

## IF NO EASTER I CORINTHIANS 15:1-19 3-31-13

### I Corinthians 15:1-8

*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,<sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,<sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.<sup>6</sup> After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;<sup>7</sup> then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;<sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.*

**12-19** *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?<sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised;<sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.<sup>15</sup> Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.<sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;<sup>17</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.<sup>19</sup> If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.*

I read to this point, but I could surely go on, for all 58 verses of this chapter relate to the resurrection of Christ, and thus to Easter. But we have special interest in verse 19 where Paul asks and answers the questions, “What if there was no Easter?” Oh, what a thought! What a terrible, terrible, thought! Can you imagine what it would be like, to have no Easter? That would be unthinkable. Why retailers all over America would panic. The bonnet industry would crumble. Sears would have to find yet another name for a sale, and *Early Spring sale* just doesn’t have the appeal of a *Pre-Easter Extravaganza*. Without Easter NBC wouldn’t know when to show religious movies. Schools wouldn’t know when to take a break. Easter seals would become Lincoln’s birthday seals. And, of course, the Easter bunny would have to find another holiday to profane. There would be chaos without Easter.

Well, what I say, I say in jest. But Paul has some things to say on this subject that are quite serious. What if no Easter? Or put another way, “what if Christ did not rise from the dead?” The apostle begins to answer that question in verse 14 and he says, “Even if Jesus did not rise again, Christianity is still a great faith and a great way of life.” Is that what he said? Hardly. 14 *if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.* Vain, useless, futile, a big waste. And Paul says, “If no Easter my preaching is a big joke, a waste of breath.” He also says, “Your faith is worthless too.” May I go a short step further and propose what is fully being taught here. Without Easter life is vain. Life is a cruel joke. And at the end of the road we find out we are all April fools. Now many Christians would take issue with that statement. Soren Kierkegaard asked, “*If the body of Jesus were found and Christianity proved a lie, how many clergymen would resign?*” I suggest most would not. They have reasons to go along with the idea, but Paul said, “Huh, it’s all meaningless!” Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, **if** no Easter.

Why is that? Well, for one, it leaves us without any grip on spiritual reality. Every other philosophy or religion is based on the ideas of human imagination. But the Christian faith takes us right to history for its basis. The redemptive events in Christ, especially the resurrection are the gateways for knowledge. Without the resurrection, who knows what’s happening?

Why is life vain without Easter? Because, without Easter we are stuck with a terminal existence. Without Easter we only have threescore and ten or maybe one score and seven or maybe less. We face the constant reality that death could always come and put an end to labors and dreams and relationships. Without Easter death is it. Death conquers and no thinking human being can live with that. In his short story, "Pigeon Feathers" John Updike deals with a little boy named David who is troubled about heaven, who wants to be assured there is one and that he will go there. In his catechism class he asks the pastor about it who says to him, "David, you might think of heaven as the way the goodness Abe Lincoln did live after him." David objected: "But is Lincoln conscious of it living on?" Later he says to his mother, "I don't understand ministers who say it's like Lincoln's goodness going on and on." Mother says, "I think Rev. Dobson made a mistake. You must try to forgive him." David says, "It's not a question of his making a mistake. It's a question of dying and never moving or seeing or hearing anything ever again." In exasperation his mother replies, "Darling, it is so greedy of you to want more when God has given us this wonderful day, and our farm, and you have your whole life

ahead of you." Finally, the young man says, "Mother, good grief, don't you see, if when we die there's nothing, all your sun and fields and what not are just a horror. It is all an ocean of horror." This is a theme that is repeated over and over again in modern literature. The existentialists want us to face up to what life with no God would be like. The nihilists like Frederick Nietzsche shout to us, "*Life is meaningless! There are no morals. No values. There is no purpose for anything.*" And if death eats it up in the end that's true. Ingmar Bergman states the dilemma of modern man in a dialogue contained in his film, *The Seventh Seal*. Here a conversation ensues between one called Knight and Death:

***Knight:*** *I want knowledge, not faith, not supposition, but knowledge. I want God to stretch out his hand towards me, to reveal Himself and speak to me.*

***Death:*** *But He remains silent.*

***Knight:*** *I call out to Him in the dark, but no one seems to be there.*

***Death:*** *Perhaps no one is there.*

***Knight:*** *Then life is an outrageous horror. No one can live it in the face of death, knowing that all is nothing.*

Will Durant, former chair of the philosophy department at Columbia, writes:

*God who was once the consolation of our brief life, and our refuge in bereavement and suffering has apparently vanished from the scene; no telescope, no microscope discovers Him. Life has become...a fitful breeding of human insects on the earth; nothing is certain in it except defeat and death – a sleep from which, it seems, there is no awakening...Faith and hope disappear; doubt and despair are the order of the day. .. It seems impossible any longer to believe in the permanent greatness of man, or to give life a meaning that cannot be annulled by death...The greatest question of our time is not communism vs. individualism, not Europe verse America, not even East verse West; it is whether man can bear to live without God."*

But what do men do? They don't think about it. They fill up their lives with a sensual tingle in an effort to forget. What if no Easter? Paul says it well, **32a** *If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?* If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Sproul says, "Hey, if there is no resurrection. I'm sleeping in tomorrow. **32b** *If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.* Baby, we only go around once in life, so go for the gusto and then rot. If no Easter, preaching is vain, faith is vain. Man is a useless passion. Your life is vain.

Well, the apostle goes on here. **15** *Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.* All the preachers and missionaries of all time have given themselves for a lie.

They have even sinned by saying God did something which He did not do. This would make us Jehovah's false witnesses. Still, there's more. If no Easter 16-17 *For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised;*<sup>17</sup> *and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.* You foolish Christians, talking about forgiveness, talking about an atoning death for your sins – if Jesus did not rise again that death was only a death. The guilt you know is yours is still with you. Nobody has paid for your sins. So you will. You are still in your sins. Things aren't looking good are they?

If no Easter 18 *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished..* The martyrs died in vain. That beloved Christian friend or parent – you won't see them again. They aren't floating in the clouds,; they're dead and gone. If no Easter death is simply decay and rot. It's the final stop on a trip to nowhere.

And finally, if no Easter 19 *If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.* You skeptics here, don't get angry at the silly Christian who tells you about Jesus and eternal life. Pity him or pity her 19 *If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied* The Christian has put all his Easter eggs in one basket and his basket won't hold eggs if Christ is not raised. Pity him.

Now, we've just been over some pretty heavy stuff. If no Easter, I Corinthians 15 says Christians are pitiable, the dead are dead, we are still in sin, Christians are false witnesses, faith is vain and life is pointless. Man, if Christ isn't raised, if Easter isn't real, this is the pits. But we stopped at verse 19. Paul goes on 20a *But now, Christ has been raised from the dead!* What would be is terrible, but, glory to God, we don't face that. Christ is risen. Easter is real! But wait. Words are cheap. How do we know it's true? Why do we, why does Paul, believe in Easter? That's what we must consider now.

Why believe in Easter? What does Paul say? Does he say, "*Man, the options are so bleak we must believe He's alive.*" And in stating it like that we equate, "believe" with "pretend." Now, some might want to do that, but Christianity does not run away from the facts, it runs to them. The options **are** bleak, but that's now why we believe. No, we believe in Easter because the story of Christ and His example have risen up to live within our hearts, inspiring us ever more to a life that benefits the whole of mankind. This is the silliness of religious liberalism that denies the bodily resurrection but affirms Easter in the soft glow of sentimental mush. Paul would have

none of it. If Christ is not really risen, stop the music, quit the games. Face the vanity of your beliefs and let mankind go to the dogs.

Why believe in Easter? Well, Paul gives two answers. #1 is that the Bible says Christ rose **4** *and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.* Now, what if I don't believe the Scriptures, Paul? Hey, don't panic. Paul goes on and says, #2 believe in Jesus because the risen Christ has appeared! **5,6a** *and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.* <sup>6</sup> *After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now.* He could have added – “go see 'em.” **6c- 8** *but some have fallen asleep;* <sup>7</sup> *then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;* <sup>8</sup> *and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.* Paul says, “I **know** that Jesus lives because I've seen Him and I wasn't alone in this. The Easter message has been passed on to the world thru men and women who were eyewitnesses. II Peter 1:**16** *we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*

Now, what do you say? Were these guys false witnesses? Were the founders of the Christian church rank deceivers? Consider this: Would a man die for something he knew to be a lie? Maybe he would die for a lie. Sure. But for something he knew was a lie? Ridiculous!. That is a psychological absurdity. Every apostle, history records, died preaching that Jesus rose up from the dead. The Bible records it, the early Christians sealed their testimony with their own blood and what about the enemies of the church? They never debated. Had they produced the body of Jesus Christianity would have died at birth, but no one had the body. No one could explain the empty tomb. No one could explain the total change and the absolute certainty they saw in the apostles and hundreds of others who saw the resurrected Lord. And frankly, no one can explain the transformation of millions through the years, who have had an encounter of some sort with the living Jesus.

Now, I'll be honest. I've had my intellectual doubts as a Christian. I was a philosophy major in college. I studied in seminary and in college, all the major assaults on our faith. I've even invented a few of my own, but every time I doubt I come back to this. Who is this Jesus and how can I explain history apart from Easter? There is no other world view that fits the facts. I've looked at the options and I've come down to this: It's either full-blown Christianity or it's

nihilism, with its dark pronouncement that life is meaningless. Take your pick. I'm just glad to say that the Christian faith fits the facts.

Now, we've seen "what if no Easter" and we've seen why the "if" isn't needed. We've seen why we believe in Easter. Now let's replace the "if" with "since" and see what we come up with. Did you follow that? Since Easter is true we know Jesus is the Son of God ®. Now there are only three options about Christ. Either He is a liar and the greatest deceiver the world has seen. Or else, He is a lunatic who thought He was God, or He is who He said He is, the Son of God, God incarnate. I mean anybody who claims to be God and who claims He will rise from the dead and come again with angels to judge the world is either a liar, a lunatic, or He is Lord. Where do you stand? Jesus gave some direction as to how to answer this trilemma. He said, "You want proof? I'll give you proof. I'll die and rise again on the third day. If I do that, believe me." He said this to His enemies and I think anyone will admit that is a fair challenge. And his enemies too Him so seriously they placed an armed guard at his tomb. But it didn't stop him, not death, not the Roman guard. He arose and God cast His vote saying that Jesus is Lord. In Romans 1:4 we read that Jesus **4** *was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.* At the resurrection God said with thunderous voice, "This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him!" Look at Acts 2 and you see this simple argument over and again. He is risen, therefore He is Lord 2:**32** *This Jesus, God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. **36** Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.* In Acts 5 Peter again says in verse 5:**30-31** *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. <sup>31</sup> He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.* We keep going in Acts. Now chapter 10:**40-43** *God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.* And this passage takes us to application #2.

Since Easter is true you must get ready to meet Jesus because He is appointed as Judge of the living and the dead. And you fall into one of those two categories. Doubt now, if you like, you

will meet Jesus someday. He said He would rise from the dead and He did it. He said He would return to judge all men. Don't bet against Him. Get ready to meet Jesus. Acts 17:**30-31** *Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,* <sup>31</sup> *because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."*

God has given proof. And since Easter is true you must get ready to meet Jesus. How do you do that? Application #3 is to believe in Jesus with your heart. Romans 10:**9** *if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* Now that's simple isn't it? But it's so critical. If I polled this group, probably 95% would say, "I believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus." And I guess you do, with your mind. But so what. You won't be saved from sin unless you do it with your heart. That means not only that you assent to the claims of Christ, but that personally trust in Him. And when you do it will show in your life. Something in your mind only, affects your mind, but when its in your heart it affects everything about you – the way you live and choose, and the way you think and feel. Does your faith in the risen Christ make you different from your unbelieving neighbor? If not, it's not heart faith and it's not saving faith. Don't run away from conscience just now. Honestly look at yourself and if you know that Easter hasn't changed you – trust Christ today with your death and your life. Obey Romans 10:**9** *confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* When you do this let me, let someone know. Since Easter is true, you believe in Jesus with your heart

Application #4. Since Easter is true, since Christ lives we shall live. I Corinthians 15:**20-22** *But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.* <sup>21</sup> *For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.* <sup>22</sup> *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive* Then later we read in **51** *Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.* That is the theme verse for our nursery. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." In Christ all shall be made alive. What truth is more essential for my soul? John 11:**25** Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies."

Finally, since Easter is, we should serve Christ with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Look at the logic of the apostle again. **31-32** *I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I*

have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. <sup>32</sup> If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Sleep in, don't strive, don't sweat over anything. Not if death prevails. But he says in **54d-58a** then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren. This is the conclusion of this whole great chapter on the resurrection. What does it all mean for us, Christian? **58** Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. Do you know what it's like to work in vain? To build something only to watch it destroyed, or clean something only to watch it dirtied again. Wasted effort and toil. Paul says, "Everything is like that if death is it. But Christ is risen, your toil is not in vain. It counts and counts forever." **58abc** Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Since He is alive I pour myself out in His service with the pure reward of knowing that my deeds will follow me and the victory is sure.

So, merchants, have your sales. Easter means profits and eggs and bunnies and TV specials but for those who understand it, since Easter is true, we know that Christ is God's son, we prepare to meet Him, we believe in Him with all our hearts, we will live with Him and we will, we should serve Christ with diligence and endurance. And all God's people said, *Amen*. S-47