

IF CHRIST HAD NOT ARISEN -- WHAT THEN?

Of all the terrors "IF" introduces, of all the dire assumptions "IF" sets forth, not one is as terrible and as black and as bitter as the black assumptions in the sentence "IF" Christ be not risen, THEN." Fasten your eyes upon the midnight bloom of that dark assumption. Harken to the shrieks and frightful mutterings of despair in that dire supposition. Walk with me along this cold and flowerless road -- "IF Christ be not risen." It is a road which is filled with stones and not one smooth spot on it. It is girt with fatal pits and dread abysses of woe. If it a road of plight, a road of blight, and a road of night. It is a road where summer sun never shines. It is a road where icy blasts reign with sullen and relentless fury. It is a road where horror of horrors assail us; where the concentrated terrors of all despairs surround us; where woeful sorrows rule ever; where blessed joys rule never. If Christ had not arisen, then: --

I. He Would Be Dead Now.

"But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised." Vs.13. "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised." Vs. 16. If Christ were dead! If we once plunge our eyes into the blackness of that dark assumption, we shall be the better fitted to feel the grace and glory of the resurrection. If Christ had not arisen, He would still be dead; the suborned report of the Roman guard would have been true, the Sanhedrin would have been triumphant, and we ould be worshipping a corpse today.

II. All Preaching Would Have Been Useless.

"But if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain." Vs. 14. What a horrible statement -- "our preaching is void!" "If Christ be not risen," then all of our preaching is vain, empty, deceitful, void of reality, and worthless. If Christ is still in the tomb, all preaching is a pathetic fiasco. Instead of it being the proclamation of the truth, it is the dissemination of a falsehood. The gospel so rests upon Christ's resurrection that, when one succumbs, the other must share the same fate.

If Christ has not arisen, then all preaching has become the base prostitution of philosophic finery and skeptical speculation which has gone through the heavens and told us that there is no gold there. And through hell and told us that there is no fire there. And through the cross and told us that there is no sacrifice for sin there. And through Christ and told us that there is no God there. And through all sorrow and told us that there is no comfort there. And through all providence and told us that it is all an idle dream. And through all prayer and told us that it is a useless exercise. And through all sin and told us that there is no forgiveness there. And through Olivet's slopes, with her sweet memories, and told us that there is no truth there in the promise to return again. And through all farewells and told us that they are forever and ever. And through the future and told us that there will be no meeting there.

If Christ is yet in His shroud, all our preaching is frost and ice and barrenness instead of summer glories and autumn fruitage. If Christ did not arise, all preachers of all the centuries are guilty of giving dry bones for meat, muddy batter for bread, scorpions for eggs, and serpents for fish. Apart from His resurrection, there is no balm for torn spirits, and no hope for aching hearts in any preaching.

In imagination travel back across the centuries. If Christ had not arisen, all the preaching of Talmage, when tens of thousands assembled to hear, was useless. All that Spurgeon said through many years, when he preached to thousands every Sunday, was useless. Whitefield, riding the country over, crossing the ocean many times, preaching on land and sea, but all in vain. Jonathan Edwards, throwing revival torches everywhere, could have spent his time better twirling his thumbs if Christ had not arisen. Moody, taking one continent in one hand and another continent in the other hand and rocking them both toward God, preached all in vain. Or think of Wesley carrying his proclamation on wings of flame to every part of his native land. He proclaimed the gospel to the miners of Northumberland, to the privileged students of Oxford, and to the poor and unprivileged peasantry of Ireland. He came across the ocean and proclaimed his tidings on the unfamiliar soil of Georgia. But what uselessness if Christ had not arisen! William Carey, preaching with pen and word of mouth, opened the blind alleys of ignorance into endless highways of wisdom for millions of people. Adoniram Judson's preachign turned the wilderness into a garden, uprooted the thron tree, and planted the cedars of God. Carroll crushed opponents of truth with mighty preaching. Joseph Parker preached until men became unaware of their surroundings. Robert Hall, in his most impassioned moods, drew men out of their seats with his preaching. Christman Evans stirred the land as when a storm hits it. Truett opened fountains of penitential tears with wooing preaching. To many others who preached with tongue of flame and heart of fire, men listened as slaves to an emancipation proclamation, as children frightened at the roar of a storm, as soldiers to a call of the bugle.

But, if Christ had not arisen, all that Beecher and Broadus ever preached, when all the bells in their belfry rang for God, is empty chatter. All the preaching that caused white-haired penitents to kneel at the throne of grace with little children is noisy squawking. All the preaching that brought heaven down to earth, that brought the glory of God to communities where vice and wickedness walked naked and unashamed, that put a stop to drunkenness and blasphemy, that made restitution to the utmost an eager joy, all such preaching was useless if Christ had not arisen.

Suppose there were five hundred men in a prison, and a man came and announced a pardon for all of them! And them, just as they were taking off their prison garbs, and just as they were looking out to the great outdoors, the news should come that it was not a pardon. What a cruel disappointment! That is how Paul felt about his own great preaching is Christ were still in the Syrian grave. If Christ had not arisen, all preaching would have been useless.

III. Faith In Christ Would Be Worthless.

"But if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, and also your faith is vain." Vs. 14. Let us think about this horrible assumption that our faith is an empty bubble and worthless.

To whom is Paul writing? To a little company of believers who lived in Corinth. And what kind of a city was Corinth? It was a gay, shallow, wild, wicked, materialistic city -- a boiling cauldron of manifold iniquity. With what did they have to contend in that evil day? With falsities, with evasions, with ambiguities, with sophistries, with mean expediencies, with illicit compromises, with corruption housing itself in a lie, with the world and the flesh and the devil. And from what had these believers separated themselves? From the fond attachments of a lifetime. Their relationship to Christ made them strangers in their own home community, their trust in Christ had made them foreigners in their native land, their loyalty to Christ had made them pilgrims in their own country. They had listened to the gospel and had put their trust in Christ. By faith

they went about Corinth quietly, rejoicing under the banner of the Saviour's love. By faith they faced anything -- faced everything. By faith they dared anything and everything. By unshaken faith in Christ, they achieved greatness, manifested heroic achievement, and rendered helpful service. And yet, if Christ had not arisen, their faith was rooted in delusion, and had nothing about it of eternal reality and truth.

Now, apply this to yourself. If Christ had not arisen, this faith of yours, that gives you comfort, which has renewed you in heart and life, which you believe is leading you home to heaven, would have to be abandoned because it would be fixed upon a falsehood. If He did not rise, your faith rests on what never happened; then, certainly it would be worthless.

IV. The Apostles Would Have Been Liars.

"Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; for we witnessed concerning God that He raised up the Christ." Vs. 15. When a man bears false witness, he usually has a motive for doing so. What motive had these men? Surely they were the most extraordinary false witnesses who ever lived. Observe how Paul puts his own personal veracity and that of his fellow apostles into direct issue. The idea of being a false witness stung Paul to the very quick. Paul was proud of his honor. He had done enough to be recognized as a lover of the truth, and a defender of the truth. He had been left in cold and hunger, in nakedness, and in thirst, but he never surrendered a fact.

In the case of Paul and his fellow witnesses, there was no excusable hallucination. It was simply a matter of plain testimony by reliable witnesses to an external concrete fact. Either Christ arose or they lied in saying He did; but liars are not ethical teachers. And body-stealers and tomb-breakers are not martyrs. Vandals are not evangelists. Had they anything to gain by declaring that Christ arose, if He had not done so? Their interest all lay the other way. The testimony that Christ had arisen meant loss of property, the crucifixion of worldly ambition, buffeting, homelessness, and persecution.

Think of what it meant to Paul to give this testimony that Christ had arisen. He was in danger of his life in Damascus. He was coldly suspected by his fellow believers in Jerusalem. He was stoned in Lystra. He was assaulted in Iconium. He was beaten with many stripes in Philippi. He was attacked by a lewd and envious crowd in Thessalonica. He was pursued by callous enmity in Berea. He was despised in Athens. He was blasphemed in Corinth. He was exposed to the fierce wrath of the Ephesians. His life was endangered by shipwrecks, by robbers, by rivers, by sleepless nights, by hunger, by cold, and by starvation. All this to be a false witness or liar? A conclusion contrary to all reason. Only a crazy man would endure such hardship and hazards to propagate a lie.

V. Living Believers Would Be Unsaved.

"But if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins." Vs. 17. It is here implied that faith in Christ alone can take men out of their sins. We are taught that Christ "was raised for our justification." If He had not arisen, we could not be justified. In penalty and power sin would still attach itself to us.

What an oppressively black assumption that we are yet in our sins. Those of us who are believers have been believing that we had come into Christ's freedom, gladness, and light; but if the assumption that Christ has not arisen were true, we would still be in bondage, sorrow, and night. We have been thinking that our feet had been taken out of the miry clay and placed on the solid rock; but "if Christ be not raised," we are pitiable victims of a colossal delusion. All our sins, like bloodthirsty wolves, howl around us, robbing us of joy. All our sins, like hissing serpents, wrap themselves around our feet and keep us from walking in paths of peace.

To speak fully of the misery of being yet in our sins, one would have to have in his voice the moan of all heartaches, the shriek of all maniacs, the hiss of all serpents, the fury of all storms, the rumble of all devastations, and the madness of all perverts. perpetual pain, and no ease! Scorching sun, and no shade! Tormenting thirst, and no water! Ceaseless toil, and no rest! Merciless arraignment, and no advocate to make a plea! That is but a feeble description of what it means for a man or woman to be yet in their sins.

VI. The Righteous Dead Would Have Perished.

"And then those that fell asleep in Christ perished." Vs. 18. How tender and gentle is the word or phrase that Paul used to describe their passing — they just fell asleep in Jesus.

"Asleep in Jesus! blessed sleep,
From which none ever wakes to weep;
A calm and undisturbed repose,
Unbroken by the last of foes.

Asleep in Jesus! oh, how sweet
To be for such a slumber meet;
With holy confidence to sing
That death hath lost his venom'd sting."

Some of those whom we loved, who were redeemed by Christ's blood, have gone from us. They thought they were going to sleep. And so did we! But if Christ had not arisen, they would have simply fallen into ruin. They thought they were going from a stormy sea into a harbor of peace. They thought they were going from the fear and dread of the tomb into the light and joy of God's home. Comforted by what seemed to be Christ's presence and supported by the promises of the gospel, they thought they were sleeping to wake again. And so did we, as we closed their eyes with fingers clumsily gentle. But if Christ did not arise, they were cruelly deceived in all these things. And we, too. "If Christ be not risen," there hangs over all graves and over all the mausoleums of all the ages a darkness that no earthly lamp can lift. Of all the thousands of family vaults, not one to swing open again. Of all the graves, not one to be emptied. Of all the seas, not one to give up its dead. Of all the graveyards, not one disturbed. What a bleak world a dead Christ opens to us. But thank God Christ arose! Also for the fact that they will arise too.

VII. The Christian Life Would Be A Misery.

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are more miserable than all men." Vs. 19. If Christ had not arisen, our life-hopes would be woven of rotten threads. There would be no strengthening companion in the sore battle of today, and there would be no waiting friend when the mysterious door opens on the unknown tomorrow.

Apart from the resurrection of Christ, man has no evidence of a future state. Our chief joy is in the hope of the world to come where we expect to have rest, happiness, victory, and perfection. The hope in Christ which redeems Christian life from the misery alluded to in this verse is the hope that through His precious death and His glorious resurrection, our inevitable immortality will be one of bliss.

But now in conclusion, let us turn aside from this black path of incredible assumption. Let us stand again in the spring light of the resurrection and hear Paul say, "But now is Christ risen from the dead." Vs. 20. He is the first sheaf of the resurrection.

Wisely speak those who tell us that historic fact is against the dark assumption of His being yet dead, that spiritual experience is against His being yet in the grave, that regenerated lives are against His being wrapped in a shroud, that the testimony of the saints is against His being yet in the tomb, that the instincts of immortality in our souls are against His being yet in death's dreary dominion. The world is lit up with the glory of the resurrection. Our horizon shines with the light of eternal hope. Let us join in saying: "Bless the Lord, O My soul; and all that is within me, Bless His Holy name." Psalm 103:1.