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Sermon Notes

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The Devastating Consequences If There Is No Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

A few years ago, I came across a volume of historical essays called "What If?" written by some of the best historians of our time... called "counterfactual history" or "alternate history"

Examples:

What if Alexander the Great had died in his first battle with the Persians at Granicus River in the year 334 BC, as he nearly did when a huge Persian nobleman named Spithridates smashed his axe into Alexander's helmet... a second blow was about to follow which would certainly have ended young Alexander's life and his dreams of conquering the Persian Empire. But Alexander's bodyguard managed to kill Spithridates just in time.

What if there had been no fog on August 29, 1776, allowing George Washington and his army to slip out of certain defeat at the hands of the British in New York City? The American Revolution would have ended right there and then.

What if D-Day had failed... or if Chiang Kai Shek had defeated Mao and the Communists in 1946...

History turns on tiny moments in time like this... it becomes fascinating to delve into the ALTERNATE REALITY

The Apostle Paul does some alternate history and the alternate theology that would flow on one simple historical change

WHAT IF JESUS CHRIST HAD NOT RISEN FROM THE DEAD?

I. The Challenge to the Resurrection... Then and Now

A. Greek Philosophy

B. Even Among Many Jews... they did not see bodily resurrection from the dead in the scriptures. Like the Sadducees

C. Now: Scientific Materialism... Stephen Hawking... death ends everything... dreams, plans, emotions all just biochemical reactions in the material brain; death ends it all

D. Paul's Approach Here in This Chapter

1. Proof of the resurrection

a. Scriptural... through the Old Testament prophecies

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

b. Historical... through the more than 500 eyewitnesses (including himself) (verses 5-8)

c. Theological/Logical... reasoning theologically the implications of the opposite: What if the resurrection from the dead is impossible?

2. Who is Paul arguing against here?

a. Is he taking on the skeptic, the irreligious, atheistic, mocker?

b. It seems not, as we'll see... for many of the implications that Paul seems to assume are detestable, horrendous, reprehensible

are actually believed to be TRUE by the cultured intelligent despisers of Christianity

- i) They really do think resurrection from the dead is absurd scientifically and philosophically
- ii) They are glad to embrace all of the logical consequences that Paul lists here
- iii) Christ has NOT been raised from the dead
- iv) All preaching of the Christian gospel really is meaningless
- v) All Christian faith really is worthless
- vi) All people who claimed back in the day to have seen Christ alive after he died were actually liars, deceivers, false witnesses
- vii) All people are NOT “still in their sins” because sin itself is a questionable societal construct
- viii) All dead Christians have merely ceased to exist... annihilated by the decay and entropy that has caused their physical body to disintegrate
- ix) Christians are not worthy of any pity at all... for they brought their miseries on themselves by being disturbers of the peace of others through their offensive message

3. No, I believe Paul is arguing WITHIN THE CAMP... people who want to be considered Christians, members of the Christian church in good standing, but who philosophically cannot embrace bodily resurrection from the dead

1 Corinthians 15:12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

We don't know how many in the Corinthian church denied resurrection, or how influential they were

But it was such an important issue, Paul spends 58 verses on it here to address it... this is absolutely essential to the Christian faith!!

So... the debate opponents were actual members of the Corinthian church

- a. Perhaps they taught that the “resurrection” idea is merely a symbol of spiritual renewal that comes in your life
- b. The resurrection ideal is a spiritual transformation resulting in a new moral lifestyle
- c. This is very much like 19th century classical liberalism, which embraced a lot of Darwinism and materialism but which also sought to be considered Christianity
- d. The miracles were spiritualized, not seen to be actual matters of scientific and historical fact
- e. So Paul is arguing against false doctrine **WITHIN THE RANKS**, and here (verses 13-19) showing the logical outcome of their doctrine that resurrection is impossible
- f. They should be **HORRIFIED** at these conclusions if they still want to be considered Christians
- g. Basically Christianity is **OVER FOREVER**, and they would hopefully be horrified at that
- h. That is who Paul is arguing against

E. The role of logic in the Christian faith

1. Jesus continually used logic in his presentation of God’s Word to the Jewish nation

Matthew 6:30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

2. Paul is a very logical thinker... reasoning was essential to his entire approach to evangelism

- a. The Book of Romans makes dozens and dozens of logical arguments
- 3. This shows us something about the basic nature of God and of the Christian religion

***Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD.
"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.***

- 4. Logic is sound thinking... it is part of the human mind having been created in the image of God
- 5. Part of salvation is to learn to think soberly and with proper judgment
- 6. Scripture teaches us to destroy faulty arguments

2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

F. Paul's Logical Tactic Here: Reduction to Absurdity

- 1. This logical strategy works when you take your debate opponent's argument and push it out to its logical conclusions, and show that those logical conclusions are ABSURD and REPULSIVE
- 2. So, Paul takes these members of the Corinthian church who claim to be Christians, but who deny that resurrection from the dead is possible and pushes their viewpoint out to its logical conclusions... and those conclusions should be seen to be DETESTABLE

G. The Devastating Consequences if Resurrection is Impossible

- 1. Then Christ Himself Has Not Been Raised
- 2. Then All Christian Preaching is Useless
- 3. Then All Faith in Christ Would be Useless (Including Yours)
- 4. Then All Witnesses to the Resurrection Are False
- 5. Then All Human Beings Are Still in their Sins

6. Then All Dead Christians Are Eternally Lost

7. Then All Suffering Christians Are the Most to Be Pitied On Earth

If someone didn't think these consequences are devastating, let's be honest... **THEY'RE NOT CHRISTIANS!!**

II. The Devastating Consequences If There is No Resurrection

If there is no resurrection from the dead...

A. Then Christ Himself Has Not Been Raised

1 Corinthians 15:13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

1. If resurrection itself is a logical, philosophical, scientific impossibility, then Christ himself has not been raised from the dead
2. He is not the exception that proves the rule... he himself would have succumbed to the inevitable... when he breathed his last on the cross outside the city gates of Jerusalem, that would have been his last moment of existence
3. Beyond that, all his teachings and his moral example would have been rendered null and void... for he claimed that he would die and on the third day, he would be raised from the dead. If he has not been raised, he is exactly what his enemies said he was: a liar and a deceiver of the people
4. We can't cherry-pick some of the moral teachings and loving example of Jesus, like his compassion on the power and outcasts, and his courage in facing the corrupt power-structures; no the whole thing goes down the drain, because he lied about who he was and what he had come to do

B. Then All Christian Preaching is Useless

1 Corinthians 15:14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless

1. Paul's eighteen-month ministry in Corinth would have to be exposed as useless, vain, having achieved nothing
2. In fact, all the church-planting Paul did throughout Asia and Greece would have to be exposed as USELESS, vanity of vanities, a chasing after the wind...
3. It would have been better for the pagans he won from their paganism to have continued sacrificing to the gods and goddesses
4. It was a waste of Paul's efforts to write all the doctrines he did about sexual purity, and marriage, and meat sacrificed to idols

C. Then All Faith in Christ Would be Useless (Including Yours)

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

1. Paul makes it very personal... if Christ actually has NOT been raised from the dead, every single Christian in the world has built their lives on a lie, on an empty cloud of nothing
2. This includes each and every one of YOU, members of FBC Durham!!
3. All the supposed comforts and consolations of Christianity are essentially frauds, not worth anything
4. All our prayers, all our gifts to the poor and needy, all our sacrificial acts for the gospel... all of them are vanity of vanities... worthless
5. All the preaching and writing and thinking I've done on "heaven as a world of love" and all the consolations of the New Heaven and New Earth are as deceptive as the fraudulent Wizard of Oz... the little man behind the curtain
6. Heaven itself is a deception... life ends when we die

D. Then All Witnesses to the Resurrection Are False

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

1. Paul already said his preaching was USELESS, but here he is saying it is actually FRAUDULENT... a LIE, if Christ has not been raised
2. Because he CLAIMED to have seen the resurrected Christ on the Road to Damascus, and that was the basis of his call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles
3. But that whole story would now be official exposed as a LIE, a FRAUD, a deception
4. Not only Paul, but the Apostles who stood in downtown Jerusalem and preached boldly that Christ had risen from the dead were actually lying... perhaps it is just as the Jewish authorities told the soldiers at Christ's tomb to say

Matthew 28:13 His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'

But if Christ has NOT been raised from the dead, then what happened to the body? Probably the disciples DID IN FACT steal his body away in the night, they were all preaching what they KNEW to be a lie

5. So also all the great Christian preachers in history—the great evangelists, missionaries, pastors—all of them are in this category
6. They would be doing exactly what Christianity's cultured despisers in every generation say that all Christian ministers are doing: deceiving gullible people for power and money
7. Perhaps they didn't know as clearly as the first disciples did; perhaps Augustine and Chrysostom and Martin Luther and John Calvin and George Whitefield and John Wesley and Charles Spurgeon and Hudson Taylor and Billy Graham all really did believe Christ rose from the dead
8. But they were all of them deceived and wasted their lives on a lie

E. Then All Human Beings Are Still in their Sins

1 Corinthians 15:17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

1. Christ came into the world to save us from our sins

1 Corinthians 15:3 Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

2. But if Christ has not been raised from the dead, we are all still under the wrath and curse of God for violating his holy laws
3. We have no Savior! We have no Mediator between us and God! We have no one interceding at the right hand of God!
4. Christ's resurrection VINDICATED him as our Savior... it was God's way of saying "Payment accepted"

Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification

5. But if Christ has not been raised from the dead, we are on our own, and have no hope of forgiveness

We are the "people walking in darkness" who have seen NO GREAT LIGHT

We are like the whole world "dead in our transgressions and sins"

We are like the rest of mankind "without hope and without God in the world"

We stand moment by moment under the just wrath of God and there is no escape from that terror

6. We will die and be condemned for our sins, and we have no hope

F. Then All Dead Christians Are Eternally Lost

1 Corinthians 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

1. This is referring to dead believers... including Old Testament saints

2. So the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11 is what John MacArthur calls in this context the “Hall of the Foolish”... Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, the prophets... all of them were looking ahead to Christ, trusting the truth of the resurrection in him
3. Job said in his suffering he was looking ahead to Christ his mediator

Job 19:25-27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

But he was deceived in his forward-looking faith, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, neither will Job or any of the other Old Testament heroes

4. And all the heroes of the New Testament and church history beyond... they all died in deception if Christ has not been raised from the dead

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we should grieve exactly like the rest of the world who have no hope... because we have no real hope either

Your dead Christian spouse... you will never see him again

Your saintly Christian mother whose casket you wet with your tears, you didn't cry enough... you'll never see her again.

All the millions who died in hope, who “died well” filled with joy, speaking boldly to their loved ones who gathered around their deathbeds to watch them cross over... they were all of them deceived... for they are all LOST FOREVER!

G. Then All Suffering Christians Are the Most to Be Pitied On Earth

1 Corinthians 15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

1. This verse has challenged me for years

2. In one sense, the word “we” in this context really should refer to all Christians, we who believe in the resurrection of Christ from the dead
3. We are pitiable people, because we have based our entire lives on a lie
4. But actually, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, that doesn't make worship of Artemis true... all worshipers of Artemis could be equally pitied
5. But Paul says “If for this life only we have hope in Christ, that puts US in the worst possible position compared to all other people”
6. Why? Because of the level of suffering that Christianity has produced in the lives of his true followers
7. So, if Christ has not been raised from the dead... they are deceived... but so is everyone else; what makes Christians to be PITIED MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE ON EARTH is that their faith supposedly has cost them much if not everything of earthly benefit and (if Christ has not been raised) will return NOTHING on that immense investment

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

8. Paul's list of suffering make him to be pitied more than anyone else on earth:

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Paul's trade only makes sense if Christ has been raised from the dead:

Philippians 3:8 I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Philippians 3:10-11 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

9. So all the Christians who suffered extremely to spread the gospel... from the first martyrs to this present day
 - a. Stephen who saw heaven open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God... he was deceived... intense wishful thinking. His stoned body was thrown into the grave where it decayed and that was the end of Stephen
 - b. James, the first apostle to be martyred, is lost forever
 - c. Peter, crucified upside-down for his bold testimony to Christ simply got what he deserved as a disturber of the peace
 - d. Those whose blood wet the sands of the Coliseum were FOOLS... Tertullian said "the blood of martyrs is seed for the church", but if Christ has not been raised from the dead, they were to be pitied more than anyone else on earth
10. Adoniram Judson's letter to Ann Judson's father is exposed as a howling travesty rather than a mark of heroism
11. The challenge to us comfortable Christians
 - a. For us in the affluent West, this final statement is a little hard to comprehend

1 Corinthians 15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

- b. If our Christian faith has cost us very little, and actually has in some way increased our earthly comfort—prosperity,

orderliness, diligence, pleasant family life, orderly and prosperous Judeo-Christian society, etc. we are not above all people to be pitied if in fact Christ has not been raised from the dead

- c. Verse 19 challenges us to live as though this were true... that our Christian faith pushes us to do things that cost us much in this world

Well... that's enough of Paul's argument! It is dreary beyond words!

And I can't leave it hanging there

III. The Delightful Reversal of them All

Instead, let's just reverse these seven assertions ... please know there are far more wonderful truths connected with Christ's resurrection for us and our future bodily resurrection in him than these seven!!

If resurrection from the dead is NOT impossible...

A. Then Christ Himself Has Indeed Been Raised... Just as He Said

1 Corinthians 15:20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

- 1. If Christ actually HAS been raised from the dead, he is vindicated in ALL HIS CLAIMS
 - a. He actually is GOD the SON

Romans 1:4 through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

- b. He is the only way to God

John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

This means, if Christ has been raised from the dead, all the other religions on the world are exposed themselves as frauds

- c. He will raise his people from the dead on the final day
- d. He will come to judge the living and the dead

Acts 17:31 [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

B. Then All Christian Preaching is Not Useless, But Powerful!

1. The gospel has been spreading from that upper room in Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth for almost twenty centuries
2. All that proclamation of Christ crucified and resurrected has been **POWERFULLY EFFECTIVE** for the salvation of human souls in almost every tribe, language, people, and nation

Nothing has changed planet earth and the course of history as much as the preaching of the Christian gospel in every generation... and if Christ HAS BEEN RAISED from the dead, then the hope he has given to millions and millions of people who are drawing every single day closer to death has been real and powerful

C. Then All Faith in Christ Is NOT Useless (Including Yours), But Will Result in Eternal Life

As Peter preached to Cornelius, the Roman centurion:

Acts 10:40-43 God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

D. Then All Witnesses to the Resurrection Were Telling the Truth... Even to this present day!

E. It Is Possible for Human Beings to Be Saved from Their Sins!

F. Then All Dead Christians Are NOT Eternally Lost, But Actually in Heaven Awaiting the Resurrection from the Dead

G. Then All Suffering Christians Are NOT the Most to Be Pitied On Earth, But Will be Rewarded in Proportion to their Suffering and their Faithfulness