

The Fact of the Matter

I Corinthians 15:1-20

This past week after reaching its conclusions, the Attorney General, William Barr, released the slightly redacted 400 page Mueller report on its findings regarding whether or not then President elect Trump and his campaign team colluded with Russia in order to fix the presidency. Opponents of the President have made it abundantly clear that the briefing by Attorney General Barr was a political ploy aimed at hiding facts about the report. They believe that in some way he and President Trump have conspired to keep things secret. The sad reality is that they aren't interested in the truth. Instead, as a friend of mine recently stated, they are afraid of it. Afraid of what it might really have to say about the strong possibility of political corruption that fostered the investigation in the first place. Now I haven't read the report, although it has been made available to the public, but it seems that while it doesn't indict him neither, in their opinion does it fully exonerate him. What a mess.

As I consider the events of these past years and all the conspiracy theories that have been spun, I find some similarities in the resurrection account. As we read in the Gospels the record of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we have both political and religious leaders wanting to cover up the truth for their own purposes. Rather than accept the reality of the truth, they would rather spin the truth to their own advantage and cover it up. What was it they feared? Jesus had already stated that His kingdom was not of this world, so from a political standpoint they had nothing to fear. The religious leaders perhaps feared losing control of the religious system they had come to rely on to line their pockets. Had they accepted the truth of the resurrection they could have been part of a force that would usher in the church. Instead we read in **Matthew 28:11-15** that after the resurrection when the guards reported the facts to the religious leaders they paid the guards large sums of money to keep the matter quiet

and if they were investigated they were to say that the disciples stole the body at night while they were sleeping.

The late Chuck Colson, who served under President Nixon, had this to say about the resurrection: "I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world – and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

The matter before us today is the resurrection. If it is in fact false, as so many claim, then it has been the longest standing ruse in all of history. For nearly 2,000 years a lie has been perpetuated, a lie that people have willingly died for, a lie we are willing to pass on. This morning if you have your Bible, please turn to **I Corinthians 15:1-20**. When we think about the resurrection we must begin with the question that has to be on the minds of anyone who has or will believe that Jesus rose from the dead, what if it's not true. Let's begin by looking at the problem without the resurrection, because if Christ didn't come back to life after His crucifixion then that poses a whole set of problems for those then and now have believed that He did.

I. THE PROBLEM WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION

Let's keep in mind as I said a moment ago, that a lot of people in positions of power didn't want the news to get out that the body of Jesus was missing. They did not want to believe in the bodily resurrection. That would prove they were wrong. So they went to great lengths to cover it up. And if they had stolen it on account of not wanting the

disciples to steal it and say He was alive, they could have easily produced the body as evidence that He didn't come back to life. The fact is they couldn't because they didn't and remember that right after the burial, they went to Pilate and asked the tomb to be sealed and guarded so that it could only be broken by an edict from Pilate himself.

Now I want you to stay with me because I'm going to be jumping around in our text this morning. The obvious place to start then is that if there is no resurrection, Christ is dead.

A. Christ Is Dead – vs. 13, 16

Paul was writing to the Corinthians because there was some doubt on their part if they would be resurrected themselves. He argues from a point of logic that if Christ didn't rise from the dead then for sure they wouldn't either, but because He did rise again on the third day, which is a point of the gospel preached as seen in **verses 3-4**, then logically they would be raised from the dead as well.

So logically he states that if there is no resurrection then Christ is still dead in the grave.

In A.D. 632 Mohammed died and was buried in Medina. Every year masses of Muslims make a pilgrimage to pay honor to a man who is dead and still in the ground.

Confucius is still dead.

Buddha is still dead.

As a matter of fact, every religious leader who founded a religion is in a grave somewhere, everyone except Jesus Christ. But if the resurrection is not true then, like everyone else, even He is still dead. If there is no resurrection then Jesus is still in the tomb and the women and the disciples all lied. They fabricated a story because they wanted it to be true. Some who deny the resurrection, claim the disciples didn't see a physical body but merely a spiritual manifestation. Therefore Christ must still be dead.

There is another problem if there is no resurrection.

B. Preaching Is Useless – v. 14a

I would be as guilty as those who started the lie because I'm keeping it up. I'd be out of a job. I might as well burn all my books, clean out my office and go look for another job. Everything I have hoped in, everything I have believed, everything I have taught would be worthless. If it still happened today I deserve to be tarred and feathered and run out of town.

Preaching is useless. It has no merit, no value. It is just a bunch of empty words, based not on truth but on an idea, a philosophy. It would be of no consequence. We might as well pack up right now and head out to enjoy our ham dinner.

I'd be guilty of either being incredibly naïve or belonging to the brotherhood of one of the biggest scams ever. Take your pick.

There is a third problem pointed out in the text.

C. Faith Is Empty – v. 14b

Like preaching, your faith, our faith would be of no benefit. If the resurrection didn't happen, then all the promises we have believed, held onto, lived for, and hoped in are meaningless. There is no joy, no peace, no provision, no security, no hope, no love, no forgiveness, no resurrection, no rapture, and no eternal life.

It would all just be a pie in the sky sweet bye and bye and we can join in with everyone else who is living it up today eating and drinking and being merry because tomorrow we die. Truly the Wisdom of Solomon would be correct when he writes that everything is just meaningless under the sun.

If there is no resurrection and Christ is still dead, and my preaching and your faith is worthless then

another problem is that our sin still reigns.

D. Sin Still Reigns – v. 17

If there is no resurrection of Christ and He is still in the grave, then the only thing His sacrifice did was essentially take the life of an innocent man. He died for nothing and the sacrifice we thought He made to appease the wrath of God on our behalf is of no consequence. It too was meaningless, of no value. We are still in our sins because He didn't conquer it or the grave or death. We would still be under the curse of death as the consequence for still being in sin. That's what the Bible says we have coming to us.

If there is no resurrection and Christ is still dead, and my preaching and your faith is worthless and sin still reigns in us, then we deserve to be pitied.

E. Pity Is Expected – v. 19

I like the KJV here. It says **“we are of all men most miserable.”** It means to be in a wretched condition, to be pitied. We deserve to be looked at with scorn by others for being willing to believe a lie. We are taken down a wrong road.

On March 26, 2019, British Airways Flight 3271 took off from London City Airport. All of the passengers purchased a ticket to Dusseldorf, Germany, but the pilots, flight crew and air traffic controllers were operating off of another flight plan. The pleasant jaunt became tense when the plane landed in Edinburgh, Scotland. Safety was never an issue, they just followed the wrong plan and ended up at the wrong destination. London City Airport apologized stating, “As pleasant as Edinburgh is this time of year, we're sorry that passengers traveling to Dusseldorf... initially landed in the Scottish capital.” The plane was refueled and took off again “after the involuntary stopover in Edinburgh.” Such events remind us that you can be simultaneously sincere and

wrong. When it's a plane, you can eventually get to your destination, but when your eternity is at stake, make sure you have the right flight plan because there's no rerouting after death. The journey may be pleasant but it's a trip to nowhere.

If the resurrection never took place, we're following a flight plan we think will get us to heaven that will never arrive. We have bought the wrong ticket and we'll never be able to get rerouted.

If the resurrection never took place there are a lot of problems. **Did the resurrection take place just as Scripture tells us?** Consider the proof.

II. THE PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION – vs. 4b-11

First of all there is the testimony of Scripture.

A. The Testimony of Scripture – v. 4b

Paul is referring here to the Old Testament. In the very first sermon Peter preached he made reference to the Old Testament and the resurrection. Both **Psalm 16 and 22** are Messianic Psalms written a thousand years before Christ.

Psalm 16:8-10 “I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.”

Written 700 years before Christ **Isaiah 53:10-12** says He would suffer and die but that He would then see His offspring, referring to His resurrection and the spiritual children who would be His.

During His ministry Jesus predicted His resurrection. **John R. Stott writes “Jesus Himself never predicted His death without adding that He would rise, and described His coming resurrection as a sign.”**

Matthew 12:38-40

Matthew 16:21

Matthew 17:9, 22-23

Matthew 20:17-19

John 2:18-22

John 14-16

Scripture substantiates the resurrection. Critics have discounted the historicity of the Bible based on perceived inconsistencies. At one time historians didn't believe the Bible because there was no evidence the Hittites ever existed and then they found proof. They said there was no evidence of Pontius Pilate being governor in Judea and then they unearthed a coin with his inscription. The Bible is not a history book, but when it speaks of historical events it is accurate. That accuracy logically should lead us to conclude that the resurrection happened. The Bible tells us a lot about the miracles of Jesus, all which must be taken by faith because there is no way to substantiate them. We can read about Peter walking on water or Jesus healing various people. We must take these by faith. There is only one miracle that can be verified and that is the resurrection. If people won't accept the truth of God's Word there is other valuable evidence that must also be considered. You might ask what that would be. Consider the testimony of eye witnesses.

B. The Testimony of Eye Witnesses – vs. 5-8

A solid court case is built on credible evidence and part of that evidence where available is in eye witness reports of those who either saw the crime committed or can corroborate with factual evidence that the person standing trial was somewhere else.

This past year the Senate Judiciary committee was embroiled in circumstantial evidence that then nominee for the Supreme Court Judge Kavanaugh was at a place 30 years earlier where no one could definitively substantiate having said to commit something that was full of holes.

Paul cites multiple eye-witness reports of people who saw Christ alive after the crucifixion – a dozen here, a couple there, and on one occasion 500 people. That's hard to dispute. Any lawyer trying to establish the facts of the resurrection would have to talk to these people who claimed to see Him and conclude that they were all telling the truth. As Chuck Colson said, why would you willingly suffer persecution just to perpetuate a lie? If it was a lie, you would have thought with so many people trying to keep it up that someone would have cracked under the pressure.

But if believe these eye witness testimonies seem to stand a bit on shaky ground, how about the facts of the empty tomb as testimony.

C. The Testimony Of The Facts

When we begin with the facts of the resurrection we must first assume that the tomb was occupied. The gospels give evidence of Jesus's death. Paul says in **verse 3** that Christ died. **How do we know so?** When we read the various facts surrounding the crucifixion we read, for example, in **Matthew 27:50** and **John 19:30** that when He had cried out one last time He gave up His spirit. That's another way of saying that He gave up the ghost or simply put, He died. Later in the same chapter we read that Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and wanted to claim the body of Jesus for burial. He prepared the body and placed it in his own tomb. You wouldn't wrap a body in cloth strips and prepare it with a hundred pounds of burial spices if He weren't dead.

Mark 15:37 and **Luke 23:46** say that He breathed His last. Mark says that when Joseph asked for the body, Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly and called for the centurion to validate the death. It was like calling the coroner. Roman soldiers assigned to a crucifixion were skilled at their trade. It was their job to know that someone was dead, otherwise it meant their own. They had a reputation to uphold.

John's account goes a step further by noting that in order to hasten death at the request of the religious leaders because it was the day before the Sabbath the soldiers broke the legs of those hanging on the crosses, but when they came to Jesus they already saw He was dead but just to make sure one of the soldiers thrust His spear into the side. The prophet Zechariah spoke about looking on the one they had pierced (12:10).

Jesus was in fact dead when He was placed in the tomb. He hadn't fainted and His body wasn't stolen. The women who had witnessed His death also saw where Joseph and Nicodemus had taken Him. So they were surprised on the first day of the week when they went to the tomb that the stone had been moved. When they told the disciples, Peter and John raced to the tomb and saw it empty with the grave clothes still there. Matthew mentions that an angel spoke to the women and told them to go tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Then consider the fact of the missing guards. A squadron had been assigned to guard the tomb. It consisted of 16 men, four would stand in front of the object they were guarding while the others probably slept or kept watch as well. They did this on four hour rotations. How about the darkness, the torn veil and the people who came back to life?

It seems crazy to think that the disciples who had earlier ran away out of cowardice suddenly gathered enough courage to overcome the guards and roll the stone away or that they didn't make any noise while the guards slept. That's what the soldiers were told to say, that they were sleeping an act that would have otherwise rendered their own death.

Then there is the stone which had a seal on it after it was rolled in place. A rope was strung across the outside of the stone and sealed with wax by the ring of the guard. Today it would be yellow that that said "police line, do not cross." It was official. But that was broken when the stone was moved, which in

itself was quite a feat because it's estimated that the stone probably weighed between 1½ to 2 tons. **At best I lifted a concrete block that weighed about 450 lbs. and that only about 2 inches off the ground. It was the anchor to one of the docks at camp. Not even on my best day could I move a 2 ton rock.**

Luke 24 says that the women all wondered how they were going to move the stone and were surprised that it was already out of the way. When they entered the tomb the body was missing with the grave clothes still there. Who would steal a body and leave its wrapping? Mary even thought the gardener had taken the body.

The testimony of the facts surrounding the resurrection provides credible evidence that has withstood many an accusation to the contrary by those who have attempted to disprove it ever happened only to come away convinced of the resurrection. Instead of disproving the resurrection they have had their lives transformed by the gospel. That in itself is a strong testimony for the resurrection.

D. The Testimony Of Transformed Lives – vs. 9-10

James the half-brother of Jesus wanted nothing to do with Him before the crucifixion but became a servant of Christ and leader in the early church. Paul radically changed from one who persecuted those who followed Christ to one who was persecuted because of Christ.

Peter went from a denier to a devoted follower. All the disciples became fearless in proclaiming the faith. All would die a martyrs death except John who was banished to an island. All through history there is testimony of many who have been radically changed because of the resurrection.

John R. Stott says: "Perhaps the transformation of the disciples of Jesus is the greatest evidence of all

for the resurrection.”

For almost two thousand years the resurrection of Christ has impacted countless people whose testimony bears witness to a transformation that can be explained no other way.

The decade following Russia’s Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin sent emissaries to the country’s towns and villages to promote Marxism. They were empowered to speak with authority and suppress any resistance. The church was an obstacle that had to be overcome, so they insisted on blind loyalty to a godless form of government. One large crowd listened to a speaker for nearly three hours as he vehemently extolled the virtues of communism. Satisfied that he had adequately convinced them, the political speaker sat down. As the place quieted, a priest standing in the back of the hall spoke out, “I have just one thing to say to you: Christ is risen!” Though aware of the retaliation that would certainly follow, the crowd immediately cried out, “Christ is risen indeed!”

There is plenty of proof in the resurrection. Your faith is proof positive because you stand as a testimony to its transforming work.

British legal scholar J.N.D. Anderson said, “Men and women disbelieve the Easter story not because of the evidence, but in spite of it.”

A transformed life speaks to the power and purpose of the resurrection. There is plenty of proof.

III. THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF THE RESURRECTION – vs. 1-4, 17, 55-57

First of all when it comes to the power of the resurrection we must see that it is part of the gospel message. It has the power to save.

A. It Has The Power To Save – vs. 1-4, 17

We have already stated that without the resurrection we are still in our sins and there is no salvation. Salvation is contingent on the resurrection.

Romans 10:9 “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

If it weren’t for the resurrection Christianity is just a house of cards. It falls apart without it. *The door of Christianity swings on the hinge of the resurrection.* Without the resurrection the door of Christianity is closed shut.

You must believe in the resurrection to be saved. If we are to believe the gospel we must believe in the resurrection. The resurrection is the proof that God accepted the sacrifice for sin and salvation is offered so that by believing we have eternal life. Without the resurrection we are still dead in our sin.

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

British philosopher John Locke stated “Our Savior’s resurrection is truly of great importance in Christianity, so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it.”

In the opening verses Paul asserts the credibility of the gospel. It was not something he made up or altered, but something he received. This is the gospel he preached to them, a gospel they are standing on for their salvation. Verse two does not mean that they could lose their salvation. It means that if they don’t believe this gospel they were never saved to begin with. This gospel, he says, is comprised of three essential truths.

Christ died for our sins.

Christ was buried as evidence of His death.

Christ rose again.

In **verse 1** they had received the gospel.

In **verse 11** they had believed the gospel which included the resurrection of Christ.

John MacArthur adds “Because it is the cornerstone of the gospel, the resurrection has been the target of Satan’s attacks against the church. If the resurrection is eliminated, the life giving power of the gospel is eliminated, the deity of Christ is eliminated, salvation from sin is eliminated, and eternal life is eliminated.”

And with this I close. Because the resurrection has the power to save it has the power to secure. They were concerned about their own resurrection.

B. It Has The Power To Secure – vs. 55-57

If the resurrection of Christ never happened then we are still under the curse of death. The sting of death is still present. But the resurrection of Christ assures the believer that when physical death comes the sting of death won’t be felt because we rest secure in our own resurrection. Because He experienced a resurrection, so will we.

v. 51-52 “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

Among the works of Johann Peter Lange who taught at Bonn University in the 1800’s in Germany is this wonder hymn The Lord of Life is Risen.

The Lord of life is risen;
Sing, Easter heralds, sing!
He bursts His rocky prison;
Wide let the triumph ring!
In death no longer lying,
He rose, the Prince, today;
Life of the dead and dying,
He triumphed o’er decay.

The Lord of life is risen,
And love no longer grieves;

In ruin lies death’s prison,
Sing, heralds, Jesus lives!
We hear the blessed greeting;
Salvation’s work is done!
We worship Thee, repeating,
“Life for the dead is won!”

Around Thy tomb, O Jesus,
How sweet the Easter breath;
Hear we not in the breezes,
“Where is thy sting, O death?”
Dark hell flies in commotion,
The heavens their anthems sing;
While far o’er earth and ocean
Glad hallelujahs ring!

O publish this salvation,
Ye heralds, through the earth,
To every buried nation
Proclaim the day of birth!
Till, rising from their slumbers,
In long and ancient night
The countless heathen numbers
Shall hail the Easter light.

Hail, hail, our Jesus risen!
Sing, ransomed brethren, sing!
Through death’s dark, gloomy prison
Let Easter chorals ring!
Haste, haste, ye captive legions,
Accept your glad reprieve;
Come forth from sin’s dark regions;
In Jesus’ kingdom live!

Hallelujah for the resurrection! Jesus is alive. His resurrection guarantees that we too will experience resurrection power. He is risen. He is risen indeed.