

#1773

Cf. #472 #591 #691 #795 #884 #1360 #1623 #1739

1 Corinthians 15:12-23¹

3rd Sunday of Easter

*Misericordias Domini*²

Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of believers

Supplementary Lectionary Series "B,"
Epistles, adapted

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Gloria Dei WELS Grand Blanc MI

April 7, 2013

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April 14, 2013

Elders & Boo

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 [empty] 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 the most pitiable of all men.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, a firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep.

²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, a firstfruit; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

WHAT IS THE RESURRECTION CONNECTION?

- I. IF CHRIST DID NOT RISE, THEN BELIEVERS CANNOT RISE EITHER
- II. SINCE CHRIST DID RISE, THEN BELIEVERS WILL ALSO RISE

In the Name of Jesus, our Risen Savior, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

What is the point of celebrating Easter? It is not the bunnies, newborn chicks or colored eggs. Rather, the point of celebrating Easter is Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is an astounding miracle. Isaiah describes how Jesus looked as he was beaten and flogged, a crown of thorns pounded into his head, and nails driven through his hands and feet as he was crucified. Isaiah wrote, "there were many who were

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

² This Third Sunday of Easter is traditionally known as *Misericordias Domini*. This Latin phrase refers to the heartfelt goodness of the LORD, which is reflected in our creation, redemption and sanctification. We rejoice and give thanks to our Triune God for all his goodness and mercy toward us.

appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness” (Isaiah 52:14). Hanging from the cross, Jesus must have looked like a piece of raw, bloody meat. His death was verified by the Roman soldier who came forward and drove a spear into Jesus’ side, out of which came a pouring of blood and water which had separated – a sign of death (cf. John 19:33-37). Jesus was beaten, bloody, mutilated and dead. Yet, on the third day, Easter Sunday morning, Jesus arose from the grave triumphant. What are the implications of Jesus’ resurrection?

What are the implications of Jesus’ resurrection? What follows from Jesus’ resurrection? How are believers in Jesus connected with Jesus’ resurrection from the dead? Today, we look at the question: WHAT IS THE RESURRECTION CONNECTION? WHAT IS THE RESURRECTION CONNECTION ... I. IF CHRIST DID NOT RISE, THEN BELIEVERS CANNOT RISE EITHER; but, II. SINCE CHRIST DID RISE, THEN BELIEVERS WILL ALSO RISE.

WHAT IS THE RESURRECTION CONNECTION?

I. IF CHRIST DID NOT RISE, THEN BELIEVERS CANNOT RISE EITHER

St. Paul describes a horrible situation among the congregation at Corinth. He says, “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?” (15:12). Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was being taught among the Corinthians; but what some of the Corinthians were saying was that there was “no resurrection from the dead” – that is, believers in Jesus would not rise from the dead. St. Paul describes the results of such a false, pernicious, heretical teaching.

St. Paul writes, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised” (15:13). If the dead are not raised, then God did not raise Jesus from the dead (cf. 15:15b). St. Paul makes the case that Jesus, true God but also true man, could not have risen from the dead, if there were no resurrection from the dead. Jesus was true man. If there were no resurrection from the dead, then Jesus did not rise either. The consequences following from that are terrible and horrible.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then “our preaching,” St. Paul says, “is useless” (15:14a). The preaching, proclaiming and testifying that Jesus had arisen from the dead was useless and meaningless if, in fact, Jesus did not rise from the dead. In addition, those who had faith in Jesus as their crucified and risen Savior – their faith also was useless, meaningless, empty, and futile (cf. 15:14b,17a).

Faith in a Savior who was still dead, who suffered but did not rise – that faith was empty. Such a faith was based on lies and falsehoods. Such a faith was ridiculous and laughable. St. Paul follows up on the point that such a faith in a still-dead Savior was based on lies and falsehoods.

“If Christ has not been raised.... We are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But [God] did not raise [Christ] if in fact the dead are not raised” (15:15). That meant that St. Paul was a liar. It meant that all of the Apostles who were saying that Jesus arose from the dead – all of the Apostles were liars. It meant that the Gospel accounts written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were also lies. It meant that Jesus himself was a liar, because Jesus testified on several occasions that he would go up to Jerusalem, suffer and die and rise again (cf. Matthew 16:21; 20:18,19; Mark 10:32-34; etc.). It also meant that the Old Testament was lies.

In the Old Testament, for example, Isaiah had testified about the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus ...

***¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him
and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life
a guilt offering,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
¹¹ After the suffering of his soul,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied ...
(Isaiah 53:10,11a).***

Isaiah says that the Messiah would “see his offspring and prolong his days”; Isaiah says that “after the suffering of his soul, he would see the light of life” – those words are speaking about the resurrection. If the dead are not raised, however, then Isaiah was a liar.

If there were no resurrection from the dead, then King David, who wrote Psalm Twenty-two, was also a liar. The Messiah spoke through David: “I will declare your Name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you” (Psalm 22:22). A dead and buried Messiah could declare or proclaim nothing. In addition to all of that, there was another most horrible consequence if Jesus did not rise from the dead.

St. Paul writes, “If Christ has not been raised, ... you are still in your sins” (15:17b). What that meant was that there was no forgiveness of sins, no cleansing of sin, no washing away of sin. It meant that death was the final destiny of human existence; and not just any death, but eternal death in the torment and torture of hell, which was outer darkness, a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth; where their worm did not die and their fire was not quenched; where there was only a lake of burning sulfurous fire into which all people – everyone including those poor misled people who believed in Jesus – the place into which all people were thrown when they died (cf. Isaiah 66:24; Matthew 25:30,46a; Mark 9:42-48; Revelation 20:10,13b,15; etc.). Moreover, what about those who had died, passed away, believing in Jesus?

St. Paul refers to those who had died believing in Jesus in this way, “If Christ has not been raised.... Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost” (15:18). “Those ...

who have fallen asleep in Christ,” is a way of referring to those who believed in Jesus and died. The result of Jesus’ not being raised from the dead was that believers who had died would not be raised from the dead either. Finally, if there were no resurrection from the dead, then those who believed in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and believed in the resurrection of believers from the dead, were the most pitiable of all people (cf. 15:19).

“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are the most pitiable of all men” (15:19). If Jesus were not raised from the dead, then those who believed in him as their risen Savior were to be pitied above all people. Look at the persecution they endured for a lie. Look at the atrocities done to them and the execution of some of them – all for nothing. Such people could only be objects of scorn and ridicule and pity. What fools!

APPROPRIATION

What a list of consequences if Jesus did not rise from the dead! What a list of results for those who did believe in the resurrection of the dead! If Jesus did not rise from the dead, how foolish believers in Jesus were to think that there was such a thing as a resurrection from the dead. The same is true today.

While some people may not come out and say it publicly, they may live their lives on this earth as if there were no resurrection from the dead. They do not bother to come to worship to hear God’s Word, which assures them that there is a resurrection from the dead. Perhaps they think they will only hear falsehoods and lies if they come to church. They may not come to worship because they would rather grab all of the gusto in life they can: “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die and there is nothing left.” In addition, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then life on this earth has no point.

Why have faith in Jesus and strive to live a decent life in that faith – a faith that is empty and meaningless? Why even try to do good to other people? Why put up with ridicule, scorn, ostracism, and not fitting-in with others, if there is no resurrection. And, what about the members of one’s family who have passed away – who have died?

If there is no resurrection from the dead, then all of those people who died believing in Jesus are just dead. In addition, they are continuing to suffer in their state of deadness, because their sins have not been washed away – their sins have not been forgiven. There is no hope, if there is no resurrection.

Now, it is true that you and I confess that Jesus is our risen Savior. It is true that you and I confess that we too shall be raised from the dead on the Last Day to live in heaven with Jesus forever. Yet sometimes we go through our daily lives – the daily grind – with attitudes and emotions that imply that we do not have faith that we will be raised from the dead. Life’s cares, anxieties and pressures, disappointments, tears and sorrows; weigh us down. We are weighed down to the point that we do not even think about a resurrection from the dead that will bring us into glory with Jesus. While we confess with our lips, “I believe in the resurrection of the dead,” we do not focus on that goal.

How empty and meaningless is life if Jesus did not rise from the dead. How useless and vain is life if believers in Jesus are not raised from the dead. But there is a resurrection from the dead, and Jesus' resurrection proves it and points to it.

WHAT IS THE RESURRECTION CONNECTION?

II. SINCE CHRIST DID RISE, THEN BELIEVERS WILL ALSO RISE

After pointing out the consequences if believers are not raised from the dead, and if Jesus is not raised from the dead, St. Paul gives an emphatically clear statement: "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!" (15:20a). The words with which St. Paul opened this Fifteenth Chapter of First Corinthians, rehearse the testimony to Jesus' resurrection.

St. Paul writes,

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also ... (15:3-8a).

St. Paul gives only a summary of Jesus' resurrection appearances – appearances which prove that he arose from the dead and is alive. And, as we looked at the implications and consequences if there were no resurrection from the dead, so also we look at the implications and consequences since there is a resurrection from the dead.

St. Paul states that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a "firstfruit." One of the Old Testament regulations was that the believing Hebrew was to bring some of the firstfruits of his crops, fields and orchards to the Temple and dedicate these to the LORD. The firstfruit was a signal or pledge that other fruits would follow. So also here. St. Paul says, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, a firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20).

"Those who have fallen asleep" is a reference to believers in Jesus who have died. As Jesus died and was raised from the dead, so also believers in Jesus die and will be raised from the dead. This resurrection of believers in Jesus takes place on the Last Day.

St. Paul writes,

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, a firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep.... ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, a firstfruit; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (15:20&23)

The phrase “when he comes” – “when Jesus comes” – is a reference to the Last Day, Judgment Day. On the Last Day, Jesus will come in glory with all his holy angels and believers in Jesus will be raised from their graves, gathered together, and live in glory in heaven with Jesus forever. This was the point that St. Paul also made in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians.

St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the Truth. He called you to this through our Gospel, that you might share in the glory of our LORD Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:13b,14). Believers would be in glory in heaven with Jesus forever. All this was a consequence, a result, of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

So, we have a description of God’s “economy” of salvation – that is, how God works out his salvation. St. Paul explains, “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (15:21,22). The “man” through whom death came into the world was Adam – and Eve – in the Garden of Eden. They sinned of their own free will by disobeying a clear and simple command of God. The result of their sin was death for all mankind, since all mankind were made in the image of Adam and Eve – sinful. Paul explains in Romans Chapter Five, “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). But “in Christ,” all will be made alive.

We need to pay particular attention to St. Paul’s words here, “as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (15:22). The words “in Christ” [εἰν τῷ / Χριστῷ / παντὲ³] – all those who are “in Christ” – is a reference to believers in Jesus. The same reference is made in the last verse of our text: “Each in his own turn: Christ, a firstfruit; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” [οἱ τῷ Χριστῷ] (15:23). “Those who belong to [Christ]”; or, “those who are of Christ” [Greek], is a reference to believers. This does not deny, however, the resurrection of all the dead – both believers and unbelievers.

All people will be raised up from the dead on the Last Day. God announced this to Daniel in the Old Testament when he said, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Who are the “multitudes who sleep in the dust?” All people, for that is the end and destiny of all flesh – simply dust. God told Adam and Eve after they sinned, “You [shall] return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19b). On the Last Day, all people will be raised. Jesus too testified to this truth.

³ Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

Jesus told the Jews, “A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice [the voice of the Son of man, Jesus] and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28b,29). “Those who have done evil” are unbelievers; for the writer to the Hebrews states, “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6a). “Those who have done good,” is a reference to believers. Only those who are in Christ [eĵn tw` / Cristw` /] by faith, will be raised from the dead to enjoy eternal life in heaven with Christ.

APPROPRIATION

Here is what is waiting for you and for me some day. Some day soon – soon compared to how long we have in eternity – some day soon we will die. We too will be turned to the dust from which we were taken: “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” But then, some day soon, we will be raised from the dead. Some day soon, we, who have fallen asleep in Jesus, who believe in Jesus as our Savior – we will be raised from the dead. At that Last Day, Jesus will send his holy angels to gather you and me and all believers together, and we will be taken into heaven in both body and soul. There we shall live with Jesus in glory forever. We shall be “forever with the LORD” (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17). How do we know this for sure?

How for sure and certain do we know that by faith in Jesus we shall be in heaven forever with the LORD? We know this because Jesus suffered, died and rose again. As Jesus was raised from the dead, so also we who believe in him shall be raised from death on the Last Day.

CONCLUSION

Here, then, is the resurrection connection: Jesus arose from the dead on the third day. Jesus’ resurrection assures us that he is God’s Son and the Son of man. Jesus’ resurrection assures us that all of our sins have been taken away. Jesus’ resurrection assures us that we, who believe in him, will also rise from the dead on the Last Day to live forever with Jesus in the glory of heaven. Amen.