

## THE HOPE OF EASTER\_ HE'S ALIVE!

Ever wonder what life would be like if something never happened\_ or had happened differently? Like **suppose**, Hitler had been victorious in WWII or if President Kennedy had not been assassinated. How might the course of history have changed? How different might our present reality be? There's actually a whole field of study called "**Alternate History**" in which historians consider a specific historical event, which they refer to as "*the point of divergence*" – and they hypothetically erase the event. Then they imagine from that point forward the likely consequences. What would the ripple effect be? What impact would erasing that moment have on us today?

This reminds me of how the Apostle Paul pondered what life would be like **if there was no Easter** by asking the question "*What if Jesus was not raised from the dead?*" What difference would it have made to them\_ or to us? Open your Bibles to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15; page 1789 in the Pew Bibles. Though I'd encourage you to read the whole chapter, we will be focusing on some selected verses, which will be on the screen for your convenience. (14-15) "**If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 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.**" If there was no resurrection, the apostles were all liars\_ and our beliefs are as empty and vain. Now, I'm not saying you wouldn't be a better father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, neighbor or friends for following Jesus' teachings, but nothing you do would be of eternal consequences. Reading on in verse 17-19 "**If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.**" If there was no resurrection, we are still lost in our sins. We will live and die as sinners and even our best efforts will gain us nothing but death. (Romans 6:23a) That death would not be some peaceful sleep or unconsciousness. If we ever see our departed loved ones again, it'll be joining them in a place of eternal torment\_ and therefore we are to be greatly pitied. Why? The pleasures we denied ourselves, the things we gave away to those in need, the sacrifices we made for the benefit of others- well it was all a waste.

But\_ Paul swears\_ not on stack of Bibles\_ but by the Spirit of God that gave Him these words in our Bibles\_ that Christ has been raised. Listen to the earlier verses (3-7) "**For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.**" Paul says the resurrection is an historical reality. 100's, if not 1000's, of people saw Jesus alive 3 days after He had been brutally killed. The body that was broken and bleeding was whole and healthy. How could this be?

There are those who admit that they cannot responsibly deny that multitudes of people claimed to have seen Jesus alive again\_ but are unwilling to accept the possibility of His bodily resurrection. So they suggest some historical alternatives for these eyewitness accounts. Maybe Jesus wasn't really dead. He only fainted and walked out of the tomb when he came to. Or maybe He had a twin brother who showed up all of a sudden and claimed to be Jesus. Or maybe it was mass hallucination, something in the water caused gave them visions. Or perhaps some say He was beamed up to a UFO, rejuvenated, and then returned to earth. The concept of resurrection is beyond their ability to accept\_ unless an ancient alien made it happen.

Yet, Paul explains using the illustration of a seed in verse 42-43. **The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.** Jesus is not dead. Paul says in verse 20: **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...** And Paul also insists in that verse because this is true of Christ, it will also be true of those who put their faith in Him\_ for **He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** In other words, He leads the procession out of the grave. He's the first of many who will follow. Those who put their faith in Jesus will rise even as He did. Turn to a neighbor and tell them Jesus isn't dead. **"He's alive!"**

Now listen closely to what this means. We are **not** still in our sins. Because Jesus is alive, we know He is who He said He was (**Romans 1:3**) \_ and so we know His death on the cross accomplishes what He said it would. His sacrifice provides the atonement for our sin. When He declared on the cross that **"It is finished!"** He announced that our sin debt had been paid. Our record of wrongs has been erased. Tell your neighbor, **"He's alive and I'm forgiven!"** All of our sins, even those we thought were so despicable and so shameful that no one who knew of them could ever want anything to do with us. Jesus blood forgives all of our sins.

One more thing. After Jesus arose, He ascended to the Father. As He told His followers in **John 14** that He would do; that He was going to prepare a place for us in His Father's house. There's plenty of room, but Jesus was making ready a place especially for us. There's no back door into heaven. There's no servant's entrance, either. There's only one way and His name is Jesus. It's not Peter serving as bouncer at the door\_ deciding who gets in or is kept out. No, it's our faith in Jesus that is the key to the gate. If you believe that, tell your neighbor, **"He's alive and I'm forgiven\_ heaven's gates are open wide!"** As Tom sang so marvelously\_ we should be shouting from the rooftops.

No wonder Paul says in verses 53-57: **"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Amen? Death has lost its sting. I have nothing to fear from. Don't misunderstand me, I do not look forward to the process of dying. It is so often a painful experience. But, because Jesus died and rose again, I have utter confidence in what awaits me on the other side. I will rise victorious from the grave and dwell forever in glory. Not because I've earned a place in heaven, but because Jesus paid for my eternal home there. And that's true for you, too, if you have fully placed your trust in Jesus.

And in the meantime? Paul closes his thoughts in verse 58 with these words: **"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm."** Don't let those who are rewriting history, erasing the resurrection from its pages, confuse you. In fact, Paul says: **"Let nothing move you."** Don't turn loose of your convictions. Keep the faith. Hold onto your hope...and... **"Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."** Think about it. We are not to be pitied. Because Christ has been raised, everything we do for the kingdom, all we give to kingdom work, everything that we do in Jesus' name, matters. And considering all that Jesus did for us at the cross and all that He gained for us in the resurrection, it's the least we can do.