

The Implications of Easter
Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:12-20
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther
April 6, 2008

Introduction: Some Big Events Change Your Life & All of History

The ancient patriarch Job expressed the power of Easter, when he said: *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—for whom Christ Jesus once rose:

Some big events have the power to change your entire life. Some big events have the power to change all of history. And if we imagine what life or history would be like without them, it makes us thankful that those events happened.

I'll give you two examples.... Let's say you are married. What would life be like if you had never met your spouse? Wow! That would be different, wouldn't it? Personally, if I hadn't met my wife, I might have gotten mighty lonely during the past twenty-two years. I wouldn't have my four beautiful children. Personally, I know I'd be a lot less able to compromise on things that really aren't so very important. Then again, without my wife, I might have learned to cook and do the laundry (!). Personally, I can't imagine what it would be like not to have my wife. And that makes me thankful for her.

One more example.... Sixty-five years ago, back in World War Two, suppose the Axis powers had won the war. How would that have changed our world? Wow! Things could be quite different now, couldn't they? Maybe, we'd be speaking German again – or Japanese! – right now. Probably we could not travel all over the world and find somebody who speaks our language. Arguably, our freedoms could be very limited. The technological breakthroughs we've experienced might never have happened. We may never have entered in earnest into the space age or into the computer age. And you and I might not be Christians right now. So, I suppose we can be quite thankful that things turned out the way they did.

Well, today's Word from God takes up the most important event in your life—in fact, the cardinal event in all of human history. These words from Scripture get us to thinking what things would be like if that event hadn't taken place, and they make us very happy, thankful, and relieved that such an important event did take place.

Part One: What If Jesus Hadn't Risen?

Now in God's Word to us today, the Apostle Paul is writing under inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. He's writing a letter to one of the churches he had established. It's in Corinth, a city in the country of Greece. And Paul is writing to the Corinthians in about the year fifty-five AD—about a quarter century after Jesus had died and risen from the dead.

In fact, that's just what Paul has been writing about: Jesus' Easter morning resurrection. Paul has listed numerous people to whom the risen Christ had appeared, including Paul himself. And now, Paul combats what is apparently a false teaching making the rounds in the Corinthian church. He says: **But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead** – which is precisely what Paul has just said – **how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** That was a main tenet of standard Greek philosophy. There was nothing of which you could be more sure than this: dead people just don't rise.

Of course, that conflicts with the chief contention of Christianity itself. And Paul goes on to list, in quick succession, six tragic implications if dead people don't rise again. First of all: **If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.** If dead people don't rise, since Jesus died, he didn't rise. And all that joy we experienced two weeks ago at our Easter services was simply a sham....

Second implication: **And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.** "If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, I'm wasting my time doing all this proclamation," Paul says—and you're wasting your time listening....

Third implication: **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.** We are falsely teaching about God; we're calling God a liar, if Christ Jesus didn't rise from the dead. Every time you and I confess, "The third day he rose again from the dead" – and think of how many times we and others have said that! – we are lying.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile – and the fourth implication? – **you are still in your sins.** If the dead don't rise, Jesus didn't rise, and nobody conquered death for you, nobody forgave your sins for you, and you still have to pay for your own guilt.

The fifth implication, if Easter hadn't happened: **Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.**—literally: *they perished eternally.* My Mom, and my grandparents, and your loved ones who died in Christ?—I hope we enjoyed them, because we'll never see them again, if Easter didn't happen.

And finally the sixth implication: **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.** If Jesus didn't rise, our whole life is built on a lie. We look like absolute imbeciles. And maybe we're depriving ourselves of a lot of fun: trying to love and to serve others, rather than taking advantage of them.

Part Two: Thank God Jesus Has Risen!

It's not a pretty picture, is it? If Jesus didn't rise, and if the dead don't rise, my life isn't worth living, and neither is yours. **But** then, like so many ball players moping around the court, looking down at their shoes, while the star player cruises down the court and takes off from the free throw line for a spectacular, two-handed, rim-rocking slam dunk, we read: **CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!**

Christ has risen from the dead!!! But how sure can we be? I mean: our own experience teaches us that dead people simply don't rise. So: Christ has risen from the dead? Yes! It is possibly the best attested event in all of history. See, not one or two people, but a half dozen men wrote detailed contemporary eyewitness accounts of Jesus' Easter morning resurrection. These men referenced not a few, but hundreds of witnesses. God himself had prophesied the event hundreds of years beforehand by men like Job and David and Isaiah. And to this day, we can go visit the place where Jesus' resurrection occurred, and we mark the day when Jesus' resurrection occurred. The organization that was established on the basis of Christ's resurrection – the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints – is still in business to this day: testifying to its living Founder.

I mean: If you believe that George Washington lived, if you believe that the Roman Empire or the Egyptian dynasties happened, it's nothing difficult to trust that Christ has risen. There are more witnesses with more details in more books on the life, death, and life again of Jesus Christ than a person will find on anyone or anything else. And besides, you have God the Holy Spirit's own testimony assuring your heart by way of his Word that it is so.

So: Christ has risen from the dead! And: You will rise from the dead! You see, to God it's one and the same thing, because he says: **Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! —the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** The *firstfruits* were the first part of the crop given to God which made the rest of the crop available for use. The *firstfruits* were the part of the crop which, when given to God, were a sort of guarantee from him that the rest of the crop would come in—a down payment from God, so to speak. Jesus was those *firstfruits*. He's the guarantee that we will rise, since we are attached to him, and since he has promised it to us. Jesus is also the offering that makes us available for God's use.

So, Christ has risen from the dead! And you will rise from the dead! And all those implications Paul listed before are contrary-to-fact.

The dead do rise! So, implication number one: Christ has risen!—and all that celebrating we did two weeks ago can continue this week, and the next, and the next. Every word of praise we voice in prayer, every word of adoration we deliver in song—it's all worth it, because Jesus has risen and his ear hears it all.

Christ has risen! And implication number two is this: All my preaching and teaching, and all your listening and believing, is worth it; in fact, it's the best use of time we could possibly make! It's worth dedicating our entire lives to this message, because this message has the power to rescue other people, too.

Christ has risen! And implication number three is: We are not false witnesses about God. All the blood that all the martyrs spilled for this message, and all the sweat that we shed for its sake: it's all worth it, because we have found the truth – the ultimate truth! – and we are proclaiming it.

Christ has risen! And our sins are gone! That's implication number four—and how desperately we need that.... Our idolatry of our possessions and our pleasure – it's dead and gone! – Christ buried that in his tomb. The harm we've done to others and our failure to benefit those close to us – that's dead and gone! – Christ buried that in his grave. Our big sins, our bad sins, our shameful sins, the ones that still tend to torment our conscience with guilt – they're dead and gone! – Christ buried them in his tomb.

Christ has risen! And our loved ones who died in Christ do live, and will live, and they'll live eternally. That's implication number five of Christ's resurrection. Your loved one who died in Christ, whom you still miss desperately—get ready to see him again! get ready to see her again! because the reunion is going to be forever.

Christ has risen from the dead! And finally, that makes us the most blessed of all people! ...You're not the wealthiest person? It doesn't matter! Your rich room in paradise is prepared. ...You're not the most popular person around? It doesn't matter! You're going to have lots and lots of friends in heaven. ...You're not the prettiest thing the world has seen? It doesn't matter! You will look resplendent forever in your glorious resurrected body.

Conclusion: Easter Changed Your Life & All of History

So: What if Christ hadn't risen from the dead? Don't trouble yourself any longer with the thought. Christ has risen! We will, too! Let the celebration continue forever!!! Amen.

The ancient patriarch Job expressed the power of Easter, when he said: *After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* Amen.