

Good News From The Graveyard

1 Corinthians 15:12-23

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Ernest Poole portrayed one of his characters in his novel, "The Harbor," as one who does not believe in history. He was convinced that the past had nothing it could teach us. He said cynically: "History is just news from a graveyard."

Perhaps, it may have never occurred to this author, but unwittingly he gave a remarkable description of Easter. For this is what Easter is all about. Easter is "news from a graveyard!"

And this news comes from where news of any kind is least likely to come – from the grave, which is the symbol of the final defeat and humiliation of man's most noble hopes.

And what glorious news it is! Someone has described it this way: "Easter is not an argument. It is an announcement. It is not a syllogism. It is a shout!"

Whatever else Easter may be to you, it is a triumphant proclamation of good news – “He is not here! He is risen!”

Now, we have heard it said many times, especially on Good Fridays, that the Crucifixion is the foundation of the Christian faith.

However, on Easter Sundays, we also hear some preachers proclaim that the resurrection is the foundation of Christianity.

Thus, some Christians are confused and are asking, “Which is really the true foundation of the Christian faith? The crucifixion or the resurrection?”

Which is really more important of the two?

Now, lest we start an argument here, I want to say that neither of the two is more important than the other. Both are as important as the other.

- To argue about this is just like debating which is first, the hen or the egg? Or, which is more important – the father or the mother?
- We cannot and must not choose one at the expense of the other.
- None of them is more important than the other.
- Both are indispensable to the Christian faith.

The Crucifixion and the Resurrection are the two elemental facts constituting the Gospel.

- They inter-lock and are inter-related.

The fact that Christ died does not in itself constitute the Gospel, save as it is linked with His resurrection and vice-versa.

The Crucifixion establishes the value and meaning of the resurrection. And the Resurrection demonstrates the value and meaning of the Crucifixion.

Someone has said that “Calvary’s Cross was a question mark raised against the Judean sky.” It was indeed a big question mark when it was raised.

But by Easter morning it had become an exclamation point!

When the cross was raised that Friday noon, it was indeed a great question mark:

- What then?
- What’s next?
- Is it true or is it false?
- The next 38 hours or so while Jesus remains in the tomb was the most suspenseful time in the history of the world.
- Everything was hanging in the balance!

Then came the great exclamation point!

The good news from the graveyard: “He is not here!” “He is risen!”

- Then, the great question mark of the crucifixion was erased and obliterated by the great exclamation point of the resurrection.

1 Corinthians is the great resurrection chapter in the Bible.

Although the main theme is the resurrection of course, the Apostle Paul approached the topic from two different standpoints:

1. Negative: The great question mark – verse 14.
“If Christ has not risen...then what?”
This is the great question mark of a crucifixion without a resurrection.
2. Positive: The great exclamation point – verse 20.
“But now is Christ risen...”
This is the great exclamation point of the crucifixion because of the resurrection.

I. The Great Question Mark: “If Christ has not risen...” – verse 14.

The death of Christ on the Cross raised three question marks in the minds of His disciples and of the then known world and even to the whole Christendom.

A. It raises a question mark on the Gospel.

a. “If Christ has not risen,” then Christ’s own testimony was untrue.

1. Then, it is not true that He is the resurrection and the life.
2. Then He cannot be the way, the truth and the life.
3. “If Christ has not risen,” then all the great doctrines concerning Him crumble to the dust. Thus, the Apostle Paul said our preaching is in vain! Our faith is worthless! For what is there to preach about and what is there to believe about?

b. As C.S. Lewis has so aptly puts it in his Trilemma: “It is either, Christ is the Son of God or He is the biggest lunatic or liar that ever lived!”

c. “If Christ has not risen” then the Church is also a gigantic fraud.

1. It is nothing but a majestic structure, without any foundation.
2. If there was not empty grave in Joseph’s garden, then this is the emptiest thing on earth.

d. “If Christ has not risen” then Christianity is a grand delusion.

1. It means our assurance of forgiveness, our joy of justification, our peace of heart and mind, our answered prayers, our sweet fellowship with God, our bright hope for the world to come, are all imaginary, and all the millions in every age who have had these experiences have been fatally betrayed!
2. And as the Apostle Paul said – we have only been false witnesses of God.

B. It raises the question concerning death and immortality.

a. “If Christ has not risen,” then those who believe in immortality have been living in a fool’s paradise.

1. Instead of “departing to be with Christ” those who have died in this faith have perished like a beast. Their whole life has been a mere hallucination.
 - b. “If Christ has not risen,” then there is no answer to the great question that has puzzled the sages of all ages:
 1. “What is death?”
 2. “Is there life after death?”
 - C. It raised the question mark on life itself – verse 19.
 - a. “If Christ has not risen,” then we are of all men the most miserable.
 1. It means for us to be cast down from the high tower of our personal blessedness into the abyss of darkness and despair.
 - b. “If Christ has not risen,” then there is nothing more to life.
 1. Life is but a ghastly mirage. The Apostle Paul said in verse 32, “If the dead are not raised (and they are not if Christ is not risen), then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”
 - c. “If Christ has not risen from the dead,” then we are not better than the animals in the zoo.
 1. Life would be completely meaningless and totally purposeless.
- II. The Great Exclamation Point: “But now is Christ risen” – verse 20.
- A. Now is Christ risen!
 - a. This is the good news from the graveyard!
 - b. “He is not here!”
 - c. “He is risen!”
 - d. What a joyful ring there is in this shout. It is like the blast of the trumpet victory.

- e. "Now is Christ risen," and the foundations of hell have been shaken.
- f. The son of righteousness has arisen in His strength and scattered the darkness and brought health and beauty with His healing rags.

"But now is Christ risen," and the great question mark becomes a great exclamation point!

B. The resurrection ratifies and authenticates the efficacy of the Gospel.

- a. "Now Christ is risen," therefore the Gospel is true.
- b. Our preaching is not in vain. The Gospel of the Risen Christ is still the power of God unto salvation to every believer.
- c. "Now is Christ risen," therefore our faith is not in vain. We do not trust a dead Savior, but Him who is "the Resurrection and the Life." It is no vain thing to trust on the Living Lord, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, who had the power to lay down His life and to take it again.
- d. "Now is Christ risen," therefore we are not now in our sins. He died for our sins, but He rose again for our justification. His death was the paying of the price. His resurrection was the evidence that God had accepted the price paid for our redemption.

C. The Resurrection answers the question or mystery of the Grave.

- a. Is it not fitting that the answer concerning the question of the grave came from the grave itself? "Now is Christ risen," therefore there is victory over the grave: "O grave where is thy victory?"
- b. John 5:28-29 states, "...the hour is coming, in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice, and will come forth..."
- c. Death has always been a winged monster to the human race, where Christ and His resurrection is unknown. But "now is Christ risen," therefore there is victory over death: "O death where is thy sting?" He hath swallowed up death. Christ Himself took part

of the same flesh and blood that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death. Jesus Christ has abolished death, and had brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

d. The Resurrection assures the coming and establishing of the Government of Christ.

1. "Now is Christ risen," therefore, we are not of all men the most miserable. Christians should be the happiest people on the face of the earth, because of the resurrection of Christ.
2. "Now is Christ risen," therefore, we have the best of all friends in Jesus, the sweetest of all promises in God's Word, and the greatest of all treasures in the fullness of Divine Grace.
3. "Now is Christ risen," therefore we hold the highest of all earth's positions in being the servants of the Lord, crowned with honor and glory. We enjoy the brightest of all prospects in the coming kingdom. For according to Revelations 20:6, "...we shall reign with him a thousand years."

Conclusion:

In that first Easter Sunrise Service, when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the empty tomb of Jesus, they were greeted by a shining angel, who told them the good news from the graveyard: "He is not here! He is risen!"

But he went on further and gave them a directive:

- Come, see the place where the Lord lay.
- Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen.

After hearing the good news from the graveyard, we must also obey the directive from the graveyard, summarized in four little words: “come, see, go, tell.”

- First of all, we must come and see. We must first accept Christ personally and understand the implications of His resurrection.
- Then, we must go and tell. We should be stirred to action. It is our duty to run with the good news and tell others.

“Christian brothers shout and sing -
Death has lost its ancient sting!
Quickly now the tidings spread:
Christ is risen from the dead.”

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.