

Series: A Missional Church for a Pagan Culture

VBC

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1 Corinthians 15:12-20

March 22-23, 2008

“What if There Was No Resurrection?”

INTRO

You may have seen this headline—Friday Oregonian—
“Portland Brokerage Bets Big, Loses All”

- the story of Hybrid Training, a Portland discount brokerage
- that bet its future on the most volatile, dangerous stock of all—Bear Stearns
- it was a huge—and turned out to be—fatal investment
- by Monday—their doors were closed for good

What if everything *you* invested in collapsed?

- the stocks, the home, the education, the relationship?
- but here’s a more troubling question—
- what if everything you gave your life to turned out to be empty?
- your job—your calling—YOUR FAITH?

-When I think of this—I’m reminded of the Far Side cartoon—where Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame is at the Pearly gates and discovers God is a chicken

-more seriously—I remember the movie *About Schmidt* with Jack Nicholson

- the story of a 60 year old man who gave his whole life to his work
- and when he retired—all he had left was his motor home and his daughter
- and trying to run her life—he discovered he had wasted his own
- IT HAD ALL BEEN FOR NOTHING

- what if the promise of Easter turned out to be empty?
- what if we gave everything to something wrong?
- what if it turned out all this talk, celebration of resurrection turned out to be made-up?
- would it matter?
- could Easter go on? Your faith survive?

The church at Corinth apparently thought so

-in fact—they thought the idea of a literal resurrection of the dead was crazy

-corpses don't rise from the grave—this was so unsophisticated

-and these were believers!

-who out of their Greek cultural background viewed the body as corrupt—something to be freed from

-the idea of a resurrection became their stumbling block

-and that might be true for you

-some people say—I like some parts of Christian belief—but I can't accept this raised body part

-but Paul makes the point that if you deny the fact we will one day be raised from the grave

-you might as well deny that Jesus rose

-and if you deny His resurrection—everything you've invested is empty (read 15:12-15a)

-if there is no real substance to the resurrection—

1. CHRISTIANITY IS UTTER NONSENSE

a. without the resurrection—our preaching is in VAIN

-garbage, baloney, drivel, noise—all represent the word

-it has been nothing more than smoke and mirrors

-no matter how persuasive, how polished—it's all been an illusion

-nothing more than empty gestures—POINTLESS POINTS

-what people like me have given our lives to have been a total waste

-you may have just as well invested in Bear Stearns—owned an Edsel—worked for Enron—sold sunscreen in Iceland

b. Our *faith* amounts to nothing

-if Jesus did not rise from the grave—if He was merely a good moral teacher, a nice example who ended everything on the cross, our faith has no substance

-it's right down there with ponzi schemes—that promise everything—but underneath have no core

-verse 17—it is (like my dog Spencer)—USELESS, WORTHLESS

-take the resurrection out of our message, our lives—and there's just air—HOT AIR

-for the resurrection is the heart of the gospel—not an addendum, an appendix for those willing to read on

-not a take it or leave it piece of Christianity—optional equipment like sunroofs

-the resurrection of Jesus is the mainframe, the driving force of our faith
-more than the tipping point—it's the entire argument
-our whole faith balances on this one event

-for it authenticated the gospel-proved Jesus was God
-fulfilled the Scriptures—declared that all that had been written had reached its climax
-declared that the kingdom of God arrived—the new age has broken in
-tells us HE LIVES!!

-if there is no resurrection—

c. *Christianity* is a lie—15:15

-we who have shared our faith have been marketers of deceit
-we have shared a gospel with all the credibility of Bigfoot and Loch Ness Monsters
-we have fabricated a story—just like Forrest Carter and Margaret Jones and Clifford Irving

-Christianity turned out to be just another contribution to the marketplace of spiritual ideas—be it Gnosticism or Oprah—simply another human social construct

-but it's worse—if there is no resurrection—

2. WE ARE STILL BROKEN—read 15:16-17

-if there is no resurrection—the work on the Cross was meaningless
-for the resurrection is the affirmation that what He did on the cross was legitimate, real—sin was paid for
-otherwise—we are still in the grip of sin
-still living in our guilt, in our condemnation, damned by our failures

-let me describe for you some of the messy prayer requests that come to our staff

-Ann still wakes up with a stubborn habit—an addiction she asks us to pray about

-Debbie is dealing with a husband who—after 30 years—is leaving her

-Susan can't pay her bills—and fears she will not make it

-Bob wakes up in a deep, dark valley and does not know how to get out of it

-Tim is dealing with a judgmental heart

- Leslie is overwhelmed with a son who cannot control his anger
- Daryll has a long history of struggle with pornography—which is killing his marriage
- and John is a divorced dad going through the pain of a dying mother

- if we edit out the resurrection of Jesus, there is no one to hope in
- no assurance He lives
- no confidence we have an Advocate to bring our needs
- no hope of reconciliation with God
- no guarantee of transformed living

- NT Wright-if Easter isn't good news—there is no good news

- Paul goes deeper—if there is no resurrection—

3. DEATH WINS—read 15:18

- what ancient paganism said ends up true—death is all powerful
- still in our sins—we perish with the rest of humanity

- all of those comforting statements at the gravesite have been meaningless “going through the motion” statements
- despair may as well have its place—for those who have passed to the other side have found no other side
- they are still in the clutches of death
- consigned to destruction—abandoned to rot
- and the living are headed towards the same eternal oblivion

- to cap it off—if there is no resurrection—

4. FOLLOWING CHRIST IS A PATHETIC CHOICE-read 15:19

- think of the magnitude of this statement
- if we have set our hopes only in a Christ of this world—an unresurrected Christ
- we are to be pitied above everyone else
- above a Dalit Indian working in a sewer
- an AIDS victim clinging on to life in the darkest region of Africa
- an addict enslaved to his/her narcissistic habits

- it's worse for Christ followers—they are pathetic dupes
- who backed the wrong horse
- oiled the wheels of a machine that is going over a cliff
- spent life arranging chairs on the Titanic

-Paul considered the emptiness in his own life-read verse 32

-believing in a wrong future—we have lived a wrong present

-choosing to be hated, reviled, persecuted for Christ...

-I might just as well have given myself to my pleasures—my impulses

-we have given our lives, our sacrifices, our sufferings for nothing

But—if Christ arose—as Paul declares—verse 20—than—just the opposite is true—

1. CHRISTIANITY IS NOT NONSENSE—IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE

-for Christ alone deals with the issue of our failures

-pays the price for our sins

-offers what no one else offers—GRACE!

-and the resurrection guarantees this

2. WE ARE NOT STILL BROKEN—WE ARE HEALED

-a life littered with mistakes and failures has been set free of guilt and condemnation

-there is available a deep restoration—perfect forgiveness

-we have an Advocate—to whom we bring our messy lives

-knowing there is reconciliation, healing

3. DEATH NO LONGER WINS—LIFE WINS

-the resurrection conquers death

-fear—evil—death no longer hold sway

-there is life—A LIVING SAVIOR—both here—and on the other side

4. FOLLOWING CHRIST IS NO NOT A PATHETIC CHOICE—BUT OUR GREATEST INVESTMENT

- a. for the resurrection confirms we have found meaning, purpose, value

-all that we have worked for and planned for and prayed for—mattered

-whether our work has been in Bible study or biochemistry—

whether composing songs or digging trenches—having been done for Christ—in the power of Christ

-IT WILL STAND!

- b. but here's why it makes no sense to pity believers

-the power that raised Christ is promised to us

- i. in the present—we can know this power now

-the power to live above sin—Ephesians 1:19-23

- to attempt great things
- to live abundant, radical, undomesticated lives

ii. and in the future—we too will be raised in bodies that are incorruptible and glorious

c. The truth is—if the resurrection is true—than denying it—denying Jesus turns out to be the worst investment

CONCLUSION

Way in the back of the Friday Oregonian was another article

- a much more important story than the demise of an investment firm

- it was the announcement that Jacob DeShazer, one of the last survivors of the Doolittle Raid on Japan died

- shot down—he spent 40 months of torture and hunger in a Japanese prisoner of war camp

And you would expect that he would live the rest of his life bitter towards those who made his life so miserable

- but during his time—he met this living, resurrected Jesus

- who so radically changed his life

- that he eventually went back and preached forgiveness for 30 years in Japan

- and planted 23 churches

- healed, given life—he made the greatest investment

- how about you?