

# THE RISEN CHRIST

## Part 3 - The Importance of the Resurrection

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 15:14-20 (ESV)



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### Story and Evidence:

This is the last in our three part series on Jesus' resurrection. Part I focused simply on the **STORY** of Jesus' resurrection. Part 2 examined the **EVIDENCE** of this story—looking at facts which showed not only is the resurrection plausible—it's the most reasonable answer for what happened to Jesus' body. Today we ask the question that determines if the past two studies have been worthwhile—What difference does it make if the tomb was empty? To get at this question, we'll turn to what the Apostle Paul had to say about it to the Christians in Corinth. First, a story.

### What Of All You Know Is Wrong?

A few decades ago, explorers found three mastheads sticking out of the ice about 300 miles from the North Pole. They belonged to Captain John Franklin's ship of Her Majesty's Royal fleet. In 1845, Franklin had been given a special assignment to claim the North Pole for Britain. In the regality of this fatal expedition, the good Captain and his crew supplied their vessel with all that made their heritage so great. They wore their finest uniforms. They stocked the galley with monogrammed silverware, napkins and china bearing Her Majesty's seal. They brought a gourmet chef to cook for them. They adorned their quarters with their nation's flag. They built a wine cellar in the hull and brought an organ that played 50 of their favorite tunes.

Then they set out in pursuit of the North Pole. But there came a problem. The icy water, the darkness and the arctic winds cut through their thin but finely pressed uniforms, and soon they all perished—many of them found wrapped for warmth in the flags they intended to stake as a claim for their motherland.

Franklin's mistake is plain to us now, but obviously not to him as he was in the process of making it. He was used to a way of doing things. He was used to regality and splendor, not severe cold and arctic winds. He was used to ornate cotton uniforms, not multi-layered fur coats. He was accustomed to navigating his homeland's seas, not uncharted waters. He took with him what he knew best, but he knew little of what he'd actually face. And all those things he carried along served only to mock him as he watched his crew perish under the conditions they met.

What if all you know about what lies ahead is wrong? If life is a journey, what if the destination is one you're not prepared to face? The thing about captains like Franklin is the consequences for how they prepare never really come around until those preparations are proven incompatible with the reality awaiting them. The North Pole didn't **become** cold and icy just for their arrival. The North Pole is what it is—bitterly cold and icy. And no matter how resplendent the ship is that sails into her ice floes, that ship with all her expectations will eventually have no choice but to yield to the truth of the conditions that await.

We are all on an unstoppable trajectory toward the grave. And whatever we believe about what happens after, we'll have no choice but to yield to the truth of the conditions that await. And we are **ALL** philosophers and theologians when it comes to this. Every last person believes things about life and what comes after. Even those who believe you can't possibly know what happens when you die are asserting that the answer to the question is **unknowable**. And that's a pretty specific philosophy. Every last person also believes things about God. Even atheism, denying God exists, is a profoundly theological position. To say God is **no one** and **nothing** is a remarkably specific doctrine.

What does this have to do with Easter? Just as the North Pole is icy and bitterly cold—regardless of whether we can imagine it, so what lies beyond the grave also is what it is. We can't will our imaginations of life after death into existence any more than we can warm the North Pole with our thoughts. So what do we need to take with us? What **must** we have to sustain us? Well that all depends on the truth of what awaits, doesn't it?

The people in Corinth were beginning to suggest we don't need the resurrection of Jesus to have hope after the grave. So Paul responds with the intensity you'd expect from one who'd survived the North Pole and then saw the ship Franklin meant to take there. You have needs—life or death needs of eternal consequence. And our three greatest needs are met in Christ **ONLY** if He is risen. And, Paul says, if He is **not** risen, these needs remain unmet and we are to be pitied—like Franklin's crew obviously sailing off to a world they're not prepared to enter. What do we need that only the Risen Christ can give?

### 1 Corinthians 15:14-20

<sup>14</sup>If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup>We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup>If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

### We Need The Truth:

Here Paul highlights, mainly in the negative, three vital needs which, if Christ has been raised from the dead, have been met. The first need the resurrection meets is our need for truth. What are you counting on? When Jesus stood before Pilate at His trial, Pilate asked Him if He was a king. Jesus answered this servant of King Caesar, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to me." Pilate shot back, "What is truth?" Truth is what has been before you ever were. It's what remains when you're gone. It's what tells you what lies ahead and what you need to take with you to survive.

1. **JESUS' RESURRECTION AUTHENTICATES THE APOSTLE'S MESSAGE:** <sup>(vs. 14)</sup> If Christ wasn't raised, the apostles' preaching has been empty. What were they teaching that stood or fell on the truth of Jesus' resurrection? They taught Jesus saves us from the wage our sin demands—death—by dying in our place. And by rising from the grave, He proves His authority over death. They gave their lives to proclaim this throughout the world. If Jesus wasn't raised, they died for nothing and so did Jesus. His resurrection authenticates the truth of their message about His authority over death.
2. **JESUS' RESURRECTION REVEALS GOD'S INTENT TO SAVE:** <sup>(vs. 15)</sup> If Jesus isn't raised, what they've been saying about God's **purpose** for Christ is also wrong. The wage of our sin is not a payment due to sin or the devil. It's due to God! And it was **God** who sent Jesus to live the perfect life we failed to live and give His record to us by putting our record of failure on Him, crucifying Him for it. It was **God** who ordained He'd die in our place, and it was **God's** plan to raise Jesus from the dead so through our union with Him we too might be saved. All this is because it was God's intent to save His people. If Jesus didn't rise, the apostles misrepresented God's intent. But His resurrection reveals God's intent to save us.
3. **JESUS' RESURRECTION PROVES HE'S WORTHY OF OUR TRUST:** <sup>(vs. 14)</sup> If Christ is not risen, our faith is futile. If the apostle's message and God's intent to save are both untrue, and if Jesus is just another martyr lying in a grave, there is no Christianity. Anyone who's ever trusted Jesus to accomplish anything **real** for them has done so in vain. His resurrection proves we can trust Him to conquer the grave for us.

Because Jesus Christ has risen from the grave, the teachings of the apostles are meaningful and true—it was God Himself who intended to save His people through Jesus' death. Because Jesus Christ has risen, our faith in Him rests on a foundation built on truth. He said He came to live and die in our place and rise victorious over the grave, and that is what happened. So we don't merely hope our faith will count for something. To be ready for what lies ahead, we need the truth. Jesus is the truth.

## We Need Forgiveness:

An obvious implication for Easter is Jesus died to meet a need. Another is He also rose to accomplish something death alone could not. Romans 4:25 says it like this: Jesus was “**was delivered up (to die) for our sins and raised for our justification.**”

4. **JESUS' RESURRECTION ACCOMPLISHES OUR FORGIVENESS:** <sup>(vs. 15)</sup> He died for our trespasses, He rose for our justification. If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, our text says, we are still in our sin. This is **serious**. John Piper noted Paul “*is pointing out here an utterly crucial connection between the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. And he is saying if Jesus is not raised, then His death accomplished nothing for the forgiveness of our sins. And if Christ accomplished nothing to remove the guilt and condemnation of our sins, then we are still in our sins and under the wrath of God. The death of Christ was the **basis** for our forgiveness and justification before God.*” And His resurrection was the **accomplishment** of it.

If Jesus wasn't raised, His death is just another ordinary death and it did nothing to **actually** pay for our sin. His resurrection **accomplishes** the goal for which He died—the removal of our guilt by paying the debt we owed for it. Because Jesus Christ has risen from the grave, we are forgiven for our sins.

## We Need Significance:

Why, ultimately, does it matter if we have the truth? What difference does it make if we are forgiven or not? Why would God offer such a price to rescue us from our sin? What are we worth to Him? In Jesus' resurrection, we find an answer to this.

5. **JESUS' RESURRECTION ASSURES US OF LIFE AFTER DEATH:** <sup>(vs. 15)</sup> If Jesus isn't raised, those who died believing in Him still perish. To perish is to experience the fullness of God's wrath. But if Jesus was raised, those who have lived a life of faith in Him don't perish. Instead, **they live** in perfect peace with God with every debt of sin satisfied. They live in joyful union with the Maker and Lover of their souls. And the only reason is because God wanted this so much that He made it possible at the cost of the life of His own Son. If Jesus didn't rise, when we die we perish. But His resurrection assures us of life after death, if our lives are hidden in Christ.
6. **JESUS' RESURRECTION GIVES THIS LIFE SIGNIFICANCE:** <sup>(vs. 15)</sup> If Jesus didn't rise, Christians should be pitied because we've followed a lie that holds nothing for us when this life is over. In obedience to Christ, we'll have missed out on a lot of the carnal pleasures of this world. But it's not just that we'll have missed out on worldly pleasures. We'll also have spent our lives hoping for eternity in the presence of a God who either doesn't exist, or worse wants nothing to do with us. We're to be pitied because we've been deluded fools!

But His resurrection shows us our faith is not in vain, and thus we are to be, as John Piper put it, **envied**. Piper writes “*there is in every one of us the longing that our lives count for something ... that we don't come to the grave and say, 'I've wasted it!'*” Paul ends our chapter saying, “*be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*” If Christ isn't raised, we should pity any who trust Him for anything. But His resurrection assures us not only is there life after death, there is great significance in this life because all we do in His name is eternally significant and valuable.

## But In Fact, Christ Has Risen!

Paul has been expressing what's hypothetically lost if Christ hasn't been raised—our faith is in vain, Paul's preaching is futile, God doesn't intend to save us, when we die we perish, and our lives are a pitiable sham. Still, many are avoiding the question Paul begs: Are we sure we're right about what we believe concerning the value of life, our standing before God and what comes after the grave? Or are we like Franklin's crew happily packing everything we like to think we'll need, but little of what we truly need. It's not only Christians who should be pitied for basing their lives on a lie. We should pity anyone who does that.

But if Christ has been raised, then all that would've been lost is now secure. So Paul leaves the hypothetical for the truth: “*Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” <sup>(vs. 20)</sup> Jesus is risen and has gone to secure and prepare a place for us with Him in glory forever if, and only if, we accept that He died for our sins and rose to accomplish our forgiveness before God. What lies ahead is uncharted territory for us all. What we bring, if we're to survive, must be nothing short of all that we need—a Savior with authority over death itself. There is only One, because there's only One who has risen—Jesus Christ. Do you have what you need?