

## What If Christ Had Not Been Raised?

A sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

What would be the first thing you would buy if you had a million dollars? If you could go anywhere in the world, in the universe, where would it be? If you could be any animal, you would be... What if you could have breakfast with any person from throughout history? Who would it be?

I'm sure you've played this lighthearted game before...the game of "what ifs." It's fun to imagine how different life could be...sometimes. Sometimes, asking questions with the words "what if" isn't part of a game but a part of serious reality, like: "If you went to work tomorrow and your boss handed you a pink slip and said you had two weeks to find a new job because you were being let go, do you have any idea where you'd even start looking and applying?" Or, if this summer, we get some terrible fires that reach town and your house burned down, do you know where you would move to? Or, what if you were in a freak car accident, who would take care of your kids?

Sometimes, it's not so much fun to think about how different life could be. That's the mindset the apostle Paul was in. He had spent some time in the city of Corinth, building up the church, and more importantly, the believers there. But now, in Ephesus, he received a letter from them letting him know things weren't going so well there. A variety of spiritual issues and questions had arisen, and the Corinthians needed help. They needed guidance. They wrote a letter to Paul, and he responded with this, the book of 1 Corinthians.

Today, he answers one of their questions. They wanted to know if there would be a resurrection of the dead. He answered their question with an even scarier question, the same question he asks us today, "What if Christ had not been raised?"

You know, for Paul, it was just a "what if" question. But for the disciples, in the hours, the first couple of days following Jesus' death on Good Friday, it was reality. I'm not so sure the disciples were giddy as kids on Christmas morning, just bubbling with excitement, waiting for Jesus to walk through the door on Sunday morning. Jesus was dead. And they did nothing to stop it.

Oh, Peter whipped out his sword and chopped off a guy's ear in a brief moment of courage, but he didn't try to argue when Jesus commanded him to put it back in its sheath. But even more than that, I'm sure what really burdened his conscience was the thought, "Well, what if I wouldn't have been such a coward when they "accused" me of being Jesus' disciple in the courtyard? What if I would have done more to stand up for Jesus?"

And the other disciples, can't you imagine them questioning themselves as well? "What if we would've followed Peter's lead and physically fought back when they wanted to arrest Jesus? What if we would've been in the crowd when he stood before Pilate, swaying the crowd to vote to release Jesus instead of that barbarian, Barabbas? What if we would have taken Jesus seriously all those times when he talked about suffering and dying, instead of just brushing it off as Jesus just talking?" Because now he was dead...gone.

If I were in their shoes, knowing Jesus was dead, but not knowing for sure he would rise, I don't know how I'd be able to go on...knowing who he was...knowing what I didn't do...the pain, the guilt, the hopelessness.

That's the picture Paul wanted to paint for the Corinthian believers here, and it's the same one he paints for us as well. Because if there is no resurrection of the dead at all, then not even Jesus rose. That's the sad reality. It's unfortunate that there were some in the Corinthian church who being influenced by the typical pagan Greek attitude toward the doctrine of the resurrection, the mindset that "when the dust has drunk the blood of man, and he's once dead, there's no uprising."

But Paul points out what would be even more unfortunate...if that were true. Let's just follow Paul's logic here: What if there's no resurrection of the dead at all, then...not even Christ has been raised because he had died. The disciples were witnesses.

And if Christ had not been raised, their preaching was useless. Their faith was useless and futile and worthless. They were "false witnesses" because what they taught about Jesus rising from the dead and what they believed about Jesus being alive, being eternal, it was all a hoax. They were liars.

And if Christ was still dead their sins were still there because Jesus didn't take them away because he couldn't be God and be dead. Then those who had fallen asleep believing in Christ were lost for all eternity because they don't get a second chance to change their minds, and those who were alive and still believing in him were pitiful fools.

Thankfully, though, we know how this all played out. After all, why are you all here this morning...this particular morning...Easter morning? Because Paul's hypothetical situation is just that...merely hypothetical. There is a resurrection from the dead. Christ himself has been raised from the dead.

But just think about it for a moment. What if Paul's premise were actually true, and Christ had not been raised from the dead, that would change everything. Our outlook in life would be just as bleak.

If Christ had not been raised – we are to be pitied more than all people. We've made a sad choice. Why? I mean, just look at the life of a believer. As followers, imitators, of Jesus, we deny ourselves and our desires. We make sacrifices out of faith in Jesus. We suffer at the hands of our spiritual enemies, always hoping that the sufferings of this present time won't even begin to compare with the eternal bliss and glory stored up for us in heaven. But if Christ had not been raised, then we've put so much stock into believing in him and living for him and for what?

But you know what would be even worse than that? "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." So, if Christ had not been raised...We wouldn't have the second half of this book (the Bible) We wouldn't have Easter. But more than that...our preaching would be useless....faith would be useless...you'd still be in your sins.

How would that be? Think about it. Yeah, Jesus died for sins. But if he didn't rise from the dead, then two things: 1) He isn't God, because God is eternal, 2) He isn't God, because he lied. He had said so many times throughout his earthly ministry that he would rise from the dead, and so to not do that would make him a liar.

And if he isn't God, he couldn't have taken our sins away. In Romans, Paul wrote, "[Jesus] was raised to life for our justification." But, if he was not raised to life, then we haven't been justified. If we haven't been declared just and righteous, our sins haven't been declared forgiven. Then we are still in our sins. The dead in Christ are in the same hopeless state, lost eternally because they, too, got it wrong and they don't have a second chance to turn things around.

What a pity! Without Jesus' resurrection, this life would be terrible. We'd be without any real hope of getting to heaven because we're sinful. We fall way short of God's demands for perfection and can't do

anything to change our status. The reality is, we'd be living for ourselves, and then once we die, that would be it...except not.

Our bodies would be laid in the grave...to rest in peace. But death would be anything but a peaceful sleep. Because without Jesus' resurrection, we'd be going where we deserve, to hell. If Christ had not been raised, as bad as this life can seem at times, the nightmare of hell, much worse, would never end.

Now, I don't know if this has ever happened to you with someone you love, but Becky plays this "game" with me where she'll ask, "If I were to die before you did, would you remarry?" And my typical response is always, immediately something along the lines of "I'm not going to play this game...I'm not going to answer that question because you're still here."

Well, Paul here does the same. "If Christ had not been raised..." He presents this hypothetical statement (which logically followed on the heels of the question about the resurrection of the dead he'd been asked), but do you notice how Paul doesn't even allow time for that foolish thought to sink in. It's as if he's saying, "What if??? Don't even think about it!"

**"If Christ had not been raised...but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!"**

"INDEED been raised." Indeed...it's a matter of fact. We don't have to play that "what if" game. There are no ifs ands or buts about it. "Christ has indeed been raised."

Friends, do you see the beauty and the comfort in that statement? All the imaginary scenarios Paul set forth earlier, about useless preaching, futile faith, being a false witness, being lost, having no hope, being pitied, still being in our sins, we don't have to think about them – at all – because they are not true.

Here is what's true. Through one man (and woman) and their sin in the Garden of Eden, not only have scary questions like these, doubts like these come about, but sin came into the world, and death came as a consequence of that sin. We will all die because there's sin in the world. We will all die because we sin.

"But Christ has indeed been raised..." Through one man and his sinlessness throughout his entire life, through one man and his death on the cross, through one man and his resurrection from the dead, our sins are gone, we will die, but we will live again. Because of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection...because Christ has indeed been raised, we, too, will be made alive. Yeah, as descendants of Adam, we inherit the unfortunate characteristic of sin and death as a result of that sin, but as a child of God, we inherit eternal life through Christ. Because Christ has been raised, we, too, will rise to eternal life in heaven.

Is that enough assurance for you? If not, read further. Paul calls Jesus the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

You know what the firstfruits are, right? In Israelite culture, the firstfruits would've been the first part of the harvest, given to God out of confidence that God would bless them with many more crops...given out of confidence that there's more to come. Christ's resurrection is the first, but we have the confidence that there's more to come. We are to follow!

Wow, how encouraging is that, especially when we're tempted to think like, to live like Jesus is dead, like he hasn't been raised, like he'll never be raised. But no resurrection of Christ means no peace with God in this life and no blessed resurrection for us in the life to come.

But, we don't ever have to think like that. "Christ has indeed been raised!" That means we aren't in our sins anymore. Our faith is not futile, but fruitful, because our peace with God starts right now. We are full of sure

hope right now. And, because Christ has indeed been raised, those who have fallen asleep in Christ will awake not to the nightmare of hell, but to the glorious dream...no, better, the glorious reality of bliss and joy and eternity in heaven. That includes you and me.

What if? "What if Christ hadn't been raised?" A silly question. The wrong question to ask. The better question is, "What if you were to die tonight, are you confident you'd be going to heaven?" No hesitation. A resounding YES! Because Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

That's what Easter's about. That's what we're here for. That's the awesome comfort the sweet Easter message gives. "I know that my Redeemer lives...He lives, and I shall conquer death...Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives: 'I know that my Redeemer lives!' " Amen.