

# KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



## 1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Faith without "ifs"

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Imagine a day — or just a morning — without the word "if." We don't like to admit it, but it starts with "*If* I wake up in the morning." *If the teacher will let me . . . If the boss is in a good mood . . . If the traffic isn't bad . . . If I have the time . . . If I remember . . .*

"If" is a gigantic word, isn't it? It shows our lack of control and the countless unknowns that the future holds.

"If" is an equally huge word in spiritual matters. It means there is room for uncertainty and doubt in our relationship with God as well as our eternal future. It implies that God's Word isn't true. In our text, Paul uses *if* in the context of the resurrection of Jesus. But then he shows us what faith is like without *if*. Today I'd like you to think about faith without *ifs*. Without *ifs* we live in a world of certainty and can rely 100% on God's promises, which is what God wants for us.

Our text addresses the big Easter *if*. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, there are some monstrous consequences. Let's look at them in the order Paul presents them in our text.

**If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless.** The preaching of the gospel by the apostles hinged on the resurrection of Jesus. One of the reasons that we read from the book of Acts during the Easter season is to see how often they stressed the resurrection of Jesus. If Christ didn't rise from the dead, he was only another person crucified by the Romans. Perhaps he was unjustly killed; but he was still dead. There was nothing special or unique about him.

Paul continued, **and so is your faith.** Our faith has no foundation if Jesus was just a unjustly crucified man. He was a martyr, perhaps, but that doesn't change anything about who we are.

Without a resurrected Jesus, the Christian faith is of no value. In over 2,000 years Christians

have not fixed social injustice, done away with poverty, ended wars, or established a nation that is moral and godly. The moral code that the Bible teaches is certainly good and God-pleasing. But humans across the globe, in our nation, and even we sitting here, have demonstrated the ability to ignore God's will and commit all sorts of sins. The Christian faith is worthless if Christ is still dead.

Paul writes of the apostles, **we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.** You might as well toss out the Bible if Christ didn't rise from the dead. The apostles who wrote the New Testament (but it is also in the Old Testament) taught that Christ rose from the dead. If he didn't, they were liars. Ignore them, since they lied.

Another consequence of no resurrection: **If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.** We hear of the futile faith again, but also the dire result: **we are still in our sins.** The payment was not satisfactory. Our sins condemn us. God demands perfection. Your arguing that he isn't fair, doesn't change his demand. James writes that one sin is enough to make us imperfect. Of course, one sin isn't our problem. A life-time of being unhappy with our circumstances, lying to others to protect ourselves, excusing our selfishness, and finding satisfaction in our possessions are more than enough sins to make us unworthy of God's love. We cannot remove our sins ourselves; and if Christ didn't rise from the dead then his sacrifice was imperfect and our sins weren't removed by him either.

The consequences keep coming: **Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.** Death is an end. It is a horrible end in which sinners realize the anger of God at sin and enter into the fiery pit of hell.

Paul concludes: **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.** If Christianity is just a moral code for improved behavior, what a pathetic people we are. We aren't better. We may have our moments when we shine; but we also still have moments that show the darkness of sin that still resides in us. We are trying in vain to be good enough to please God.

"If" is a pretty big word! If the resurrection was only a metaphor for newness or a story to give us hope, we should leave this building, sell it, and slowly slip into the despair of knowing that when we meet God it will be horrible.

Of course, Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 15 is that the resurrection of Jesus is a fact. **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** Earlier in the chapter, he listed the eyewitnesses. There were plenty of people who saw Jesus alive!

Now, if Christ is indeed alive, then the Bible is the truth. Then our faith has meaning because the sacrifice of Jesus was the perfect payment for our sins. His blood washes us of every sin. We are innocent before God because of Jesus. Our inability to remove our sins isn't a problem, because Jesus made the full payment on our behalf.

A living Jesus means that we too will live forever. Death was defeated. Those who die in faith are only resting in the grave. One day, Jesus will call them from their graves to live in the glory and perfection of heaven.

A living Jesus means we can live with certainty about how God feels about us. Our sins are gone. What a powerful message that is for us as we face trials and problems in life. They cannot be because God is punishing us; he loves us and forgives us. And so we know that God only acts

in love. His wisdom being higher than ours means we may not always understand why he permits the troubles he does; but his love cannot be questioned.

At the end of the this chapter, Paul makes another application for us. Because Jesus is alive, **Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain** (1 Corinthians 15:58).

**"The work of the Lord"** doesn't mean just being a pastor or teacher. Nor does it only mean the time you spend working on something for church. **"The work of the Lord"** is the work he's given you to do in your home as a husband, wife, parent, or child. **"The work of the Lord"** happens at your job as you use the gifts God has given you to serve others. **"The work of the Lord"** happens as you listen to and help your friend with a problem.

As a child of God, you do the work of the Lord all day. And it matters! Because Jesus is alive, has taken away your sins, and is going to take you to heaven, don't let anyone or anything tell you that what you do doesn't matter. It matters to the Lord Jesus and so it is important.

The resurrection of Jesus is the "if" crusher. Your sin is most certainly removed. Your place in heaven is most certainly secured. Your life of service to Jesus most certainly matters. Live a life of faith that has no "ifs" because Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia. Amen.

Easter 2  
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