

Shown by Our Hope

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Introduction

In 1966, 17-year-old Linda Nyro wrote a song recorded by Peter, Paul, and Mary that also became a huge hit for Blood, Sweat, and Tears in 1969. The song was “And When I Die”, which contained lines like “I swear there ain’t no heaven and I pray there ain’t no hell” and “all I ask of living is to have no chains on me.” She said that she didn’t have to labor over it because it expressed “a certain kind of folk wisdom teenagers have.” If that was the “folk wisdom” of the teenagers of the 60s, it’s no wonder that today that’s the way the world operates. Death is simply an end, so let me live my life the way I want. “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!” It explains why, even though we think they should, most unbelievers don’t really fear death. They don’t **want** to die because that’s the end of living; they care **how** they die. As the song says, “All I ask of dying is to go naturally.” But what is there to fear if death is only the end and there’s no afterlife with reward and punishment?

Our Problem

Our problem is that we believe in God and His Word. And the Bible says there **is** an afterlife; there **is** a heaven and hell. We’re all sinners and not one iota of sin will enter heaven. As Luther says: “The fact that I feel this fear of hell and of God’s judgment is a reliable sign that I am a Christian and have some faith; for whoever is terrified by this must surely believe there is a heaven and hell.”

Salvation

Of course, the Gospel answer to all that is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God paid the ransom for our sins on the cross. He died in our place, so that we can have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This is our message to the world: “There **is** a heaven and hell, and since we’re all sinners, we’re all doomed to hell. The Good News is that Jesus Christ died to pay the price for our sins, so we can have life and go to heaven for eternity instead.” In a few weeks’ time, when we begin the Lenten season, we will be focusing on preparing to walk with Jesus as He goes to the cross.

Not the Whole Story

However, that’s not the whole story. Don’t forget the Resurrection. There were some who were teaching in Corinth that there is no resurrection. “Dead men don’t rise to life.” Paul uses logic to refute this claim.

1. *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised (v. 13)*. Think about what you’re saying. Let’s draw this out to its logical conclusion.
2. *If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain (v. 14)*. The word means “empty”. We preach Christ crucified and resurrected. If that’s not true, our preaching is empty and nothing we say can be trusted.
3. *Your faith is in vain (v.14)*. If our preaching is empty and you believed our preaching, then your faith is empty, null, and void.
4. *We are misrepresenting God (v. 15)*. This is a serious error. We are lying about God.

5. *You are still in your sins (v. 17)*. The resurrection vindicated the crucifixion, proving the sacrifice was acceptable. Only the death of the Son of God would be a valid sacrifice. If Christ is still dead, He isn't the Son of God, and the sacrifice was in vain. Sins have not been forgiven.
6. *Those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (v. 18)*. If Christ is still dead, he didn't conquer death, either. And those who died in Christ have really died in their sins.
7. *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied (v. 19)*. As Christians, we suffer for Christ's sake. We sacrifice things of this life for the next. We are reviled because of our faith. As Luther says: "Who would be stupid enough to be a Christian if there were nothing to a future life?"

The Conclusion

The only logical conclusion that Paul can come to, and we must also, is that *Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (v. 20)*. Our hope is in the Resurrection. It cannot be separated from the Crucifixion; they are two sides of the same coin. Dr. Dymale, my first homiletics professor at Malone College always said, "Every sermon must include the Christ-event. Without the Christ-event, you might as well be telling them 'Be kind to animals'". The 'Christ-event' is the Birth, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Service of the Table

We celebrate this at Communion, for we can only eat His body and drink His blood because of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. At His birth, His divinity took on His humanity, so He could suffer and die, His death paying the price for our sins. Because His humanity is still united to His divinity He bodily rose from the dead and lives to give us, through His body and blood, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Jesus is shown to the world as the Son of God through the hope we have in the resurrection.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
