"If Christ be not risen then"— I Cor. 15:14

The greatest things in nature and in religion are those of which we are most insensible. The air on which we depend each moment for life is invisible to us. We breath it, but we do not see it, it is not the object of sight. The light which makes all things visible to us is itself invisible. We see through it but we do not see it. Shut out the air and our gasping lungs begin at once to tell us what it is to be without air. Shut out the light and our darkened eyes quickly make us realize what it is to be without the light. It is precisely so with the great truths of religion. We fully realize the (Their)

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"I do not know that the world would have been very different if Christ had not risen from the dead" says a careless objector. But blot out the fact and the doctrine of the resurrection and see! Put a vacuum in the place which the doctrine now fills in the church. Put back the darkness of the grave, where the Easter light now shines and see what would follow. "If Christ be not risen"— then what?

The apostle tells us in the verses which follow my text what the consequences would be. He gives at least five conclusions which must follow if the supposition be admitted that Christ is not risen. viz. that "our preaching is vain", that "our faith is vain", that "we are yet in our sins," that we are "found false witnesses", and "that they that have fallen asleep have perished".

I. If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain.

There can be no gospel of the resurrection without the fact of the resurrection; for this you remember is the gospel— "the word of faith which we preach" as Paul calls it — viz. that "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead thou shalt be saved."

This is the historic basis of Christianity. All its doctrines, all its promises, all its hopes are staked on this single fact that Jesus Christ was dead but is now alive. What is it that we preach about Jesus? We proclaim him as
both Lord and King and ask men to receive him as such — but what success can we expect to have in urging the claims of a defeated candidate? Such Jesus certainly is if he did not rise from the dead. He proclaimed himself King, and he was put to death for it, and when he was crucified the Jews said "if he be the King of Israel let him come down from the cross and we will believe him". He did not come down — but there was [a] test of his Lordship on which he stated the question — not whether he should come down from the cross but whether he should come up from the grave; not whether he should answer the sentence of death in the midst of its execution, but whether he should renounce that sentence after its execution. This was the test on which Jesus rested the whole issue. "Put me to death, and after three days I will rise again" such was the challenge which he threw out before the world, and if he did not abide his own self appointed test, we who preach the gospel have nothing to do but to hang our heads and confess that our hero has made a failure and forfeited his pledge. Think of men issuing checks on a broken bank, and following it up year after year! That is exactly what all the preachers are doing who proclaim the truth and purity and nobleness of Jesus Christ, as the greatest of men and yet deny that he rose from the dead. They ask you to believe in the integrity of a man who couldn't keep his own word, a man who having again and again announced that he should rise from the dead utterly failed when the time came.

I tell you friends a half gospel is vastly harder to believe than a whole gospel. Those who deny the supernatural facts of Christianity because they are unreasonable, and yet preach upon the natural facts, put the severest strain upon reason. It is very easy to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God if he rose from the dead, but it is very hard to believe that he was either a good man or a true man if he never came out of the grave. In that case he simply spoke falsely and broke his most solemn promise, and there is nothing that he said that can be believed in, and "our preaching is vain".
II. If Christ be not risen "your faith is vain".

Of course that would follow if our preaching is vain as we just stated. Faith can have no existence apart from fact. Let me see you cast your shadow upon the wall and then walk away leaving your shadow still there. This is now more impossible than that faith in Christ's resurrection could remain after the fact of his resurrection has been taken away. Superstition may remain, Easter flowers, Easter music, Easter sentimentalities. It is quite astonishing to see how much of all these things people may indulge in who have no more faith in the resurrection than they have in witchcraft.

But I am speaking now of that Scriptural faith which stakes the destiny of the soul upon the risen and living Christ. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is at God's right hand in glory today with the same body that was once nailed to the cross, with the same hands that touched the sick and healed them, with the same feet that walked the shores of Galilee, with the same brow that was circles with the crown of thorns. That is what I understand true resurrection faith to be without qualifications or restrictions.

"Faith is the evidence of things not seen" says the Scripture. It is that which makes Christ risen and glorified a real fact to us, not a phantom, not a sentimental dream, not a pocket corruption, but a personal fact, and you cannot believe that unless you are sure that he rose from the grave with a body of flesh and bones eighteen hundred years ago in Jerusalem.

I find there are so many persons whose Easter faith is just like their Easter eggs, an empty painted shell with no yolk in it. They like the poetry and the charm and the sentimentality of the resurrection but have not the slightest belief in the fact. Perhaps they can go so far as to say with a great French skeptic that "the disciples undoubtedly found the sepulcher empty, but what happened after that - they cannot say. Whether the Jews came by night and stole him away or whether he vanished as an exhal... or floated away as a phantom they cannot say. An empty tomb, but no risen Christ,
If Christ be not risen (con't)

an Easter egg shell but no living tenant breaking that shell and coming forth and at last mounting on wings of glory to the sky.

It is not the question whether the tomb is empty but whether Christ is risen. If you don't believe that "your faith is vain". The teaching of the Scripture is that Christ came forth from the grave in his resurrected body, a body so truly identified with the one in which he suffered that he could say "handle me and see that it is I myself", not a phantom, not a ghost "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have".

Faith is the shadow and facsimile of fact, and a risen Christ, with a literal body is the only one that has substance enough to cast a shadow. If you do not believe in that your faith is vain.

III. If Christ be not risen "ye are yet in your sins".

He took our sins upon himself that he might expiate and take them away. If he did not rise from the dead, we have no proof that he has succeeded. He is our surety. If he has failed then the debt comes back upon us, and all its fearful liabilities of pain and penalty are once more laid at our door. The crucifixion is only half of the atonement, and if this half fails then both fail. Death is defeat unless it is crowned with life, suffering is a stigma unless it culminates in triumph. And if Jesus Christ does not come back from the grave there is but just one conclusion possible, that he took our sins upon him and sunk under the load, that instead of burying those sins they have buried him, that instead of lifting them from us, he has been hopelessly crushed by them.

There is a Jewish tradition that Og the giant king of Bashan once lifted a huge stone over his head to throw at his enemies when his strength failed and the huge weight fell upon him crushing him to the earth. We saw Jesus, strong Son of the mighty God, lifting our sins that he might cast them unto the depths of the sea! If he has not risen we must believe that those sins have become like a millstone about his neck,
If Christ be not risen ... (con't)

to drown him in the depths of the sea. Indeed everything fails if the resurrection fails, his life, his example, his teaching, his claim of godliness all fail and go for nothing if he does not come forth from the tomb. "Oh melancholy conclusion" as one has said to a brilliant beginning. To all our experiences of human failure it adds one more which surpasses all the rest and proclaims for the thousandth time, but with extreme emphasis the inscrutable decree of our nothingness. There was a man greater and wiser than all the rest, a man without fault or sin, a man who in mind and heart and life was worthy to wear the crown in the kingdom of his fellows and to exercise over them a universal empire of love and adoration. There was a man unique among men, in a word, there was a perfect man, but he made shipwreck in the face of death and disappeared as we all shall one day. Disappeared, death finally attached him to his car like an illustrious captive and he swings like all the rest to illustrate the majesty of the King of kings and to furnish the most brilliant ornament of his triumph." Such is the fact if Christ be not risen from the dead.

We speak, and speak rightly of Christ paying the penalty of death, but I remind you that there are two parts and a payment, in order that the transaction shall be completed, the giving of the price and the taking of the receipt. If Christ has only died, the price had been paid. But how could we know that it had been accepted and the debt discharged unless he had risen again? His resurrection body I hold to be God's receipt given back to us after three days, declaring that the price had been accepted, the payment completed, the debt cancelled. He was but displaying the receipt and holding it up before his church when he appeared in the middle of his disciples after ... was risen
and said "peace be unto you". "And when he had so said he showed them his hands and his side". His hands and his side, wherein were written the marks of sins cancellation, and the covenant of release for all who should henceforth believe on the Son of God. If Christ be not risen we have only a blank instead of a receipt, the darkness of the defeated Christ instead of the light of glory.

IV. If Christ be not risen then "they which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished"

Christ's resurrection is the only pledge we have of seeing our departed friends again. Looking, speaking and acting just as they did when on earth. I know not what meetings and recognitions may take place in the spiritual world, in the disembodied state just beyond the grave, upon that question the Scriptures are absolutely silent. But they are not silent concerning the resurrection state. That will be a condition of joyful conscious, blessed reunion. After Jesus came forth from the tomb he knew his disciples and was known by them, he talked with them, walked with them, ate and drank with them and thus gave a living demonstration of the certainty of natural recognition beyond the grave. Therefore we know that we shall know each other in the resurrection life. But this knowledge all depends upon the fact that Christ is risen.

Mark the very strong statement of the Apostle. If Christ be not risen then they which are fallen asleep in Jesus have perished. I do not understand by this that the souls of those who have died in Christ have ceased to exist. These happy spirits, the Scripture teaches, are with Christ in person. "Absent from the body and present with the Lord". They are unclothed of the body and subject no longer to its pains and sorrows, and in the light and
joy and glory of the Master’s presence. But what the Apostle teaches, if I understand him rightly is that if Christ be not risen, then the bodies of our departed have perished forever, they could never be restored to us.

But Christ’s resurrection has enabled us to say without failing, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." That is the gospel, dear friends, which this reliving Christ preaches to you today. The beloved forms that have long since vanished in the dust, the dear face of mother written all over with the sincerity of kindness and affection, the gracious and beloved face of the Father so sweet, the sweet baby face that welcomes you home as it appears pressed against the window pane, the forming of husband, brother, sister and friend, these are not spectres of memory lacking fact, photographs hung in the chambers of affection whose originals we must never more expect to see. "If Christ be not risen" it would be so.

"But now is Christ risen and become the firstfruits of them that slept." The firstfruits are a sample and pattern, so that we know that just as Christ came back from the grave with a real body, only glorified and made immortal, so our loved ones will come back from the grave in bodies made like unto Christ’s glorious body. Sickness and pain all gone, scars all healed, imperfections all removed, deformities all smoothed away and death swallowed up in victory. Oh glorious hope. "As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." The earthly is frail, depraved, marred, sin shadowed and mortal, a "body of death" from which we often cry out to be delivered. The heavenly is beautiful, holy and glorious, recreated after the image of Christ. To such a body Christ’s resurrection has given us a secure title deed.
If Christ be not then (con't)

Application

(1) "Raised for our justification"

(2) That we might "have part in the first resurrection".