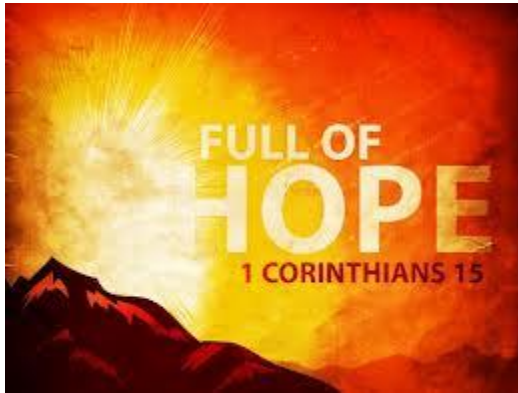


Sunday Evening Service 12th May 2013. Jim Brown, 1 Corinthians 15:1-20 "If" is a small word.



Although it has only two letters 'if' can embody matters of significance. For example, politically: If Britain hadn't invaded Iraq... or personally: If he'd remembered to wear a seatbelt..... Who has never said 'If only...'?

In 1 Corinthians 15 the word 'if' introduces enormous implications. *'If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'* In what JB Phillips referred to as one of the most important passages in the Bible Paul here goes straight to the crux of

our faith. He is speaking directly to those in the church at Corinth who have begun to question the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Thomas was the first recorded sceptic and it took a resurrection appearance of Jesus to convince and humble him. Other sceptics have been more or less vocal down the ages and many have tried to challenge, contradict and explain away the bodily Resurrection.

There had been numerous theories as to what became of Jesus' body. Some said grave robbers had taken it. It's true that some people will steal anything and grave robbing was a frequent occurrence but Jesus had no possessions or riches worth stealing - even if robbers had managed to avoid arrest by the guards on duty at the tomb. Others said the Disciples took it - if so why were they cowering away in the upper room, afraid of persecution for their faith? Some said the soldier guards had fallen asleep on duty. If so the penalty would have been their execution. If, as some suggested, the Jewish religious authorities had stolen it surely they would have subsequently produced it to put an end to Christianity.

Paul does not bother to address these theories - he focuses instead on the evidence. He points to witnesses who were still living. Paul confronts the doubters head-on and urges them to stop and face up to the implications if Jesus is not risen from the dead. *'And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.'*

Christ crucified is not the whole Gospel - Christ resurrected is what gives meaning to the rest of the Bible. We know that a principal qualification for apostleship was to have witnessed Christ's death and resurrection. Without the resurrection all preaching is futile but we know that the apostles' preaching was anything but futile and sinners were converted in their thousands.

The crucifixion and the resurrection are twin and complementary planks of our faith. Paul concludes this passage on a positive affirmation 'But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.' Just as the first Adam brought death the Second Adam has brought eternal life. Alleluia!