

All or Nothing

Easter Message

Selected Scripture

Introduction

My twin boys were challenged recently in the Sunday evening clubs, to share the gospel with someone. They were told to find someone and tell them the truths about the Lord and His life, death, burial, and resurrection. One of them decided to practice on his four and a half year old sister. He pulled her aside, sat her down in a chair in the living room, and said, “Now you listen to me.”

This six year old boy began to relay to his sister all of the principles of Jesus Christ – His death, His burial, His resurrection. She sat there, believe it or not, quietly listening and was all ears. Finally, he finished and walked triumphantly away, having done his part.

My wife, who was watching from the kitchen, relayed to me that our daughter sat there for a few moments and then, hollered after him, “I already know all that,” which was not too encouraging to that little evangelist!

There is something about this response, however.

A few weeks later, she came to me and was telling me a little about her Sunday school lesson and some of these truths. I found myself thinking to myself, “I already know that.”

It is a tendency of and so easy for the human heart to take for granted precious truths, as well as things, for that matter. We can take our spouse, our job, our health, our friendships, our relationship with Jesus Christ for granted.

Then the Easter season, like an alarm clock, rolls around and wakes us up from a desensitizing sleep. It causes us to look again into the dark corners of an empty tomb. We whisper, with awe, the words, “Jesus Christ is alive! He is risen!”

Now, in this church, we take the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as fact. We do not doubt it in the classrooms. We do not cloud it or debate it in the pulpit. We, by faith, simply believe the words of scripture.

I will never forget attending, fourteen years ago, the early service of a Unitarian church on Easter Sunday morning. The beautiful chapel was made of stone inside and out. The stone floor echoed and re-echoed the anthems that were sung. The pews were hand-carved and there were beautiful, ornate, stained glass windows.

I remember sitting there, after all of the singing, as the minister approached his pulpit. He got up and in a monotone, he, obviously bored to death, read from his manuscript, three reasons why Jesus Christ was still dead. I sat in that hand-carved pew glued by sorrow. In fact, after the service, I sat there and watched people, dressed in their Easter finery, walk out of that chapel with long faces and sad expressions. Why? Because with their minds, they had chosen to reject what their hearts longed for – hope beyond the casket, confidence beyond the grave, a living, breathing, interceding Savior, which they knew nothing of.

The Significance of the Resurrection

Paul wrote, in I Corinthians 15:14,

if Christ has not been raised [from the dead], . . . your faith also is vain.

Our faith is absolutely worthless if Christ has not been raised from the dead. Why?

Let me give four reasons why the resurrection, literally and physically, is so significant to everything we believe. There are many more than four reasons, but we will discuss four. We will look back and forth between I Corinthians 15 and John 14

1. First, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gospel of Christ is meaningless.

Look at I Corinthians 15:1-2. Paul begins by saying, in effect, “I draw your attention to . . .”. This is like a teacher who has students that are carried away or distracted by the singing birds or a friend, so the teacher snaps his fingers and says, “Hey, focus

here!" Paul says, "I want you to focus on what I'm about to say."

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if [since] you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

The word "if," in verse 2, could be rendered "since" as it is the third class condition.

Paul is saying, "Hold fast to these cardinal truths because if you do not, believing in faith is absolute vanity; it is meaningless; it is empty.

What are they to hold to? Continue to I Corinthians 15:3-4.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Ladies and gentlemen, *this is the gospel; this is the good news!*

Satan is attempting, in the first century and in this century, to rewrite the gospel; to make it something other than these cardinal doctrines; these truths.

The human heart knows there is something more out there. Surveys show, in fact, that more than 90% of Americans believe in a life hereafter; that there is something more beyond the grave. Satan does not try to get them to deny this; he simply tries to rewrite what the hereafter is and the way they can get there.

I read of Houdini, this past week, the well-known, world-renowned escape artist. In one of his acts, his feet would be tied by a rope and he would be suspended upside down while wearing a straight jacket. Then, before crowds, he would wriggle his way free in a matter of minutes. In another act, he would be handcuffed and put in a box that would then be padlocked and submerged under water. In a few moments, he would re-emerge. However, he could not escape death. He was a mystic and dabbled in the occult. He once told his wife that he would try to communicate with her when he went beyond. In 1926, Houdini died. As he died, his last words to his wife were, "Bess, believe."

For ten years following that day, Bess would light a candle and would sit before that candle in the evening, waiting for a message from her husband. In

1936, she blew out the candle and never lit it again. Ten years had passed with no message.

My friend, the only person to escape death is the One who conquered it. By knowing Him, we can conquer it as well.

New Age theology comes along in our century and in our generation and rewrites the resurrection of Christ. It also attempts to rewrite the gospel; the cardinal truths of how we can go from here to heaven and experience life hereafter, as God would have us experience.

The New Age writer Levi Dowling, in his book *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, rewrote the resurrection of Christ, supposedly through psychic revelation, and in that rewriting, rewrote the gospel. He writes that Jesus' resurrection was really a transmutation from flesh to divinity; that He simply became like a god. According to Dowling, Jesus' resurrection was not literal or physical, but was a process whereby He became God.

New Age theology, by the way, is intent on destroying the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Why? Because of its importance to the gospel.

Paul wrote, in Romans 10:9,

. . . if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, [then] you will be saved;

To deny Christ rose from the dead, to say He is transmuting from some fleshly being to some divine being by good karma, to say He somehow had enough good works that He became part of the divine consciousness, is to deny salvation; it is to deny the possibility of salvation.

There are, by the way, people meeting in churches today, in our own town, who deny the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not enough to be religious, my friend. Easter Sunday is a waste unless you believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead and, in that belief, you go from death to life.

2. Secondly, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, life is hopeless.

Look at I Corinthians 15:17-19.

and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ

have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

In other words, ladies and gentlemen, if Jesus Christ did not destroy death, we cannot enjoy life.

I read a quote that O. J. Simpson made on June 12, 1978 (before the death of his ex-wife). He was a millionaire superstar football player and wrote, "I sit in my house in Buffalo and sometimes, I get so lonely it's unbelievable. Life has been so good to me. I have a great wife and good kids. I have money and health. But I am lonely and bored. I often wondered why so many rich people would commit suicide, and now I know that money is not a cure-all."

Ralph Barton was an incredibly successful cartoonist who was known around the world. He took his own life. The note he left behind is proof of the truth and the validity of the resurrection and the necessity of it for us. He wrote these words, "I have had a few difficulties in my life, and only a few. I have had many friends. I have had great successes. I have visited great countries of the world. But I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day."

Men and women, you cannot really live until you are ready to die. And you are not ready to die until you have met the One who conquered death and gives life – the person of Jesus Christ.

3. Thirdly, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, heaven is unreachable.

Look again at I Corinthians 15:17.

and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

Notice that you are still in your sins if Jesus did not rise from the dead. In other words, dying on the cross was *not* enough. Something else had to happen to validate what Jesus did on the cross. He had to shatter the tomb in which He rested. Jesus had to come back to life. So Paul says, in this verse,

if Christ has not been raised, . . . you are still in your sins.

Notice again in I Corinthians 15:18, that Paul also says,

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

Literally, they have been destroyed. Continue to I Corinthians 15:19.

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Two observations

Let me briefly make two observations at this point.

- Number one, if Jesus Christ lied to His disciples in the past, then He is lying to us about the future.

Look at John 14:1-2a. What were Jesus' words, apart from the resurrection, which made Him a fabricating liar?

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places . . .

Literally, "In My Father's house are many mansions, "mone" in the Greek, or compartments; dwelling places."

It was typical eastern fashion for a wealthy landowner – a father – to simply add on to his home as his sons married. The family literally, lived in the same compound. I know this destroys the view of a mansion on some cul-de-sac somewhere. Jesus is basically saying that God the Father, the wealthiest of all landowners, has added on to His house, rooms for all of us. We will literally, live in the same mansion.

Jesus then says, in John 14:2b,

. . . if it were not so, I would have told you for I go to prepare a place for you.

Jesus is simply saying, "You've got to trust Me. I'm telling you the truth. I go to prepare a place for you."

Let me give the second observation.

- Number two, if Jesus Christ did not rise again, He cannot return again.

How do we know this? Look at John 14:3. Jesus says,

If I go and prepare a place for you [if I ascend], I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus Christ is saying, "I am your passport; I am your transportation to heaven."

If Jesus is lying about the cross and the grave, then He is lying about heaven. If He lied to His

disciples about that, then He is lying to us about the future.

The lies of Satan, by the way, about the ascension of Christ have been promoted and propounded, even since the ending of the first century. Men have since, contemporized the disbelief in Jesus Christ's literal, physical resurrection and ascension.

One example was a man by the name of David Hume, who was very influential over a hundred years ago. He wrote these words, "I flatter myself" – he was a humble man – "that I have discovered an argument which will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusions."

One of the "superstitious delusions" was the resurrection of Christ. His argument was basically, a naturalistic explanation for everything in the Bible that was supernatural.

Preachers today, follow Hume and deny the parting of the Red Sea and Noah's Ark. They deny all of the miracles of Jesus Christ, which is part and parcel of this naturalistic explanation. If you buy this, by the way, the problem is that Jesus Christ could *not* rise again – He had to come out as some vision; He had to come out as some spirit, He could not physically, literally, live and breathe and eat and walk again.

It was tragic that Hume's thought influenced, in his day, the brilliant mind of Thomas Jefferson, who was the author of the American Declaration of Independence. I am, by the way, not making unpatriotic statements – I am an American from top to bottom. Jefferson, however, was so influenced that he cut out all of the miracles in the gospels – they could not have happened. When Jefferson died, his rewritten gospel was published and called, *The Jefferson Bible*, extant even today.

Let me read John 19:41-42 in *The Jefferson Bible*, "Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus." He then wrote Matthew 27:60, "And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed."

This is the end of verse, end of chapter, end of book, end of Bible. It is over. Jesus is dead. What despair.

So of those who die, contrary to Paul's words, which must be wrong, we mourn as those who have no hope – right? No. We,

. . . will not grieve as the rest who have no hope. (I Thessalonians 4:13)

My wife and I received a letter, this past week, from a dear friend of my wife's, named Mary. Included with the letter was a pamphlet used for her sister's memorial service. We had gotten a letter from Mary about a year ago, and she had written that her sister had disappeared. This sister was married and was a mother and a grandmother. Her family was a very close-knit family, with people who loved each other and loved the Lord Jesus as their Savior. She had gone to the grocery store, but never came back. Both she and her car were missing. A search was mounted, but it was not until the fall that the car was found – blood-stained. The man who was driving the car was apprehended. He was a criminal with a past. A few months later, this woman's body was found.

This really hit home because it was someone my wife and I knew. Yet, as we looked at the memorial pamphlet of this woman who had gone on to be with Jesus Christ, we did not read any bitterness. It was really more of a graduation – her family knew why they would see her again one day. The casket is not the end.

How do we know this? Because the scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ conquered death and that those who know Him will also conquer eternal death and live forever.

So Paul goes on to say, in I Corinthians 15:19,
If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

In other words, we are so deluded that we deserve the compassion of the world. We are throwing our lives at the feet of and in the service of someone who is still dead. If Jesus is not alive, it is no wonder that Paul said we deserve the compassion of the world.

4. Fourthly, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, godly living is impossible.

Look at John 14:16-17 and notice who we are told would come as a result of Jesus ascending to the Father. Jesus said that after He ascended,

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper [or Comforter], that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive,

because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

Skip to John 14:26.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Ladies and gentlemen, did you notice the condition for the coming of and the indwelling of the Spirit of God that allows us to live godly lives? It is the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. If He does not go up, the Spirit will not come down. It is hinged upon this truth. And what does the Spirit do in our lives? He produces, what we call, the fruit of the Spirit, according to the words of Paul,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; . . . (Galatians 5:22-23a)

I was reading, this past week, the biography of an individual who told of a time he was riding double on a motorcycle with a very good friend. They were buddies and they were laughing and talking as they rode through a subdivision. A long stretch of a car pulled up with two ladies in it. The car slowed down and for about two blocks, at twenty miles per hour, these ladies were just staring at them as they talked and laughed. Finally, the lady on the passenger side rolled her window down and hollered, “What right do you have to be so happy?” Before they could answer, the ladies sped off.

Who produces the indwelling, abiding joy that allows us to laugh, even with death and difficulties to face square on? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. He would not come down unless Jesus Christ went up.

There is another fruit and that is faith.

You may remember Peter – the disciple who was so cowardly that when a little wisp of a girl pointed a finger at him and said, “I recognize your Galilean accent – you’re one of His,” Peter, eventually, cursed Jesus’ own name and fled weeping (Matthew 25:69-75).

Later, Peter is standing before the Sanhedrinists, the religious leaders of his day, and they are saying to him, “Peter, stop preaching in Jesus’ name.” (Acts 5)

Peter takes a big breath and tells them, in effect, to go jump in a lake. He might as well have, because he said, “It is better for me to obey God than you. I

will *not* stop preaching that the One *you* crucified, and was buried, now lives again.” (Acts 5)

The disciples were launched into life-threatening ministries, motivated by one thing – that Jesus Christ is alive! They gave their lives for the truth. Traditions and stories have been passed down to let us know what happened to these men.

- Matthew was slain with a sword in Ethiopia.
- Mark would die after being dragged through the streets of Alexandria.
- Luke was hanged from an olive tree in Greece.
- James was thrown from the temple wall and then, beaten to death with clubs.
- Bartholomew endured the torture of being skinned, or flayed, alive, before dying.
- Andrew was bound to an x-shaped cross, from which he slowly died (and, evidently, preached of Christ to those who came to watch him die).
- Thomas, the doubter who needed evidence, had spears run through his body.
- Jude was shot to death with arrows.
- Matthias, who took Judas Iscariot’s place, was stoned and then, beheaded.
- Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome, after asking his executioners to allow him to die differently than Christ because he was not worthy.

These men died for their faith in Christ and Peter felt he was not even worthy to die in the same way. Why? Peter says, in II Peter 1:16b,

. . . we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Jesus Christ is alive!

What about us, as believers? We did not see Him. Thomas would hear from Jesus’ own lips,

. . . “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.” (John 20:29)

One of the greatest evidences of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is what He has done to your life and to mine. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, because Jesus went up and the Spirit came down and came in, is proof that there is a living Savior.

A lot of people know of Josh McDowell and have read his books. I have nearly all of the books he has written. Few, however, know this man's testimony.

It is interesting that Josh was raised in a home with a very abusive, alcoholic father. He grew up defending his mother. Sometimes, when he was not there, he would come home to their farm and go out to the barn and find his mother beaten and lying in the manure behind the cows, unable to get up.

When Josh would invite his school friends over, he would take his drunken father out to the barn and tie him up. He would then, drive his father's car and park it behind the silo, so he and his mother could tell his friends that his father had somewhere to go.

Josh McDowell writes, "If there was anybody that I hated, it was my father. I despised that man."

Josh went on to a university and there, as a freshman, he heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did not respond. As a sophomore, he heard it again and received Christ as his Savior. He said, "God began doing something in my life. The Spirit of God had come in and was now producing fruit. It was about a year and a half later, but finally, I could look at my father, who had not changed, and tell him that I loved him."

About six months after he entered his sophomore year, Josh had an accident. He was in traction and was sent home to the farm to recuperate, taking leave of college. While he was home one day, his father came in sober. He said to Josh, "I don't understand how you can tell somebody like me that you love me."

Josh had an opportunity, for the first time, to share with his father what had happened. He told his dad, "A year ago, I hated you; I despised you. But something has happened in my life and it came in the person of Jesus Christ. Because of Him, I can love you."

Josh writes with his own hand, "Forty-five minutes after my father entered my room, he knelt beside my bed and asked Jesus Christ to come in."

He shares this story in a book that he has written, entitled, *The Resurrection Factor*. Josh McDowell says that this is one of the greatest evidences in his life that Jesus Christ is alive because of what it did in turning his hatred to love.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, we pause today, for just a brief hour, and we take a look into the dark corners of

an empty tomb. And, oh, is it important for us to be able to say by faith, according to the scriptures, "Jesus Christ is alive. He is no longer there."

This gives us the ability to bind our lives – with its trials, its sorrows, its joys – with the confidence of knowing that God, through Christ, is behind *everything*. So we have:

- the truth of the gospel because of His resurrection;
- a life that is no longer hopeless because of His resurrection;
- heaven that is attainable because of His resurrection;
- godly living that is possible because He went up and the Spirit came down and resides within.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ began that Sunday morning, when the glorified man, the God-man, folded His clothes. John tells us that He folded His head napkin. I wish I could have seen that. The Greek verbs tells us that it was not in haste – He took His time. There was no hurry – He had conquered it.

After Jesus folded His grave clothes, He appeared to the twelve. He said, "Goodbye," to the grave, and "Hello," to them, as they huddled in the small upper room.

Jesus' appearance began a revolution that continues to this day. It is a revolution born and energized by the fact that Jesus Christ is risen, He is alive!