

Easter Sunday 2020

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, April 12, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Good morning and Happy Easter! Thank you for taking the time to join us on this most special of days. I invite you to have a Bible at the ready, take whatever notes you deem necessary, and purposefully ENGAGE for the next thirty to forty minutes.

FYI – In a spirit of full disclosure, I am a bit DISAPPOINTED by the fact that we cannot worship together this morning. As I have said many times in recent days, there is no substitute for face-to-face (i.e., personal connection). Yet in another sense I REJOICE—for I believe that this period of forced separation is BENEFICIAL (particularly on Easter Sunday)! As one online writer commented...

QUOTE – “We are about to learn, for the first time as a generation, that Easter is not about” the many things we often make it about. e.g., It is not about the new dress and fancy hat; it’s not about packed churches, hyped-up worship sets and well-worded sermons; it’s not even about family dinners and candy-related bunnies. Rather, it IS about Jesus! It’s about an empty tomb and His victory over death, hell and the grave.

KEY – “This year, Easter is not about us...it is about Him...and that is OK...” concludes the author!

- 1) If You Are a Veteran Believer (i.e., Fully Versed in the Resurrection of Christ)—LEAN IN...
- 2) If You Are a Young Believer (i.e., You Are Discovering the Glories of the Res)—LEAN IN...
- 3) If You Are a Non-Believer (i.e., You Know Precious Little About the Res)—Pls. LEAN IN...

SETTING THE STAGE

As we wade into the waters this AM, I posit that Scripture puts forth an unmistakable, unequivocal TRUTH...

Acts 2:24 (NIV)

24 . . . God raised him [i.e., Jesus Christ] from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

KEY – The Resurrection of Christ is among the most FOUNDATIONAL elements of the Christian faith...

QUOTE – A close study of Scripture reveals that approximately three-hundred texts highlight the truth that Jesus was RAISED from the dead. God’s Word reveals that the earthly and spiritual forces arrayed against Christ were [ultimately] powerless against Him. The enemy could not defeat Him; hell could not overpower Him; death could not keep Him; and the grave could not contain Him.

FYI – It is IMPOSSIBLE for me—as a minister—to overstate or exaggerate the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a fundamental reality upon which the SUPERSTRUCTURE of our faith rests and the basis for what we believe!

YET TO THIS I ASK...

WHAT IF? PT. 1 (–)

Q. What if it never happened?

Q. What if Jesus never rose from death?

Q. What if Christ proved to be still in the grave?

NOTE – These are NOT trivial questions. These are WEIGHTY questions that we do well to explore.

Q. What if Jesus Christ was still dead and Easter NEVER happened?

Q. How would a still-dead Jesus impact your understanding of Him?

Q. How would a still-dead Jesus impact YOUR Christian experience?

Q. How would a DEAD Jesus affect the whole of the Christian faith?

TRY FILLING IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE...

KEY – If Jesus did not rise from the grave, then ____ (FILL IN THE BLANK) ____.

WHAT IF? PT. 2 (–)

For many this will prove to be a DIFFICULT Q to quickly A. There are far too many dominoes that begin to fall if the happenings of Easter never happened at all! It is worth noting that OTHER faiths/world religions have the luxury of not having to contend with such issues...

KEY – Adherents to other faiths FREELY admit that their leaders/originators are clearly DEAD.

QUOTE – Whether it is the body of Muhammad, Buddha, or other founders of faith-movements, you can view, handle, and be in the presence of their physical remains. If you have the time, the financial capacity and the inclination, you can travel to and visit the final resting places of PROLIFIC religious leaders.

KEY – But Christianity is UNIQUE in that we profess that there is NO place on earth where you can see, handle, visit or encounter the remains of Christ, for He is seated at the right hand of God forevermore. In this way, our faith is truly unique!

WHAT IF? PT. 3 (–)

Yet—if the task of A this Q was thrust upon us—Scripture speaks definitively to the matter. The apostle Paul—inspired by the Holy Spirit—ADDRESSED this topic in the Book of 1 Corinthians (chapter 15). I would ask that you please turn to that chapter.

NOTE – In CONTEXT, Paul was writing to believers who were extremely immature in the faith. Though they had chosen to follow Christ, they wrestled with issues related to sin, godly living, and proper theology. Specifically, they doubted the reality of resurrection from death—primarily because the pagan philosophies they were saved out of did not allow for such things.

Paul—in an attempt to correct and instruct—PENNED the following...

1 Corinthians 15:12–19

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 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. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

KEY – According to Paul, there are SEVERE implications if Christ had NOT been raised. Let's address his points...

WHAT IF? PT. 4 (–)**1) Verse 14a****1 Corinthians 15:14a**

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless

NOTE – The FIRST implication of a still-dead Christ is that our PREACHING of the gospel would be utterly USELESS (i.e., empty; futile; pointless). The Great Commission of Christ—the standing order of the Church—would be diminished to an exercise in utter futility.

The hallmark message of the Early Church was Christ Crucified AND Resurrected. The heart of their message was a living—NOT A DEAD—Savior who could save, restore, transform, provide, guide, protect and so much more.

Christians throughout the ages have gone to great lengths to share their faith. They have traveled, they have sacrificed, they have gone without and they have often suffered greatly to preach the gospel. Certainly, Paul would fit into this category of person! Some of you have paid a price for preaching the good news of Christ's Resurrection! But IF Christ is still dead, such preaching—i.e., all preaching in fact—is FUTILE and a complete WASTE of time and energy.

2) Verse 14b**1 Corinthians 15:14b**

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

NOTE – The SECOND implication of a still-dead Christ is that our FAITH would also become USELESS (i.e., for nothing; meaningless).

Consider the various things that we trust the Lord Jesus for (e.g., salvation, restoration, healing, provision, guidance, etc.). Each and every one of those things hinges upon His being ALIVE, well and able to provide. Remove a living Jesus and WHAT exactly are we trusting in? WHO exactly are we praying to and through?

3) Verse 15a

1 Corinthians 15:15a

15 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.

NOTE – The THIRD implication of a still-dead Christ centers upon matters of CREDIBILITY.

Let's begin with the credibility (i.e., the trustworthy reputation) of the APOSTLES and early DISCIPLES. They all made the claim that Jesus was alive. They proclaimed that Christ had risen from death. IF this event NEVER happened, this would put EVERYTHING they taught and said into dispute. They would (rightfully) be deemed false witnesses!

Q. If we cannot trust them on this point, how can we trust them on any point?

Moving along, let's consider the further fallout of this point. Based upon their works/writings (i.e., Paul, the apostles & other biblical writers), how many of US have told people that Jesus is alive? That He has conquered death? If that is false, what EXACTLY does that make US?

4) Verse 17

1 Corinthians 15:17

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

NOTE – The FOURTH implication of a still-dead Christ pertains to our ETERNAL DESTINY. Without the resurrection of Christ, we are STILL condemned sinners in the eyes of God. We are thus subject to death, hell and the grave (i.e., the divine penalty for our sin).

We must realize that we are NOT just saved by Christ's death alone, but ALSO by His resurrection. His resurrection was God's VALIDATION that His sacrifice was acceptable and sufficient to pay for the sin of humanity. Without the resurrection we have NO certainty that God has truly made a way for us to be saved through Christ.

Our assurance is based on a living Christ who broke the power of hell and death, NOT one who is still swallowed up in defeat. If He could NOT achieve victory over such things, what assurance do we really have that He will give us such victory!

NOTE – The whole of our hope for eternal life is based upon the following promise of Christ...

John 14:19 [Jesus Speaking]

19 . . . Because I live, you also will live.

5) Verse 18

1 Corinthians 15:18

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

NOTE – The FIFTH implication of a still-dead Christ is a truly painful one, as it pertains to the FINAL STATE of our LOVED ONES who died in Christ.

We gather COMFORT from the fact that dead believers are ushered into the very presence of Christ. We mourn for them, but not as the world does. Why? Because we have a certainty of where they are – so they are NOT truly lost!

We also gather great JOY from the truth that we shall be reunited with them one day. I have lost loved ones that I cannot wait to see again. I am hoping to see their smiling face when I close my eyes to this life and open them in the next. I want to see them—and I know that I will because they are with Him!

But if Christ was NOT raised, the comfort we draw and the hope we experience is all for not. Dead believers are NOT with Christ but separated from God for all of eternity. There is NO home going and/or reunion to look forward to—only the certainty of inescapable and inextinguishable judgment.

6) Verse 19

1 Corinthians 15:19

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

NOTE – We sacrifice MUCH as believers. Think of how often we DENY ourselves in service to the Lord and others. What makes all of this surrender and obedience worthwhile? The belief Christ will make it worth every sacrifice in the end.

But if Christ is dead and there is no eternal life or divine reward in store for us, this is all for NOTHING! In this scenario, the pagan and the sinful would be in a far BETTER position! Though they have no hope for the next life, at least they have the passing pleasures of sin. Yet those who serve the Lord would have neither!

We would truly become objects of PITY.

SUMMATIONS & TRANSITIONS

In light of these statements, allow me to NOTE the following...

NOTE – Christianity has endured MUCH throughout the millennia. In spite of boundless trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, danger and more, Christianity has not only survived—it has often thrived. The Church of Jesus Christ is finding ways right now to endure, survive and thrive—even in this time of crisis and isolation (wherein we cannot gather)! Unprecedented time for the Church in this nation.

KEY – But the Church of Christ could NOT endure a dead Jesus. Remove a Risen Christ and the whole of the faith comes crashing down like a clumsily built house of cards. If it turned out that Jesus' Body was definitively and demonstrably found, I would be among the first to EXODUS this religion.

WHAT IF? PT. 1 (+)

But if the skeptic would have believers wrestle with the question, “What if Jesus were dead?”—I think it is only fair that they should wrestle with its COROLLARY. i.e., “What if Jesus did rise from the grave?” What are the ramifications of a still-living Jesus?

NOTE – To begin to answer this Q let us turn to Matthew 12 (a text not often connected with Easter Sunday)...

Matthew 12:38–40

38 . . . some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”

39 He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

FYI – Herein the religious leaders approach Jesus, desiring that He provide a miraculous SIGN for them. This request sounds STRANGE to us, particularly when you consider the Jesus’ ministry was often accompanied by public supernatural displays. Whether it was the casting out of demons, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, multiplying food, etc., many signs had been done—by every estimation!

WHAT IF? PT. 2 (+)

KEY – But the word SIGN in this passage connotes MORE THAN a miraculous work!

QUOTE – A sign—in this usage—indicates an exceptional work that definitively PROVED that Jesus and His teaching were of God. It would have been like saying, “Jesus, do something so spectacular that it proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that you are of God. Do something that makes us believe!”

Q. Of course I must ask, “What work could He have performed to really convince them?”

This is WHY Jesus REBUKES them in verse 39. Their requires for proof despite all that they had seen and witnessed only confirmed their evil and hardened hearts. Only a truly wicked people ask for proof in the face of such overwhelming evidence (cf. 39a).

KEY – Yet the Lord does speak beyond this work of rebuke—noting that a sign WOULD BE given.

Q. What sign would be given?

A. The sign of Jonah (vs. 39–40).

WHAT IF? PT. 3 (+)

Q. What is Jesus speaking of? What does this cryptic statement mean?

A. Jonah was an OT prophet who ran from the call of God. In the midst of his wanderings, God allowed for a great fish of the sea to swallow Jonah. For THREE DAYS Jonah was inside of this beast (i.e., cut off from the land of the living). After three days, Jonah was delivered from death to life!

KEY – Jesus indicates that His sign would MIRROR that of Jonah. i.e., He would be cut off from the land of the living for three days—only to rise again to life! This is clearly a reference to His RESURRECTION (prior to it happening)!

NOTE – We cannot look past the significance of this statement. Herein, Jesus declared that the definitive proof that He and His teaching were of God was His RESURRECTION from death! i.e., The Resurrection would prove—beyond any shadow of a doubt—that He was truly of God and that His message was to be believed!

LET'S DELVE A BIT DEEPER INTO THIS...

WHAT IF? PT. 4 (+)

1) The Resurrection Authenticates the PERSON of Jesus Christ.

KEY – The Resurrection affirms that what Jesus claimed about HIMSELF (i.e., Nature/Work) must be true.

NOTE – Jesus made IMMENSE claims about Himself (i.e., His Nature and Work). Consider the following...

- He declared Himself to be the Bread of Life (cf. John 6:35 – Source of Spiritual Nourishment and Life)
 - He declared Himself to be the Light of the World (cf. John 8:12 – The Sole–Ultimate Arbiter of Truth)
 - He declared Himself to be the Door or the Gate (cf. John 10:7 – The “Sole” Gateway to Life Eternal)
 - He declared Himself to be the Good Shepherd (cf. John 10:11–14 – Providential Care of His Own)
 - He declared Himself to be the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25 – Master Over Death/Life)
 - He declared Himself to be the Way–Truth–Life (cf. John 14:6 – Gateway to Life and Truth)
 - He declared Himself to be the True Vine (cf. John 15:1, 5 – Source of Life and Vitality)
- Christ declared Himself to be the Son of God (cf. John 3:16)

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus—as the Son of God—is unique in relationship. We are children of God by creation and through adoption. This is not true of Him. He was not made a Son through creation or through adoption. He has always existed as the Son of God.

Jesus—as the Son of God—is unique in nature. Since He was not created or adopted, He shares the same essence or fundamental nature of God. This indicates that He is God Himself (i.e., the same level of Deity as His Heavenly Father)!

-Christ declared Himself to be the Son of Man

NOTE – This is a term borrowed from the OT Book of Daniel that speaks to divine KINGSHIP...

Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14

9 “As I looked,
 “thrones were set in place,
 and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
 His clothing was as white as snow;
 the hair of his head was white like wool.
 His throne was flaming with fire,
 and its wheels were all ablaze.
 10 A river of fire was flowing,
 coming out from before him.
 Thousands upon thousands attended him;
 ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
 The court was seated,
 and the books were opened.

13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

KEY – In total, it is clear that Jesus made some tremendous claims about His nature and work—claims that NO ONE in the right mind could or would make! If we were still dead, we could label Him a LIAR or a LUNATIC (to borrow the language of C. S. Lewis). **Q.** But what do we call Him if He has risen from the grave? LORD...

WHAT IF? PT. 5 (+)

2) The Resurrection Authenticates the MESSAGE of Jesus Christ.

KEY – The Resurrection affirms not only the Person of Christ—but the whole of His MESSAGE.

NOTE – When you consider the Gospel record, Jesus was the consummate TEACHER! His teaching endures through the ages, touching upon every facet of human life, living and beyond. We cannot—of course—highlight the body of Christ’s teaching today. The sum total would take years to address and a lifetime to digest.

FYI 1 – If Jesus is DEAD, we would have every permission to disregard and diminish His teaching.

FYI 2 – If Jesus is ALIVE, we would have every obligation to embrace and hearken to His message.

i.e., If Jesus did defeat death, that would serve as EVIDENCE that His message WAS of God. And if His message was from God, I am ACCOUNTABLE for the manner in which I obey or reject it. My hearkening to His Word will be met with BLESSING/FAVOR—disobedience will be met with PENALTY/CURSE (i.e., time and eternity).

KEY – We, thus, have NO permission to dismiss, diminish or alter His teaching IF it IS of the Lord!

WHAT IF? PT. 6 (+)

3) The Resurrection Authenticates the PROMISES of Christ.

A promise is ONLY as trustworthy as the person making it. If an unreliable person makes me a promise, I hope for the best but prepare for the worst! If a reliable person makes a promise, I am much more inclined to place my hope in its fulfillment.

THUS SAID...

KEY – Jesus promised to rise from death on several occasions. If He FAILED to keep His promise in this area, how can we trust Him in any area? This would DESTROY His credibility! But if He KEPT His word in this area—i.e., truly conquering death—then ALL of His promises hold true...

Q. Have you ever considered the promises of Christ? Glorious to consider—better to believe!

Matthew 11:28–30

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 7:7–8

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

John 10:10

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 14:1–3

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Q. WHY do we trust in His promises?

A. Because He has PROVEN to be trustworthy!

CONCLUSION PT. 1

Q. What if Jesus never rose from death?

A. The whole of the Christian faith would COLLAPSE...

KEY 1 – And I would have EVERY permission to dismiss Him in kind.

Q. What if Jesus did rise from the grave?

A. The Person, Message and Promises of Christ would be affirmed...

KEY 2 – And I must consider/determine my RESPONSE in kind.

QUOTE – “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

Q. What are you going to do in light of what I have presented today?

Q. Are you going to DISMISS Easter and its implications for your life & living?

Q. Are you going to EMBRACE the Risen Christ and HAIL Him as both Lord/Savior?

KEY – In just a moment I am going to lead in prayer. If you would like to give your life to Christ in faith, use my words as a TEMPLATE/PATTERN. Thank you for taking the time to tune in today and may the Lord bless you! REPEAT after me...

Lord, I CONFESS that I am a sinner.

I am in need of Your mercy—I have sinned against you.

But I BELIEVE Jesus died for me.

I believe Jesus paid the penalty for my sin.

I believe—on this Easter—that He rose again.

I believe He is the only way who can save me.

I confess that Jesus is my LORD.

I receive Jesus Christ as my SAVIOR.

AMEN.

NOTE – If you prayed that prayer, I would LOVE to hear from you.

CONCLUSION PT. 2

I thank you for joining us today. If you would be willing – ONLINE GIVING...