

“If There Is No Resurrection” (I Corinthians 15)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (4/12/2020)

Introduction

An article in *The Minneapolis Star* (April 5, 1969) by Louis Cassels argued that the resurrection is “God’s assurance to man that life has meaning.” He closed the article: “In the last analysis, it is our conception of death which decides our answers to all the questions that life puts to us.” This is a partial truth that misses the most important fact—the resurrection proves that God has granted *eternal life* to all for whom Christ died.

Cassels cited Bertrand Russell: “Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving.” The result of this view of human existence means that—“All the labors of the ages, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to ultimate extinction.” Cassels then stated, “But suppose [the resurrection] really happened.” There is no “supposing.” Paul assured the Corinthian believers: “*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead*” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Cassels continued, “That is why the historicity of the resurrection is a crucial issue for disbelievers as well as believers. And it is a question the church dares not try to soft-pedal or side-step in an effort to make its teachings more acceptable to skeptics. But if the New Testament gospels are based, as they are purported to be, on eye-witness accounts of an incomprehensible but real happening, the Christian view of life and death has been impressively validated. In the face of ruthless persecution, the early Christian community steadfastly insisted that the resurrection was an actual, unique historical event.”

Christ’s resurrection is the foundation of our hope of eternal life. Christianity is the only religion on earth whose founder claims to have conquered death by rising alive from the grave and promising that all His followers will, like Him, be raised to newness of life. Christianity is also unique in offering hope to believers that, upon death, the soul goes immediately into the presence of God (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Old Testament saints did not have a concept of heaven, their hope being resurrection. “*As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness*” (Psalm 17:15). In the very first written book of the Bible, Job asked the question that has been the concern of men in every age. “*If a man dies, shall he live again?*” (Job 14:14). Jesus answered Job’s question in His resurrection. “*Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*”

I. Resurrection Power Prophesied

1. From the beginning Jesus prophesied His resurrection.
 - a. Jesus gave the Jews the sign of the temple (John 2:18–22).
 - b. Jesus gave the Jews the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38–40.). He followed with a rebuke, noting that the men of Nineveh repented at Jonah’s preaching, then added, “*Behold, something greater than Jonah is here*” (v. 41).
2. Jesus informed the disciples of what was coming and how His ministry would end (Matthew 16:21).
3. At His trial before the high priest, Jesus testified of His approaching glory (Mark 14:61–64).

II. Resurrection Power Proven

1. Jesus proclaimed His power to raise the dead (John 10:17, 18; John 11:23).
2. Jesus proved this power by raising people from the dead during His ministry (Luke 8:49–56). He also raised Lazarus right before His passion to seal the Jews' condemnation in the face of His tremendous power, proving His claim to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament (John 11).
3. The Jews proved the resurrection by the precautions taken at His tomb (Matthew 27:63–66). These people were not stupid or sloppy and would not allow the disciples to steal the body. A fellow wrote to the religion editor of a newspaper: “Sir, at the Easter service, our pastor said that Jesus merely swooned on the cross and the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?” The editor replied: “Beat your pastor with a cat-o’-nine-tails with 39 heavy strokes; nail Him to the cross; hang Him in the sun for 6 hours; run a spear in His side to see if His dead; then put Him in an airless tomb for 72 hours and see what happens.”
4. The apostles proved the resurrection by boldly proclaiming the truth.
 - a. Their proclamation was based on their eye-witness accounts (1 Corinthians 15:3–8). How is it possible to build the kingdom of God on a lie and see the blessing of God? Paul aptly argued, *“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. . . our preaching is in vain . . . we are even found to be misrepresenting God”* (1 Corinthians 15:14, 15).
 - b. The resurrection was the central theme of their message (I Corinthians 15:1–4; Romans 1:3–6).
 - c. They endured persecution because of their resurrection hope (I Corinthians 15:30–34).

What Can We Conclude?

The resurrection is the proof of Christ's Deity.

The resurrection is the proof of redemption.

The resurrection is the promise of the believers' hope.