

“If Christ has not been raised,” 1 Cor. 15:13-26
Pastor Tom Johnson, April 4, 2010

Karl Marx gave a perfectly reasonable explanation for religion. He believed that people invent God when they are powerless and hopeless. Religion is for people whose lives are so bad that they need to invent a myth to make them feel better.

He said, “Religion is the opiate of the masses.” In other words, religion is for unhappy people who will have no other alternative but embrace a lie because the truth is simply too hard to take.

Ted Turner founder of TBS SuperStation, CNN, and TNT has often said that “Religion is for losers” and that he doesn’t want anyone dying for him and that Christ should not have bothered dying on the cross. It was a waste of time.

One Ash Wednesday, some of his employees showed up to work with ashen crosses on their foreheads. He publically said that Christians are “Jesus freaks” and should be working somewhere else.

Richard Dawkins, a popular evolutionary biologist and preacher of atheism has often called Christians and pastors “idiots.” In his national campaign for atheism, he toured the country like a circuit preacher with a huge banner on his bus that said, “There’s probably no God. Stop worrying and enjoy your life.”

Paul—a former skeptic himself—actually said it better than any of these skeptics. He says, **“If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”** If Christianity is a lie—then people should feel sorry for us, pitiful Christians.

Paul wants to introduce us into a world where there is no resurrection of the dead. He wants us to imagine our lives as if Christ has not been raised. He wants to picture our lives for a moment as if Christianity is the lie that some say it is.

“If Christ has not been raised from the dead then our preaching is in vain.” All those Sunday school lessons you heard as a child—about Jonah, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Daniel and the Lion’s Den—about John the Baptist eating bugs and Jesus healing, dying, and rising from the dead. It is a myth.

If Christ has not been raised, all those Sunday mornings when you could have slept in—all those sermons you’ve listened to—it was in vain. It was a waste of time. It was a waste of money.

If Christ has not been raised, Paul says, **“We are misrepresenting God.”** All those people you knew, pastors, teachers, parents, or grandparents who told you about Jesus, they are all liars. They are propagators of a fantasy world. Whether they know it or not, they are purveyors of falsehood. They are tellers of tall tales and myths.

If Christ has not been raised, Paul says, **“your faith is futile”**—your faith in a Creator is futile. You were not loved before the foundation of the world. You are not fearfully and wonderfully made. God did not knit you together in your mother’s womb. No one knows the number of hairs on your head.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith in Jesus as Savior is futile. Paul says, “You are still in your sins.” You are a broken, unhappy, and hazardous human being with no hope. You were once lost and never found. You were blind and still don’t see.

If Christ has not been raised, Paul says, “**We are above all people most to be pitied.**” We are the most sorry lot of human beings on the planet. If Christ has not been raised, our faith is the crack-cocaine and opiate to calm our hopeless lives. We are the losers we are said to be.

If Christ has not been raised, the world should be reaching out to us in compassion. There should be mercy ministries to Christians to rescue us from mass generational delusion. If Christ has not been raised, we are indeed a pathetic people.

If Christ has not been raised, Paul says, “**Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.**” There is no one to lead you through the valley of the shadow of death. Death is eternal lights out. Death is permanent silence. No angels. No streets paved in gold. No tree of life. No Jesus. Nothing.

If Christ has not been raised, death is ultimate reality. Death is the end of all things. Science tells us that the Sun will run out of energy and die. The galaxies will one day collapse or collide. The universe will implode just as surely as there was a big bang. If Christ has not been raised, we should eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Death will reign forever. <Pause.>

I’m so glad that Paul only wants us to entertain this imaginary world for so long. I’m so glad that this fantasy world—where Christ is still in the grave—is a lie. I’m so glad that that life without hope—living without faith—eternity of death—that’s the myth.

Paul writes, “**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.**” In fact, just as surely as death entered into the world, Paul says, so has the resurrection. We all know death as part of the human experience. But, as Christians, we believe eternal life to be the outcome of our hope in the resurrected Christ.

Because Jesus has been raised, life will reign forever. Because Jesus has been raised, life is ultimate reality.. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord will live forever.” We cannot, and we will not, believe that death is the most final and powerful reality in the universe.

And it is not because we want to get high on some fantasy and some myth to calm our anxious lives. We believe that life overcomes death because Christ has risen from the dead. He is not in the grave. He is reigning as King of heaven and earth forever.

<Pause>. Actually, when I think about it, I feel sorry for those who do not have this hope. I feel badly for people who choose to embrace the reality of death and reject the reality of prevailing life.

I want the whole world to have the same joy we Christians have this Sunday morning. I want them to know that we live in a world where hope prevails over despair, good over evil, and life over death.

Because Christ has been raised, our preaching powerfully proclaims and delivers eternal life. Because Christ has been raised, we have the privilege of passing on this treasure from generation to generation.

Because Christ has been raised, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, [and] the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Because Christ has been raised, we are not temporary occupants of a dying planet but citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

Because Christ has been raised, we are not in our sins but have received the full pardon and forgiveness of our sins. Because Christ has been raised, all those who fall asleep in Christ “have not perished but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

Because Christ has been raised, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Because Christ has been raised, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps 23).

I know that my Redeemer lives;
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everliving head.

He lives and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives my mansion to prepare;
He lives to bring me safely there.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!