



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

“How to be Really Miserable”

TRANSCRIPT

According to our clock in the back, let's begin our class by looking to Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for the provisions of life. We thank Thee for the rain that has come. We thank Thee for the assurance that we have a great God in Heaven who providentially cares for us and for his creation. We thank Thee even more for the plan of salvation and for all that is meant when we read in the Scriptures that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the savior of men. We thank Thee for the glorious future that is promised to us; to have one who is to come as King of kings and Lord of lords, and who has the authority and the power to carry out the will of our triune God. We are indeed grateful.

We thank Thee, Lord, for all of the experiences of life and pray that they may teach us the things that they are designed to teach us. We thank Thee also for the promises of the word of God to the effect that Thou art with us. We remember the Old Testament promises which set forth the presence of the Lord God with his people. We thank Thee for our Lord's reiteration of those promises in resurrection assuring us that He is with us all the days of our lives, even to the end of the age. We thank Thee for the comfort that that does bring to us in all of the experiences of our lives.

We pray that we may never forget that; that we have a Savior who is with us constantly and to be with us to give us wisdom, to strengthen us, to encourage us, to give us guidance; all of the things that we need. Help us, Lord, to truly lean upon him. We pray for this church. We pray for the members of this church, for the friends who visit, for their families. And we pray that the ministry may continue in the year to come and continue with increased blessing from Thee. We give Thee thanks for our elders. We thank Thee for others who minister the word of God here, and we pray for them. We pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit as our teacher this evening as we open the Scriptures. And we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Well, our subject for this evening is “How to be Really Miserable,” and we have weather to go along with it. So perhaps it is designed that way by God in Heaven. We’re in Romans -- we’re in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and we’re looking at the section that has to do with the resurrection. And in our last study, our first study in 1 Corinthians 15, we looked at the first eleven verses in which the apostle set forth the resurrection and the resurrection appearances and made the point -- I said was -- I think the main point that he wants to make is the resurrection is an inalienable element in all Christian teaching. In other words, we really do not have the gospel as the New Testament sets forth, the Gospel in its greatness and fullness, if we do not have a bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I mentioned that A.M. Ramsey, one of the Archbishops of Canterbury in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, not too many years back, said, “For them (that is the apostles) the gospel without the resurrection was not merely a gospel without its final chapter, it was not a gospel at all.” In other words, it is absolutely essential for the gospel that we have a resurrected savior. Today we often hear the term “gospel” used in religious language. We talk about those who preach the gospel or the gospel this or the gospel that, but the facts of it are not mentioned and, in fact, other comments of those who make statements like that,

evidence the fact that they do not really believe those great events. And there are some who do believe our Lord’s death for sins, but the resurrection is not a part of it.

Paul makes it plain that we don’t have a gospel if we do not have the resurrection. There is no indication, unless there is a resurrection, of our Lord’s victory over sin. Sin may have claimed him so far as we know if there is no resurrection. No victory over death is known by us, no victory over hell itself unless the resurrection is confirmed by the inspired Scriptures.

The critical difference that the resurrection made with the early believers is evidenced in the replacement of the seventh day as the day of the gathering of the people of God by the first day. If you will put yourself in the place of a Jewish man who believed that God had given them a revelation -- the Old Testament revelation -- through the prophets, and they were specifically told that the first day of the week they were to rest, many of their feasts were feasts that gathered around the significance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a big day with them. But the apostles begin to meet on the first day of the week, not the seventh. These Jewish, believing men begin to meet on the first day of the week.

So it’s evident that the resurrection, which occurred on the first day of the week made such an impression upon them that the meetings of the Christian church were transformed by that event. We -- for example, we read in the New Testament in Matthew chapter 28. I believe I read this last time but in Matthew chapter 28 in verse 9 we read these words,

“And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.” That was the first day of the week as we read in verse 1, “Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to dawn.”

In John chapter 20 in verse 1 and verse 19 we have confirmation of this, also. We read in verse 1, “Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was yet dark.” And then in verse 19, “Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace (*be*) with you.’” The first day of the week; the day of Pentecost was also a day that occurred on the first day of the week. So the fact of our Lord’s resurrection transformed the apostles in more ways than one, transformed them with emphasis upon the new life -- resurrection life -- but the whole meetings of the early church came to be different. Pentecost, the feasts, and then when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 in verse 4, “And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,” we see some of the significance for them of the first day of the week.

In chapter 16 of this epistle and in verse 2 the apostle writes these words, “On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there may be no collections when I come;” again, evidence that they were meeting on the first day of the week and not the seventh day.

Now, there are a couple of loose ends that I would like to try to tie together from the meeting last week, because I felt at the end of the meeting that I had probably left some of you confused. Now, I may have left some of you confused a lot of times, but sometimes I know I’ve left you confused, and I think I probably did in my comments on the statement in verse 9, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” And then, well, it was verse 8, “Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” I’d like to just underline what I tried to say about that “born out of due time.”

Now, it is the opinion of a few people -- not many -- that what Paul is talking about is that the time for someone like him to be truly born into the experience of a special kind of life is at the second coming of our Lord or the rapture of the church. I

don’t think that’s what Paul has on his mind. It’s something else. But this word that is translated “born out of due time” is one word. It’s the word *ektroma*. That word means something like an abortion. In fact, it’s been translated in some versions as an abortion. But the connotations that it might have today are not specifically there; but nevertheless, it means something horrible in birth, something freakish, probably would be better.

So the question is: why did Paul speak of himself as one born out of due time? Well, if you think about Paul’s life and you realize that he was on the Damascus Road, and he was met by our Lord in that marvelous appearance of the Lord to him when he was struck down and then transformed by the appearance of the Lord to him from a persecutor of the church to one who preached the gospel to the end of his days and, so far as we know, according to tradition, lost his life in doing that, we can understand why someone might say he was someone born out of due time. That is, his birth, his Christian birth, was freakish. It was horrible. He didn’t have a long period of time like the other apostles in what has been called a period of gestation. That is, over a period of time they came to be attached to our Lord. But his was sudden and distinct and definite and contrary to normal experience. It may be that that what he means is one born out of due time.

His name, of course, was *Paulos*; that means “little.” And it was a term that could easily been applied to him as ‘the little one’ for being a small man, a little Jew, someone may have thought of him in that way. And so it may be that he speaks of himself as one who is the little one. People speaking of him in a negative way as the “little fellow” or it may be that it’s a reference to the way in which the Jewish people who were opposed to the gospel sought to persecute him. And even some of the Christians who were professing Christians -- or at least the professing Christians -- said unusual things about him. For example, in 2 Corinthians 10 in verse 10 we read, “For *his* letters,’ they say, ‘*are* weighty and powerful, but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible.”

So undoubtedly the apostle has a lot of criticism of that kind, which is characteristic of people who want criticize an individual who is making an impact, and so you can understand that people were saying these things and Paul, himself, has heard these things. And so perhaps what he is really doing when he says “as by one born out of due time,” as one born in a freakish way, as one who has come into the Christian faith in a strange way, he’s picking up something that they have said about him and using it of himself. And many of the present students of the Pauline letters believe that that is more likely what Paul had in mind; that he’s referring to what people said about him as one, an abortion, a freakish kind of person. So I wanted to make that plain because it’s not easy to understand precisely what it is, and we don’t really know absolutely what is the meaning of the apostle when he says that.

Now, when we come to verse 12 through verse 19, which is our passage for tonight, I feel that one of the most significant remarks made about this was made by Gordon Clark. Now, listen to what he says. He’s writing a little commentary. He was a philosopher for many years at Wheaton College then later, Chairman of the Philosophy Department at Butler University; a very intelligent man. He’s now with the Lord, wrote probably 30 or 40 books and a number of them commentaries. He was a pretty good Greek student as well as a philosopher. But he writes when he comes here, “One is almost ashamed to write a commentary on these verses. No other language could make the meaning plainer.” I have never heard commentators make comments like that. But Dr. Clark was that kind of person. He was just, in effect, saying, there’s no need for me to write any commentary on these verses, they’re plain enough as they are. Paul has made it as plain as it could be made and so I’m ashamed to even write some words of explanation.”

Well, Dr. Clark, I’m ashamed with you, too. But I do know from my own experience and others’ that sometimes it’s important for the simplest, plainest things to be explained further; that some of us who don’t respond too well to the word of God may

understand them. All right. We’re going to do that. But look at verse 12 through verse 19, I’ll read through the verses now, beginning at verse 12,

“Now, if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

That’s interesting, isn’t it? That in the church at Corinth there were people who actually were associated with the body of believers in some way who were saying, “We don’t believe in the resurrection. People don’t rise from the dead, do they? Give me an illustration.” There is no illustration. This is it. But they were actually in the company. Now, I’ve known people, even in Believers Chapel, that I’ve called on and they’ve said, “I don’t believe what you’re preaching.” Now, they were talking about Calvinism when they said that. So it’s possible, you know, for people to sit in an audience like this who just don’t believe. I read in the paper, I think the other day, of a person who was in a church and he had joined the church and he had been helped by the church, but he said, “I’m an atheist.” What kind of church is that? Well, there were in the Corinthian church, a church that was started by Paul’s preaching, people who didn’t believe in a resurrection. “Some of you don’t believe,” he says.

Verse 13,

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if, in fact, the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

Now, some of you then suggest that in Corinth -- there were actually in the Corinthian assembly -- individuals who didn’t believe in the resurrection. How would they get into a Christian assembly in that day? Because you would be persecuted in a Christian assembly by Jewish people particularly and by others as well.

Well, what was their background? Probably, they were not skeptics in the sense of some of the others that Paul ministered to such as in Athens. It’s possible that they were mystical enthusiasts. It’s possible they were devotional dreamers. But it is strange that they were there. Justin Martyr has some things to say about this later on, and he comments a century later that Christians who announced that there was no resurrection of the dead; that as soon as we die, our souls are taken up into heaven. He heard them preach, and he retorted that they were unorthodox since -- and I’m quoting Justin now -- “I and all other Christians of orthodox belief know that there will be a resurrection of the flesh and also a millennium in Jerusalem.” Paul does not allude to a millennium here, but he does allude to the resurrection.

And so it’s possible then we did have people -- we do have people a church, such as this, who didn’t believe in the resurrection and to account for them, well, how can we account for them? We might account for them by suggesting, perhaps, that they came from the Sadducees. And the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection like the Pharisees did. Jewish people believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the Pharisees did not. We have some evidence of that in the Book of Acts, you’ll remember in the conflict between the two sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So it’s possible that there were some Sadducees who didn’t object to -- I mean, who were attracted by the gospel, but nevertheless still had that feeling about no resurrection. But still they were in the company of the saints, had not reasoned through what might be the Christian view and how important it was to them. It’s possible, of course, that there were other types of individuals. They could be a Gentile who had retained that some of the views of the

mystery religions because they didn’t believe in the resurrection. And so they may have been attracted to Christianity and took along with them their opposition to a resurrection of the body.

At any rate, we know that there were such people in the Corinthian assembly. Paul says, “Some of you are saying that there is no resurrection of the dead.” If you follow Paul’s arguments -- it’s very simply, I’m ashamed to have to go through it, of course. I’m ashamed -- but just remember this, the heart of Paul’s argument is that the Lord Jesus Christ is representative of himself and those who are debtified with him. In fact, the representative God-man is the clue to all of this that Paul writes here; that when the Lord Jesus acts, he acts for all associated with him. That’s one of the most important truths for us to understand.

I was reading in Spurgeon, *This Morning and Evening*, just recently a few days back and he has a section on our representative; the Last Adam. Jesus is the “Federal Head” of his elect. Every heir of flesh and blood has a personal interest in Adam because he is the “Covenant Head” and representative of the race under the law of works. Under the law of grace, every redeemed soul is one with the lord of heaven for he is the “Second Adam”, the sponsor, the substitute of the elect in the new covenant of love.

Well, actually Paul says even more than that here. He says, “How do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.” In other words, our Lord is represented -- the representative God-man, and if he rose from the dead, then no person ever has justification for saying there is no resurrection of the dead, because our Lord has been raised.

So that’s the point that Paul makes: You who say you believe in Jesus Christ as the one who died and who rose again, now you’re saying there’s no resurrection of the dead. If you say there’s no resurrection of the dead, you’re denying that Christ has been raised from the dead. You see, I’ve spent a few moments explaining what didn’t need any explanation. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

But now, what is the case if he has not been raised? He says in verse 14, “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty.”

Now, in verse 17, he says, “if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile.”

Now, this is something that does need a little explanation. There are two adjectives that the apostle uses. The first one is the one that’s translated in verse 15 in the version I’m using as “*empty*.” our preaching is empty, your faith is empty. That’s an adjective that means empty of content. So when he says, “if Christ is not risen (in verse 14), then our preaching *is* empty” it means there is no content to it. Your faith is also empty; it has no content because what you’re believing in is something that has not taken place. And so there is no objective content to your faith or Paul’s preaching; his message. His message doesn’t have any reality to it. If he preaches that Christ died, was buried and rose again, when there is no resurrection, then he’s preaching something that does not have any content. You get the point?

Well, Gordon Clark said he was ashamed to explain it; it’s so obvious. You know, if there is no resurrection, you can’t say, “I believe in the resurrection” and believe in something with content; doesn’t have any content. You’re believing in a mirage. It’s a myth; no content. That’s his point: if Christ is not risen, then our preaching, our message -- the word is really his message; what he proclaims -- doesn’t have any real, historical content. It’s empty. Your faith is also empty. You thought that you were resting upon a historical fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it has not occurred.

So every one of you have been conned by a snow job, in effect. To contend for the resurrection is just flimflammy, a Venus fly trap. We all know what a Venus fly trap is, don’t you? I saw that. I had to look it up and see what it was. But I looked it up and I saw. It’s nothing. All it is is just a plant that loves insects and so it catches them. Nothing to it, just a little plant. So what Paul is really saying, “Look, if Christ is not risen, our preaching is without content; your faith is without content; you’ve been conned by those who talked about the resurrection of the dead; your faith has taken hold of no real

object. A phantasm, an air castle, a mythical Shangri-la; all of these are synonyms for what it means to believe in something that really did not take place. It’s reached -- it has reached for the moon, it’s grasped a spider’s web. Actually, all they were really believing in was the decomposing corpse of an itinerate Jewish carpenter turned Rabbi. That’s what someone said about it.

So what kind of faith do you have? A faith in that kind of a person; faith, really, in a dead man. Faith in a dead man? No one can give himself to a dead man. You cannot have faith in a man who has lived -- though he may have lived a marvelous life but now he’s dead. He’s been brought under the power of death himself, what good can he do you? So it’s not possible to have a saving faith in a dead man. No man can expect anything from a dead man. He surely will not receive anything from a dead man. If we’re talking about eternal life, we were talking about salvation. So your faith is empty, my message is empty. But furthermore, Paul says, in verse 15, “Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not (raise -- are not raised -- do not ) rise.” So in other words, not only do we have an empty message, not only is your faith empty, but we, the apostles, are false witnesses of God.

Now, what would that mean? That means that our Lord is an imposter, of course. He’s another guru figure and to think to link Yahweh with this is blasphemy. So if you talk about God and you say that God, Yahweh in Heaven, raised up the Son of God, then you are linking the Lord God in Heaven, Yahweh, the supreme being, that Israel regarded as the one true and only God, you’re linking him with this guru who’s now dead, whose bones are decomposed -- his body is decomposing in the grave. We’re false witnesses. To link Yahweh, to link the true God -- the one and true God -- with such a teaching is blasphemy. To say that God raised him from the dead is to link him with something that is absolutely false, contrary to the word of God.

Now, in verse 17 -- after he says verse 16, “For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.” Isn’t that simple? If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. You cannot say the dead don’t rise without denying Christ’s resurrection. A man has already been raised. A man has already risen from the dead so you cannot say there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead. And now verse 17, “And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* (we could translate this vain again. My text has) “Futile; you are still in your sins!”

Now, this word is a different word. The other word is the word *kenos*, which means empty of content. I guess if I saw Martha coming home during the Christmas holidays with a big package, and I was a Greek and she understood Greek, now I open the package and somebody had stolen everything that was in it, I would say, “This package is *kenos*,” it’s empty, it doesn’t have anything in it. But now this word is a word that means it doesn’t have useful aim or effect. It’s without useful aim or effect. It doesn’t do what it is supposed to do.

Now, I might pick something out of a package and look at it and it’s supposed to do something. But if it doesn’t work, then it would be *mataios*. That’s the word that Paul uses here. *Mataios*, that is, void of useful aim or effect. Now, you said the faith in a savior who hasn’t been resurrected is empty, doesn’t have any content, you’re believing in a mirage. Now, he says if Christ has not risen, your faith is empty, vain, futile here. And he means by that, specifically, it doesn’t do what it was supposed to do. Your faith in Christ was supposed to save you, isn’t that it? Your faith in Christ was supposed to bring you the forgiveness of sins. But if it’s *mataios*, it’s void of its useful aim or effect, it doesn’t do that, and so you’re still in your sins. Your sins still stand between you and the Lord God in Heaven, and you stand condemned. The resurrection’s significance, the Father’s acceptance of the Son’s work, is involved in this. If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, you’re still in your sins.

Now, I’m going to ask you to turn at this point to Romans chapter 5 -- 4, I’m sorry -- in verse 25; Roman 4, verse 25. We sing in Believers Chapel from time to time a hymn

that has a stanza -- has a chorus -- that grates on my theological nerve every time we sing it. I’ve made comment about it before but it just went by. It’s so popular as a hymn; people love the hymn. They sing the words of the hymn. It’s a great song, you know. Sing those that sound good. Those that have the message correct, well that’s a secondary thing. One day, you’ll remember it’s -- Wilbert Chapman’s hymn, chorus is [singing] “Living he loved me, dying he saved me, buried he carried my sins far away, rising he justified freely forever.” I won’t sing the rest of it. You might want me to sing again. But it says, *rising he justified*. That’s erroneous. That’s erroneous.

Now, I want you to notice the text. Romans 4:25, “Who was delivered up because of our offenses and raised because of our justification.” Now, many of you have the Authorized Version. It has *raised for our justification*. *For* is like Heinz’s varieties; there are literally scores of them. Isn’t that true? All of you people have some white hair on your head, you know about Heinz. And you know that they have multitudinous cans of various kinds of goods. Well, *for* in English is a word that means many different things. But the word in the original text here is the word that means *because*. Raised for, that is, on account of; *for*, in the sense of *on account of*; on account of our justification. Well, look, it’s not that we’re justified by his rising; it’s not because he rose and therefore by that rising from the dead, he justified us. He justified us when he died for our sins. He rose because of our justification.

In other words, he had accomplished the task in his death. That’s why Paul said in this epistle, “I determine not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The crucifixion is the important work of our Lord. The resurrection flows out of the work of dying upon the cross and the satisfying of all of the claims of God against us. In his death, that’s why we preach his death. His resurrection flows out of that. And so our hymn says, “Living he loved me, dying he saved me (Those are great expressions.), buried he carried my sins far away (Well, I don’t know about that.), rising he justified freely forever.” No. No, he rose for a different reason entirely. When he died, he

justified us freely forever. He rose in order that God may make plain what happened when he died. In other words, the resurrection is the evidence that the work that Christ did in dying is satisfactory to him. The resurrection then is designed to attest what our Lord has already done.

Now, I – so when that hymn is called out and you look over at me, my mouth is closed. And it’s closed not because I don’t like a lot of the sentiments in that hymn, but I don’t believe that you ought to sing falsehoods. And that’s very plain. This is very plain. You see, the resurrection is Christ’s -- put it in common language; the language that people often use; Bible teachers use -- the resurrection is Christ’s amen. To Jesus Christ’s, it is finished. “It is finished,” is what he said on the cross. The resurrection is God’s amen to “It is finished.” It’s the sign that he accepted what Christ did for those for whom he died. We love the resurrection. We look at the resurrection and say, “Yes, the Father has accepted the work that he has done for us. And so that’s what we celebrate. We celebrate what he did on the cross. The resurrection is important. It’s the testimony to the successful completion of his work.

Now that’s not the only text at which this statement is made. Back in chapter 2, verse 24 of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, we read these words, “Whom God raised up having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible that he should be held by it.” Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death. Notice: he raised him up after he had loosed the pains of death. It’s the death of the Son of God as the substitute that is the ground of our salvation. The resurrection is the evidence of it. That’s very important. They preached the resurrection. What they really were preaching was what Christ did is sufficient and your crucifixion of him brings you under condemnation. And the resurrection is the evidence of that, and that’s why the Jewish leaders and the Gentile leaders were so upset at the preaching of the resurrection because it specifically said that God had truly accepted what the Son had done and rejected what they had done in crucifying him.

So -- and if Christ is not risen, if faith is futile, then you are still in your sins. H.A Ironside has an interesting section in his little commentary, which I have been borrowing for now all these months from Howard Pryor and Anne, and he says that he often tried to illustrate what Christ had done by his two hands. And he said, “Let my left hand, I say to the audience, speak of my blessed Lord Jesus Christ, my right hand speak of myself, a sinful man. He said my Bible has a red cover and he said I take my Bible with its red cover and put it on my right hand in token of the fact that this is a picture of me with my crimson sins resting upon my soul. What am I going to do about it? ‘I cannot cleanse my own heart if I wash myself with snow water and make myself never so clean,’ says Job, ‘yet thou art plunged me in the ditch and mine own clothes shall abhor me.’ I cannot cleanse my heart. I cannot put away my sins. But see here is the blessed Lord Jesus Christ illustrated by this left hand of mine. There’s no scholarly book resting upon that hand because he was the sinless one. He knew no sin or thought, word and deed. He was absolutely the holy one, but in grace, he went to that cross of shame, was nailed upon the tree on Calvary’s hill. And when he hung there, Jehovah laid on him the iniquity of us all. He said, ‘I transfer this red book to the hand that represents Jesus.’ That crimson load that rested on me was transferred to him when he hung on the cross for then he was bearing the load of our sins. That explains the darkness that enwrapped his soul, the cry of anguish. ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’ Having borne sin’s judgment, he descended to the grave and lay there for three days and three nights.”

And then he made an interesting point. I really hadn’t reflected on it in connection with the resurrection, but he said, “During that interval -- the three days and three nights, to use a biblical expression, that the Lord Jesus was in the grave -- no one in all the world knew whether his work was really settled -- had really settled the sin question.” Think about it. We would not have known now if that resurrection had not occurred. And he made reference, Dr. Ironside did, to the men traveled on the Emmaus

Road and our Lord drew near to speak to them. And you remember they -- our Lord said, “Why are you standing there looking so sad?” And they said, “Don’t you know what’s happened in Jerusalem? While Jesus was here, we thought,” they said, “we thought that it was He who shall redeem Israel.”

So they were absolutely miserable. All of their hopes were dashed when our Lord Jesus was crucified and placed in a grave. And so far as they know, he was in that grave at that time. Talk about being miserable. That’s the greatest misery of all, to not know that our sins are forgiven, to not know that what Christ has done is sufficient for our guilt before God.

But on the third day, our Lord had come from the grave. Mr. Ironside said, “The Irishman was right when he said, ‘What a wonderful salvation. If anybody will have to be kept out of heaven because of my sins, it will have to be Jesus. (He means because he took my sins.) But blessed be God, they cannot keep him out. He’s there already.’ So the resurrection is the means by which we know that our sins have been forgiven, my Christian friend. That’s why on Easter Sunday we celebrate the forgiveness of our sins known to us because of the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross.

Now, the apostle goes on to finish it up because we want to try to finish it up now. In verse 18 and verse 19, these words don’t need any explanation. I’m just underlining things that are plain and clear. I can understand why Dr. Clark would say he was ashamed. “Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” Notice the little expression *then also* because this is an inference from what he’s been talking about. If Christ had not risen from the dead, then also those who had fallen asleep in Christ have perished. They not only live in sins, he’s just said, if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. They not only live in sins but the dying ones have perished. So what kind of life do they have? They live all of their life in sins; constantly committing sins that flow out of unredeemed heart. And then at the end of it, they perish. What a life. What a life to have. Constantly sinning, constantly coming under the

judgment of God, having no hope in this world, and then when you die, no relief. You perish; perish forever.

So then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ -- now, wait a minute, what kind of language is that: to fall asleep in Christ? Well, that’s the biblical term for a believer, isn’t it? The word to fall asleep is a word reserved for believer’s death. You don’t have in the Old Testament -- or in the New Testament, I should say because this is a Greek work *koimao*. You don’t have in the New Testament any use of this term to say, “Then Herod fell asleep” or “Then Pilate fell asleep” or then any other persecutor of the apostles fell asleep. This is a word reserved for believers. When believers die, they sleep. “We loved Dr. Wood. He has fallen asleep.”

Now, he’s alive in spirit. He’s with the Lord. His body is asleep. This is a word for the body, to fall asleep in Christ. It’s reserved for believers. It’s used back in chapter 11, verse 30 where we read, “For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” Believers who died, judged for their sins, but nevertheless, were believers who had believed in Christ and therefore, they belonged to the family of God. But they fell asleep; this is the word that was used for Stephen, fell asleep. You’ll find unbelievers don’t fall asleep. They die. Believers are those who fall asleep.

Now, notice, he says here in this verse, verse 18, “Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ.” What a magnificent expression. This is what we do. We fall asleep in Christ, don’t we? All you young people in this audience, you’ll see me one day if the Lord doesn’t come, I’ll be laid out like this. He fell asleep. My body fell asleep, but my spirit will be with the Lord. But now notice the contrast. I’m leading up to this. Notice how Paul puts this. Then they “who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” if there’s no resurrection. You get the contrast? This marvelous way of describing a believer’s death: his body has fallen asleep, his spirit has gone with the Lord, but if there’s no resurrection, he’s perished. The greatest, most wonderful way to die: to fall asleep in our Lord. To awaken, if there’s no resurrection, you’ll awaken to the fact of eternal judgment. What a

horrible way to wake up. Talk about a nightmare; that would be a nightmare of all nightmares. To rest in our Lord and wake up after your physical death to realize you’ve picked the wrong horse.

They -- then also with no resurrection, those who have fallen asleep in Christ, have perished. They not only lived all their lives in sin, but the dying ones have perished. As a matter of fact, he’s used that term before back in chapter 1 in verse 18, he describes all of us, you know. He says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.” You see, what he says in effect is that if you actually, in your perishing state -- all of you, you’re perishing. Every one of you -- every one of you is perishing, did you know that? Your body is perishing. If you haven’t believed in Christ, you’re perishing totally. But your body is still perishing unless our Lord comes. And if you’re not a believer in Christ, you are perishing totally. You’re on the way. You haven’t perished yet, but you’re perishing. You’re on the way. Don’t [you] believe it? Look at the lines on your face; look at the change of color in your hair; look at all of the other things that indicate the fact that the Bible is true. You are perishing. That’s what Paul says. He describes us all as perishing. We know that. We know we are perishing. And then if Christ is not been raised from the dead, if we’re not a believer in him, when we die -- when our bodies die, we complete the perishing for eternity. In fact, we’re given another body; a body in which we’re able to perish for eternity on; continue to suffer eternal judgment; the body of the lost in the resurrection of the lost.

So we, however, have not backed a loser. We have not been flimflammed. We have not believed in a mirage. We have believed in historical and spiritual and eternal fact: our Lord has been raised from the dead. This marvelous contrast does not apply to us. We have fallen asleep in Christ. And when we die, we live forever looking for the resurrection body in which we shall enjoy eternal life. Someone has said that if Jesus stayed alive -- if Jesus stayed dead, there are only two possible conclusions: either he was not the sinless person everyone thought he was or he might have been without

personal sin but his attempts to atone for the sin of the world by his death didn’t meet with divine approval. But the Scriptures have said he has been raised from the dead.

And so in verse 19, Paul says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the (most miserable) most pitiable.” How may one be really miserable? By neglecting through unbelief the marvelous provision of a resurrected Savior’s person and work; that’s the way that we are more miserable than all men. For Christians, you see, have suffered for their faith. Every Christian who has believed in Christ has known what it is to suffer for his faith; some more than others. Some have suffered in horrible ways and have ultimately lost their lives; some have had their heads chopped off because of their faith.

If it’s really true that Christ has not been raised from the dead, if in this life only, Paul says, we have hope in Christ, we of all men the most pitiable, the most pathetic. We’ve wasted our lives in the offense of the cross and then discover that our faith in him doesn’t have any content, doesn’t do what it’s supposed to do. We are of all men most pitiable. How important for us is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s God’s way of saying he did the work, it satisfies me, if your trust is in him, you have the assurance of eternal life. May God touch our hearts. And if we do not believe in him, if he is not our hope and trust, give us that trust in him. And there’s no better time to trust than right now if you never had trust in him.

Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these words of the Apostle Paul. They are plain and clear. They make it very plain to us that what Jesus Christ did on Calvary’s cross in shedding his blood in the divine plan is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins forever. And we thank Thee, Lord, for the resurrection; that marvelous way of letting us know that Thou has accepted what he has done as sufficient for our sins. O Father, may there be not one person in this auditorium who does not have the hope in the savior who died and has come forth from the grave on the third day.

“How to be Really Miserable” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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For Jesus’ sake. Amen.