What if Christ has not risen!

In vain our preaching, faith, life and death

Morning Worship, Lord's Day 26th April 2009, 9.30am

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Bible Readings

Old Testament:	Psalm 16:8-11
New Testament:	1Corinthians 15:12-34

Hymns/Songs

1. Approach: *"Give to our God Immortal Praise"*
2. Forgiveness of sins: *"I lay my sins on Jesus"*
3. Enlightenment: *"Open our eyes O Lord"*
4. Response: *"Saviour, your dying love"*

Main Points

1. Introduction
2. The preaching of the Gospel would be useless
3. Our faith would be futile
4. Life and death would be without purpose
5. We would be pitied more than all men
6. We would die like dogs
7. Conclusion

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1. Introduction

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

The congregation in Corinth was in many respects a problem church. It was not a model church. It caused a lot of pain and heart-ache for the apostle.

Paul went to Corinth in A.D. 51 after a very unfruitful evangelistic effort at Athens.

Corinth was a seaman's paradise and a moral cesspool. Divorce was rampant. Prostitution plagued the streets, and the moral air was polluted with the luring aroma of sin. The moral depravity of this city most vividly reflects the spiritual need of Corinth. The vile character of the old city carried over into the city of New Testament times. The "*to act the Corinthian*", came to mean, "*to commit fornication*", almost in the same way as we use the term *sodomy*, to refer to homosexualism as it was practiced in Sodom and Gomorra.

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[1] *Feel free to copy, quote or duplicate this document.*

The city contained nothing less than 12 temples. The most famous was the one dedicated to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, whose worshippers practiced religious prostitution. Some people who worshipped idols became Christians and were careless and unscrupulous to carry some of their heathen worship ideas into the worship of the Christian Church. This is what caused Paul to be so heartbroken for the church in Corinth.

Amongst other things, some in the Corinthian church did not believe in the resurrection. Chapter 15 of the first letter deals with this problem.

In the first few verses of this chapter Paul deals with the fact of the resurrection. He sums his teaching about the resurrection up in verse 11:

> *… this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:11)*

Some contemporary liberal scholars cunningly deduce from this chapter in the Bible that Paul did not know anything about the bodily resurrection of Christ purely because he does not mention the empty grave! It is only with very crafty arguments that they then say the reference to Christ appearing to all the people mentioned in verses 5-8 is what people *believed* about the resurrection of Christ which was then at a later stage added to the text.

But such argument is plainly absurd: If someone would want to believe that Christ died, and that He had as spiritual resurrection, one would at least take some of what the Bible says as the truth. The question is, why? If you reject one fact mentioned in the Scripture you have to be honest in rejecting all of it. Who determines what the truth is and what was added?

Paul deals with the argument of some that there is no resurrection from the dead and concludes: *We preach that Christ has been raised from the dead, but what is the point of Him being raised from the dead if this momentous event has no effect on us who believe in Him*? He therefore closes the argument with this statement: *no resurrection of the dead, no living Christ*. Full stop! End of the story.

It is therefore only logic that he stacks the arguments, one after the other, saying "*If Christ has not been raised …*" And that is what we want to look at today.

2. The preaching of the Gospel would be useless

> *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. (1 Corinthians 15:14)*

The Bible here refers to what prophets and ministers of the Word have been doing and are doing as a divine charge received from God would be useless. The term "*preach"* here is specific to mean *the public proclamation of the Gospel* as we see it done by those called by God to do so. It also refers to the "*thus sayeth the Lord*" of the Old Testament. It is the utterance of the Word of God as received from God. Synonyms to this word is to *evangelise* or to *herald*.

This word is used in reference to the words of Moses (or a term meaning all of the Old Testament):

> *For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath." (Acts 15:21)*

This word is used when John the Baptist preached the Word of God:

> *And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. (Mark 1:4,7)*

Jesus also "*preached*" the Gospel:

> *Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. (Mark 1:38-39)*

And so did the other Apostles on the command of Christ.

> *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and He send them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere. (Luke 9:1-2, 6)*

"To preach Christ" means to announce Him as the Messiah and urge the reception of His gospel.

> *Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. (Acts 8:5, 9:20)*

This is what Paul says: what the apostles and ministers of the Word are doing would be useless if Christ has not been raised from the dead.

Paul uses the term *useless* elsewhere. He writes in Colossians 2:8

> *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. (Colossians 2:8)*

Useless preaching is to preach deceptive philosophy. It is to preach in vain. It takes you nowhere, it means nothing, it is time and energy wasted. For this every preacher will give account before God.

But our preaching is not in vain or hollow, because we preach Christ and Him crucified. We preach the living Christ, the One who was raise from the dead, the One who is victorious over the power of evil and the effects of sin. That's why the apostle says:

> *"… our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6)*

> *"…For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:2-4)*

In fact, without the risen Christ our Gospel would be one big lie. Paul says:

> *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 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. But he did not raise him if in fact the*

> *dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. (1 Corinthians 15:14-16)*

The Gospel is about Christ, Him crucified and Him being raised from the dead. His life, sacrifice, death and resurrection is indeed the fulfillment of everything written in the Old Testament. Not preaching this Gospel is to preach a lie. It is to say things about God which is not true. Some preachers actually do that and reduce the message of the Bible to a book of a self-help religion with no grace in it, but only a cheap, meaningless and humanistic emotional and sentimental love. I saw a TV program the other night in which the presenter went out of his way to demonstrate that all religions are just about doing good and loving one another. He therefore concluded that it is not what Jesus came to do which counts, but what He came to teach what counts! What rubbish. Such a Gospel is a lie, meaningless and hollow.

Further, without Christ risen from the dead preachers would have no Gospel: all would still be in your sins. This is a vast statement: without the resurrection of Christ we would still be in the bondage of sin, on our way to eternal destruction. Imagine proclaiming such a message. This is what Dr McNab is trying in Melbourne: there is no resurrection from the dead, the only message here is that we live in a world where there is an enormous amount of violence in this world (Good Friday), we have our lows (the grave) and we need to learn how to overcome these moments by learning more about ourselves and our abilities to be better people (resurrection). What a pathetic gospel!

3. Our faith would be futile

To have futile faith is to have a faith which is without purpose and content. Why would one then believe? Why would you call it faith in the first instance? Some people actually believe this way – they believe with a shrug of the shoulder, they believe in some "god up there". That is no faith; it's pure speculation; it's pure philosophy about certain possibilities.

To have such faith is hold to some loose speculation which is worthless and empty. Such faith is the same as not believing at all. It takes you nowhere and means nothing. Don't call that faith! If anyone has such "faith" there is no difference between him and the non-believer.

After healing a crippled man in Lystra, Paul was heralded as a god by the locals. They wanted to bring them praise and homage. But Paul then pointed out that their faith in their so-called gods was worthless – another use of the word futile.

> *"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from <u>these worthless things</u> to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. (Acts 14:15)*

Instead of them believing in these senseless gods, Paul preached to them the Gospel of the living God who created the heavens and the earth.

Without the message of the living Christ our faith is futile. We can just as well shut the doors of the church, close the bank accounts and divide the money between ourselves and go to the local pub and have a good time. That's the conclusion of Paul just a few verses on in this chapter:

> *If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (1 Corinthians 15:32)*

4. Life and death would be without purpose

Paul declares the reality of a faith without the sure knowledge of the risen Lord: then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

This is the logical consequence of a faith without the risen Christ in it. We come from nowhere, we are on our way to nowhere and in between everything is pretty miserable. Listen to what the Apostle says about dying with a purpose:

> *But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)*

Another verse:

> *I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Philippians 1:20-24)*

5. We would be pitied more than all men

Talking about miserable and pathetic – that is the life and the Gospel without the risen Lord in it. Paul says he and others who exposed themselves to death, persecution, hunger, trails and tribulations, and all others who heard their message will be pathetic – that is if all was done in vain – if Christ has not risen from the dead.

Poor people, they went through all of that for nothing!

6. We would die like dogs

If Christ is not raised from the dead, we will just die like dogs. Our life would be meaningless like that of an animal and our death would have no purpose. We would live for nothing, believe in nothing and die for nothing.

But that, of course is not true. Christ is risen! We have reason to live, we have reason to believe, we have reason to spend time, talent and energy on behalf of the Gospel and the Lord, and we will see Him in the life hereafter.

It surely has consequences for the unbeliever: reject this message and face the living Christ on the other side of the grave, where He will be the Judge and not the Advocate. What a dreadful misery that would be!

7. Conclusion

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Paul ends this chapter of his letter to the Corinthians with this message:

> *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves*

> *fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)*

Christ was raised from the dead – let's rejoice. Our message, faith, life and death are not in vain. Amen.