

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20 BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

“If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”¹

“**B**ut in fact Christ has been raised from the dead!” The heart of the Christian message is that Christ has been raised from the dead. The tomb is empty and the tomb is emptied of all terror. We Christians need no longer live in fear of death, for Christ has conquered death. And yet, it seems that we are traumatised at the thought of death. Is it because we are not so very different from the ancient Corinthians? If we think of what lies ahead, it seems as if we give only a cursory acknowledgement that the Bible speaks of life, real life, that is somewhere beyond this present existence.

Each year, for a brief moment, what should be central to our worship is forced to the fore, and mankind is compelled to think of our Living Saviour. Thinking of Him, we consider for a brief moment the implications for our own lives because He has conquered death. The challenge of the Faith is for believers to live as Resurrection People each day. The challenge is for us to live as though the Master did indeed conquer death. The challenge is for us to live as those who are now free of the fear of death.

THE APOSTLES’ MESSAGE — The message of the early disciples was both certain and clear—having been crucified, Christ Jesus conquered death, rising from the dead. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood to preach before the wondering crowd—the very crowd that like maddened animals had bayed for the Master’s crucifixion. In the same manner as religious zealots whom we have witnessed in this day, in their rage they had cried out for Him to die. Now, empowered by the promised Spirit which the ascended Saviour had sent, Peter and all those who had gathered in prayer for ten days, testified to the resurrection of Jesus the Crucified.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,

‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.”’

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” [ACTS 2:22-36].

The resurrection of Christ Jesus was central to all apostolic preaching. Rushing to see a crippled man who had been healed, the people were confronted by Peter testifying, “You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses” [ACTS 3:14, 15]. Drawing that message to a conclusion, he boldly stated, “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” [ACTS 3:26].

Haled before the Sanhedrin, the Apostles testified, “Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” [ACTS 4:10-12].

When arrested a second time and called to answer for disobeying the Sanhedrin’s demand that they cease speaking of the Risen Lord of Glory, the Apostles responded, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” [ACTS 5:29-32].

Witnessing to the Gentiles of the household of Cornelius, Peter testified, “We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead” [ACTS 10:39-43].

**1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!**

The resurrection of Jesus was central to Paul's preaching on the first missionary journey. "When [those living in Jerusalem] had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus" [ACTS 13:29-33a].

This message of Jesus risen from the dead became the hallmark of apostolic preaching; and the resurrection of Christ the Lord continues as central to the message of life to this day. This was Paul's testimony in the verses preceding the text chosen for this day. "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-11]. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead!

CHRIST CONQUERED DEATH! TRUE? OR FALSE? Since the apostolic message was built around the resurrection of Christ the Lord, and since the hope of the resurrection is offered for all who believe in Him, then is it not surprising that some adherents questioned the resurrection. However, as I've already intimated, belief in the resurrection of the dead is frequently doubted, or at least ignored by many professing Christians. Contemporary churches often appear to have adopted a rather squishy faith—it requires little, changes naught and promise much. A central tenet of this flaccid faith is a willingness to jettison the resurrection as though it is an antiquated relic from a forgotten era. It is as though the theologians in this bold, new day have concluded that niceness has superseded conviction. But the Apostles would have argued that the resurrection of the Master and our own promised resurrection are essential. Transformation of life into a life that is pleasing to God demands confidence in God's power to raise the dead.

Paul tackled the issue of soft faith head on. "If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-15].

The Good News does not call people to believe easy things—the Gospel of Christ calls us to believe difficult truths! Nevertheless, the things we are called to believe are true! And that means these truths are worthy of strenuous effort to hold them as indispensable. We struggle with the knowledge that we are sinners. We may minimise our brokenness, imagining that we are able to satisfy God's righteous demands without major changes in what we believe; however, we keep running up against difficult truth that touches all people. Paul makes two dark statements concerning our common condition as he writes the Roman Christians. He warns that neither culture nor race will suffice to make us acceptable before God, noting, "There is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" [ROMANS 3:22a, 23].

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

Then, Paul states a sobering principle that however much we may struggle with that dreadful truth, we must succumb at last to its reality. Paul warns, “The wages of sin is death” [ROMANS 6:23a]. Struggle as much as we might, inveigh against the inevitable ever so much, yet each single individual is under sentence of death. The question is not “if” we shall die; the question is “when” we shall die. We are born dying.

Thus, we are confronted by these two dark truths—we are sinners, offensive before Holy God and we are dying because of our broken, fallen condition. We struggle against death, trying vainly to somehow grasp immortality. Candidly, a person must be either emotionally crippled or have suffered prolonged brainwashing to actively seek death. We were born to live; and yet, we must die. We Christians do not seek death—we seek life. However, if we are born from above, if we are walking with the Living Master, we do not fear death. Christ our Master has transformed the dark waters of the River Styx into a pleasant bath preparing us for Heaven itself.

If Christ was not raised, what message do we have as Christians? Paul challenges doubters in pointed fashion to think of the consequences of their doubt. He asks, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:13]. We could rephrase the Apostle’s challenge to the doubters, “Who do we worship if Christ was not raised?” A dead saviour is no saviour at all. For if the Master died but failed to conquer death, we are left without hope in this world. If Jesus did not defeat death, at best we are left with a demigod to whom we ascribe a sort of ritualistic acknowledgement. We are no better than the Gnostics, if we worship one who mouldered in the grave. ***But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead!***

If Christ did not rise from the tomb, is this Christian Faith any better than any other religion? Paul again challenges those who deny the resurrection of the Saviour, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:14]. The death of a religious figure, however noble that death may have been, is not sufficient as a foundation for building lasting doctrine. A suffering Saviour, however greatly that Saviour may have suffered, is insufficient for securing hope against the fact that each participant in that religion must face her own death. However, if that One in Whom we have hoped not only presented His life as propitiation because of our sin and then rose to life, we can rejoice in knowledge that we have a living Saviour—and that is the Christian message. We worship God who took on humanity, presented His life as a sacrifice because of our own sinful condition and who, after He was buried, rose to life. ***But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead!***

If Christ was not raised, the whole fabric of the Faith is a lie. Again, the Apostle wrote, “We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:15]. Christianity is a gossamer film, a phantasm constructed from the febrile imaginations of deluded men over centuries, if Christ did not conquer death. If Jesus did not break the bonds of death, rising from the dead, which aspect of the Faith remains true?

I often appeal to the essence of the Faith in urging people to recognise those with whom we share this holy faith. ***God became man, being born of a virgin.*** If there was no resurrection, then we cannot be certain of this truth. ***He lived a sinless life.*** However, if there was no resurrection, sin bested Him and His life was ultimately meaningless. ***He rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father.*** But, if there was no resurrection there was no ascension, and He cannot be seated at the right hand of the Father. ***Through faith in the Risen Saviour we are saved.*** If He does not live, our faith is in an event that is not unlike the fate that awaits each of us. ***Jesus is coming again for those who are redeemed.*** There is no return if He does not live. ***But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead!***

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

If there is no resurrection of the dead, there is no hope for us when we must face the last enemy. Note the pointed words Paul wrote in addressing this truth. “If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised... Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:16, 18]. One fact is certain for each one listening to the message this day—we are not going to get out of this life alive. However, residing within the heart of each individual is the knowledge that we are more than a fortuitous aggregation of cosmic dust. The fact that we think, that we have feelings, that we long for something more than mere existence all point to the fact that there is something beyond this moment we call now.

One of the saddest tasks for any of us is attending to the burial of those whom we love. We love not the body, but the person. We laughed at the sparkling wit, were comforted by the gentle words and grieved with those we have loved when they sorrowed. Inevitably, the dark spectre steals them from us or takes us away; we are compelled to relinquish the bodies of our loved ones to the earth. For almost the whole of mankind we surrender those we love to the cold embrace of the earth in the hope that there is something more. But if there is no resurrection, then we have no hope when we place our loved ones in the tomb. They are lost to us forever.

I was raised with a rich heritage of faith. I grew up hearing the stories of those who went before in the Stark lineage. My grandfather was a pioneer preacher to the lead miners in southeast Kansas. Though he was a believer, in his early life he was not walking with the Master. His eldest daughter had gone to college preparing to follow in her mother’s footsteps by becoming a teacher. While away from home during her studies, Wilma fell ill with an inflamed appendix. Her illness was in the days before antibiotics were commonly available; and before surgery could be performed, her appendix burst resulting in overwhelming septicemia.

As she lay dying, my grandfather was with her in the hospital room. Wilma had walked with the Lord, following her mother’s example in the Faith. Her mother had died several years previously; and now, Wilma would pass through the same dark waters into the unseen land. The end was near when suddenly her eyes opened and she asked, “Daddy, do you hear that?”

“Child, what do you hear?”

“Daddy, I hear the most beautiful music I have ever heard.”

“Honey, I don’t hear anything. What do you hear?”

“Oh, daddy, it is so beautiful!”

Then, her eyes opened wider still as she exclaimed, “Daddy, do you see them?”

My granddad was astonished; no one else was in the room. “Who do you see, Wilma?”

“Daddy, how beautiful they are! Daddy, how bright!”

And with that, my aunt was transported from this life to that bright world to come.

If Christ did not rise from the tomb, then I shall never see this aunt whom I’ve yet to meet. I shall not see my grandfather who prayed for me, who tutored me in the Faith and who loved me as few others could. I will not see my grandma, severe and stern, but ferocious in her love for a motherless boy. I will not see my dad, who sang the hymns of Zion with élan, keeping time with the beat of a hammer pounding hot steel. And those beloved saints who courageously walked with us, who bravely shared the Faith and who sought the Lord are lost forever, if there is no resurrection. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead!

When we have resigned our loved ones into the hands of the Redeemer—He who had lain in the tomb before them and Who waits for His own on the other side of the dark waters of death; we say our goodbyes in the knowledge that we shall see them again. They will no longer be limited by bodies subject to death; they shall come forth with glorified bodies like His glorious body. If this is but a delusion, then our loved ones have perished, forsaken of God!

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

Think of the martyrs who died in the Faith. As stones pelted his body, Stephen gazed heavenward and spoke of what he saw. "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Before he died, he pleaded with the Master, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then before he died, he made this final request of the Living Saviour, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" [ACTS 7:56-60].

If there is no resurrection, his death was a meaningless event. The martyrs who died throughout the long years until this very day will have died in vain if there is no resurrection from the dead. Did those twenty-one Copts who were brutally beheaded by the Islamists in Libya die as fools? If there is no resurrection, they were fools for clinging to a Faith that means nothing in the end. All those who have been slaughtered because of their Faith will have died never to be seen again, if there is no resurrection from the dead.

In making these arguments concerning the death of our loved ones and concerning the death of the faithful, I am not attempting to provide proof. These arguments are an appeal to what we know intuitively to be true. I am not mounting some form of epistemological argument; this is an intuitive argument that speaks to the heart of the most jaded individual. With those who know the Saviour, we exult, "*In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead!*"

The heart of the Christian Faith is the resurrection of Christ the Lord. If He did not conquer death, we have believed a lie and we are, in fact, still estranged from God. The Apostle has challenged those who deny the resurrection, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:17]. The Faith is personal to me. Transformed by the Risen, Living Christ, I have enjoyed freedom in Him for almost fifty years.

I am not proud of what I once was; but I am ecstatic at all that God has done for me. I have seen the blackness of my own sinful condition; and I have discovered the beauty of freedom in Christ. I will not speak at length of the evil I once did; but I will speak of Christ who saved me. When God intervened in my life, I was opposed to all that was good and all that was holy. I had dropped so low that I realised I was capable of the most despicable evil. I wanted nothing to do with God and even less to do with those who professed to walk with Him. In such a miserable state, why should God accept me? I was an enemy to the Holy One. Yet, God showed me mercy. Rather than condemning me as I so richly deserved, Christ the Risen Saviour forgave my sin and welcomed me into His Family. Since then, my testimony is, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" [GALATIANS 2:20].

The final tragic consequence if Christ is not raised is that we are a pitiful people. The professing saints who doubt the resurrection of the Lord are warned, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:19]. While many in this fallen world would say that we Christians are pitiful, we are pitiful only if there is no hope beyond this life. Some religions imagine a future defined by nothingness; they struggle to divest themselves of all feelings and of all desires in this life, believing that by doing such they are equipping themselves for a breakthrough to that new life. Others look forward to a life defined by the carnal pleasures they have known in this life. They are so focused on the flesh that they cannot imagine a life without gratification of the flesh. We Christians know that we were created for so much more than this present existence. We were created to know God and to enjoy Him forever. Our hope is defined by the words of the Apostle, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" [PHILIPPIANS 3:20, 21].

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED... Imagine what the world would be if Jesus had not come to earth. Had He not provided His life as a sacrifice for us, what would the world be like? If He had not conquered death, what would our world be? The world would be far different than that in which we now live. For this reason the Apostle makes the statement he does, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:19].

Over twenty years ago, Dr. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe wrote a book that asked "What if Jesus Had Never Been Born."² The book could as easily have been entitled "What if Jesus Had Not Been Raised." That book explored the impact of the Faith on multiple facets of modern life—ministries of compassion, the value of human life, assistance to the poor, education, liberty, science, economics, family, the arts and music and health and medicine. There is a reason that Europe and North American excelled in the advance of knowledge in varied fields of study—they sought to discover the thoughts of God through pursuing His mind. It is because the Pilgrim Fathers and the founding fathers of America were convinced that mankind is endowed with certain unalienable rights from the Creator that the liberties taken for granted in much of the western world exists today.

Other religions may recommend giving alms to the poor or even doing kind deeds on a *quid pro quo* basis; but the Faith of Christ the Lord leads to lifestyle changes leading us to reach out to those who are hurting and in need. Other religions may establish madrassas to enforce memorisation of sacred scriptures and to pursue religious studies. But the Christian Faith encourages independent thinking to learn the thoughts of God as revealed through His Creation. Other religions create art, but the Faith of the Lord Christ encourages the creation of beauty for its own sake to honour God and to honour man who is created in the image of God. While there have been subtle advances in medicine and health encouraged among societies dominated by other religions, the Christian Faith is moved with compassion to relieve suffering. It is not without precedence that Christians were on the front-lines during the Ebola outbreak last year.

Wherever a society has embraced the Faith, mankind has advanced and all peoples have prospered. I am not suggesting that fallen man is perfected, but the Faith has served as a restraint on the unbridled pursuit of self-gratification when that Faith is regnant in a civilisation. Whenever the Faith has been marginalised and excluded from the public square, chaos and sorrow have prevailed. Can any nation or civilisation or culture be presented in which advances in such a varied number of areas can be produced having rejected the Faith of the Living God? Where, in the experience of modern nations has there been a society that promoted freedom and defended decency when that society was not based on the Faith of the Risen Saviour?

Was the Nazi Holocaust the result of the Christian Faith? Was it not rather the exclusion of the Faith that permitted the atrocities the Nazis visited on mankind? Were the Soviet Gulags the result of the proclaiming the message of the Prince of Peace? Did Stalin murder forty million people in the Name of Christ? Did Mao murder seventy-two million Chinese in order to promote freedom and righteousness? The promotion of Communist atheism allowed the imprisonment of untold millions in the Soviet Union and in Communist China. When the churches were driven underground in those Communist nations, millions more died, murdered at the hands of ruthless dictators. The Khmer Rouge were not Christians, were they? And the killing fields of Cambodia were not meant to honour God were they? Did the Castro brothers honour the Son of God when they silenced people through prison and murder to impose their perverted will on Cuba?

² D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, **What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 1994)

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

James Russell Lowell, served the United States as Ambassador to the Court of St. James. On one occasion he attended a banquet where the Christian Faith and missionary advance in particular was attacked by some infidels who were scoffing. He spoke up in defence of the Faith, saying, "I challenge any skeptic to find a ten square mile spot on this planet where they can live their lives in peace and safety and decency, where womanhood is honoured, where infancy and old-age are revered, where they can educate their children, where the Gospel of Jesus Christ has not gone first to prepare the way. If they find such a place, then I would encourage them to emigrate thither and there proclaim their unbelief."³

In light of the blessings we living in the West have long enjoyed, I warn this present generation that we are in extreme peril of divine judgement. We have permitted the slaughter of the innocent in the name of freedom and choice. We have endeavoured to silence the righteous in the name of tolerance. We have exalted the wicked in the name of diversity. We have stolen liberty in the name of safety. We have done all this, imagining that we are doing what is good and decent and right. Simultaneously, we have excluded God from the curricula of our schools, denied our children the right to pray, enslaved the citizenry through expanding the public dole and censured those hardy souls who dared speak out against society's mad rush toward oblivion. While doing these things, we seem to have imagined that God's silence indicated His approval. However, if God did not spare His Son because of the wickedness of mankind, dare we imagine that He will continue to ignore our wilful ignorance? *IT IS PRECISELY IN PROPORTION TO THE PROMOTION OF GODLINESS THAT A CULTURE THRIVES AND PROSPERS.* By the same token, *IT IS IN PROPORTION TO THE EXALTATION OF EVIL THAT A SOCIETY INVITES DIVINE JUDGEMENT.*

I am not so naïve that I believe lost people will heed what I say, though God perhaps will touch some hearts. I do not suppose that any argument I might now advance will persuade those who stand opposed to the Faith. I understand that I am speaking primarily to fellow believers. I know that strength and power lie with God. I am convinced that He delights to work through His holy people as they live righteous and godly lives, as they plead with Him for His glory to be revealed and as they declare His message of life to family, friends and colleagues.

It is high time for us to live as people redeemed by the Risen Saviour. I am not advocating a noisy march or a voter registration drive; neither am I proposing some elaborate plan to revive the churches of our Lord. I am simply calling the people of God to remember who we are—a people made new by the power of the Living Son of God. Then, remembering who we are, I advise that we do the first things. Today, as we remember the Master's conquest of death, we need to hear again the words He spoke to the Church in Ephesus. "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" [REVELATION 2:5].

BUT IN FACT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD! The Apostle rejoices with powerful exclamation when he exults, "*Christ has been raised from the dead!*" All heaven rejoices at the glorious thought, "*Christ has been raised from the dead!*" In the preceding verses, Paul has considered the tragic consequences if there is no resurrection; he compelled those reading this letter to consider carefully the implications that assuredly arise from such a sorrowful situation. However, such speculation (for speculation it is) is meaningless, for Christ has been raised from the dead! This message impelled Apostles and preachers to hasten throughout the Empire, driving the Roman eagle from her nest—*Christ has been raised from the dead!*

³ F. S. Schenck, **Christian Evidences and Ethics** (YMCA, New York 1910) 85; quoted by Kennedy and Newcomb, op. cit. 238

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

This message, though opposed by religious advocates and oppressed by Imperial diktat, cannot be squelched. Those intoxicated with the heady knowledge of freedom in Christ and deliverance from the fear of death cannot be silenced. They know that life is stronger than death, that truth is stronger than falsehood, that good is stronger than evil and that love is stronger than hatred. Those who secured the crucifixion of the Saviour were moved by the same raw hatred that motivates wicked men in this day to attack the Faith and to assault the faithful. However, because Christ lives, the child of God shall be victorious as were those saints who have preceded us in this Holy Faith.

If there had been no resurrection, it would have meant that evil triumphed. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. Theodosia Garrison sums up the reality in a beautiful poem.

“I heard two soldiers talking
As they came down the hill,
The sombre hill of Calvary,
Bleak and black and still.
And one said, ‘The night is late,
These thieves take long to die.’
And one said, ‘I am sore afraid,
And yet I know not why.’

“I heard two women weeping
As down the hill they came,
And one was like a broken rose,
And one was like a flame.
One said, ‘Men shall rue
This deed their hands have done.’
And one said only through her tears,
‘My son! My son! My son!’

“I heard two angels singing
Ere yet the dawn was bright,
And they were clad in shining robes,
Robes and crowns of light.
And one sang, ‘Death is vanquished,’
And one in golden voice
Sang, ‘Love hath conquered, conquered all,
O heaven and earth rejoice!’”⁴

The question must be asked of you: does the resurrection change anything for you? Church membership is not in view when the question is asked. Whether you are religious person or whether you are irreligious is immaterial. Whether you have participated in religious ceremonies, rites or rituals is of no consequence when confronted with this question. What matters is whether you know this Risen Lord of Glory. What matters is whether you are accepted in the Beloved Son of God. Acceptance is guaranteed by God Himself for all who are willing to receive the gift He offers. That gift is life itself with all the attendant blessings that accompanies that life—joy, peace, the forgiveness of sin and adoption into God’s family.

⁴ Theodosia Garrison, “A Ballad of Easter” (G. P. Putnam’s Son, New York, NY 1921) 62-63

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-20
BUT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

This is the message of life—the ancient though ever new apostolic message that delivers from death and judgement. God sent His Son, Jesus, who is the Christ, in order to present His life as a sacrifice because of mankind’s sinful condition. The Son of God was crucified and buried; but He rose from the dead on the third day. Those who were insistent on His death were unable to explain why the tomb was empty; and though they tried to intimidate those who saw Him, who ate with Him and who handled His body after the resurrection, the joyous message they trumpeted could not be silenced. Jesus ascended into the heavens and is seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, God invites all who are willing to receive the forgiveness of sin.

This is what you must do. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13].

The invitation of God is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” [ACTS 16:31]. Do it now. Receive this life that God has promised. Amen.