Dead are blessed
- We are to be envied

THE RESURRECTION CHANGED HISTORY.
HAS IT CHANGED YOUR ETERNITY?

Action?