

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless!" ... These harsh words were written by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:17.

Furthermore... two verses later he also wrote... that if Christ has not been raised... "we are of all men most to be pitied". ... We should be pitied for being the biggest fools on this planet – if the resurrection is just a hoax.

On the other-hand... if Jesus did indeed come back to life... after dying on the cross... then there should be no fear whatsoever - in any of us - to be recklessly so politically incorrect ... as to say Christianity is not just one of many equal faiths the world. ... We know Christianity is true... and all of the others are cheap imitations. ... If the resurrection did happen... than without apology... we should be able to say - Christianity far exceeds Buddhism... Islam... New Age religions... American Indian Spirit worship... or any other religious System. ... That is exactly what the resurrection declares!

Our Gospel is offensive... and we need to be willing to be much more offensive.

In our pluralistic society... we aren't suppose to say "*We're right and other religions are wrong*"... but **if Christ rose from the dead** - THAT IS INDEED THE CASE! ... Polite society says that we should be misleading about the truth... and simple pretend that we are followers of just one of many different ways. ... But if the resurrection is true... we had better not pretend. We had better not mislead.

I could hardly be more offensive... and politically incorrect... when I say Jesus rose from the dead!... even though Jesus **proved** His claim to be the Truth and all other religions to be false. ... I could hardly be more offensive... and politically incorrect... simply by quoting the very words of Jesus:

**John 14:6 (ESV)**

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

And neither was Peter being a good participant in polite society when he said **this** about Jesus:

**Acts 4:12 (ESV)**

*... there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Peter boldly proclaimed that you cannot be in right standing with God through the teachings of Buddha... Confucius... Mohammed... or the New Age teachings of Oprah Winfrey and her Guru - Toole... or any other religion or spirituality.

Jesus said - I'll **prove** My claims. ... I'll rise from the dead. He said that He would do this... several times before He died... and then He went ahead and demonstrated why He alone is the way the Truth and the Life. None of the other religious leaders even come close to attempting to verify their claims like Christ did.

But the looming question is: can we believe that Christ really **did** come back to life? ... .. What made Peter and all the other disciples so bold and politically incorrect...? ... Is it possible that we... and they... have all been duped into believing a carefully constructed lie ... ?

Should we be the object of other people's **pity** - much like the pity I often feel for those who believe those absurd magazine tabloids... and internet scams? ... (Which... by the way... reminds me. I just inherited 2 million dollars from a sweet Christian widow in Saudi Arabia... whose husband recently passed away. She too is dying and doesn't need the funds... and does want her corrupt friends to have it. So... I figured... "Why not?" and we have been emailing back and forth. On Friday we both agreed for her to deposit the money directly into my bank account for me. – See what I mean about her being so sweet?! - It should come any day now.

I hope you know that I am kidding! But I get so many of these scam emails that it makes me think some people actually believe them – otherwise these offers would dry up. I pity these victims who believed the lie.)

Before I became a pastor... when I was a professional sleight-of hand magician... I had an acquaintance named Larry Lavelle. ... For publicity Larry... a fellow magician... would perform age-old magic tricks for the "National Enquirer" and the "Star" tabloid newspapers. ... And the stories they would print were absolutely hilarious: "California Psychic Walks over Burning Hot Coals"... and "Psychic Drives Blindfolded through Crowd"... I remember being so amazed ...1) That someone I

knew was the subject of a national publication... 2) how embellished the story was when it came to print... 3) that people believed his hoaxes.

I pity those who believed it. ... But you can pity me - even more – if the resurrection is not true! ... Because I am basing my entire life on it being true.

But am I... and are you... the victims of a tremendous hoax...? ... Let's evaluate it from something the Apostle Paul wrote:

### **1ST CORINTHIANS 15:1-8**

The evidence we have for our believing in the resurrection are the eye-witnesses who saw Him live from the dead.

But... so what...? There are supposed eyewitnesses of Bigfoot. There is even a new television series called... "In Search of Bigfoot." ... If they interview a supposed eyewitness... should we all automatically believe that this strange ape-like creature exists and is wandering around our forests...? There certainly are those who say "Yes, he exists, and here are the people who have seen him."

So is this the same kind of evidence that Christianity rests on? ... If we believe that Jesus rose from the dead... on the basis of the accounts of eye witnesses who saw Him... and talked about Him... and told us about their experiences with Him after He rose.. it would be very difficult to escape the logic that we must also believe in the existence of Big Foot.

Now I am not trying to equate the **importance** of believing in Big Foot with the **importance** of the resurrection of Christ. ...The truth is... there is a vast difference between the level of evidence for believing in the existence of Bigfoot and believing in the resurrection.

The reason Paul wrote the verses we just read in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians... was because of a fear that he had... that their belief may not have been strong enough. ... Let's read the two verses prior to what we just read.

### **1 Cor. 15:1-2**

"Believing in vain" is a wishy-washy type of believing that says "*O.K., I'll concede that there may a **possibility** that all this really happened*".

...That kind of a believing in vain - accomplishes absolutely nothing. There is no salvation in that wimpy kind of faith... so Paul presents evidence in an attempt to strengthen their belief.

### **1 Cor. 15:3-4**

Twice Paul writes the phrase... "*according to the Scriptures*" in very close proximity. ... Paul is pointing to the strong evidence of prophecy. 700 years before Christ came... prophecies were given that foretold of His life... His death... His burial... His resurrection... and even the very day and year when the events we celebrated last Sunday – the presentation of the Messiah to the Nation – would happen. (Daniel 9:24-27 gives the exact day and year.)

Copies of Daniel and the other prophets exist today... which archeologists date long before the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... when Christ was alive on Earth. Let's look at just one of these pre-existing and clear prophecies:

### **Isaiah 53:5-12**

Everything that happened to Jesus in His life... His death... burial... and resurrection was exactly as it had been prophesied about some 700 years earlier.

Someone might say, "*Well big deal... Jesus knew what the Scriptures declared.. so He merely arranged things in His life to look like fulfilled prophecy*". ... However that does not hold much weight... when you pay close attention... So much of this... He had absolutely no control. ... For example... His burial in a rich man's tomb.

Even more unlikely was His birth place - Bethlehem - which the prophet Micah prophesied, also some 700 years before Jesus was actually born in Micah 5:2. ... And there is also the incredible prophecy about His betrayal for 30 pieces of silver.

Zech. 11:12-13 specifically spells out that Jesus would be:

1. Betrayed by a friend
2. For 30 pieces of silver (not 29, not 31)
3. Silver (not gold, the more common currency)
4. The money would not be kept, but would be thrown down (not

placed)

5. Thrown down in the Temple

6. That it would be picked up and used to buy a potter's field

This is exactly what did happen... Jesus fulfilled the prophecies that were written about Hirn - hundreds of years before His birth.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:5**

Cephas is another name for Peter. ...We do not know when and where Jesus appeared to Peter. I am sure Peter was the apostle who was hurting the most at this particular time. ... He had denied his Lord during the wee hours of the morning... before the crucifixion. ...Three times he had professed that he did not even know Him... and he supported it with curses and oaths. ... When he realized what he had done... Peter went out into the night and wept bitterly. You can imagine how Peter must have been feeling... all through this terrible time after the crucifixion of Jesus... when he was suffering from the awful pangs of his guilt over this denial.

I think it is for that reason that Jesus specifically sought Peter out first. He found him in his brokenness... in his heartbreak... in his hatred of himself... in his awful sense of guilt... and Jesus made clear to Peter that He forgave him.

It must have been this Jesus' resurrection appearance to Peter... that changed him from a broken-down frightened man... who lied that he ever

knew Jesus... to one of the strongest... most confident leaders the church has ever known. Christ's resurrection appearance radically transformed - not only Peter - but all ten of the other disciples... who were so frightened at Jesus' arrest that they scattered and ran. (Judas had already hung himself.)

Something happened that made 11 broken-down men... who were scared and fearing for their own lives... none of them considered "Important men" of their day... to change suddenly... then go out and turn the world on its ear - each of them claiming that they had seen the resurrected Jesus.

The drastic transformation of these eleven men... is a historically provable fact... and so are their claims... to have seen Jesus alive after His death.

All but one... of the remaining disciples suffered **horrible** deaths because they refused to **deny** their claim about Jesus' resurrection. Encyclopedia Britannica... using historical writings - writes that some were crucified on a cross like Jesus... some were beheaded... one as flayed alive... one was dropped into a vat of boiling oil... and some had their heads chopped off.

John... of course... suffered the longest... and eventually died in exile on a lonely island. ... Each of them - history affirms - died horrible deaths that they **could have** escaped - if they would simply **deny** that they saw Jesus alive after His death.

As Christian author and speaker, Josh McDowell, is known for saying: Never in the course of all history will you find one example of anyone dying for something they clearly would have known was a lie.

Many persons in history **have** died for a lie. ... History is full of examples of those who gave their lives heroically in battles... Kamikaze pilots during World War II... for example... willingly gave their lives... dive-bombing their airplanes into Allied ships at sea. They died because of something they deeply believed- in... as part of their Emperor worship. But... unlike these disciples... they died - because they **believed** so strongly that their country and religion were true.

Peter and the rest of the disciples... couldn't have done the same thing... because they would have **known** whether or not their belief was a lie. They **said** they had seen Jesus alive again.... After He died. Either they did or they didn't. ... .. Would they have suffered such torture and death so they could hold onto what they would have known was a lie...?

### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:6**

When Paul wrote this letter to the Church at Corinth... it was about 25 years after the crucifixion... and most were still alive. ... If the Corinthians wanted to check it out... there were still many hundreds of people who were **there** and had **seen** Jesus... and could bear testimony to it.

The citing of Jesus alive... after He had been crucified... did not happen

in a vacuum. ... It was not a spotting in some remote forest that few people frequent. It happened in the very geographic location where Jesus' enemies were... who would have LOVED to quell the story... if they could.

Bigfoot and aliens from outer space... don't even come close to such verification. The events that they supposedly witnessed is never right there on the scene where the greatest critic would be... and the events happen before small audiences... not big crowds. ... Paul appeals to more than five hundred people... from various backgrounds and attitudes... not 2 or 3 people from the same family.

### **1ST CORINTHIANS 15:7**

James mentioned here is undoubtedly the half-brother of Jesus. He would be the oldest remaining son (after Jesus) of Mary and Joseph... who grew up in Nazareth... as a sibling of Jesus. ... John mentioned in his Gospel... that the brothers of Jesus did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. ... And you can understand why. ... It would have been very hard to believe that someone you made mud pies with... someone you ran through the fields and went skinny-dipping with... and all these other things that kids do... was the Son of God... the Creator of all the universe.

But after the resurrection... James was transformed into a powerful believer... that persecution could not silence. ... It was that phenomenal event... that finally convinced James... that his brother (Jesus) was the

Son of God. ... We do not know when Christ appeared to His skeptical brother. ... But it is this James... who became so convinced that he turned around and wrote the Epistle of James in our New Testament. ... Interestingly... If you read that letter... you will see how reverently he refers to his brother as “the Lord Jesus.”

### **1<sup>st</sup> CORINTHIANS 15:8**

This was clearly that remarkable scene on the Damascus road... when young Saul of Tarsus... burning in his hatred against the Christians... was trying to eliminate them. ... Suddenly a light brighter than the sun shone around him. ... He was blinded by it and was thrown to the ground. He heard a voice say to him "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*". He said, "*Who are you, Lord*"... and the voice identified itself... "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting;*"

That event - Paul's encounter with the resurrected Jesus - changed his life forever. ... What could possibly motivate someone to give up a life of luxury... his certain and secure future as a national leader of the Jews... all of his wealth... his heritage... his zeal... and his personal friendship with the High Priest...? ... But something made him give all that up... and then go all over the Roman Empire and subject himself to torturous beatings. ... On more than one occasion... Paul was beaten to a pulp... only to get back up and preach Christ some more. ... What makes a man do that...? Something he knows is a lie...? ... No! Only a real encounter with the resurrected Jesus could explain how we got the Apostle Paul.

The witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ are of a far different caliber than any of the witnesses to any other event in human history. ...or even Bigfoot... for that matter. ... 1) We have the witness of fulfilled Scripture that was written hundreds of years before Christ's birth... 2) we also have the witnesses of His disciples and others... who were willing to die for something... they would have known to have been a lie... if it was...

Paul has marshaled incredible evidence for the Gospel... and the truth of the resurrection. ... So... What is your verdict ... ?

Are you willing to resist society's call for you to bow to political correctness... and instead - bow to a risen Lord...? Christ has risen!

He rose from the dead so that we can believe that He truly is **THE** way... **THE** truth... and **THE** life... and that there is **NO OTHER** name in heaven or on earth... by which man can be saved.

God sent His Son to die... in order that we might live. Do you care...?

We... as sinful human beings... have NOTHING good in ourselves... to win God's favor. The Bible says that every single one of us has too **much** sin in our life. Even if it were just **one** sin (it's not)... but even if it were just **one** itty-bitty sin... that is enough to make us **worthy** of Hell. We all deserve severe punishment – for turning our backs on the God Who created us to have fellowship with Him... because we said... “*No thanks God... I don't want You... I don't need You!... MY way is better*”

*than Your way...”*

Turn back to God... today... through an acceptance of the truth... that Christ’s punishing death on the cross... completely **satisfied** a Holy God’s anger toward you. YOU deserved to die physically... but Jesus took the punishment for you. It has been paid. ... Your receipt is the resurrection. ... Accept Jesus’ payment of your own penalty... and begin serving the Lord in obedience to Him... today.