

What a tremendous significance the resurrection has for the Christian!
We have good news – for ourselves, for our fellows, for the whole world!

Forgiveness of sins is sure for all who will believe in Christ! The hope for an even fuller life beyond the grave is not a fleeting imagination! An Easter faith without the historical fact of the resurrection would put us among the miserable indeed – what an awful state we would be in if Christ has not been raised!

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!”

Hallelujah!

- Meditate on v. 20 and on what this means for our gospel, salvation and hope.
- Christ is “alive for me!” – what does this mean to me?



Three studies on Jesus, his Cross and Resurrection
by Peter J Blackburn

3. If Not?

Rudolph Bultmann wrote, “An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable... The real Easter faith is faith in the word of preaching which brings illumination. If the event of Easter Day is in any sense an historical event additional to the event of the cross, it is nothing else than the rise of faith in the risen Lord, since it was this faith which led to the apostolic preaching. The resurrection itself is not an event of past history. All that historical criticism can establish is the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection” (*Kerygma and Myth*, I, 1952, pp. 39,42).

Little wonder that Bultmann and his theology have been the centre of much controversy! Nor are we surprised that Dr Bultmann should find Paul’s reasoning in 1 Cor. 15 “dangerous” and “fatal” (*ibid.*, pp. 39,112).

For Paul, it is not merely “the Easter faith” that is important – there would be no Easter faith without the historical fact of the resurrection. Indeed, without the resurrection as a fact of history, the Christian faith is empty and worthless, no matter what personal value it may hold.

In 1 Cor. 15, Paul deals with the problem of the resurrection in general – some of the Corinthians were saying “there is no resurrection of the dead” (v. 12b). But Paul reasons, if there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ has not been raised; and, if Christ has not been raised, three conclusions of devastating consequence for the Christian life must follow.

- Some modern-day skeptics are inclined to say about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, “It doesn’t happen, therefore it didn’t happen!” But does this really beg the question of who Jesus is and whether he is unique? Why?
- Some people, like Bultmann, have tried to hold some kind of “Easter faith” without the historical fact of the resurrection, but is this really possible? Why?

No Gospel...

“If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 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” (vv. 14,15).

If Christ is not raised, every minister, preacher, teacher, missionary... in the world is, wilfully or ignorantly, perpetrating a hoax and misleading people to trust in a delusion; this, not simply with respect to the resurrection as a fact of history, but with regard to the gospel that depends on it.

We must be more ruthlessly honest here than Bultmann was prepared to be and admit that, without the resurrection of Christ as an historical fact, the Christian gospel is merely “the opiate of the people,” a sort of “pie in the sky when you die” that keeps you contented but has no substance.

This is, perhaps, one of the greatest dangers of the existential approach to theology with its tendency to the “nothing but” – note, in the passage quoted from Bultmann, “It is **nothing else than** the rise of faith in the risen Lord.” For sure, the first disciples came to believe in the risen Lord, but was this faith a phantasy, hallucination, delusion?

No resurrection – no gospel!

- Would the Communists be right after all, and religion just “the opiate of the people” without the resurrection of Christ? Why is the resurrection so vital for the Christian gospel?

No Salvation...

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (v. 17).

This spells out the implication of what has been said already – if Christ has not been raised, then every person who has trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and on the basis of faith in Christ has been assured that their sins are forgiven is in fact miserably deluded – “you are still in your sins.” You have not received forgiveness; your guilt remains. You thought you had found the way of peace and reconciliation – how wrong you were!

Here again, we have to be honest, for if Christ has not been raised, we certainly do not know any way for salvation and forgiveness of sins – we are still in our sins!

No resurrection – no salvation!

- If Christ had not risen, how would we view his crucifixion On what basis could forgiveness of sins be offered to those who repent?

No Hope...

“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (vv. 17,18).

Christianity is not “pie in the sky when you die,” but it is true that Christians believe that this present life must be lived in the perspective of eternity. For example, the Christian is to set first God's Kingdom and righteousness over such things as food, drink and clothing (Mt. 6.33); to take the narrow gate and hard road, because these lead to life (7.13,14); to set the mind on heavenly, rather than earthly, things, putting to death earthly desires and appetites (Col. 3.Iff).

If Christ has not been raised, there is nothing beyond the grave. The rigours and denials of this life have been for nothing. The greatest hopes and aspirations of this life have been for nothing.

There is some question as to whether the word “only” in 1 Cor. 15.19 should be taken with “life” or with “hope”. But the resultant emphasis is very similar – if we have had hope in this life only, with no reason to expect anything after this life (as would be the case if Christ has not risen), or, if we have hopes in Christ, only hopes, hopes which can never be fulfilled – what a pitiable state we are in!

No resurrection – no hope!

- If Christ has not been raised from the dead, where does that place us with respect to eternity?
- Many people today are seeking “spirituality” without Christ. Is there hope for anyone without the resurrection of Christ?

But Christ has been Raised!

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (v. 20).