

If Christ Has Not Been Raised (03/27/2016)

Text: I Corinthians 15:14, 15a, 17-19

Introduction

If someone were to ask you why you got up early this morning to go to a sunrise Easter service, what would you tell them?

- Would you say it is because you like getting up early in the morning?
- Would you say it is because you like watching sunrises?
- Would you say it is because your friends and family would be there?
- Would you say it is because if you go, there will be a great breakfast afterwards?

Why do we do this?

The “Real” Easter?

The Internet tells me that the first recorded sunrise Easter service as we know it was in 1732, in Germany. And if you spend too much time on the Internet, you’ll find all sorts of controversy about celebrating “Easter”. Like so many things on the Internet, you can read strong opinions about how this is really a pagan tradition, the word “Easter” refers to a pagan goddess, that the service has its roots in sun worship, that the Bible clearly commands us NOT to have sunrise services in Ezekiel chapter 8:16-17, and that God’s judgment for holding sunrise services like the way we do at Easter is to not listen to our prayers!

Well, so much for getting our spiritual advice from the Internet!

I’m very confident that you did NOT come out here this morning to disobey God and worship the sun. And I’m pretty sure you didn’t come here just to see your friends or have breakfast at church afterwards.

We come together on this day because we want to celebrate Resurrection Sunday. We want to remember that Jesus really rose from the dead on a day like today.

The Gospel of the Resurrection

As Christians, we can’t overestimate the significance of Jesus Christ rising from the dead. Near the end of his first letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul teaches that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the MOST IMPORTANT thing he has to pass on to the believers there. He calls it “of first importance”. And that gospel, that good news has key details:

- Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures

- He was buried
- He was raised from the dead
- He appeared to many
- Belief in this news, and personal trust in Christ, has the power to save

Where call ourselves Christians because we pledge our allegiance to Christ and this message of His gospel. We are believers.

The Consequences of Doubting the Resurrection

But do we really believe? What if we have some doubts about the claims of this gospel? In 1st Corinthians, chapter 15, Paul confronts the church for questioning a crucial part of the good news. There were “believers” in Corinth who were teaching that there is no resurrection of the body. And Paul confronted them aggressively. In chapter 15, he makes the point that if someone says that there is no resurrection of the body, than Christ must not have resurrected with HIS body. And if that is the case, than all of Christianity falls apart. Listens to what he says, 1st Corinthians, 15:

- ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

Paul says that the resurrection is what makes his preaching useful, and what makes individual faith useful. Without resurrection, the gospel message has no power, and faith produces nothing.

- 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.

Paul says that the resurrection is a key part of his testimony and witness. If Christ hasn’t been raised from the dead, then Paul is a liar. Because the gospel message is nothing without the resurrection. Let’s skip ahead to vs. 17:

- ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

If Christ hasn’t been raised from the dead, Paul says our faith is futile. That means it can’t produce any result. It is pointless.

- ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

Paul says that without the resurrection of Christ, all those who have died with their hope in Him are lost. They are without a future without Christ’s resurrection. We are without a future. Finally, in vs. 19, Paul says:

- ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

If our Christianity is only about this life, the benefits we get in the here in now, then Christianity is a fraud. We should be pitied for wasting our time with it.

So to recap: Paul teaches the Corinthians that if Christ hasn't risen from the dead, then:

1. Paul's (or anyone else's) preaching is useless
2. Our faith is useless
3. Our faith is futile (incapable of producing any result, pointless)
4. We are still in are sins
5. All who have died are lost (without a future), and
6. We are to be pitied because Christianity is a fraud. We are wasting our time.

So the truth of the resurrection is key to us as Christians at Cornerstone. Christianity is not just a "nice idea" with "good teachings" from a "great teacher" who was unfairly made into a martyr. No, not at all. Christianity is a radical hope in a risen savior that promises us eternal reward. Resurrection of the body. An eternal future with resurrected bodies.

But is it true? Do you believe it? How can you be sure?

Jesus is Alive

It is early and maybe some of us are a little sleepy, so I am going to do a little object lesson on the resurrection that will require some volunteers. I'm not going to ask you do anything hard, just to stand over here and hold up a little sign.

When someone asks you whether or not you believe in the resurrection, I want you to consider 5 points that might help you make your point. Volunteer #1: A

- **A** Appearances to his followers
 - 1st Corinthians 15:6
 - After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.
 - This is not just an appearance to the women, or to His disciples. This is to 500 people at the same time. 500 eyewitnesses who could confirm this reality. It is not tales told by just a few.
- **L** Low status of women in first century Judaism
 - "Criterion of embarrassment"
 - Mt 28:8-10
 - ⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with

joy, and ran to tell his disciples. "Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

- The first witness to the resurrection were women. The least in the society at the time. God chooses the "foolish of this world" to shame the wise.
- The unexpected story has a ring of truth to it, because it is not the clever polished story we'd expect, but rather the account of what really happened in Rome-occupied Israel almost 2000 years ago.
- **I** Immediate proclamation of the resurrection in Jerusalem
 - Acts 2, Peter's sermon, approximately 10 days after the Ascension of Jesus
 - We don't have time to go into it, but in 50 or so days since denying Christ, Peter's whole life turns around. He is like a new man. He proclaims boldly, because real faith in a real risen Christ has turned everything around.
- **V** Voluntary sufferings undergone by the first witnesses
 - Whole book of Acts, also Josephus, Tacitus and others
 - Again, we don't have time to go in to it in detail, but the whole book of Acts is filled with disciples of Jesus giving their all, even in difficult unglamorous situations. Something happened to them, they saw something that made them brave, decisive, and able to change the world upsidedown.
- **E** Empty tomb
 - Mt 28:6
 - He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.
 - The empty tomb is the final piece of evidence. With no body having been found, the Pharisees

A - L - I - V - E. Thank you volunteers.

Jesus is Alive

The point of this little lesson was to help you see that our belief in the resurrection is not "blind faith". We have a reason why we believe this. God does not call us to believe in what isn't true. In fact, He commands us to have a reason for our hope. And our hope is based on the resurrection, and there is LOTS of evidence of why we believe this.

Jesus is alive.

That is why we are here.

Jesus is alive.

That is why we are Christians.

Jesus is alive.

That is why Christianity is not a fraud.

Jesus is alive.

That is why our preaching is not in vain.
Jesus is alive.

That is why our faith is not futile.
Jesus is alive.

That is why our faith has a point.
Jesus is alive.

That is why we are not dead in our sins.
Jesus is alive.

That is why we don't need the world's pity.

Now maybe when you thin about your own doubts, or you responding to someone's questions about Easter, this might help you with an answer.

I want us to close with a traditional greeting that is done on days like today. I'll start, and you respond.

"He is risen!"

"He is risen indeed."

"He is risen!"

"He is risen indeed."

"He is risen!"

"He is risen indeed."

Amen.

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,
²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.