

BECAUSE HE LIVES!

by
Dr. E. Harold Henderson

Dr. E. Harold Henderson was for 25 years, from 1972 -1997, the principal English language speaker on LifeWord Broadcast, an international radio outreach of the Baptist Missionary Association of America. Dr. Henderson was the Writer of the Adult Sunday School Quarterly (Baptist Publishing House, Little Rock, AR) for 39 & 1/2 years. He authored four books and numerous religious periodicals.

© LifeWord Broadcast Ministries
Conway, Arkansas
Reprinted by permission

Prisoners Bible Crusade
2212 Stonecypher Road
Lucedale, MS 39452

CONTENTS

PREACHING HAS POWER.	Page 1
FAITH IS EFFECTIVE.	Page 3
OUR WITNESS IS TRUE.	Page 5
OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.	Page 6
OUR BELOVED DEAD ARE SECURE. . .	Page 8

PREACHING HAS POWER

“Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures ... Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ... But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Corinthians 15:14, 12, 20-22).

Those selected verses from the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians underscore a doctrine which lies at the heart of the Christian faith: Jesus Christ actually died for sinners, then rose up from death the third day and continues to live forever. Apart from that truth, the Christian faith has no substance and falls lifeless and helpless.

Suppose Jesus Christ had not risen from death. What would be the consequences? The Apostle Paul answered in I Corinthians 15:13-19 with a fivefold statement. If Christ is not risen from death, (1) Christian preaching is empty; (2) Christian faith is useless; (3) Christian

testimony is false; (4) Christian forgiveness is never experienced; and (5) our Christian dead have perished without hope.

But Jesus Christ has risen up from death. He has the keys of death and of the grave. Therefore, the very opposite is true. Christian preaching has power. Christian faith is effective. Christian testimony is true. Christian forgiveness is available. Our Christian dead are secure. Praise God for the blessed assurance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is recorded four times in the four biographical accounts of the life of Jesus Christ, once each by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It is mentioned more than one hundred times in the New Testament. His resurrection is the very heart of the Christian gospel.

Powerful preaching centers on a living Savior

The Bible says that because Jesus lives, preaching has power. If Jesus is still dead, our preaching is “vain”—empty, meaningless, without result and produces nothing profitable. On the other hand, if Jesus has risen from death, our preaching is just the opposite—full of meaning and producing good in the lives of those who hear and heed.

Preaching of the early Christians centered on the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, they spoke much more about the resurrection than about the crucifixion. There may be two reasons for that. (1) Everyone knew of the crucifixion, for a message like that travels far and fast. (2) The people needed to know why the Lord Jesus died, but particularly they needed to be convinced that the once-dead Jesus was gloriously alive after His death. Almost every Christian sermon recorded in the book of Acts makes some reference to the resurrection of Jesus.

Peter preached on the day of Pentecost that the Jews, with the cooperation of the Roman authorities, had taken Jesus *“and by wicked hands have crucified and slain Him”* (Acts 2:23). On the other hand, God had overruled their deed: *“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it”* (Acts 2:24).

The first persecution against the disciples, following the crucifixion of Jesus, came because they *“preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead”* (Acts 4:2). They threw the issue in the face of the very council which sought the death of Jesus, preaching of *“Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead”* (Acts 4:10). The point of persecution revolved around their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, and the more they were opposed, the more the disciples declared the doctrine.

In fact, the apostolic preaching common in the early years of the Christian era is summarized in Acts 4:33 in these words, *“And with great power give the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”*

Resurrection is vitally related to powerful preaching

Why is the resurrection so important to Christian preaching? Romans 10 explains in this way, *“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”* Did you catch it? The death of Jesus Christ resulted in sinners being reconciled to God because it paid the sin-debt and took away the cause of their separation from Him. But it is the resurrection of Christ, the fact that He is living, which provides salvation. A dead Jesus could not be our Savior; a living Jesus can! It is not enough that He died for our sins; He must also live for our salvation.

Therefore, those who knew Jesus best stressed the preaching of death and resurrection. There are three phases to the atoning deed which Jesus performed on behalf of sinners. They are set forth in I Corinthians 15:3, 4. (1) Jesus actually died. He did not swoon, nor pretend death. He actually died. (2) Jesus was buried. His burial and His body's remaining in the grave three days, as was guaranteed by the armed guards before the tomb, was proof that He was dead. (3) Jesus came forth from the grave on that third day.

All of that was in the fulfillment of prophecy, "*according to the scriptures*" God foretold death, burial and resurrection. He performed what He had purposed.

The truth of the resurrection is also related to the nature of Jesus. How can one know for sure that Jesus of Nazareth is all that He declared Himself to be? The apostle Paul wrote that Jesus was "*declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*" (Romans 1:4). Two things prove that He is the Son of God: (1) His holy life of freedom from sin and (2) His resurrection from the dead. The fact that He was "without sin" while living in the world, and that He is now risen from death and has ascended to the Father, is proof that He is what He said, "the only begotten Son" of God.

How does that relate to powerful preaching today? The risen Christ will bless the witness of the truth concerning His vicarious death and His victorious resurrection. His power will accompany the Christian's witness. If He were in the grave today, Christian preaching would be as weak as the superstitions of the heathen and the rituals of the idolater. But, because He lives, He blesses the gospel message and makes it effective to the saving of sinners. That is why each Christian can say today, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*" (Romans 1:16).

Preach with confidence, brother preacher! Witness with assurance, fellow Christian! Jesus Christ is alive and bears witness with power to the truth you believe and declare. Because He lives, preaching has power!

FAITH IS EFFECTIVE

How important is the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus? It is so important that the Bible says, "*If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain*" (I Corinthians 15:14). That word "vain" means "empty, profitless, to no worthwhile end." If Jesus is not risen from the physical death which came at His crucifixion, there is no truth in the Christian message and no benefit in Christian faith.

That is why we insist on the truth of an actual death and a literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. He must die to be the sacrifice for our sins (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). He must rise up from death to be our Savior from sin (Romans 5:10). To deny either His death or His resurrection is to deny the Christian gospel.

The Apostle Paul wrote that "*if Christ be not risen..., your faith is also vain.*" Why is that true? Faith in a dead Christ could not bring salvation. He is declared to be the Savior. But how can He save if He is still held in death? He cannot. Therefore, faith in a Savior who is dead is vain, empty, profitless faith which is little more than self-deception. Is your confidence in a living Lord or in a helpless victim who is bound in the powers of death?

I watched people at worship in two countries. In one, they bowed before the likeness of a man whose body had been laid to rest in a tomb in the grips of death. Those people called themselves Christians and thought they were worshiping before the crucified Christ. In the other country, people bowed before an image of a man. It had been carved from wood and set upon a shelf above a table. Those people called themselves Buddhists. I could see little difference between the worship of the two. Both bowed before helpless images. Both used prayer beads. Both left the place of worship with no expression on their faces which indicated assurance or joy in having met with their God. My heart was broken for both.

Dear Christian, Jesus Christ is not a helpless infant in His mother's arms. Neither is He the helpless victim on a cross or buried in a tomb. He is the living Lord of glory. Hear His words: *"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death"* (Revelation 1:18). It is the living Lord whom the Christian trusts.

Why is faith safe?

Is it safe to trust Him? If He were dead, such faith would be empty and avail nothing. But since He lives, such faith is blessedly effective and brings all the resources of God into the life of one who believes in Jesus.

Hear these words of Jesus: *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever BELIEVETH in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever BELIEVETH in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that BELIEVETH on him is not condemned: but he that BELIEVETH not is condemned already, because he hath not BELIEVED in the name of the only begotten Son of God"* (John 3:14-18).

Did you hear the repetition of the word; "Believe, believe, believe, believe!" Five times in five verses, Jesus called for personal faith in Himself.

Examine the advantages which come to one who believes Jesus. (1) He does not perish, but receives eternal life instead, verse 15. (2) He does not perish but has everlasting life in the place of everlasting death, verse 16. (3) He is not condemned now, nor will be condemned in the future, because He has believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God, verse 18. Blessed privilege to know Him and trust Him.

Why is faith effective?

Why is faith in Jesus Christ effective? It is meaningful because He lives. Does the faith of the Buddhist or the Moslem or the worshiper of objects in nature bring the blessing of Christian faith? Never! Why? Because to trust in the wrong person or thing is to believe in vain. Since Jesus is a living and loving Savior, it is profitable to trust Him.

Christian faith is not mere agreement with doctrine. It is accepting the teaching of a church or denomination as religious fact. It is personal confidence in the person of Jesus Christ.

Consider this word from John 3:36, *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."* What does that say about faith? Note the statements, "believe on the Son. . . believe not the Son." To believe "on" Christ means to be founded upon Him. The statements in John 3:36 refer to a person whose confidence in Jesus Christ is so sure that he bases his life and hope upon Jesus alone, trusting Him alone for all that pertains to salvation in this world or in the next.

The Biblical testimony continues. The Apostle John wrote a little postscript on his gospel record explaining why he was moved of God to write it. He wrote, “*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*” (John 20:30, 31). Why did John select the particular happenings and teachings which he recorded in his biography of Jesus? He had one consuming purpose: to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God. And why did he want people to believe that? Because faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God is the only way a person can receive eternal life.

What does faith produce?

Blessings come when one settles his faith solely upon the truth that Jesus is the Christ of God. Though once dead, He lives eternally. Romans 5:1 speaks of one blessing, saying, “*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Faith brings justification—right standing and peace with God. What a privilege to be in fellowship with the sovereign God of the universe!

First John 5:4 gives another blessing which comes by faith: “*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*” That is the complete and absolute victory promised to the person who trusts God in Jesus Christ. That is just the beginning of blessings!

But what is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” Faith gives substance to what we hope for and makes us certain of realities we cannot see. You did not see Jesus arise from death. You have not seen Him with your eyes. You have not touched Him with your hands. You have not heard Him with your ears. How can you know He is real, alive, active, and available to be your Savior? You can know through faith. Faith is based on the truth of God revealed in Holy Scripture, and it makes us certain of realities we do not see.

We do not worship a sacrificed victim; we worship a living Lord. We do not look to the tomb where Jesus was buried; we look to the throne in heaven where He is crowned and sits as Lord over all. We do not look to things seen; we look to things unseen. And the Holy Spirit of God bears witness with our human spirit that faith is valid, Jesus is alive, and we are the children of God by faith.

OUR WITNESS IS TRUE

What is the very heart of the Christian gospel? The Apostle Paul summarized it in these words: “*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures . . . he was buried . . . he rose again the third day according to the scriptures*” (I Corinthians 15:3, 4). The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ are its theme.

Why are the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus so important? They declare the fact of an objective atonement. That is to say, it is in His death in the place of sinners, His burial and His resurrection out from the powers of death and the grave which prove that He is the Savior whom God has provided for sinners.

We preach that Christ died for sinners

It is impossible to preach the Christian gospel without declaring the substitutionary sufferings

of Jesus. Listen to the words of Paul again: “*Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.*” “Note the word “for.” “*Christ died FOR (because of) our sins.*” Note the pronoun “our.” “*Christ died for (because of) OUR sins.*” Whose sins? Not His own, for He “*did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*” (I Peter 2:22). It was OUR sins which caused Jesus to go to the cross. Seven centuries before it happened, the prophet Isaiah foretold the sufferings of the Savior for sinners: “*Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:4-6).

The substitutionary sufferings of Christ for sinners is taught through the whole Bible. It was first pictured when God took the skins of animals (which necessitated the death of the animals, of course) in order to provide clothing for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). It was made clearer when Abel offered “a more excellent sacrifice” by the death of an animal offered by faith upon the altar as a confession of sin and request for forgiveness. It is seen in each sheep or bullock which was offered upon the altars of the people of God through the Old Testament times. It is most perfectly manifest in the words of the New Testament in calling Jesus “*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). The death of Jesus on behalf of poor guilty sinners was no accident nor sudden thought with God. Jesus has stood as “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8).

CHRIST died for OUR sins! What a world of grace is in that statement. Imagine what it means: the sinless Son of God dying as if personally guilty for sins which He never committed that we weak and guilty sinners might be as free as if we had never committed sin. It is a marvelous thing!

Yes, Christ died for (on behalf of) the weak and wicked sinner. Hear the truth of it expressed in Romans 5:6, 8, 10, “*For when we were yet without strength, in due time CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY. . . But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, CHRIST DIED FOR US. . . For if, when we were enemies, we were RECONCILED TO GOD BY THE DEATH OF HIS SON, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*” Christ died for us when we were weak (“*without strength*”), wrong (“*sinners*”) and wicked (“*enemies*”). “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God*” (I Peter 3:18). “*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed*” (I Peter 2:24).

We preach that Christ rose again to save all those who believe

Yes, He died for sinners—you and me. But more than that, he rose up from death to manifest His victory over all the powers of sin and Satan. His resurrection is as important as His death in the saving of sinners. “*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*” (Romans 5:10). The repenting and trusting sinner is reconciled to God on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ and saved because of His resurrection from death.

Can we confidently accept the testimony that the crucified Jesus did indeed rise up from death and is forever alive today? Yes, we can accept the doctrine with confidence.

Consider the proof that it is true. (1) The empty tomb can be explained in no other way than that He arose. (2) The report of the soldiers guarding the tomb (concerning the earthquake, etc.)

is proof that the resurrection was no scheme planned by the disciples. (3) The bribe offered by the religious rulers to the guards indicates that they believed that an unexplainable event had transpired. (4) The change in the disciples of Jesus from terrified cowards who were hiding from their enemies to courageous witnesses of the resurrected Lord shows their confidence that He had risen from death. (5) The coming of the Holy Spirit in a new capacity on that first Christian Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, was proof that Jesus had risen, ascended back to the Father and sent forth the Spirit as He had promised in John 14:16. (6) The world-wide proclamation of the Christian Gospel, with the salvation of multiplied millions through faith in the once-crucified-but-now-risen Jesus, is proof that He lives after having died. (7) The positive teaching of Holy Scripture must be accepted as true, if we are to have confidence in it at all, when it bears witness to the resurrection of Jesus from among the dead. (8) There were many witnesses, whose reliability is beyond reasonable question, who testify that they met personally with the risen Jesus in the days following His resurrection. For those reasons, and others which could be named, we accept as true the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Consider further those witnesses to His resurrection. Jesus appeared to one or more of His disciples on thirteen different occasions after His resurrection. The smallest number to see Him was one person; the largest number was more than five hundred at one time. He revealed Himself to no less than sixteen people on the day of His resurrection, and to others over a period of forty days. The number of witnesses, the reliability of their testimony, and the differing times and places where Jesus appeared to them, makes us confident that we can accept their testimony.

The Christian Gospel is bound up in the two-fold truth that Jesus died in behalf of sinners and that He arose from death to be the living Savior of all who repent and believe. That is what every Bible-believing Christian teaches as the truth of God. If there is no resurrection from death, Jesus Christ is not risen, and we are teaching a false doctrine as we preach that doctrine. But, we know assuredly that Jesus Christ is risen from death. He is alive today. We declare the Christian message with assurance because we know it is true. He who reconciled us to God by His substitutionary suffering of death now lives to make intercession before God as our ever living Savior.

What a glorious truth! Believe it. Commit yourself to Jesus Christ on the basis of it. He is not only a Savior, He will become your Savior when you turn from sin and place confidence in Him alone for forgiveness and safety. Do it now, without delay.

OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

Christian doctrine is not given for a mere mental exercise, that we might have something to believe. It is very practical. Doctrine is the basis of faith, and faith is the foundation to hope.

Consider the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Jesus from death and the grave. That is more than a theological principle. It is extremely important to our faith and assurance. First Corinthians 15:17 reads in part, *"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."* That means the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus is essential to forgiveness of our sins.

If Jesus is not risen, we are yet in our sins. If Jesus is risen, our sins are forgiven through repentance and personal faith in Him. A review of the practical benefits we receive through the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus must include this truth: Because Jesus lives, our sins are forgiven.

Meaning of forgiveness

What is the meaning of forgiveness? The word most commonly used in the Greek New Testament (*aphiemi*) means “to send forth, to send away.” It has two applications. (1) It signifies first the remission of the punishment due to sinful conduct, the deliverance of the sinner from the penalty of his sin which he justly should endure. (2) It signifies also the complete removal of the cause of offense—the removal of the sin from the record of the sinner. Both the sin and the punishment it deserves are sent away when one is forgiven. That was the message of John the Baptist who introduced Jesus as “*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*” (*John 1:29*). It is the living Christ alone who is able to send away our sins and the penalty they deserve.

Need of forgiveness

What is the need of forgiveness? The need of forgiveness is based upon two solemn facts: universal guilt and tragic penalty. (1) The Bible teaches that every person who has reached the age of personal responsibility has sinned against God and is a sinner. “*We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin... Now we ever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.. . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (*Romans 3:9, 19, 23*). Yes, every person of normal intelligence has sinned against God at least one time. That includes you and me.

(2) The tragic penalty of sin makes forgiveness imperative. God warns, “*The wages of sin is death*” (*Romans 6:23*). Remember that death means separation in the Bible. The result of sin is that every person is separated from God until he receives forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Who needs forgiveness? Every person who has sinned needs both the guilt and the penalty of his sins taken away. And who has sinned? Every person who is capable of moral decision has sinned against God and needs forgiveness. So, every person you meet needs forgiveness of sin.

Way of forgiveness

What is the way of forgiveness? Forgiveness of sin comes through Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things” (*Acts 13:38, 39*).

The Bible makes it quite clear that no man can effect the forgiveness of his own sins. Therefore, forgiveness of sin is not the result of human merit nor of human effort. It is “the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (*Ephesians 2:9*).

Jesus gave a commission that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (*Luke 24:47*). A close examination of that commission reveals some interesting truths. (1) Repentance and remissions of sins are companions, two sides of the same coin, so to speak, each impossible without the other. (2) Forgiveness of sins is in the “name” (the person, the authority) of Jesus. It is in Him alone. (3) Forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Jesus is applicable to people of all nations and so is to be preached to them all. Forgiveness is available to all in Jesus Christ.

Key to forgiveness

Why is Jesus the key to forgiveness of sins? He is the Savior because He provides salvation through His death and resurrection. His death was not just a good example of sacrifice for a

good cause. It was an objective act by which He paid the penalty for our sins. He made forgiveness possible because He suffered what each guilty sinner should have suffered. God accepts the sinner because of what Jesus did on the cross, and because the sinner turns from his sin and places personal faith in Jesus.

Jesus did not merely die to pay the penalty for sin; He lives to be the Savior of sinners. Romans 5:10 reads, *“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”* Hebrews 7:25 adds, *“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”* He paid sin’s penalty by His death in behalf of sinners. He provides salvation by living as the Savior of sinners. He lives forever to make intercession in behalf of those who come to God by Him.

If Jesus has not risen, there is no salvation possible through Him. If He has risen, salvation is offered to all. Because He lives, our sins are forgiven!

Experience of forgiveness

What is the experience of forgiveness? That is to say, how does one feel (what does one experience) when he receives forgiveness of sin?

The answers to that question may be as varied as the persons who attempt to answer it. There is no one certain way which a person must feel in order to be saved. One’s emotional reaction to forgiveness of sin will depend upon his emotional make-up.

I have seen people weep when they were saved. Others shouted. Some just smiled. A few showed no particular emotional reaction at all. Salvation is based on relationship with God, not feeling in the human emotion. Generally, the Bible speaks of “joy” attending forgiveness of sin. That is because the burden of guilt is gone and there is assurance of acceptance in peace before God. That is enough to produce great joy in one’s heart. I think the key is the sense of acceptance before God, and the emotion which accompanies that will be one’s normal way of expressing joy.

Seek the Lord. Do not seek a feeling, an experience, an emotion. Seek an assurance of personal acceptance and forgiveness before God. That can be experienced when you turn from sin and place full confidence in Jesus Christ alone. Your sins are taken away. Your relationship with God as His believing child is eternally established. Your human spirit becomes indwelt by His Holy Spirit. You are saved. Make it sure today.

OUR BELOVED DEAD ARE SECURE

“What happens when a person dies?” That question has plagued the hearts of men in all generations. It is as old as the human race and as new as this morning’s sunrise.

That question was first raised by the patriarch named Job, *“If a man die, shall he live again?”* (Job 14:14). The answer to that question, whether it be an answer of assurance or of dismay, is bound up in the New Testament teaching concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There were some who questioned or even denied that there was such a thing as a resurrection of one who had died. The Apostle Paul wrote in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians concerning the solemn consequences of such a belief. One thing he mentioned is: *“If Christ be not raised. . . then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable”* (I Corinthians 15:17-19). The hope of the resurrection of our beloved Christian dead depends upon the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ's resurrection is foundation of Christian's resurrection

The Bible teaches very clearly the fact of resurrection of the dead. Second Corinthians 5:1-8 is one of the choice passages in which the resurrection of the Christian is discussed:

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the self same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

The passage teaches not only that a resurrection of the physical body out of death is possible but that God has designed us humans for that very purpose (verse 5). He does not intend to leave our bodies forever in the grave. Even though the body dissolves and returns to dust, it shall be brought forth whole and eternally new in the day of resurrection.

The Apostle Paul explains the change which will come at the day of resurrection. We are buried corruptible; we are raised incorruptible. We are buried in dishonor; we are raised in glory. We are buried in weakness; we are raised in power; we are buried a natural body; we are raised a spiritual body. We are buried carrying the likeness of our earthly parents; we are raised with the likeness of our Heavenly Father. (See I Corinthians 15:42-44, 49). The body which is raised will be the same, and yet greatly improved over, the body we have had here in the world.

How is that related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ? His resurrection is essential to our resurrection. If He arose, those who believe in Him will arise. If He is still held in the powers of death and the grave, those who trust Him are forever held in the same powers. But Jesus is risen from the dead! Therefore, our beloved Christian dead have not perished. They are not held in a spiritual prison house of death and the grave. They are only awaiting the day of resurrection victory.

Christ is first fruits of resurrection

Observe the term “first fruits” which is often applied to a discussion of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death and the grave. Consider First Corinthians 15:20, 23, *“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept... But every man after his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.”*

What does that mean? The term means “the earliest ripe of the crop or tree.” You are familiar with the ripening of the fruit on a tree, or a crop in the field. You have seen some fruit ripen more quickly than the rest. The first ripe watermelon from the vine, the first mature corn from the stalk, the first red apple from the limb, these are each the “first fruit” of the coming harvest. “First fruit” means the first of a kind of which many shall follow after.

Jesus is the *“first fruit of them that slept”* in that His resurrection is the first of many resurrections which will follow. He is the first fruit because the resurrection of others will be in the same manner as His own. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection.

Jesus Himself made the application of that blessed truth. He promised, *“Because I live, ye shall live also”* (John 14:19). What assurance the Christian can have as He meditates upon that promise of Jesus.

Christians in Thessalonica did not have assurance concerning the fate of their believing dead. They were fearful lest one missed the return of the Lord when he died. The Apostle Paul

wrote to them in I Thessalonians, chapter four, and encouraged their heart with this assurance. (1) An understanding of the truth of resurrection will keep one from sorrowing hopelessly at the death of a loved one, verse 13. (2) Belief that Jesus died and rose again is essential for a Christian perspective concerning death, verse 14. (3) The living Lord Jesus will personally descend from heaven to call the dead to come forth from the graves at the time of resurrection. (4) Saints who have died, and saints who are living will go together into the presence of God to be with Him eternally, verse 17. Christians everywhere can rejoice in that blessed assurance.

Because Jesus lives, those who have died with faith in Him are secure. They are not perished. They will not miss out on His coming. He who has risen from death will raise them by His great power and take them into His blessed presence forever.

Do not doubt the Bible doctrine of resurrection of Jesus Christ. All your hope depends upon Him as living Savior. He is risen! Therefore, (1) preaching has power; (2) faith is effective; (3) our testimony is true; (4) our sins are forgiven; and (5) our Christian dead are secure.

I remember standing by the casket of my mother and then my father and saying a prayer of thanks in my heart for the Christian truth of resurrection of the dead. The separation at death is not a final separation for Christians. It is only temporary until the Lord returns and the resurrection occurs.

Jesus is alive today. He lives to be the Savior of all who believe. I urge you to trust Him. By repentance toward God and personal faith in Jesus Christ, you can know the assurance of forgiven sins and the blessing of life eternal, right now.

“Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee” (Job 22:21).