

### “Christ has indeed been raised“

The modern world largely discounts the possibility of miracles. In fact maybe you struggle with the miracles of the Bible... or you know someone who does. This may very well be a barrier to honestly listening to the Word of Christ. Some people long for a Christianity that has been stripped of all the miracles. And, in fact, you will find many Christian churches which believe and teach just that. They teach, for example, that the feeding of the 5,000 isn't a miracle... it's just a story that teaches us that when one person shares, everyone starts to share. They teach that Jesus didn't heal the sick... it was all psychosomatic. (They convinced themselves they were better and they “got better.”) And Jesus didn't really rise from the dead. His resurrection is just a made-up story that teaches us to rise from the death that is selfish, sinful behavior, and to “live” a new life of kindness and generosity.

Let me be clear: when you strip the miracles out of Christianity, you are not left with Christianity. You are left with a different and false religion. The miracles are an essential part of the story. Without miracles, the Christian faith collapses entirely.

I think you should know, however, that those who deny miracle do so on the basis of faith. [*Repeat.*]. The common assumption is that science proves that miracles don't happen. That's just not true. Science deals with nature and explores natural causes. That's all it does and it's all it can do. If there are causes for something beyond the natural, then science has nothing to say. Science is silent. Miracles do not have a natural cause. That's why they're called “supernatural.” They are beyond the scope and realm of science. Miracles cannot be proven or disproven by science. Those who discount miracles do so, because they want to believe that **there can't be a God who does miracles**. There is no way to prove or demonstrate that assumption... it can only be believed. Ironically, it must be accepted by faith.

Understand that when it comes to believing in miracles or believing God, no one can approach this topic neutrally and objectively. Everyone approaches it with a presupposition... either the presupposition of faith in God, or the presupposition of unbelief. Thomas Nagel, an atheist, at least was honest about that much. He said: “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.”<sup>1</sup> A believer, then, places hope in God. An atheist places their hope in their not being a God! Nagel hopes there is not a universe where he is ultimately accountable to God. It's easier for him to hope that there is no God.

So, bottom line... to disbelieve in miracles requires faith. For the rest of this sermon, if you are one that struggles with miracles, would you suspend your faith in their impossibility for a little while, and consider the possibilities if they truly are miracles.

If there are miracles, then they will reveal something about the God who does them. Today we will consider the greatest miracle of the Bible: the resurrection... and the greatest of resurrections – that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Last Word” by Thomas Nagel, Oxford University Press: 1997

So today we will look at some words that Paul wrote to a church in Corinth that was made up primarily of people immersed in the Greek culture. This is interesting, because the Greek culture of that time knew nothing of the resurrection of the body. Just up the road from Corinth was Athens, the religious and culture center of Greek culture. When Paul preached in Athens, and taught about the resurrection, that caused quite a stir. No one had ever taught that there would be a bodily resurrection of the dead. Some were intrigued. Others scoffed. Corinth was not far away, and they took their cues from Athens. Believing bodily resurrection was possible was completely counter-cultural.

I think many have this idea that the people of Jesus' day were a primitive, superstitious culture, and that the people would believe anything. That's just not true! In fact, especially when it came to the whole concept of bodily resurrection, few people of that time believed in it. The Greeks didn't believe in it. Even those who believed in an afterlife viewed the body as a prison from which we would be permanently freed at death. So no resurrection. Many Jews didn't believe in it either. The Sadducees were a prominent Jewish religious and political group that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Some believed resurrection of the righteous would happen at the last day, on Judgment Day. But a bodily resurrection happening in this natural world? No one believed that!

And here's the rub: if a person doesn't believe in bodily resurrection, then they also won't specifically believe that Christ rose from the dead. So Paul writes a 58-verse chapter (15) in his first letter to the Corinthian church to demonstrate to them how foundational and essential it is to believe in the miracle of the resurrection, and consequently, the bodily resurrection of Christ. Paul demonstrates that if Christ could not and did not rise from the dead, the entire Christian faith is destroyed. So let's read carefully:

1 Corinthians 15:12-22

**12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?**

"IF" it was preached? It most certainly was! It was preached by all the apostles... frequently. The resurrection was central in the preaching of all of them. So the "if" here is more the sense of "since." Since it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead,

Some Christians in Corinth were skeptical about bodily resurrection and were saying that such a thing was impossible and never would be. Paul is indignant. How can they say that?!

Paul launches into 7 disastrous results of Christ has not been raised.

**13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, That's the statement that launches the consequences if resurrection is impossible... then not even Christ has been raised.**

1) Christ is not raised. Christ is true man, so if bodies cannot rise, than Christ's body did not rise. Deny bodily resurrection and you also necessarily deny Christ's resurrection.

**14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.**

2) The second consequence of no resurrection is: Preaching is useless. 3) The third consequence: and so is your faith. That Buddha didn't rise from the dead has no bearing one way or the other on the religion. That Mohammed didn't rise has no impact on the religion. But Christianity is not like those. If Christ did not rise, Christianity ceases to exist. Our preaching and our faith are useless. "Christ crucified and risen"... that was the broken record of the apostles teaching. It's what every ancient sermon was about. Take away the resurrection and there is nothing worthwhile left to preach about, and your faith is useless.

Romans 10:9-10 says: **That 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.** And if you don’t believe God raised him from the dead, you will not be saved. And v.17 says, **“You are still in your sins.”** Sins aren’t forgiven if Christ didn’t rise! Because then Christ was not who he said he was and he didn’t do what he said he did. At best we would have to concede that he is still paying for sin. The wages of sin is death, so if he’s dead... then you are not completely saved. If you are not saved, then what else is there of importance to believe?

**15 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.**

4) The fourth consequence if there is no resurrection: all of the apostles were frauds and liars. When the disciples replaced Judas, one of the primary qualifications was that the person had to have been a witness of the resurrected Lord. The apostle Paul could serve as an apostle to the Gentiles because on that road to Damascus, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him. The book of Acts features numerous times the apostles preached, and the resurrection is prominent. In chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples, Peter proclaims Christ’s resurrection to the crowd. In chapter 3, he again preaches Christ crucified and risen. In ch.10, Peter preaches to a group of Gentiles and again preaches about Christ crucified and risen. In Acts 13, Paul is preaching and the resurrection of Christ is proclaimed. And again in chapter 17. The resurrection of Christ is spoken about frequently in the Epistles. So if there is no resurrection, then the apostles were liars and frauds! All they taught was a made-up lie.

By the way, it also makes Christ a liar since he is the one who foretold his resurrection. If Christ was a liar and fraud you are still in your sins.

**15 But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.**

5) The fifth consequence of denying the resurrection: If there is no resurrection, then Christ did not rise either. So do you see how this all is connected? The resurrection of dead people, the resurrection of Christ, the preaching and testimony of the Apostles, the faith of believers – these all form a unit. They all rise or fall together. *Either* dead men rise, Christ rose, the gospel is true, the faith of believers is valid, and the testimony of the Apostles is accurate. *Or*, dead men don’t rise, Christ didn’t rise, preaching is useless, faith is empty and the Apostles are liars. It’s a package deal.

**17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.**

6) So here is the 6<sup>th</sup> consequence if there is no resurrection. All the believers of the past who have died – think of them all! – this would include Peter, John, Mary and Martha, Paul, Stephen... it would include Martin Luther... it would include people of more recent history, past Pastor at Good Shepherd like Pastor Free... it would include those from your family who have already passed away as believers in Christ, maybe your grandparents, or great-grandparents, or even parents, or siblings, or son or daughter – all of these believers who have died, if there is not resurrection and Christ is not raised, then they are all lost. All of them are in hell. None of them saved... if Christ has not been raised.

And that lead Paul to this seventh consequence and logical conclusion:

**19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.**

7) We are to be pitied more than all people on the planet. There is absolutely no earthly gain for being a follower of Christ. He himself said it. He promised us suffering and persecution if we

follow him. If that's what we get in this world, and then we die and there's no resurrection and therefore no heaven... what pour fools we are! The whole planet should pity all the dumb Christians who denied themselves in this world only to be denied eternal life in the next too.

Wow, that's a lot of negative consequences. That wasn't fun to go there and consider all that fallout if Christ has not been raised. So let's get to the good news:

**20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

You don't have to worry about a single one of those seven consequences, because Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! Because he is risen, there is gospel, that is, good news. What is the gospel? He says what the gospel is at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15. It is this that "Christ died for our sins, (v.3), according to the scriptures, and (v.4), that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve and then to 500 brethren, and then to James and then the Apostles, and then to me." He appeared in a resurrected, physical, visible, touchable form. His resurrection was verified by a great cloud of witnesses!

\*\*\*The resurrection is a reality and if Christ the God/Man rose from the dead, then men do rise and if men do rise the gospel is true, your faith is valid, the Apostles are preachers of the truth, you will not perish, you will have everlasting life and you are most to be envied (not pitied). And verse 20, He is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." All who ever die in Christ will live. Christ rose and he is the first... the leader, the firstfruits, the initial one of all who will one day rise as well.

Friends, there is so much more to talk about in 1 Corinthians 15, but we are out of time. I would like to ask you to open up to that great resurrection chapter of the Bible in the next couple days and read the whole chapter. Make this reading your personal Easter celebration. This chapter is one of the greatest in all of Scripture. Your faith will be strengthened as you read and study it.

That Christ rose from the dead is a miracle. And miracles do happen. Place your trust in him, and God promises that same miracle will happen to you as well. Your body will not remain in the grave. Even though you die, you will live. God will resurrect your body and give you a new and glorified body. In the flesh, with your own eyes, you will see God and live in his immediate presence forever and ever. You, dear Christian, are not to be pitied. You are to be envied. Stand firm in this truth... the truth of the resurrection of the body. For Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! Amen.