

Now is Christ Risen

Rev. Marvin Kamps

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” I Cor. 15: 19-20

We are the Church of Christ. The Church has ever confessed that Jesus arose. The meaning of Easter is that Christ bodily arose and ascended into heaven and is set at the right hand of God in glory. The angels declared it: “He is not here for he is risen.” The bodily resurrection of Christ is the occasion for our joy on Easter morning. Nothing less than this truth of the bodily resurrection equates with the angelic invitation, “Come see the place where the Lord lay.” The Church of Christ, along with Peter and John, each Easter morning runs to the place where our Lord was laid and beholds and believes.

Our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. He is the God of Abraham. Isaac and Jacob...and of the man Jesus, who lives forevermore.

Of what benefit or profit is it to us that Christ arose from the dead? Consider this situation: one man is wealthy and is able to satisfy his every need and desire. How does this wealth profit another? Just because one man enjoys abundance does not necessarily imply that his poor neighbor’s financial position will improve. Is it, therefore, conceivable that Christ’s resurrection and exaltation would be of no lasting significance for us? Some in Corinth would have answered in the affirmative.

The believer answers this question by saying that because Christ arose, we may be and are assured that we shall also be raised from the dead to live with God in glory. Jesus’ resurrection is the cause of which our resurrection is the effect. Jesus is our legal and organic head. We have a right to be raised from the dead unto eternal life, for Jesus paid for all our sin and guilt. Even as Jesus, the Head of the Church, is bodily in heaven, so shall we be, who are the members of His body. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him...in order that where “I am, there ye may be also.” We know that this is true! This is a thrilling and comforting knowledge received through faith, the gift of God, given only to those for whom Jesus entered death and the grave. There is an inseparable relationship, an unbreakable bond, between Easter morning and the moment when the last trumpet shall sound marking the resurrection of the dead unto eternal life. Christ’s resurrection is our resurrection! There is one resurrection, not several. Christ’s resurrection and the believer’s resurrection is one whole.

* * * * *

This truth was denied at Corinth! In the church at Corinth some believed that the dead rise not. For Paul asked: “How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” Some taught that this earthly life is all that there is; there is no life hereafter. The dead do not rise again. Those that taught this idea excluded Jesus from this teaching. In Corinth it was believed by all that, indeed, Jesus was raised from the dead and is now set at the right hand of God in glory. Jesus was confessed as the living Lord, whom the believers loved and for whom they lived. They believed that Christ arose, but they held the position that we shall not rise from the dead for there is no resurrection of the dead. Some in Corinth saw not the inseparable relationship between Christ’s resurrection and our resurrection. So, they taught that this life is all there is for us. Christ arose, but we will not.

This position occasions Paul’s penetrating analysis of their hope. “If in this life only we

have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” If in Christ we do not hope with respect to the life to come after death, we are of all men most miserable. True! Why then deny the flesh, endure trials and persecution, bear the reproach of Christ, and suffer loneliness, which is the experience of all them that enter in at the strait gate and walk in this life along a narrow pathway? If it all ends in death anyway, what’s the use? We are of all men most miserable.

If you think the Corinthians were foolish, consider the unbelief taught and believed in the “church” today. Millions of people made their annual visit to the local church this past Easter. People, who regularly fail to attend worship services throughout the year and who by this failure reveal their contempt for the Word, fetishily filled to capacity the churches of the land this past Easter morning. They came early, decked out in colorful dresses and orchid corsages, as they ostentatiously displayed their spring finery on Easter morning. What was the message they came to hear? Not the truth of the bodily resurrection of Christ as God’s pledge of our resurrection. Today’s modern pastor scoffs at the truth of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Christ is not bodily risen from the dead. The tomb is not empty. For the Modernists the resurrection, and thus Easter, means that the ideals and goals of Jesus’ life have risen again in the hearts of his disciples. His life, His ideals of love, honor, justice and morality have risen again in the hearts of Jesus’ followers. This is what was preached Easter morning by thousands of unbelieving preachers in our land. Thus, the people were told that Jesus’ ideals, loved and lived, make life worth living! If we hope in Jesus only in this life we are not of all men most miserable as Paul claimed, but we are happy and blessed. This was the fodder for thousands of people who refuse to eat the heavenly manna of truth in Christ.

But, you ask, what of the empty tomb, the linen grave clothes, the angel’s message, and the appearances of our Lord? Were not these evidences of the bodily resurrection of our Lord? These, the Modernist tells us, are all symbolic representations presented by the early church in its scriptures to convey their understanding of the resurrection. They are not actual events rooted in historical fact. These are not to be taken as evidences of a "bodily resurrection" of the Christ. Science has shown the impossibility of the dead coming back to life. It is contrary to our experience. The dead rise not. Thus, Christ is not risen from the dead in any bodily or physical sense of the word. But, the Modernist assures us that in a certain sense we can say Jesus lives nonetheless. Jesus lives, for the ideals of love, righteousness and justice for which He died have become the resurging and impelling power of the Christian community in the world. After all, very little of the real Jesus was laid in the tomb. The real Jesus is to be found in the love, kindness and righteousness of His disciples. Consequently, the Modernists deny the ascension of Christ to God's right hand and, by implication, the truth of heaven and hell as local, everlasting places. This life lived for the man of Galilee is all there is.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

* * * * *

But now is Christ risen from the dead!

This is Paul’s unshakeable foundation. The appearances of Jesus are evidences of the bodily resurrection of Christ. God hath declared that He hath raised His Son from the dead. Who would dare deny it and thus make God a liar? Modernists! But the Christian Church responds in faith to the angel's invitation to come see the place where the Lord lay, and seeing with the eye of faith, we believe. The Word preached and personally appropriated by faith every week is believed and confessed on Easter morning. Christ arose! Bodily from the dead is Christ Jesus now risen to live forevermore. He was delivered for our transgressions and He was raised again for our justification. The bodily resurrection of Christ is God’s declaration that the elect, the

repentant sinner, is justified. Our God has declared by the resurrection of Jesus our right to dwell eternally with Him. Jesus' resurrection is a divine Word wherein is declared the certainty of our own resurrection.

Some truth! It is the unshakeable foundation of the Christian hope.

The Man of Sorrows is raised to the highest glory at God's right hand. All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus. The Spirit of God was given to this man who destroyed the power of the Devil, sin and the grave. Christ arose bodily from the dead. He draws His own infallibly unto Himself. Our hope is in Jesus, both in this life and in the life to come.

Our hope is not in Jesus only in this life. For His resurrection life is become our life eternal. We hope in Jesus because He lives and hath given us the Spirit of God. Our living Lord's life of love and obedience unto God is ours for He hath given us eternal life by His Spirit that dwelleth in us. He that loves his brother and obeys God's commandments is born of God. In regeneration this eternal life is given to the elect, who are dead in sin and sinners by nature, by the living Lord Jesus, who is the Christ over all.

When Jesus was on earth He in perfect love and righteousness was obedient unto death, for He lived in the hope of the resurrection. (John 10:17; John 17:5) Thus the Church of Christ lives the same life of obedience unto eternal life in the new heavens and new earth.

Our life is not of all men most miserable, but is of all men most blessed and enviable. True, our life is filled with trials, persecutions and ridicule. We bear the reproach of Christ. We deny ourselves. The believer struggles against sin and Satan in this life. We enter the strait gate and walk along a pathway too narrow for the flesh. This is all true, but our life is not of all men most miserable. For we rejoice to be accounted worthy to suffer for Christ's name sake. We know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us. It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like him!

* * * * *

Jesus is become the firstfruits of them that slept.

Firstfruits? Yes, Jesus is become the firstfruits of the dead. In saying "first-fruits." Paul uses a figurative expression borrowed from nature. In the natural sense of the word the firstfruits are the first handfuls of grain that were harvested. The rest of the harvest was to follow. The firstfruits and the rest of the fruits were one harvest, one whole. And the firstfruits are the certainty that the whole is ripe for harvest.

Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection "harvest." Note that Christ is become the firstfruits. There were persons who were raised from the dead before Jesus was, such as Lazarus and the son of the widow of Nain. But these resurrections were not of the same nature as Christ's resurrection. Lazarus returned to this earthly life only to experience death again. This was not so with Christ. Christ arose unto heaven. The corruptible took on incorruption and the natural became heavenly and spiritual. Jesus arose and went to heaven as the exalted and glorified Christ. Lazarus returned to the earthly, sinful sphere of death.

There was no resurrection like unto Jesus' resurrection ever before. Christ is become the firstfruits of them that slept. Jesus resurrection is the first of the bodily resurrections unto eternal life in glory. As certain as it is that Jesus arose according to God's own testimony, so certain it is that our mortal bodies shall be raised from the dead and we shall personally and bodily enter the heavenly and eternal. Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits of them that slept and the resurrection of those that die in the Lord...the rest of the harvest. There is only one resurrection - one whole! The living Jesus lives to translate us out of the earthy into the heavenly.

“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you. Rom. 8:11.” Believer, Christ’s empty tomb is our empty tomb!
Hope in Christ...both in this life and in the life to come.

Comfort one another with these words.

Originally Published in:
Vol 35 No 3 May 1976