

Third Sunday of Easter
 May 4, 2014
 I Cor. 15:12-20

In Christ Jesus, whose resurrection is the assurance of our resurrection, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Are you living for a “hopeless end” or an “endless hope?” The difference is staggering. We mentioned last week that the sophisticated, logical Greek mind looked upon the teaching of the resurrection as foolishness. When Paul proclaimed the resurrected Christ in Athens some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers mocked him and said, **WHAT DOES THIS BABBLER WANT TO SAY?** Most Greek philosophers like Plato believed in a dualistic view of nature. In other words, everything that was spiritual was intrinsically good, and everything physical was intrinsically evil.

Therefore the concept of a resurrected body was repulsive to them. They believed that the after-life was a time for the soul to escape from the prison of his evil body and return to God. One of their philosophers wrote, “When the day shall come which shall part this mixture of divine and human, I will leave my body, and myself I will give back to the gods.” Other Greek philosophers were of the opinion of the pagan Aeschylus who wrote, “When the dust has drunk the blood of man, and he’s once dead, there is no uprising.” What a “hopeless end!”

Unfortunately, as we mentioned last week, some of the believers in Corinth were influenced by these teachings and were doubting or at least questioning the resurrection of Jesus and the bodily resurrection of the dead. In our text Paul dissects these two beliefs and tells these Corinthians and us what a big difference it makes.

THE RESURRECTION DIFFERENCE

I: WITHOUT CHRIST’S RESURRECTION, WE FACE A HOPELESS END!

II: WITH CHRIST’S RESURRECTION, WE HAVE AN ENDLESS HOPE!

Paul writes in vs. 12: **NOW IF CHRIST IS PREACHED THAT HE HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, HOW DO SOME AMONG YOU SAY THAT THERE IS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD?**

A denial of any kind of resurrection also denies that Christ rose. If no flesh rises from the dead, then Easter didn’t happen either. Those members in Corinth who said they believed in Jesus’ resurrection, but did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, can’t be right. Faith in the resurrection of Christ actually includes faith in the bodily resurrection of all the dead. The two must go hand in hand. In this verse Paul is stating his thesis: **If Christ is risen, then we cannot deny the possibility and the reality of the resurrection of the dead.** In the following verses, Paul now draws some logical conclusions to show how absurd and eternally damaging it is to reject the idea of a physical resurrection.

We read verses 13-19: **BUT IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, THEN CHRIST IS NOT RISEN. AND IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, THEN OUR PREACHING IS EMPTY AND YOUR FAITH IS ALSO EMPTY. YES, AND WE ARE FOUND FALSE WITNESSES OF GOD, BECAUSE WE HAVE TESTIFIED OF GOD THAT HE RAISED UP CHRIST, WHOM HE DID NOT RAISE UP--IF IN FACT THE DEAD DO NOT RISE. FOR IF THE DEAD DO NOT RISE, THEN CHRIST IS NOT RISEN. AND IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, YOUR FAITH IS FUTILE; YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS! THEN ALSO THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN CHRIST HAVE PERISHED. IF IN THIS LIFE ONLY WE HAVE HOPE IN CHRIST, WE ARE OF ALL MEN THE MOST PITIABLE.**

Paul is appealing to the Greek’s logical mind. He says that the consequence of denying the resurrection of the dead is that Christ will then have not been raised. Therefore, all that we teach, the whole Gospel message is then useless, vain, empty. Denying the doctrine of man’s resurrection logically leads to denying the fundamental doctrine of Christ’s resurrection. When that doctrine is lost, the entire message of salvation is lost. Deny one doctrine of Scripture, and you will, if you follow it out, deny other doctrines as well, for **THE SCRIPTURES CANNOT BE BROKEN.** God’s Word is a whole body of truth, not just separate teachings that don’t affect one another.

Following Paul’s logical line of thinking means that when he proclaimed that Christ did rise from

the dead, he must have been lying, for if man does not rise from the dead, then Christ didn't rise either. Then the Easter story is only a fairy tale of enormous proportions that has deceived countless billions around the world for almost 2,000 years and Paul's seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus was only a hallucination.

In fact, Paul goes on to state, that if Christ didn't rise, then people who believe in him have an empty, useless faith. This means all of us would still be condemned by our sins and under Satan's control. Trusting in a Messiah who did not conquer sin, death and the devil would leave us no better off spiritually than unbelievers and those who do not believe in a hereafter or in a god. Paul had written to the Romans that Christ **WAS RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION**. If Christ was not raised, then we have not been justified. If we haven't been declared righteous, our sins haven't been forgiven and we are still in our sins. That would be our hopeless end, our many sins still condemning us to eternal damnation and separation from God.

Also for those who have fallen asleep in Christ, who died confidently believing in Jesus' resurrection; like Delilah, Laurie Marzofka, Prof. Gurgel and many, many more, then they would have perished eternally, if Christ has not risen. Theirs too would be a hopeless end without a resurrection to eternal life.

Paul concludes the first part of his thesis with this final implication for this present life for all of those who believe in Christ: **IF IN THIS LIFE ONLY WE HAVE HOPE IN CHRIST, WE ARE OF ALL MEN THE MOST PITIABLE**. If believing in Christ has value only for this present earthly life, then Christians are fools who have made a very tragic mistake and who should be pitied above all others. Without the resurrection, Christianity is pointless. All who have renounced themselves for Christ's sake, who have made sacrifices and endured sufferings for His kingdom, who have been led to believe that the sufferings of this present life is not worth comparing to the bliss and glory of the hereafter are really to be pitied and are hopeless.

Then unbelievers who indulge in the sinful pleasures of this life and live to gain the greatest this life has to offer---fame, fortune, and fun---are wiser and far better off in practical terms than the believers. Then our words of faith that we proclaim at the close of the Apostle's Creed; **"I believe...in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,"** are not true, are a bunch of lies. Our words this morning from the Nicene Creed would then be nonsense, **"I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."** We would be looking and hoping for something that would never come to pass. What a hopeless end we would have. The Christian life is not worth living if the hope and promise of the resurrection is not true.

But Paul's thesis consists of two points. The second point makes the big difference. We read in verse 20: **BUT NOW CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND HAS BECOME THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP**. In effect Paul is saying, "Away with all doubt, unbelief and hopeless endings--Jesus Christ rose from the dead!" Easter is a fact that cannot be denied. The resurrection of Christ is a reality, upon which we can rest our faith for an endless hope.

Paul says that Christ is the "first fruits" of those who have fallen asleep in Him. The picture is that of the first fruits of the harvest. In the Old Testament the first fruits were the first sheaf of grain, the first basket of wheat or bushel of corn or grapes that were offered to the Lord as a thank offering to show that all the harvest was His and from Him and would be dedicated to His glory. The first fruits also were an indication that the harvest of the rest of the crop was just beginning. The rest of the grain, wheat, corn and grapes would follow. What a perfect picture of our Savior's resurrection.

Because His tomb was empty so shall ours be. Because He rose from the dead, so shall we rise. Because He entered into eternal glory so shall we follow Him into eternal glory. Paul wrote in Romans 6:5 **FOR IF WE HAVE BEEN UNITED TOGETHER IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS DEATH, CERTAINLY WE ALSO SHALL BE IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS RESURRECTION**.

Christ is the first in the harvest of those who have fallen asleep. That means that the bodies of Delilah, Laurie, Prof. Gurgel and of all the others who have died in Christ will be resurrected to everlasting life and be reunited with their souls where they and we will live forever in endless joy. Theirs and ours is not a hopeless end, but an endless hope.

We are still in the Easter season. According to the church year, this year it lasts till June 1st, but in reality the whole New Testament era is the Easter season. It began with the resurrection of the Redeemer and it will end with the resurrection of all of the redeemed. Between those two events, here in time, lies the spiritual resurrection of all of those who have been quickened, made alive in Christ through saving faith.

So we live between two Easters, Christ's Easter resurrection some 2,000 years ago and our resurrection on Judgment Day. In the power of that first Easter resurrection we gladly and confidently face whatever trials and troubles, sorrows and sadness this life has to offer and look longingly for that last Easter of the final Resurrection.

What difference does the resurrection of Jesus make in your life and in mine?

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BUT

WITH CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, WE HAVE AN ENDLESS HOPE

Amen.