

*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

Yeah he is! Is he? I don't know, when was the last time you saw someone rise from the dead? You have to admit, that is one big, unbelievable pill to swallow – "He is not here; he has risen" (Matthew 28:6).

Maybe we are all the victims of an elaborate, two-thousand-year-old prank. The tomb was empty because his disciples stole the corpse and tricked everybody (Matthew 27:62-66). Man, did we get punked!

It's kinda awkward to admit that you fell for it. But aren't you just a little bit relieved? One less embarrassing thing to believe in. Dead people don't come back to life. And why is it such a big deal to believe that he lives? Christianity is about faith and hope, not historical reality.

Is it? Look who's being punked now. Faith, without fact, is a lie. Hope, without history, is hopelessness. If Christ has not been raised, then what in the world are you doing here? Even the Bible admits that if Christ is still dead, Christians are dead wrong (1 Corinthians 15:14-19).

Everything we ache for – heaven, forgiveness, peace with God, eternal life, freedom from our struggles – it is all based on one simple historical question: Did Jesus rise from the dead? The answer to that question **changes everything**.

So you can understand why the Apostle Paul is upset when one of his churches doubts Easter. Some Christians in a city called Corinth claim that a resurrection is impossible, and Paul has to respond: **Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain (15:1-2).**

Easter is all about the gospel, and if you do not hold firmly to that Easter gospel, **you have believed in vain (15:2)**. If Jesus' bones are dust in a tomb, then you are the most pitiful people on the planet. Why? Because you're wasting your life! You trust in a man who is not the Savior he said he was, who did not rise again like he promised (Matthew 20:19), and who can't do a thing for your future because he's dead.

So what's the advantage to being a Christian? What do you gain by resisting the urge to always do what makes you happy? What's the benefit in being ridiculously out of touch with our culture? What's your reward for the hours of prayer and the small fortune you give in offerings? Is it worth it? No! Because if Christ has not been raised, you live only to die.

That's bad news. But Easter is all about good news. That's what the word *gospel* literally means. Not "good story," not "nice tall tale," not "something that gullible people are desperate to believe." But "good news."

You can take your stand on it. You can hold firmly to it. And this is where you start: **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (15:3). Easter changes everything** and makes Christianity fundamentally different from every other religion on earth. Buddha spoke words of wisdom and Mohammed was spiritual, but only Jesus died for our sins!

And don't miss the beauty of that one little letter: **Christ died for our sins (15:3)**. Not sin, sins. The multiple. The many. If you're here today thinking, "Yeah, but I'm a repeat offender; he won't forgive me." God says, "I forgive you. Christ died for your sins."

Plus, Christ's death for sins is **according to the Scriptures (15:3)**, Scriptures like Isaiah 53:5, "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Your sins are gone, now there is only peace and healing.

"But that sounds too good to be true!" It is too good. And it's also too true. This is why you can be sure: **That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (15:4)**. The empty tomb means that our sins do not have the last word. Jesus paid that debt on the cross, and the empty tomb is the receipt from the Father: "It's true. Payment received. You are forgiven" (Romans 4:25).

This also is **according to the Scriptures (15:4)**. God telegraphed the resurrection throughout the Old Testament. For example, today Jonah prays: "Salvation comes from the LORD" (Jonah 2:9), because when they threw him overboard, he was swallowed by a great fish and vomited onto dry land, alive and well, three days later. Jesus calls his resurrection the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39-40), because when he dies, they place him in a tomb, which he vacates, alive and well, three days later.

The resurrection has always been part of God's plan and it is, in fact, the foundation of Christianity. Many non-Christians think that we're just a bunch of willfully ignorant morons who believe in some Book that magically fell from heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Christians are Christians because something happened in history unlike any other thing that ever happened. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, died, and was buried, but he refused to stay dead. He rose from the dead. The resurrection is an historic fact.

Christianity is not about cleverly invented myths or imaginary people (2 Peter 1:16). Jesus didn't rise because you believe that he did. Whether you believe or not, it happened. Jesus lived his life for you. He paid the cost of your salvation, and it killed him. Then, three days later, he rose.

"But, Pastor, isn't that just a bit ... unbelievable? When you officiated Grandpa Willie's funeral, you watched them lower his body into the ground. Did he show up at the luncheon afterward with a ham sandwich in his hand and thank you for the nice sermon?"

True. I've never seen a resurrection. Neither have you. But just because we haven't seen one, doesn't mean others haven't. When Jesus rose, there were witnesses. Lots of them.

**And that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also (15:5-8).** Eye witnesses! Hundreds of them! And Paul doubles down. "Most of the five hundred plus are still living, you Corinthians can go and talk to them yourselves, though some have fallen asleep."

Did you catch that? Sleep. That is how the Bible describes Christians dying – sleep. This isn't some euphemism to avoid the ugliness of death. **Easter changes everything**, including death. Death can't hurt us. Oh, it can kill us, but it cannot keep us down. Why? Because it couldn't keep Jesus down.

Now physical death is sleep. When you go to sleep, what happens? You close your eyes. Nothing scary about that. It's the same with death. Death closes your eyes, but Jesus opens them, and you are with him, alive. And on the Last Day Jesus will wake up your sleeping body and reunite it with your soul.

Easter means that there is more to come (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). That's important to remember, because often it doesn't seem like there is more to come. Or, at least, you wouldn't know that by looking at us. Earlier you said, "He is risen indeed!" But is that consistent with the life you live? Because if you actually believe that, no area in your life remains untouched or unchanged.

So do you live like there is not more to come, like there is no tomorrow? Like the purpose of life is to have as much fun as possible, pile up as much stuff as possible, and follow each and every desire of your pretty little heart? Then on your deathbed you can say you had a good run, right?

That is a sinfully inconsistent attitude. **Easter changes everything**, including us. Not just our future, but also our present. Listen to this: **For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am (15:9-10).**

Jesus died on the cross and rose again not as some nice story, but as the real way that God has forgiven real sinners, sinners like you and me. That has an effect on you. Paul was a violent man who killed Christians, but the risen Christ changed him. Once, he was defined by his sin. Now he is defined by God's grace.

We can claim the same thing. Fill in your own blanks. "I do not deserve to be called a *blank* because I *blank*." A child of God because I cheated. A Christian because I strayed. A believer because I doubted. A saint because I sinned.

Yet because of Easter, Paul's confession is your confession: **By the grace of God I am what I am (15:10).** You have a new identity in Christ. You are not your sins. That is what you were. Remember who you are because of the resurrection: you are Jesus' brother; you are Jesus' sister (Matthew 28:10).

**Easter changes everything.** That's why it's such a big deal to believe, "He is not here; he has risen" (Matthew 28:6). No more condemnation. No more guilt. No more looking over your shoulder afraid of death. All of that died with Jesus. It's buried in the tomb. It can't harm you anymore, because Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia and amen.