

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed

By Paris Reidhead*

I invite you to turn again to the portion that has been read, I Corinthians, Chapter 15. I would emphasize that verse which will be considered our text, the 20th verse:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.”

The sermon theme is the greeting that has been used in Russia and among the Orthodox Christians for centuries. On Easter morning, when one would meet another, the statement would be made, “Christ is risen.” And the answer, “He is risen indeed.” Today a large portion of the world’s people are under governments that have decreed that God does not exist, and that Christianity is a myth, and religion is an opiate of the people. Tyranny, tyranny of men’s minds, and men’s spirits replaces the freedom that the Lord Jesus Christ died that they might know, and yet in the midst of this tyranny there is a privilege of freedom, and the experience of freedom. Out of Russia, for instance, came some years ago testimony to the fact that just two to three percent of the people in Russia govern the other 97 per cent to some degree against their will, and have been unable in these 40 years’ control of all the means of communication to exterminate the knowledge of God or the love of Christ.

It was in a southern Russian town that a lecturer appeared on Easter day, to indoctrinate the people in the atheistic convictions that were held by the government. They were commanded to attend. Everybody in the village, in the little town, came, and listened as they knew they must in quiet, to the lecture, and when he finished he asked if there were questions. A young man, having lived his whole life under communist government asked if he could speak. He came to the rostrum and said, You heard the lecturer, you heard his arguments, you have listened to the proofs he has presented that God does not exist. Now I ask you fellow villagers what do you say to this? “Christ is risen.” And from every throat there came, “He is risen indeed.” Forty years had been unable to change that which had been put into the hearts of the people by centuries. He turned to the lecturer and said, You have controlled our schools, you have closed our churches, and you have been able to declare that God does not exist. But what you cannot do is to change what you have just heard. Lest you misunderstood, let me afford you an opportunity to hear it again, Listen. Christ is risen. And from every throat, now more loudly than before, He is risen indeed, affirming the fact that all the effort of Satan with all the tools that he commands are not adequate to exterminate the fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. But how sad it is that one of the officials at the United Nations some months ago came to one of the American representatives on the permanent staff, and said, What we have been unable to do in forty years you have succeeded in doing in two years. And the American official said, To what do you refer? He said, We have brought eleven young men to study in one of the universities in New York City, all of whom were religious, save two, and only two candidates for the communist party. They have been in this university for two years. When we gave them a questionnaire as they returned, we asked them as to their faith, and nine said, We are now atheists. We have been convinced by what we have heard in this American university, the university in New York City, that God does not exist; and seven of the nine said, We would like to apply for membership in the communist party. And what Communist Russia had been unable to do in 40 years, Christian America had succeeded in doing in two years.

It brings us then to this fact, that it is one thing to have freedom, and it is another thing to use freedom. It is one thing to have truth, and it is another thing to obey truth. It is one thing to hold philosophically that Christianity is true; it is another thing to have an experiential reality in that truth. We understand, of course, that the only philosophical system in human history that ever addressed itself to the basic problem of man, namely his sin and wickedness, is Christianity. The only system of thought that ever undertook to destroy that sinfulness, and change man is Christianity, and historically the only movement that has ever succeeded in doing it is Christianity. Therefore, it behooves us that we in this year of our Lord, 1963, face again the fact that our nation pauses to some degree at least before it prays to remember that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. We must ask ourselves to what degree this has become relevant, and meaningful, and personal in our own heart experience.

Now there are certain fundamental truths that must be understood by us, and so I affirm them again. The first is this, that Christ’s death is **sacrificial**. Oh, how many there are who will stand behind desks once dedicated to the preaching of the truth, who will say that Christ’s death is illustrative, that it is figurative, that it is a helpful example. Many are going to be the subtle

twists that will be given by men who have become purveyors of destructive error. While they pay lip service to Easter and the resurrection, they will by the cleverness of speech be able to deceive earnest hearts that sit before them, and actually destroy all the significance and meaning of both the death and the resurrection of Christ.

But there are still those, and we are one or but multitudes, that will be faithfully declaring that what Paul said in this first part of the Chapter is absolutely true, that Christ died for our sins. This is why He died. He died a sacrificial death. According to the Scriptures, where does this testimony of the death of Christ begin. See it, if you will, in the 3rd Chapter of Genesis where Adam and Eve in sin, brought before God in repentance, are covered and clothed with the coat of skins. An innocent lamb, dying, shedding its blood, pouring out its life, that their sin might be covered. The first illustration, the first Gospel sermon, the first picture of the grace of God, is in the first book of the Bible. And from there on, wherever a lamb is slain, or turtle doves are offered, or an ox is brought to the door of the Tabernacle, it is again the picture reenacted, the object lesson illustrating the fact that one day, the seed of the women, whom we know to be the Lord Jesus Christ, the virgin born Son of God, is going to come, His heel will be bruised, will be injured; He will be put to death. But the head of the serpent will be crushed. Speaking of the fact that in the death of Christ the open triumph over sin, and death, and hell will be affected. It is not only given to us in type, in shadow, but it is also given to us so explicitly, so clearly that a wayfaring man, though he runs, need not miss the meaning of the Word. How can you add in clarity to what Isaiah said when we hear him, "Surely, He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquity. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sleep, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and was afflicted. Yet He opened not His mouth. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (Isa. 53:4-7). "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11). How could it be clearer that there is One whom the prophet calls God's righteous Servant, that shall bear the iniquities and shall thus make possible their justification.

And so it is Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. Throughout the Old Testament, and through the New Testament, by the words of the Apostle Paul, which was the experience of everyone present is added to that chorus that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. But the importance of this fact is seen in this statement that this testimony of the death of Christ, this Gospel, this good news that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture is the means whereby we are saved, by which also we are saved, if you keep in memory what I have preached unto you, lest ye have believed in vain. There is no other way of salvation, no other way of life, there is no other way to deal with one's sin much less the world of sin that all of us have accumulated and weighed our souls. The only possible way that we can ever find any provision anywhere to meet the need of a guilty heart is at the place where wrath and guilt did meet, where Jesus Christ died for us. There is no other religion in all of history that has made provision for sin that would remove it, its weight, its pressure, its guilt.

I think of Mohammed, who was a cook and friend, and one with whom I spent hours in conversation in Africa. He had been 40 years in making his trip from Nigeria to Mecca. He prayed five times a day, he fasted one month of the year, he came with a little piece of carpet no larger than that that had covered the Shrine in Mecca, and he held it out to me, and said, You know, I am going back, and after 40 years, this is all I am taking with me. I said, Yes I know, Mohammed, I know. I know how you prayed. I know how you have memorized the entire Koran. I know, but I want to ask you one thing. Do you have peace? Are your sins gone? He looked at me and said, No, of course not. I don't have peace. Of course my sins are not gone. Why there is nothing in my religion that tells me they would be, or that they could be. And I said, Yet you have been with us these years, and you know, you know that Jesus Christ died for sinners, and that He was buried, and that He was raised again. Oh, he said, I can't hear it any more. I have heard it too much. I have listened too long. And I am going back. I have no peace. I do not have the peace of which you speak. For there has been no provision in any other system for God to die. And in all the religions, of all the ages, and of all the lands, the God whoever He may be, or whoever they may be, sit in distance removed from mere men that call in their grief. And the only thing that He can do is to send some word down, some word of instruction, some word of counsel, some word of rule, saying, If you do this, and this, and add this to that, perhaps I may sometime look with some measure of pleasure upon you. But I do not even promise that.

The only thing, and the unique distinction between Christianity and all other religions is that here God becomes flesh and God does for man what man can never do for himself; and by the sacrifice of Himself opens a new and a living way whereby one can through repentance and faith immediately enter into the presence of God, into an experiential knowledge of God. Thus Paul who had years of vain effort in ceremony and ritual declared that this is the message by which you are saved. There is no other message, no other Name, no other way. It is thus throughout the Word. It is thus throughout history. It is throughout lands wherever the Gospel has gone, and it has been demonstrated again that the death of Christ is sacrificial and effective, in relieving men from the great burden of their guilt and of their sinful past.

Remember this whole message hinges upon one proof. The keystone in the arch of teaching and doctrine, and testimony is that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. And should it ever be that they could find the body of Christ, as someone said they did, and thought they would, and should it ever be that it could be proven that Jesus Christ did not raise from the dead, rise again to life after having died, then this Book would be the pack of myths that it is accused of being by its enemies, and the collection of fables. This is the touchstone. This is the keystone. This is the center and all of Christianity exists by virtue of the one fact that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead.

When Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, stood before his generation of men that had called a few brief weeks before for the death of Christ, he had this to say, that God had declared that His Son, the Lord of David, should not remain in the grave, should not see corruption. Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch, David, he is dead and buried. His sepulcher is with us. Therefore, being a prophet of God, and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins according to the flesh He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne, he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither did His flesh see corruption. Thus the Old Testament spoke not only of the death of Christ, but also of the resurrection of Christ. Christianity was defunct, it was exterminated, it was as good as gone, and these who were to be the apostles were prepared to go back to fishing, until they saw that Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead. Peter stooping down at the open tomb, looking in, and seeing the clothes wrapped as though a body were in them, and yet collapsed by their own weight, and empty, not unrolled and scattered on a bush, as some have in their art tried to picture, but simply wrapped together. This is the miracle of the clothes. And the head cloth was where the head had been. And the arms were as they had been. And the legs were as they had been. And it was bound together in the grave clothes that had enclosed the body, and the body was out of it. They were not unwrapped. They were empty, but they were not unwrapped. They were as they had been, and He passed through, as He passed through the door of the tomb, not waiting for it to be opened. It was not opened to let Christ out. It was opened to let Peter and John in. He was not bound by that, any more than He was by the planks that barred the door in the Upper Room. No, these men saw Christ alive from the dead. They were changed. The very one that quailed in fear, quaked in agony of heart, to the degree that he was willing to deny that he ever had known Christ, even with cursing to deny the Name of Christ, stood on that day of which I have read, and faced his generation with the fact that the very One whom they with wicked hands had slain, was none other than God come in the flesh and three thousand persons on that day, overwhelmed with what they had seen and heard, knelt at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and received Him as God. And every one of those eleven that remained, and had been with Christ, everyone I say, save John, died Martyrs' deaths. They were beheaded, they were stoned, they were pierced with spears, they were fed to beasts, they were crucified, and in Peter's case upside down, for he did not dare to die as had his Lord. And John, so we are told by the early fathers, was sentenced to die, but he was boiled in oil, and being taken from the caldron, expecting that he had died, they found that the oil had not touched him as the three children in the fiery furnace, and then he was exiled to Patmos where the Roman law said he could not be punished for the same sentence twice. He was the only one of the eleven that lived to die a natural death. They sealed their testimony with their lives. Had this been the fake and myth that the Jews at the time sought to make it, driving the officials to say that the soldiers had slept, certainly these men would never have been willing to have died, lonely, isolated, in places as in the case of Thomas on the shores of India, where he had gone to establish the church which bears his name, and continues to the present. All the historicity of the resurrection of Christ probably has no stronger advocate than the one who was the chief persecutor of the church, and the chief opponent of the Son of God, for Paul who thought that this was a cult that endangered the integrity of Jewish national life, and that he could serve his generation best by exterminating the church, and killing Christians found that one day on the lonely spot, even in the presence of others, but alone in the revelation of Jesus Christ, as

one said, He born out of due season, I saw Him. How marvelous it is to think that this man who had given all of his intellect, and all of his personality, and all of his ability and strength to the nefarious task of killing Christians, now should be hounded, and hunted, and persecuted, around the then known world, wherever he went, by the very ones that had been his friends and his promoters.

What better evidence is there, I say, to the historicity of the resurrection of Christ. It is stated by one who is better acquainted with law than am I, that if there is no better evidence presented on the basis of that, the witness of the testimony that is here, for any fact in history that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. It would be just as sensible to deny the existence of George Washington as to on the basis of anything that is stated in the Word question the historical resurrection, bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. This is a fact, and we recognize that it is historical, and the whole of Christianity rests upon a historical fact. It is here, on this point that the whole of our faith rests, finds its resting place.

But we recognize not only is the resurrection historical, but it is also foundational. What would it be, what would be the result? View it for a moment, and quickly, as we see here the four things that would happen, the four arguments that would rise out of the possibility that Christ was not raised from the dead.

We begin by the statement that “if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and our faith is vain,” and all those of all the ages that have heard the proclaimed message of the death of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ, who have opened their hearts to Him, should it be that Christ had not risen, would certainly have believed in vain (I Cor. 15:14). For we see the Lord Jesus Christ as our surety, satisfying the law on our behalf, and dying that we might live. If He be not risen, then this has no foundation in reality at all.

We see Him as our present Advocate at the right hand of the Father. If Christ be not risen from the death, there would be no value here.

We see Him as the Head of the Church, directing, controlling His people. Were He not risen from the grave, then this too would be vanity. And so the argument is that if Christ were not risen then all preaching would have been nothing but a waste of time, but words filled with air and not meaning.

Then it would be also as a second thing that Christ had not been raised from the dead, *men would still be in their sins*. There would have been no assuaging of their guilt, there would have been no relief of their conscience, and there had been no deliverance from the fear of death and of hell. There would have been absolutely no answer to their iniquity and the fierce fire of uncertainty that burns in their breasts. Just think what terrible damage it is when any religious leader should as ever so much as cast even the slightest question of doubt on the resurrection of Christ, when the whole hope of humanity rests upon this point.

Furthermore, if it could be proven that Christ has not been raised from the dead, *then all that had died through all the ages in childlike faith in the risen Christ would have died in vain* and would have perished in their sin.

And lastly, *if Christ had not been raised from the dead believers would have been the most foolish people*, the most to be pitied, for here they have turned their back upon those momentary fleeting pleasures of the world, and the opportunity to use covetousness and avariciousness as weapons for their own promotion and advancement. They have been willing to live in distant, difficult places, under primitive conditions in order that there by a poured out life they would be able to tell some of the death of Christ. The most foolish of all mankind would not be the wastrel drinking up his health, and life, and substance in the cups of pleasure, nor the one giving their bodies and their minds to debauchery. The most foolish of all of earth’s family would be the ones that have lived the soberest, the wisest, and the kindest across the years.

This I say would be the result if Christ be not risen from the dead. Thus this truth is absolutely foundational. It is the very keystone in the arch. It is the cornerstone of the foundation. And Christianity can have no significant existence apart from the fact that Jesus Christ was literally, and physically, and bodily raised from the dead. And it is this that is the testimony of the church of Jesus Christ around the world today. Now is Christ risen from the dead. He is risen. He is risen.

You say, you have presented the testimony of the Scripture, you have presented the evidence of the Word, you have shown us the consequences of question at this point. But there is one thing that I have to understand for myself. Can I know Him. Must I simply accept what is here? Must I simply accredit what is written. Yes, you must credit what is written, and accept what is there, but not simply. Nothing in relation to our faith can be reduced down to simply, because we are dealing with eternal truths that are the revelation of the Eternal God. And anything that had to do with eternity and with God cannot be just simply. You say, Well it is not enough for me to believe that what the Bible says is so. It is not enough for me to accept even the testimony of men who sealed their witness with their lives. I want to know, Can I personally know God, and can I know Jesus Christ in any vital, experiential way? that will satisfy me as obviously Paul was satisfied. Well Paul had given himself in open opposition to the church, living with the very people that had seen Christ, and know Him, and walked with Him, and talked with Him, and eaten with Him after His resurrection. God knew his heart, knew its needs, knew its demands, and was prepared to meet him, and God will meet you; and you can know. You can know just as certainly as Paul did. You can know just as certainly. You say, Will I have a Damascus Road experience? No. Not unless God in His sovereignty feels that a Damascus Road experience is essential for you, and for Him. But you see the Damascus Road experience is not the significant part of what happened to Paul. It is not the light, for that same light which shined over the entire company was understood only by Paul. It is not the voice, because the voice was heard by others to whom there was a hindering rather than articulation of words. No. The significant thing in the, experience of Paul was that he was prepared to meet the conditions when he knew them. And this is the means whereby you can know. When you are prepared to meet the conditions, when you know those conditions.

And what are they? The conditions are always the same. Jesus Christ is God; the controversy that God has had with men is that men have tried to be God in their own lives. No one can ever know God, and no one can ever have vital experience with Jesus Christ until he is willing to relinquish all right to rule in his own heart and life, and bow unconditionally before Jesus Christ. And these are the conditions. Oh, you can pray at the edge of Christianity. You can become active in church. You can feel that it is for the good of the community that churches have existed. But you will never have inward revelation that will certify to you the fact that Jesus Christ is God until you are prepared to meet the conditions. And the condition is unqualified, irrevocable, absolute abandonment to His sovereignty. This is what is meant by believing on Christ. To believe is to be convinced that He is God, that He was virgin born, that He lived sinlessly, that He died sacrificially, that He was raised bodily, and all of this attests the fact that He is God, and as God there is only one response that He deserves, and one response that He will recognize, and that is an unqualified abandonment to Him, surrender to His Person. And when He secures from you that, you will have the revelation. You can stare at each other through the years of time, view Jesus Christ historically, and view Him theologically, and view Him ecclesiastically, and never know Him until you submit to Him. But it is only on the basis of submission to His Person, and that receiving Him as He is, that will allow Him to certify to you that He is risen from the dead, and He is God. The only one in that company on the road to Damascus that was prepared to submit to Christ was the one who heard Him speak, and saw Him. So it could be that God could come down upon Manhattan Island, and with the same degree of revelation of power that there was at Pentecost, the only ones that will hear God, and meet God, and see God are the people that are prepared to submit to His terms. Otherwise, it is just thundering, otherwise it is an emotional stirring; otherwise it is but a religious excitement. And that which keeps one from having a certifying experience that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead is unwillingness to submit to His Person, to His Sovereignty. You can know Him. You can know that you know Him. He can be more real to you than the dearest person that you know, more vital, more precious than anything, any other experience of your life, where you are prepared if need be to join that company of the faithful of the ages and have sealed their faith and testimony with their lives. But you can only know Him when you meet Him on His terms. To as many as received Him... it is to receive Him as He is presented, as Prince, and as Savior.

Paul questioned, Paul argued, Paul talked, Paul persecuted, but then he met Christ. And how do you know that he was prepared to meet Him? Because the moment that this One revealed Himself to Paul in such initial revelation as was necessary, Paul responded as though he had been preparing himself for months, years previously, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. One answer, only one. Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? Utter abandonment. Paul plans previously made ceased. All privileges previously enjoyed ceased. All possessions previously held ceased. He met Christ, and Christ was alive from the dead. This is the only way that you can meet the testimony of this day, and know the Christ of whom this testimony speaks, absolute, irrevocable, unconditional abandonment to Him. Other than that will be the thundering, the tradition, and the light of

excitement will have no clear meaning to your heart. But when you are prepared to say, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? then you have fulfilled that word which is so clearly set forth in Romans the 10th chapter, the 9th verse where it says, "If thou wilt confess with thy mouth Jesus to be Lord, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9). There it is, the very keystone of all Christian experience is that He is raised from the dead; therefore, He is Lord and Christ, Prince and Savior. And to all who are prepared to meet Him on these terms there comes that certifying experience of His presence where one is able to say, Christ is risen, He is risen indeed. Shall we bow our hearts together in prayer.

Our Heavenly Father, we think today of the fact that for years most in this company have unquestionably held as a truth that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. But there are many here today that have never understood the personal implications of His resurrection. And they have made the mistake of thinking that they could view as historically so that He had come out of the grave, and that this was what was meant by believing. Help them to understand that to believe on Christ is to be so convinced that He is who Thou hast said He is, and who He claimed to be, and who others have declared Him to be, that without hesitation we make an absolute abandonment of all we are, and have, and ever can have, or be to Him. This is what believing means. Not just to utter with the lips the truth that Christ is Lord, but to make it the affirmation of a relationship. He is Lord of my life, Lord of my plans, Lord of my destiny, Lord of my time, Lord of my talent; to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is with Paul to look into His face and say, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do. By Thy right hand Thou hast raised Him from the tomb, exalted to Thy throne and given Him all authority in Heaven and earth, made Him to be a Prince and a Savior, Lord and Christ. And Thou hast declared that to all who will receive Him, He gives authority to become Thy children, to be born into Thy family, to partake of His life. O how many our Father that have confused the issue, that thought that just holding these facts to be so was enough, just holding these truths to be true was enough, and have failed to realize that it is a personal abandonment to Him, and embrace of Him, a receiving of Him. Grant, our Father, that in these moments that close that everyone among us who has any other than a vital experiential knowledge of Thy Son's indwelling Presence shall realize that they can have that, they ought to have that certainty, and will commit themselves to Thee now, and every condition Thou dost ask so that they can. How many there are that just hope that Christianity is true, just want it to be true, are working as though it were, could be and would be, should be. But oh Father, how greatly our generation needs men who can say, I know whom I have believed. I do not know about Him, but I know Him. Give this to us now. Give this to us now. Give, we ask Thee, such a sense of Thy Presence, sealing the truth to our hearts as to enable us to grasp in every witness and fellowship, and conversation we may have the very heart of the matter, and present it to those whose hearts the Lord has prepared.

With our heads bowed and eyes closed, this moment of query, facing of an issue. You say, I do not know that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. I know what you say, and what the Bible says, but I want to know for myself. And on that basis of what I say, and what the Bible says, and what has been the testimony of the church, you make an unqualified, irrevocable, abandonment of all you are and have to Him, and you will know. You can know. Will you do it? Tomorrow will tell. But if right now from your heart of hearts you will meet Him on His terms and open the door of your heart to Him, He will come in, and every evidence of reality, so real, so genuine, so perfectly clear that you too will be willing to join that number that are prepared to say, I would die rather than to deny Him. I know whom I have believed.

Let us stand together for prayer and benediction. Bind the truth, we ask Thee, our Father, as frontlets, phylacteries upon our minds that throughout the hours of the day our hearts shall be engaged with this paramount fact of our faith, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Let the implications of it so touch our hearts and lives that because of the day with all that Thou wouldst have it man to us we will never be the same. May Thy grace, and mercy, and peace from Thyself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be and abide with blessing according to our need of each of us now and until we meet again. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, April 14, 1963 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.