

xxxx - Week 70

If ever your Christian faith droops, and even when it doesn't, you could do a lot worse than to turn in your Bible to I Corinthians Chapter 15. For in this chapter, surely one of the most precious of the entire New Testament, we are shown wonderful things, by God the Holy Spirit through His servant Paul, concerning the very heart of the Christian Faith. O this Easter weekend we shall concentrate here on verses 1 - 19.

First, see what had happened during Paul's visit to the great pagan city of Corinth: "the gospel which I preached / which also you received / in which you stand / by which you are being kept safe if you hold fast the Word I preached to you... / (it was) not in vain that you believed" (from verse 1-2, JPGreen Literal translation).

Paul had done his job, faithfully and effectively, and his listeners had done theirs - receiving the Word, and then standing firm in it.

Then, note the first thing that Paul had emphasised to them - the crucial ministry of Jesus Christ: "Christ died on behalf of our sins, according to the Scriptures" (verse 3) - that is, in fulfilment of all that had been foretold in God's Word. The Lord's death was no mistake, no accident, no spur-of-the-moment event. God the Father had planned all this, for the sake of fallen, sinful humanity, because it was the one and only method by which redemption could be achieved.

The Lord was buried, and He was raised on the third day - again, according to the Scriptures (verse 4). The Holy Spirit is giving us all fact upon fact, each of which was foreknown, foreplanned and foretold by Almighty God.

Then we come to the most extraordinary passage (verses 4 - 19). Even by this date (the mid-50s AD, barely twenty years since the Lord's death and resurrection), word was going round that the whole resurrection story was - bunk; that Jesus had not risen from the dead, and why? - because such things simply do not happen.

Just listen to the Spirit's response through Paul to this dismissal of Christ's resurrection! Jesus appeared to Cephas (Simon Peter), then to the Twelve, then to more than *five hundred brethren at once*. Most of these are still alive, the Corinthians are told, "so if you don't believe me", implies Paul, "*go and ask them*"! Then He appeared to James, and to all the apostles, and then, on that road to Damascus, to Saul of Tarsus himself.

Fact, fact, fact.

The passage continues with a dose of impeccable logic! (verses 12 - 19). See what are the implications for Christian belief if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead.

If Christ was not raised from the dead: the preaching of Paul and his colleagues, and of all subsequent Christian preachers, is in vain - worthless - and so too is the faith of any hearers who respond to that preaching (verse 14). Our Concordances tell us that the Greek word used here for "in vain" ("kenos") is about emptiness, fruitlessness, lacking in any truth, having no effect; in other words, a total waste of time.

Without the resurrection of Christ, the preachers are seen to be false witnesses on behalf of God (verse 15), and the faith of all Christian people is "foolish" ("mataios", verse 17a). This Greek word is again about uselessness, lacking all purpose, force, truth or success, and this uselessness is shown, terribly, by all Christian disciples being "still in their sins" (verse 17b).

Then it is pointed out that those who have already died trusting in Jesus Christ as the Lord, as the Resurrection and the Life, are lost, gone, perished, having lived their lives on the basis of a huge falsehood (verse 18). If the hope with which Christians are so richly blessed turns out to be a fake - with nothing beyond the grave which faces us all - we turn out to be the most miserable of all people (verse 19).

So the message from these wonderful verses is all too clear: no resurrection of Christ means no Christian faith of any substance or value whatever. For while the Christian Gospel promises us every imaginable blessing, if that resurrection never happened, this same Gospel will finally deliver absolutely nothing apart from false hopes and ultimate despair.

Our Christian forebears at Corinth would have been stirred, strengthened and encouraged by these words - and we should be too. The Christian Faith, of all the belief systems on offer these days, stands quite alone, being founded on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event that has been described as "the best attested fact of history".

Fact, fact, fact.

So we praise God on this special weekend. With stout, well-founded, well-grounded faith, and with joyful hearts, we join with our fellow Christians around the world in the ancient Easter greeting - **"The Lord is risen - He is risen indeed!"**.