

**I Corinthians 15:1-9, 12-26, 54B-58
February 10, '19**

“IF...”

**FOR THE NEXT THREE SUNDAYS, THE
LECTIONARY EPISTLE READINGS ARE TAKEN FROM
THE 15TH CHAPTER OF I CORINTHIANS.**

**RATHER THAN STRETCH IT OUT OVER THOSE
THREE WEEKS, I THOUGHT WE'D USE IT ALL TODAY.**

**IT'S NOT THAT EASY, THOUGH, BECAUSE THE
CHAPTER IS 58 VERSES LONG – THE LONGEST
CHAPTER IN ANY OF PAUL'S LETTERS.**

**I'VE DECIDED THAT – INSTEAD OF READING ALL
58 VERSES – WE'LL FOCUS ON ABOUT HALF OF THEM –
VERSES THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE CHAPTER.**

**THAT'S ONE REASON WE'VE CHANGED OUR
NORMAL PRACTICE OF HAVING THE LITURGIST READ
THE SCRIPTURE.**

**I ALSO WANTED TO GIVE JUST A BIT OF
BACKGROUND BEFORE WE GET INTO THE PASSAGE
ITSELF.**

**THIS LETTER WAS WRITTEN TO THE CHURCH IN
THE CITY OF CORINTH IN ABOUT 52 A.D.**

**THAT MEANS IT WAS WRITTEN SOME 15 YEARS
BEFORE THE FIRST GOSPEL WAS WRITTEN.**

**IT ALSO MEANS THAT THIS IS THE EARLIEST
ACCOUNT OF THE RESURRECTION.**

**PAUL HAD COME TO CORINTH TO SHARE THE
GOSPEL WITH THEM.**

**HE TOLD THEM HOW CHRIST HAD DIED AND WAS
RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY.**

**HE TOLD THEM OF ALL THE PEOPLE TO WHOM
JESUS APPEARED, INCLUDING HIMSELF.**

BUT AFTER PAUL HAD LEFT CORINTH, SOME IN THE CHURCH DECIDED THAT, IN FACT, JESUS WAS *NOT* RAISED – THAT, IN TRUTH, THERE WAS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

THOSE WHO DENIED THE RESURRECTION, CONTINUED TO PROPOGATE THEIR CONVICTIONS WITHIN THE CHURCH.

NOW THE WHOLE COMMUNITY OF FAITH WAS DEVASTATED.

IF THE RESURRECTION HAD NOT OCCURRED, THEN THE ENTIRE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH WAS IN SHAMBLES.

PAUL LEARNS OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED & THIS IS WHAT HE TELLS THEM.

YOU MAY WANT TO FOLLOW ALONG, BUT ABOUT AS MUCH GUIDANCE AS I CAN OFFER IS THAT WE'LL

**BEGIN WITH THE FIRST VERSE OF THE CHAPTER &
END WITH THE LAST ONE.**

**HEAR NOW THE FIRST WRITTEN ACCOUNT OF THE
RESURRECTION AS PAUL OFFERS IT IN THE 15TH
CHAPTER OF I CORINTHIANS.**

(After scripture)

FOUR FRIENDS WERE TALKING ABOUT DEATH.

**ONE OF THEM ASKED THE OTHER THREE, *“WHEN
YOU ARE IN YOUR CASKET AND PEOPLE ARE MOURNING
YOU, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR THEM SAY
ABOUT YOU?”***

**THE FIRST MAN SAID, *“I’D LIKE TO HEAR THEM SAY
THAT I WAS A FINE PHYSICIAN IN MY TIME AND A
GREAT FAMILY MAN.”***

**THE SECOND FELLOW SAID, *“I’D LIKE TO HEAR
THAT I WAS A WONDERFUL HUSBAND AND A SCHOOL***

TEACHER WHO MADE A HUGE DIFFERENCE IN OUR LEADERS OF TOMORROW.”

THE THIRD MAN REPLIED, “I’D LIKE TO HEAR THEM SAY, ‘LOOK! HE’S MOVING!’”

I THINK MOST OF US CAN RELATE TO THAT LAST FELLOW.

DEATH IS A FEARFUL THING.

IT’S A FEARFUL THING FOR ALL OF US.

PAUL SAYS, IN THIS PASSAGE, *“THE LAST ENEMY THAT SHALL BE DESTROYED IS DEATH.”*

MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT – DEATH IS AN ENEMY.

I KNOW WE SOMETIMES REFER TO DEATH AS A FRIEND BUT THE ONLY REASON WE CAN DO SO IS BECAUSE CHRIST HAS DESTROYED ITS POWER.

BUT WHAT IF WE’RE WRONG?

**WHAT IF HE DIDN'T COME BACK FROM THE
DEAD?**

WHAT IF THE RESURRECTION IS A HOAX?

**PAUL TELLS US THE ANSWER TO THE "WHAT IFS"
OF THE RESURRECTION.**

**IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, THERE IS NO GROUP OF
PEOPLE IN ALL THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD TO BE
MORE PITIED THAN WE.**

**IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, WHY BOTHER BEING
HERE TODAY – OR ANY OTHER DAY FOR THAT
MATTER?**

IT'S A LOST CAUSE.

**IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, WHY BOTHER SERVING
HIM?**

IT'S A WASTE OF TIME.

**IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, WHY BOTHER PRAYING?
THERE'S NO ONE TO LISTEN.**

**IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, EVERY PREACHER,
EVERY SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER, EVERY
MISSIONARY WHO'S EVER LIVED IS PERPETUATING A
HOAX.**

**IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, THE FAITH OF YOUR
PARENTS, YOUR GRANDPARENTS, YOUR AUNTS &
UNCLES, IS JUST SO MUCH WISHFUL THINKING.**

**IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, THE GOSPEL IS NOTHING
MORE THAN "THE OPIATE OF THE PEOPLE," "PIE IN
THE SKY WHEN YOU DIE," THAT KEEPS YOU
CONTENTED BUT HAS NO REAL SUBSTANCE.**

**IN THIS PASSAGE, PAUL OFFERS A LONG LITANY
OF "WHAT IFS."**

**AND THEN HE GIVES US ONE HUGE WORD THAT
CHANGES ALL THE “WHAT IFS.”**

**I KNOW I INUNDATE YOU WITH FILM REFERENCES
BUT THIS IS ONE THAT I CAN’T LET PASS.**

**TO ME, IT IS THE SINGLE GREATEST MOMENT IN
CINEMATIC HISTORY – AND I DO MEAN MOMENT,
BECAUSE IT’S NOT REALLY AN ENTIRE SCENE BUT
MERELY A WORD.**

**IN “A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS,” PAUL SCOFIELD AS
SIR THOMAS MORE IS ON TRIAL FOR HIGH TREASON.**

**HE LISTENS AS THE CHARGES ARE BROUGHT
AGAINST HIM.**

**WHEN GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK, HE
DOES SO – RECOUNTING THE LITANY OF CHARGES.**

**AND THEN, WITH A SINGLE WORD, MORE
RENDERS THEM ALL MEANINGLESS.**

**IN PLAYWRIGHT ROBERT BOLT'S
PARENTHETICAL DIRECTIONS HE SAYS MORE ISSUES
THE WORD *"WITH A GREAT FLASH OF SCORN &
ANGER."***

**IN ESSENCE, MORE SAYS, *"YOU HAVE HEARD THE
CHARGES. HERE THEY ARE."***

**AND THEN, *WITH A GREAT FLASH OF SCORN &
ANGER* HE SAYS, *"NEVERTHELESS!"***

**AND ALL THE CHARGES CRUMBLE TO THE
GROUND, VIRTUALLY MEANINGLESS.**

THAT'S WHAT PAUL DOES HERE.

***"IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, THEN THIS &
THIS & THIS & THIS."***

**AND THEN, *WITH A GREAT FLASH OF SCORN &
ANGER* OVER WHAT SOME HAVE BEEN TEACHING,
THE GREAT APOSTLE GIVES US THE GREAT WORD:**

***“NEVERTHELESS – BUT – IN POINT OF FACT –
CHRIST HAS BEEN RISEN!”***

**JESUS HAS, IN FACT, BEEN RAISED FROM THE
DEAD.**

HOW TRAGIC NOT TO SEE IT.

HOW HOPELESS NOT TO UNDERSTAND IT.

**HOW MEANINGLESS IS LIFE IF WE REFUSE TO
ACCEPT IT.**

**THOMAS JEFFERSON WASN'T ABLE TO ACCEPT
THE MIRACLES OF THE BIBLE.**

**HE EDITED HIS OWN SPECIAL VERSION OF THE
BIBLE IN WHICH ALL REFERENCES TO THE
SUPERNATURAL WERE DELETED.**

**IN EDITING THE GOSPELS, HE CONFINED HIMSELF
SOLELY TO THE MORAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS.**

**THE CLOSING WORDS OF JEFFERSON’S BIBLE ARE
THESE: “*THERE LAID THEY JESUS AND ROLLED A
GREAT STONE AT THE MOUTH OF THE SEPULCHRE AND
DEPARTED.*”**

THAT’S IT.

IT ENDS THERE.

WHAT IF THAT WERE THE END?

HOW TRAGIC TO BE LEFT WITH NOTHING ELSE.

**SIGMUND FREUD, THE FOUNDER OF
PSYCHOANALYSIS, WROTE, “*AND FINALLY THERE IS
THE PAINFUL RIDDLE OF DEATH, FOR WHICH NO
REMEDY AT ALL HAS YET BEEN FOUND, NOR PROBABLY
EVER WILL BE.*”**

THANK GOD, THE RIDDLE HAS BEEN SOLVED.

THANK GOD, THE REMEDY HAS BEEN FOUND.

**THANK GOD, THE RIDDLE WAS SOLVED AND THE
REMEDY FOUND, 2,000 YEARS AGO.**

**THERE WERE THOSE IN THE CORINTHIAN
COMMUNITY WHO SOUGHT TO SWINDLE THE PEOPLE
INTO BELIEVING OTHERWISE.**

**PAUL SAID, “*DON’T LET THEM DECEIVE YOU. HERE
IS THE TRUTH.*”**

**GOD TOOK THE HORRIBLE STAIN OF DEATH,
THAT AGE-OLD ENEMY OF HUMANITY, AND
CONQUERED IT ONCE & FOR ALL.**

**GOD TOOK THE WORST MOMENT OF HISTORY
AND TURNED IT INTO THE BEST.**

**THIS IS WHAT WE CELEBRATE EVERY TIME WE
GATHER TOGETHER ON THE LORD’S DAY.**

**WE CELEBRATE THE GREAT “NEVERTHELESS”
PROCLAIMED BY PAUL.**

**DON'T BE SWINDLED BY THOSE WHO WOULD
HAVE YOU BELIEVE OTHERWISE.**

**DON'T LET THE THOMAS JEFFERSONS & SIGMUND
FREUDS OF THE WORLD PERSUADE YOU THAT
RESURRECTION POWER IS A HOAX.**

**IT'S REAL AND ITS GREAT "NEVERTHELESS"
CHANGES EVERYTHING – EVERYTHING IN YOUR
WORLD & EVERYTHING IN MINE.**

**THAT IS THE ESSENCE OF OUR FAITH – THE
ASSURANCE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING BEYOND
THIS EARTHLY EXISTENCE, AND BECAUSE THERE IS,
WE CAN LIVE WITH HOPE.**

**WE CAN LIVE IN RECKLESS ABANDON – SHARING
ALL THAT WE HAVE & ALL THAT WE ARE WITH
THOSE AROUND US.**

WE CAN SHARE OUR LOVE, OUR TIME & OUR COMMITMENT IN SERVICE TO JESUS CHRIST.

WE CAN PUT OUR PETTY JEALOUSIES & OUR TRIVIAL DIFFERENCES ASIDE & LIVE IN TOTAL SURRENDER TO THE ONE WHO HAS TAKEN AWAY THE STING OF DEATH & RENDERED TO NAUGHT THE POWER OF THE GRAVE.

A RESTLESS LITTLE GIRL WAS DISTURBING HER FATHER, SO TO AMUSE HER AND KEEP HER BUSY, HE TORE A MAP OF THE WORLD FROM THE NEWSPAPER HE WAS READING AND CUT IT INTO SMALL PIECES.

“HERE’S A JIGSAW PUZZLE, DEAR,” HE TOLD HER.

“NOW RUN ALONG AND PUT IT TOGETHER.”

THE GIRL’S KNOWLEDGE OF GEOGRAPHY WAS QUITE LIMITED, BUT SHE WENT TO WORK & VERY QUICKLY COMPLETED THE PUZZLE.

HER FATHER WAS ASTONISHED WHEN SHE CALLED TO HIM TO TELL HIM SHE WAS FINISHED.

HE SAID, “*HOW DID YOU DO IT SO QUICKLY?*”

SHE SAID, “*OH, IT WAS EASY. THERE’S A PICTURE OF A MAN ON THE OTHER SIDE. I JUST PUT THE MAN BACK TOGETHER AND THE WHOLE WORLD CAME OUT RIGHT.*”

THAT’S WHAT THE RESURRECTION IS ALL ABOUT.

IT’S ABOUT GOD PUTTING THE MAN JESUS BACK TOGETHER AND THE WHOLE WORLD COMING OUT RIGHT.

BELIEVE THAT IT HAPPENED.

BELIEVE THAT IT’S REAL.

BELIEVE IT AND YOUR WORLD WILL COME OUT RIGHT AS WELL. AMEN.

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