

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Don't Forget the Resurrection!

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By John MacArthur

In 1874, a Baptist minister named Robert Lowry penned one of the most stirring hymns to ever exalt the resurrection of Jesus Christ--"Low in the Grave He Lay." Notice how these verses contrast the impotence of death and suffering with the resurrection power of Christ:

Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Savior;
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!
Vainly they watch His bed, Jesus my Savior;
Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!
Death cannot keep its Prey, Jesus my Savior;
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!

Death, man's most dread enemy, is powerless to reign over the Lord of life. And that truth has significance for you and me, here and now in the twenty-first century. You can see it in the most exciting and rousing part of Lowry's hymn, the refrain that punctuates each stanza:

Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever, with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Do you see in those lines what Jesus' resurrection means to you? If you are a Christian, you can rejoice in the fact that Christ rose from the dead as a victor, a champion who lives forever to reign, "with His saints." That refers to the promise based on our baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ--it is our hope and the reason and ground of all we believe.

But what if there were no resurrection? What if the resurrection of Jesus Christ is just a first-century myth to be ignored or marginalized as a secondary issue? The implications of that approach are devastating to Christianity.

I want to draw your attention to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 so that you can see what happens when you forget the resurrection.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 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.

Without question, if Jesus is still in the grave, if He is perpetually the sufferer and never the Victor, then you and I are hopelessly lost. And though that is not the case, I want to focus on the hypothetical "what if" that Paul assumes temporarily in 1 Corinthians 15. "What if the resurrection were a myth? What if Jesus Christ were still dead and in the grave?"

First of all, you would still be in your sins, under the tyranny of death along with the most vile and unbelieving pagan. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then sin won the victory over Him and continues to be victorious over you too. If Jesus remained in the grave, then, when you die you would also stay dead. Furthermore, since "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), were you to remain dead, death and eternal punishment would be your future.

The purpose of trusting in Christ is for forgiveness of sins, because it is from sin that we need to be saved. "Christ died for our sins" and "was buried, and ... raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). If Christ was not raised, His death was in vain, your faith in Him would be pointless, and your sins would still be counted against you with no hope of spiritual life.

Second, if there is no resurrection, then "those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." That means every Old Testament saint, every New Testament saint, and every saint since Paul wrote would be suffering in torment at this very moment. That would include Paul himself, the rest of the apostles, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Moody, and the faithful and prayerful saints you've known--every other believer in every age also would be in hell. Their faith would have been in vain, their sins would not have been forgiven, and their destiny would be damnation.

In light of the other consequences, the last is rather obvious. "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." Without Christ's resurrection, and the salvation and blessings it brings, Christianity would be pointless and pitiable. Without the resurrection we would have no Savior, no forgiveness, no gospel, no meaningful faith, no life, and we could never have hope for any of those things.

To have hoped in Christ alone in this life would be to teach, preach, suffer, sacrifice, and work entirely for nothing. If Christ is still dead, then He not only has no ability to save you in the future, but He can't help you now either. If He were not alive, where would be your source of peace, joy, or satisfaction

now? The Christian life would be a mockery, a charade, a tragic and cruel joke. Christians who suffer and even die for the faith would be just as blind and pathetic as those "believers" who followed Jim Jones and the People's Temple, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, and Marshall Applewhite and the Heaven's Gate cult.

Since a Christian has no Savior but Christ, no Redeemer but Christ, and no Lord but Christ, if Christ is not raised, He is not alive, and our Christian life is lifeless. We would have nothing to justify our faith, our Bible study, our preaching or witnessing, our service for Him or our worship of Him, and nothing to justify our hope in this life or the next. We would deserve nothing but the compassion reserved for fools.

But, God *did* raise "Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). Because Christ lives, we too shall live (John 14:19). "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 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" (Acts 5:30-31).

We are NOT to be pitied, for Paul immediately ends the dreadful "what if" section by saying, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20). As Paul said at the end of his life, "I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him [i.e. his life] until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Those who do not hope in Christ alone for salvation are the real fools; they are the ones who need to hear your compassionate testimony about the triumph of Christ's resurrection. So don't forget the resurrection; rejoice in it and glory in it, for He is risen indeed.

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