

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered what would be different about our world if Jesus had not been raised from the dead? It's an issue the Apostle Paul addressed directly in 1 Corinthians 15:13-20 (MSG).

“Now, let me ask you something profound yet troubling. If you became believers because you trusted the proclamation that Christ is alive, risen from the dead, how can you let people say that there is no such thing as a resurrection? If there's no resurrection, there's no living Christ. And face it—if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors. Not only that, but we would be guilty of telling a string of barefaced lies about God, all these affidavits we passed on to you verifying that God raised up Christ—sheer fabrications, if there's no resurrection.

If corpses can't be raised, then Christ wasn't, because he was indeed dead. And if Christ weren't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever. It's even worse for those who died hoping in Christ and resurrection, because they're already in their graves. If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. But the truth is that Christ *has* been raised up, the first in a long legacy of those who are going to leave the cemeteries.”

Everyone has to make a fundamental choice about whether or not you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. And in this passage of scripture, Paul asks and answers the question, “What IF there was no resurrection?”

In 2007, the Discovery Channel broadcast a show entitled “The Lost Tomb of Jesus.” This show claimed this was the tomb of the Biblical Jesus. Several bone boxes, or ossuaries, were found south of Jerusalem. One ossuary was labeled “Jesus” another was labeled “Miriamne, or Mary” and a third had an inscription reading, “Judas, son of Jesus.” The theory of the show is that Jesus of Nazareth survived the cross; married Mary Magdalene and they had a son and named him Judas.

This show was co-produced by James Cameron who wrote and directed movies like Titanic and Avatar. So what are the chances that this really does contain the bones of Jesus?

Most experts say the theory of the show has more holes in it than the hull of the Titanic. Amos Kloner, the Israeli archaeologist who oversaw the excavation in 1980 had this to say about the show: “This guy is pimping off the Bible. It makes a great story for a TV film, but it's complete nonsense. Jesus [Yeshua] was the third most popular name of Jewish men, and Mariamne [Mary] was the single most popular name of Jewish women at the time. The idea that these are the ossuaries of Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene is pure fabrication.”

So basically, what professor Kloner is saying is this would be like you finding a tombstone in an old cemetery in the U.S. that said, “George and Martha” and came to the conclusion that this is

the grave of George and Martha Washington.

One of the most implausible things about the claims of this show is that IF Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had a son, what would be the odds of them naming him after the betrayer of Jesus, Judas? That would be as likely as a couple Holocaust survivors naming their son Adolph Hitler Goldberg. But on this Easter, let's entertain the possibility that they found the bones of Jesus. What would it mean?

I. IF JESUS IS DEAD...

It's okay to ask the question, "What IF there was no resurrection?" In the passage we read this morning, Paul used the word "if" five times. So what IF? What IF Jesus didn't walk out of the tomb? Let me give you three negative conclusions we must consider IF Jesus is dead.

A. If Jesus is dead OUR FOUNDER IS A FAKE

If Jesus is dead, He's not just a fake; He's a fraud and a failure. Every other religion in the world can continue without a living founder. Gautama Buddha was a teacher who lived and died in India 500 years before Jesus visited us at Bethlehem. He is dead and buried, and Buddhists still practice their faith. Mohammed was an Arabic warrior who lived and died six hundred years after Jesus ascended back to heaven. He is buried in Medina, yet Muslims continue to practice the teachings of a dead founder.

But we can't do that as Christians. In Matthew 12:40 Jesus said, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

The great intellectual C.S. Lewis was correct. There are only three options when it comes to who Jesus is: Lord, Liar, or Lunatic. He said He would come back from the dead. IF He said it and knew it wasn't true, that would make him a LIAR. IF He said He would come back from the dead and really thought He would, but didn't, that would make Him a LUNATIC—one taco short of a combination platter. But IF He claimed He would be raised from the tomb, that leaves only one option: He is LORD.

B. If Jesus is dead OUR FAITH IS FOOLISH

Paul wrote, "IF Christ wasn't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever." (1 Corinthians 15:17 MSG) There are a few liberal Christians who don't believe the miracles in the Bible so they claim the resurrection of Jesus was just a spiritual resurrection. They say He was only resurrected in the minds and hearts of the disciples. Some people could continue their faith even without a resurrection. But I couldn't.

To me, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the hinge of our faith. Everything else swings on that. If there is no bodily resurrection, everything about our faith falls apart like a house of cards.

Some atheists and skeptics call us a bunch of fools for believing in a risen Savior. If Jesus is not alive, then they are right. We ARE a bunch of fools. For the last 47 years I've been preaching the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. If the resurrection is a cruel hoax that means I'm a fool and have basically wasted my life. If they could prove without a doubt that they REALLY found the bones of Jesus, I would issue an apology, close this book, and walk off and never preach again.

C. If Jesus is dead OUR FUNERALS ARE FINAL

Have you ever attended the funeral of a friend or relative? If Jesus is dead, that really was your last goodbye because that would mean death really is the end.

One of the first reports I wrote as a young student was on the life of Marie Curie. She and her husband, Pierre, won the Nobel Prize in 1903 for the discovery of radium, which led to the development of x-ray technology we still use today. She was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize. She wasn't a Christian. In fact, she and her husband were avowed atheists. Pierre was killed suddenly one day when he was struck down by a streetcar in Paris. He was 46 years old.

Marie was absolutely devastated. At the funeral, she clung to the body of her husband and kissed his face repeatedly.

After Pierre's funeral she wrote letters to him every day in her diary. These entries can be read in her biography compiled by her daughter, Evie Curie. It is painful to read about the depth of her pain and hopelessness. She wrote: "Your coffin was closed and I could see you no more. I saw you go down into that big dark hole. They filled the grave and put sheaves of flowers on it. Everything is over. It is the end of everything, everything, everything." A few days later she wrote: "On the Sunday morning after your death, Pierre, I went for a walk. In the street I walk as if hypnotized, without attending to anything. I shall not kill myself. I have not even the desire for suicide. But among all these vehicles is there not one to make me share the fate of my beloved?"

She continued to throw herself into her work and won another Nobel Prize in 1911, but she never recovered from her grief. There are no pictures of Marie Curie with a smile on her face. She lived twenty-nine more years until she died suffering from the effects of radiation poisoning from her lifetime of experiments. What a sad story!

And that is the story for everyone one of us who have ever stood at a cemetery IF Jesus wasn't raised from the dead. How sad. IF they found the bones of Jesus, our Founder is a fake; our faith is foolish, and our funerals are final.

But I've got good news. The good news is that after three days in the tomb, God raised Jesus from the dead.

I love to tell the story about how I was leading a group of travelers to Jerusalem four or five years ago. We had visited the place of the skull and seen the empty tomb outside the old City of Jerusalem. We were gathered in a group having a solemn time of worship and sharing the Lord's Supper together. About two hundred feet behind us in another part of the Garden, a group of African-American believers were looking into the empty tomb. As one of the guys walked out, he shouted with a voice that could be heard all over East Jerusalem. "I've got GOOD NEWS! HE AIN'T IN 'DERE!" So now let's talk about the good news.

II. BECAUSE I BELIEVE HE LIVES...

I love the Gloria Gaither song, "Because He lives I can face tomorrow. Because He lives all fear is gone." And that's a great song for a believer so sing. But not everyone is a believer. And those benefits of the resurrection don't apply to those who don't believe in the resurrection. Marie Curie never had the assurance, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow..." In fact, she filled her diary with dark thoughts of how she COULDN'T stand to face tomorrow.

So, the important aspect of the resurrection is that you and I must BELIEVE in the resurrection for it to have an impact on our lives. That's what Paul meant when he wrote, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) You must truly believe Jesus is alive to have assurance of your salvation. Let me give you three great benefits of believing that Jesus is alive.

A. I have joy in a crazy world!

Peter had been an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ, but he was writing to people like all of us who had never actually laid eyes on Jesus. "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." (1 Peter 1:8)

We are living in a crazy world: There are terrorist attacks, a crazy dictator in North Korea, and oil prices keep fluctuating. Things seem almost out of control. But they aren't out of control. God is in control. As the song says, "He's got the whole world in His hands." He's not causing these crazy things to happen because God allows people to make choices—bad or good. But when you look at the big picture God is controlling where His creation is going. He knows everything that will happen. You'll never hear God say, "Uh Oh."

Because I believe Jesus is alive, I have found the secret for inexpressible, glorious joy. I have never seen Jesus with my physical eyes, but I love Him. And because I believe in the One I've never seen, I am filled with joy.

Joy is not the same thing as happiness. Happiness is dependent on what happens. It comes from the old word "hap," which means luck or fortune. But joy isn't dependent on what happens, it is only dependent on Jesus. And He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Believing that Jesus is alive gives you a positive outlook on life. We need to be like the little boy who was in his backyard with a baseball, and a bat. He said, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world. I'm the greatest hitter in the world." Then he tossed the ball up and took a mighty swing—he missed. He said, "I'm STILL the greatest hitter in the world." He tossed the ball up again and missed again, and said, "I AM the greatest hitter in the world." He missed the next three swings. Then he smiled and said, "Wow! I'm the greatest pitcher in the world!"

B. I can face the future without fear!

Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

There is a story about a tribe of Native Americans with a unique practice for training young braves. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, he was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Before that night, he had never been away from the security of his family and tribe.

One particular young man was blindfolded and led many miles into the wilderness. He was instructed not to remove the blindfold for an hour. On this particular night, dark clouds obscured the moon and stars, and when he removed the blindfold all he could see was utter darkness. Every time a twig snapped, he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. Every time an animal howled, he imagined a wolf leaping out of the darkness. He spent a terrifying night on the edge of panic, but he didn't leave. After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight began to lighten the eastern sky. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing beside a tree just a few yards away, armed with a longbow and arrow. It was his father. He had been there all night long. If the young man had known his father was there, he could have slept in peace instead of being terrified at every sound. And that's why you should be able to let go of your fears. Jesus has promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you, so because He's alive, we can face the future without fear."

C. I'll live forever with Jesus!

Jesus said, "Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." (John 14:19) The resurrection changes everything. The empty tomb assures us that Jesus opened the door of heaven.

A cartoon in a Christian magazine showed the setting of Jesus' tomb with the stone till over the opening. Two demons were posted there to guard the tomb. One of the demons said to the other, "I sure hope Jesus doesn't come out of that tomb, because if He does, Hell help us, all Heaven will break loose!" That's what happened! All heaven has broken loose!

Because I believe He lives, I know that when I die, I will go to be with Jesus and I will live with Him forever in heaven. So whatever happens in this life, we know how this story ends! Someone said that the entire book of Revelation can be summarized in two words: WE WIN!

CONCLUSION

If you're one of my Facebook friends, you know I discovered a new song this past week that has become one of my favorites. It's entitled, "This Ain't Over." That may not be good grammar, but it is great theology. It's by Ross King, a Christian singer/songwriter who graduated from Texas A&M. When I first heard this song, it brought tears to my eyes because it communicates the victory we have because Jesus rose from the dead.

The second stanza says,

There was a plan to save us all;
By all accounts it was a failure;
And everybody saw that Jesus died;
We were humiliated and evil celebrated;

And we were afraid that it was over;
But here's the thing HE ROSE AGAIN;
And He looked Death in the eye and said,
"You're done! You'll never win!"

So we don't worry about the story;
'Cause we know how this thing ends;

And while we're waiting, we'll keep on saying, "This ain't over!
Not by a long shot. We are not even close to being done.

This ain't over! We won't give up without a fight.
We will not run. Cause this ain't over."

And when it's over, we will overcome. Between Friday and Sunday;
There is one day that feels like a thousand years;

And we grieve cause we have lost it all;
And believe for the impossible;
And we try not to fear;
And if we listen close, we can almost hear, "This ain't over!"

Sometimes we get stuck in the misery of Saturday and it seems like a thousand years, but the empty tomb reminds us that God gets the last word.

So here's the message I want you to take away today. It's bad grammar, but it's great theology.

When you've prayed and it seems your prayers are unanswered, remember, "This ain't over!"

When you get that bad report from the doctor, I want to remind you, "This ain't over!"

When someone you love walks away, don't forget, "This ain't over."

When someone breaks your heart, I need to tell you, "This ain't over!"

When your body is wracked with pain, I promise you, "This ain't over."

When you feel like giving up and there's no hope, God wants you to know, "This ain't over!"

When it seems like evil is winning in the world, I believe with all my heart that "This ain't over!"

When you walk away from the grave of that person you loved, lift up your head because, "This ain't over."

And when you breathe your last breath on earth, I got GOOD NEWS for you, "This ain't over!"

Turn to your neighbor and say, "This ain't over!"

This ain't over. Not by a long shot. Because we know how this thing ends. And in the end we win because we believe that Jesus is alive!

OUTLINE

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B. Our faith is foolish

C. Our funerals are final

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“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” *1 Peter 1:8*

B. I can face the future without fear!

Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” *John 16:33*

C. I know I’ll live forever with Jesus!

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For the Joy...
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