

The Real Meaning of Easter

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

By [Dr. James M. Baird](#)

Let us continue our worship as we take the word of the living God. It is itself alive and powerful. Turn to the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 15. This is a great resurrection chapter.

As you turn in your Bibles, I remember the first Easter after I had grown serious about the Lord; and as I entered into the worship service, I had great expectations. The sermon and the whole worship service dealt with the proof that Christ had been raised from the dead, and I was thrilled with that, and yet there was a disappointment as I left because I asked myself, "So what? What are the implications of His resurrection?" I believed in His resurrection for the first time when I came into that worship service, but I wanted to leave with some implications. That is my purpose in this worship service, that we will not only affirm but that we will examine what it means that Christ was raised from the dead.

I watched a national TV talk show this week. Two ministers, one affirmed the resurrection of Christ and the other one cast great doubt—yea, if you will, he just did not believe. It is no different; it has always been that way. When the Apostle Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the church at Corinth, the question has been raised, 'Christ really was not resurrected?' There were those who believed that and the Apostle Paul addresses the resurrection, and he says this: 'If Christ is not raised from the dead, then our faith, our lives, are useless'—he calls it, "in vain." We are hopeless. He goes on to say, 'We ought to be of all men most miserable. We ought to be pitied if there was no resurrection.' Hear the word of God. That's how crucial this resurrection is. We might as well pack it in and go on home if there was no resurrection. Hear the word of God from chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, and we begin to read in verse 12.

1 Corinthians 15:12-20:

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God

that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. 20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

God give us insight into His holy word.

Question #1: Why is the resurrection so crucial?

The first question we want to raise is, Why? Why is the resurrection so crucial? In the last few months, two major, historical figures of religious importance have been dealt with publicly: One is in a book that has been written about Mohammed; the other is a book that has been made into a film about Jesus Christ. There's been a strange reaction as far as I am concerned. For instance, both men have been questioned, both Mohammed and Christ, about their lives, about the nature and character of their lives. Now here's the difference, Mohammed never said that he was without sin. In fact, his life is a rather checkered life. He acknowledges it; everybody admitted it. But Christ claimed to be sinless. You see the difference? You make a book about Mohammed and say, "Hey, were these women really his wives?" You make a film about Christ in which you make implications of impropriety, and there's a world of difference.

You see, Mohammedism, as all other religions of this world—both ancient religions and anything that is being purported to you today to be the answer to your problems—they are all based not on the historical life of the founder of that religion or of the founders of that religion. They are saying that if you learn certain principles, certain laws, if you follow certain precepts, you will enter into a knowledge of God or come to the higher light. All of them, they teach you how to do certain things; then you'll be all right. Mohammed, never said, "Look at my life." Jesus Christ is totally different. Jesus Christ does not come to you and say, 'Follow My precepts.' He first of all says, "Follow Me." And His whole life is examined in the sense that everything He teaches is dependent upon the foundation of the historical events of His life. And if these historical events are proven untrue, then He says, 'Everything else I said is untrue too.'

Six historical events that make up Christianity's foundation

I am going to give you six historical events. These are the things that Christianity finds as its foundation. Not only that, these six things is all wound together. You cannot take one of them away or prove that one is false; if so, the whole thing will collapse. Here are the six things and they all deal with history, events in history, not precepts, events, and they all deal with the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Number 1: *He was prophesied.* That's what the Old Testament is all about, the coming of

the Messiah. And He was prophesied properly. Number 2: *He was born of a virgin as was prophesied.* Number 3: *He lived a sinless life.* He invited friend or foe to point out one sin in His life. Can you imagine any public figure in our day, a politician, somebody who is in the news media, or any preacher, to say, "You show me one thing wrong"? Yet that's what Christ did: He lived a sinless life. Numbers 4, 5 & 6: *He died on a cross as prophesied; on the third day He rose from the dead as He promised; and a month and a half after that, He ascended into Heaven as He promised.* All of those things are wound together.

When you examine the life of Mohammed, he never says, 'Look at my life,' he says, 'Look at my teachings.' When you look at Jesus Christ, He says, 'Look at these events. Are they true? If they are true, then you believe and here's what you believe.' There is a totally different approach to the whole subject. The Apostle Paul therefore says, 'If Christ was not raised from the dead, we are false witnesses and so is God and so is Jesus Christ and your whole religion is based upon a lie.' That's how important the resurrection is.

Question #2: What are we talking about when we say, "Christ was raised from the dead?"

Another question about this Resurrection Day is, "What are we talking about when we say Christ was raised from the dead?" We are not talking about the coming of spring...and surely spring is going to come this year. We are not talking about new life in nature, nor are we talking about the continuing influence of a man's thought and life. Listen. Everybody is going to have a continuing influence in one way or another, good or bad. We are not talking about His impact that has remained down through history. Nor when we talk about the resurrection are we talking about somebody who apparently was dead and He seemed to be dead, but He came alive because He wasn't really dead.

All ministers make mistakes. Most ministers don't make mistakes like I make mistakes. When I make one, it is stupendous. Fifteen years ago I was pastor of a church in Georgia, the First Presbyterian Church of Macon, Georgia. There was a man who retired, and came back to the area. He lived not in Macon but in Eatonton, Georgia about 40 miles north, and in some way he came to find out about our church. He came and he drove every Sunday. He joined our church, and he always came to the 8:30 service. He was a little bit older; he was a widower; he lived alone. And on about a Thursday evening I got a phone call from a member who said, 'Mr. so and so in Eatonton has died.' I tried to call him—no answer, which I expected. And then I called a funeral home that was given to me and the man said, "Yes." And I went through the three names of the man. "Yes." And he was a Junior. And also he said, the funeral director said, "His older sister is here, would you—?" I said, "Yes, please let me talk to her." I'd never known that a sister existed there. We not only talked; I verified. I had a prayer with her. And so we put it in the church bulletin that very afternoon: Thursday

afternoon it was printed. On about noon Friday, I get a phone call, and it's this man on the phone. He said, 'This is so and so, Pastor Baird.' And I gasped. He said, "Are you still there?" And I said, "Yes. Where are you? I thought you were supposed to be dead!" And he said, "Well, I went by the funeral home." And he said, "You see, there are two of us in Eatonton, Georgia, the exact same name, a Junior. And when this woman who was related to me said she talked to this preacher who had a prayer in Macon, it suddenly dawned on me that maybe you thought that was me who had died." And so Sunday we went ahead with the bulletin. I mean, it was already printed. And so as the congregation arrived, I had this man listed as dead in the bulletin, and so we called his name and asked him to stand and we gave him an ovation in a Presbyterian church! Naturally I had to make the explanation there, and to everybody after that service. And then I went up to him after the service as well and he said to me later, he said, "You know what? This is the second time this has happened to me." He says, "When I was a teenage boy I was in an automobile accident outside of Atlanta and they thought I was dead. A reporter for *The Atlanta Constitution* was driving by and stopped. I was pronounced dead by somebody, and he took the name and all the facts and he telephoned in to the newspaper. The ambulance came and in the ambulance they found out I was not dead, but the next morning it came out in the newspaper that I was dead." I said, "Twice?" I said, "Brother, God has got something great for you, pronounced dead twice."

Here's what I am saying: When we talk about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are not talking about springtime coming. We are not talking about a man's influence, and we are not talking about the apparent death that you read about in our day in which people seem to be dead and then they come back to life after they've had some kind of experience. Christ was, on Friday, put to death on a cross, with a spear in His side. They wrapped Him like a mummy. They put Him in the grave on Friday night. He was there all day Saturday. He was there part of the day on Sunday, and on Sunday God rolled away that stone and the man, Jesus of Nazareth, walked out bearing the scars in His hands and side. That is what we are talking about.

In the year 1889 a man died. His name was Matthew Arnold. Matthew Arnold was a literary giant, a skeptic by nature, and he made this statement, he said, "Dead men don't rise; therefore, Christ was not raised from the dead." He had it half right. We are not saying here this morning that dead men rise. We are saying that this one, unique, dead man, Christ, rose from the dead, and He rose in a new resurrected body. He had raised Lazarus, and Lazarus came forth with the same body and would die. This is a unique person and a unique event. Everything about Him—from His prophecy, from His birth, from His sinless life to His death, to His resurrection, to His ascension—it all makes sense. If one is wrong then they are all wrong. You, as the Bible says, could not believe that if He was the living God that death could hold Him. That was the first sermon preached after His resurrection. Paul in Romans says that it was proof that He was the Son of God as a unique second person of the Trinity by His resurrection.

That's what we are talking about. So you understand why it is so important that Christ rose from the dead.

Question #3: What are the implications? — Sin is forgiven and we have peace with God.

Now it raises the last question and the next question is, "What are the implications?" We could say, "Isn't it wonderful?" We could sing "And have a happy Easter" as a greeting. Why is it a happy Easter to you? How can it be a happy Easter to you? What are the implications of the death of Jesus Christ and His resurrection? They are many. We could go on. I'm going to mention only four because I think they are crucial, but there are so many.

The first one is this. I said not too long ago when David Thoreau, the naturalist, died in the last century, on his death bed as he lingered over a period of a month or so, a godly aunt approached him and said, "David, make peace with God before you die." His answer was, "Auntie, I did not know that I had a quarrel with God." No need to make peace. Thoreau was a tremendous man and a great lover of what God had created, but he didn't understand very much about himself or about his God.

I don't care who it is here—the best woman in this congregation, the best man, the best teenager in this congregation, the best man in the city of Jackson, the best woman in the United States of America, the finest person who walks the world today. I don't care who it is. That person is a sinner. And God has a quarrel with them because He's a holy God. God is so holy that when He came to this earth, He did not sin once in thought or deed.

God not only has a quarrel with us; if He's a holy God, He judges us and we are under his condemnation. If He is a moral God and if this is a moral world, we are under His condemnation. He is displeased with every sinner. Mind you, it is not that I sinned once when I was sixteen years of age; we have sinned many, many, many times this week and already this day. God has a problem. The Bible says that on Calvary's cross, God took the sins of those who will trust Jesus Christ and He nailed them to the cross.

I am sure at this time of the year you are particularly interested about your canceled checks from last year and a few receipts because you may have to one day prove that you have paid that bill. God says that Calvary's cross is the promise that the sins of all who believe in Jesus Christ have been washed clean, and the receipt that it is so is the resurrection. Christ proved by the resurrection not only that He was the Son of God, but also that His death on Calvary's cross for your sins is effective. It is the effective receipt, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's why the Apostle Paul said in our texts, "If Christ did not rise from the dead, then you are still in your sins." 'God has got a very big problem

with you and the same is true of your loved ones who have died. They are still in their sin and they are perishing. They are separated from God forever.' But the good news is, the "happy Easter" is, Christ's resurrection demonstrates that Good Friday is good because Christ died for our sins and He alone who was sinless could do it.

Suffering has meaning.

Now, there is a second implication. Not only is it a happy Easter because sin is forgiven and now we have peace with God. Not because we have *made* peace. We have *received peace*; we have *accepted* His peace and this is proved by the resurrection.)

There is not a person in this sanctuary and in the Fellowship Hall and all who hear me who does not suffer. Not a one. Some of you are under extreme suffering right now. And the question is often raised, "How can a God in heaven judge me when I have gone through some tough things on this Earth?"

There is an illustration I found years ago, anonymous. From the day of judgment into the white glory of judgment, sinners recognizing themselves are falling back from God, but there is a group down front that are not falling back; they are accusing. And they are accusing God on the basis, "You remained in heaven aloof and some of us died at Auschwitz. Some of us were in Hiroshima. Some of us because of the color of our skin were lynched. Some of us who are innocent had men do things to us, and You have come to condemn us, You who remained in Heaven?" And they began to say like this, "Before God could be qualified to be their Judge He must endure what they had endured." Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on Earth as a man. And then they began to make other suggestions, "Let Him be born," one said, "a Jew. Then He will understand some suffering. Let the legitimacy of His birth be doubted. Give Him a work so difficult that even His family will think Him out of His mind when He tries to do it. Let Him be betrayed by His closest friends, and let them abandoned Him. Let Him face false charges, be tried by a prejudice jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge. And let Him be tortured, and at last let Him see what it means to be terribly alone. And then, let him die. Let Him die so that there can be no doubt that He died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to testify of it." And as each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people that were assembled down front. And when the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served His sentence of anguish on this Earth.

I don't care who you are, there is not a thing that you have faced in your life that Jesus did not personally face—not a thing. The resurrection is proof that not only did God suffer and endure but He triumphed, *He made His cross to have meaning*, such meaning, that we put it on the top of the steeple of this church

because it is a sign now of triumph. It had tremendous implications of victory (the cross) because of the resurrection, because the resurrection proved who He was and what He had done for you. The same is true with you. *If you serve a resurrected Christ, your suffering is going to have meaning.* It is not meaningless. That's the killer of mankind.

God will work our injustices for good.

There's another side to suffering also and I tend to call it "injustice," and that's the third implication. I say "Happy Easter" because even though there are hard things in my life, I know that God is going to work them together for good as demonstrated by His resurrection. I can say "Happy Easter" to you who are suffering. I can say "Happy Easter" to you who are in the midst of the injustice. On the cross, one thief turned to Him and railed upon Christ, 'Do something!' The other one stretched out and said, 'Be quiet, for this Man hath done no evil. We are murderers and thieves; this Man has done no...'

You talk about injustice! God coming to this Earth and never sinning and then putting Him on the cruelest instrument of torture that man has ever invented! And so it is in this world. You don't have to leave Jackson, Mississippi to see the injustice. You don't have to leave your own life. But there are many of us who have suffered injustice, I think, much more than we have, much more. Is that all there is to it? You just live in a world that is immoral, unjust, and that's the end of it? I had a man tell me during a talk show in Miami—the host was saying, "You are so mean when you talk about Heaven and Hell. If I were God I would make everybody go to Heaven." And I turned to him and I said, "Let me ask you, How about Adolph Hitler? Are you not from a Jewish background? You mean to tell me that Adolph Hitler and what he perpetrated on all kinds of people, religions, and race...you mean to tell me it's just all over now and that he's in Heaven or he's in nothingness?" We changed the subject. Is this a moral world in which you live? Is the hymn writer correct when he says, "The wrong shall fail and the right prevail"? You believe that? Well, you're not going to find it in the newspapers but I tell you where you will find it: at the empty tomb. Jesus Christ prevailed over the greatest injustice this world has ever known and He's made a promise.

God will establish His kingdom on Earth.

I told you six things about His life, but there's one more fact that I have not mentioned yet because it is yet to occur. And that is, one day He comes again to this world after the judgment. And when He comes to this world, there is vindication not only of Himself but also of all those who have believed and given themselves to Him. And He establishes His kingdom upon this Earth. You think this Earth is going to be like it is now forever? Are we going to live with this sin and injustice and meanness and corruption? And men who are in white collars and men who are in blue jeans who sell drugs on corners? And kids who make hundreds of thousands of dollars selling drugs to their teenage friends? And men

who steal millions of dollars at the top of corporations? And preachers who take somebody else's woman or wife? You think that's just going to be like that forever? Oh no. There will come not only a day of judgment, there will come a day when Jesus Christ will establish His kingdom on this Earth, and on that day your body will be resurrected and put together with your soul, and you will have a resurrected body like Christ had, a real body. You know when Christ was raised from the dead five hundred saw Him at one time? He was not just in a murky, upper room by the seaside. He cooked breakfast for His disciples and He ate that breakfast with them. He was a real human being in a real body...but it was a perfect body. Is there anybody here who has a loved one or you here who are physically impaired? And some of us will never get over it, and some of us have lived with it all of our lives. On that day everything will be made right because God is moral and the wrong shall fail and the right prevail. Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, is coming again and He's gonna make this world right. Everything that He's ever done proves it, as does the resurrection.

We will see Jesus face-to-face.

There's one last thing. I'm going to die; so are you. We will all die. I know not when. What happens then? What happens then? Every preacher goes through it not once or twice or three times in his lifetime or a year, but he goes through it weekly, every week. He has people who are dying. He deals with death all the time. He deals with people who had folk who are dead and dying. They look to that preacher for hope. Let me tell you "Happy Easter." Happy Easter! When Christ rose from the dead, He said in this very chapter that death had lost its power and sting. In the earthly sense I may die, but I'm going to Heaven. The moment I leave and take my last breath on this Earth, in the next instant. Now this is not just a few preachers somewhere—*every believer* in Jesus Christ, every believer. Now everybody is going to survive death.

A number of years ago I was on a back road coming down through Alabama, going into Mobile, and we pass over the river. It was the Styx River in South Alabama. And there was a little sign over this bridge that said, "Styx River," and then underneath was a kind of a handmade sign that said "Charon Retired." And I had to laugh because you see, the Styx River is in Greek mythology the river of death, and everybody's gonna pass over the river of death. Charon was the boatman who took you over; he's retired in South Alabama because now we have a bridge.

But I thought about the real Savior who will take us over the river of death, the Lord Jesus Christ who says, 'I will not only go with you, I have defeated death, and you're going to live with Me. Yea, I go to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also.' We are going to see our loved ones. We are going to see great historical figures. As I often say, I will see my grandparents that I never saw on this earth. But more than anything else we will see God, the Lord Jesus, face to face. It is almost too much to even conceive of. But that's what He

promises, that we are going by His resurrection to heaven. Happy Easter, beloved.

There is a graveyard in London. If you don't know about it, they'll never show it to you in our day. Among all of the things you should see in London, be sure you see Bunhill Fields Cemetery. In it are buried: Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, John Bunyan, and Daniel Defoe that wrote *Robinson Crusoe*. It's out of town because the church would not allow these non-conformists to be buried within the city of London. You know the church did that, but they were great men of God. Across the street from the cemetery is the chapel of John Wesley. They wouldn't give him a church within the city. And there is his house where he died. And when he died in 1791, his last words were this, "Oh, be glad. The best of all is that God is with us." I preach on the 23 Psalm, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Thou art with me." I want to tell you something, folk. When you leave here today, the best of all is that the living God is with you.

This morning if you believe what I have just been preaching about, if you really believe that and believe it with your life so that you are willing to commit your life to Jesus Christ—not say, "Oh yeah, isn't that wonderful?" If you are saying, "I just wonder about those things." My only prayer for you is, pray that God would show you—pray that God would show you. And if you really don't believe these things, then you remember what I have said. And when your back is against the wall someday, you remember that there is a risen Savior. Maybe you can even pray right here now, "Happy Easter." We serve a risen Savior as we pray.

Beloved Heavenly Father, we thank Thee that we are serving not a dead God or a God from memory or one who is in the pages of the book from long ago. But we are dealing with One who is alive and who is here and who can give life now. We do pray that You would give that life by the work of Your Spirit. And may Your benediction rest upon believing and trusting and newborn hearts.

For it is now unto the Lord Jesus Christ who is able to keep you from falling; it is now unto the Lord Jesus Christ who is able at your death...He is able to present you sinless before His throne of grace in Heaven with exceeding great joy. To the only wise God who is our Savior: Unto Him in our hearts let there be glory. May He have majesty, dominion, power, both now and forevermore. Amen.

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