

# ***“The Big Words of the Bible: Resurrection”***

## ***1 Corinthians 15.1-20***

Easter Morning 2006

The Word of God for our sermon on this Easter Morning was written for our faith and confidence in the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter, verses 1-20 as read earlier.

Twelve years ago a book entitled A Skeleton in God's Closet was released by Dr. Paul Maier of our own Missouri Synod. The primary premise of the book revolved around a mystery concerning Christ and His resurrection. Was it all a hoax as some newly discovered archeological evidence seemed to suggest or had someone fixed the evidence so as to discredit the Scripture's testimony to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth in AD 30? The hero of the novel, a Dr. Weber, goes to great lengths to set the record straight and to expose a concerted effort to undermine this most basic teaching of the Christian faith.

The Apostle Paul, over 1950 years ago, was engaged in a very similar endeavor. There were people running about claiming that the dead don't rise. "How ridiculous and superstitious can one be?" the critics opined. Surely everyone knows that once a person dies there is nothing else. Who is silly enough to run around and preach that any one rose from the dead, let alone an itinerant preacher from Nazareth named Jesus?

To you and me today the criticism seems almost ridiculous. We take it for granted and we believe lock, stock, and barrel that Jesus rose just as the Scriptures teach. Yet, in Jesus' day and in Paul's day there were those who did not believe that the resurrection of the dead was possible. The Sadducees are the most notable of the Nay Sayers. They denied not only the resurrection but also the existence of angels and of miracles. In fact Jesus had His run-ins with them just as much as Paul and the first disciples of Jesus.

But we still read and hear the same today. The major magazines run articles that appear to be seeking the truth but all the while are denying the reality and veracity of the resurrection of Christ the first Easter. Television programs, those claiming to be news and historical, run programming that parades critics of all stripes across the screen, who by and large deny the truth of the resurrection. Some would have us think that because we didn't see, and by we I mean "we modern, sophisticated, more-enlightened and clear-minded scholars", because we do not have

video of it, and cannot prove it by science, then it could not happen.

This morning our Big Word from the Bible insists otherwise as does the entirety of the Scriptures. The Bible uses two different words when it speaks of the resurrection and rising to life. One word simply speaks of the restoration to life, the rising from the dead while the other, the focus of our attentions for our brief time together this morning, actually emphasizes the concreteness of the action, the reality, the historicity of the event that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, the dead Author of Life, was indeed resurrected never to die again. Even Jesus testifies of this when He proclaims in the Book of Revelation "And when I [John] saw Him [Jesus], I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." So we learn from the Big Word of the Bible this Easter Morn as we hear of the Resurrection.

Consider for a moment what it would mean if Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of Heaven, is not resurrected. St. Paul himself even takes us to the logical conclusion of this absurd thought. If Christ is not risen then it all is a hoax, the most elaborate con ever pulled over in the history of the world. If Jesus is not raised then some fishermen, a Pharisee, and family members of Jesus have just outwitted all the rest of us. Yet, it is a more serious matter than being made fools.

The Apostle states that if Jesus is not raised, if the resurrection never occurred in time, in history, in the year AD 30, then all the preaching of the prophets, even Jonah's stay in the belly of the great fish 3 days and nights, the preaching of Christ, the Apostles, and the Christian Church through the ages, is a bunch of empty words. If Jesus is not raised, St. Paul says, then your confidence and faith is nothing but dust in the wind. If Christ is not resurrected then we are still in our sins and we stand to perish everlasting in the fires of Hell. If our Redeemer is not risen and does not live we, Paul says, are deserving of more pity than those who did not believe for our hope does not extend any further than our last breath in this life.

Wow, that's a downer! Yes it is if only in this life we have hope, Paul says, then there is nothing we can say at the death of a loved one, to one who is dying, and to everyone who faces death. The most you could say would be, "Well, I hope you had a good life and lived it up while you had a chance, because this is all there is. All that is left is death. So, hang in there as long as you can." Such a life is hopeless, purposeless, and meaningless, isn't it? No comfort, no hope of restoration to life, no hope of reunion with fellow believers who have already preceded us in Christ.

We would be in the same shape as the first disciples and women. They had no hope as they awoke that first Easter. They had seen what had happened to Jesus. They had run away out of fear for their lives. They were wondering what had they done with their lives the past 3½ years and what would they do now. There was nowhere to run and no place to hide. Their lives and their situations were certainly deserving of pity. So would our lives be if the resurrection is not true, a historical, concrete, real event in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

But it is! That is the whole point of Easter Morn as you and I celebrate this day. All the criticisms, doubts, and attacks on the resurrection of Jesus cannot destroy this historical fact. "But now Christ is risen from the dead!" Paul writes. Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed! The tomb was empty when the women first arrived. The tomb was empty when Peter and John ran to check the story of the women. The angels announced that Jesus was not there and let them all look inside to see that all that was left was the burial cloths. But more than that the resurrected Lord appeared to many, many people, so many that it could not qualify as the hallucination of a few.

No, the Gospel writers record as does St. Paul Jesus is risen from the dead. The resurrection is the Gospel truth. For since Christ is risen it means that our sins, first and foremost, have been taken from us. We, through faith in the Jesus crucified and raised, are no longer in our sins. They have been washed from us, purged from us by the blood of the Savior. And since we are no longer in our sins, then the consequences and curse of sin no longer hang over our heads.

Though we die, we do not perish everlastingly. Though we suffer and have struggles and trials in this life, our lives are not meaningless, empty, and purposeless for our hope in the resurrected Christ is not just for this life, it is also for the life to come. For the resurrection of Jesus announces to us that we do have hope in this life – the certainty that this is not all there is to this life, that God does have a higher and noble purpose for us as we live our lives to Him, and that He is with us to comfort us, to give us strength and to lead us from this life to the life that has no end.

The fact that Jesus rose from the dead, the truth of the resurrection announces that for the believer there will come a day that these bodies will be raised and we will live in resurrected bodies forever with our risen Lord. It doesn't matter what happens to them, even more than it did to our Lord Jesus' body. Because Jesus is risen from the dead, though we be ravaged by cancer, by fire, by sword, by any other gruesome and horrible death, the resurrection announces we will be raised without any trace of death on us.

Now Jesus bears the marks of His crucifixion for eternity bearing witness of His sacrifice for our salvation. But on account of His atoning sacrifice, on account of His bodily resurrection from the dead the first Easter, we are promised we will be raised, devoid of any of the effects of sin and death. We will be glorified and free of sin never to die again. We will live forever with the Risen One, with He who possesses the keys of Hades and Death, for by His death He has won forgiveness for our sins and by His rising to life has destroyed the power of death, Hell, and the grave forever.

Since the resurrection is true we can sit next to our loved one who is dying and share the hope of the resurrection. On account of the resurrection we can share with the handicapped, the physically infirmed, those who have lost parts of their bodies the hope of the resurrection and the restoration of their bodies to glorified perfection. Since the resurrection is fact we can share the hope of the blessed reunion with those whose loved ones sleep in the Lord. On account of the resurrected Lord we can tell others boldly and without shame Jesus is the First-fruits of the resurrection and will raise all who sleep in Him to life eternal. Since Christ is the

Resurrection and the Life we can shout out with joy and elation today and every day "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!"

Such is our confidence and comfort for the word "resurrection" teaches us that Jesus' resurrection was real, concrete, and historical fact. So also will the resurrection of our bodies and the bodies of all who believe be concrete, real, and an historical, eternal fact. For, since Jesus is the First-fruits, we are guaranteed to follow and will be gathered into the harvest house of our Lord on the Day of our Lord. So the prophets, our Lord, St. Paul, and others throughout the history of Christianity believed, taught, and confessed and so shall we for the resurrection of Jesus is our hope and confidence now and forever. Amen.

**+Soli Deo Gloria+**