

Series: Resurrection!

April 30, 2017

Title: Which Gospel?

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Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 NIV

Fake News, anyone?

Fake News:

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By now you have no doubt heard and seen a lot of Fake News. It used to be largely confined to the checkout section of the supermarket. You know the weird headlines: "Aliens take over man's brain," "Eating snails cures common cold," "First Lady has filed divorce papers." Now Fake News has taken over the internet.

So what makes news "Fake News"? Experts tell us that there are various kinds of Fake News:

- Satire or parody: a story that mocks or pokes fun, but is not meant to be taken seriously.
- Stories that mix true and false content, twisting a story to lead people to a particular conclusion.
- Stories with "manipulated content" like doctored photos.
- Stories that are 100% fabrications.

Most of these varieties of "Fake News" mix fact and fiction, truth and lies, in order to deceive the reader. The best lies do just that: they include just enough information that is true to give the impression that the rest of the story must be true as well. A Fake News story is ultimately a trap: just enough truth to lure you in, but a world of deceit and confusion once you're hooked.

Fake News, 55 A.D.

Fake News has been around ever since people started telling each other stories. Paul found himself combatting Fake News in the church he had recently established in Corinth. He had come to them with the Real News – the Good News – of Jesus' death and resurrection and what that meant for

them if they would but put their trust in Him. But now, a group of people in the church had begun propagating Fake News in which the true and false were mixed together to create a false gospel.

Paul writes to the Corinthians:

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1 Corinthians 15:12 NIV

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Here was a different “gospel,” a Fake News gospel which said that God did in fact raise Jesus from the dead, but that there was no resurrection for anyone else. Jesus’ resurrection was a “one-off” event. Jesus’ resurrection opened up a new kind of spirituality that allowed believers to ultimately escape bodily existence. As Gordon Fee explains:

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“Thus for them life in the Spirit meant a final ridding oneself of the body, not because it was evil but because it was inferior and beneath them. The idea that the body would be raised would have been anathema.”

(Fee, The 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, 715)

This Fake News – fake gospel twisted God’s story so that it was more palatable to pagan culture. You could have Jesus’ resurrection *and* escape this material world to live in endless spiritual bliss. What more could you want?

Fake News, 2017 A.D.

So just how powerful is that Fake News – fake gospel?

A recent poll found that in 2013 64% of Americans believed that Jesus rose from the dead. However, a 2014 poll found that only 37% of Americans believe in a bodily resurrection from the dead. Most shocking is the finding that only 74% of Pentecostals believe in a bodily resurrection from the dead! That old Fake News gospel is still alive and well, 2000 years later!

Jesus died and rose again; we die and don't. It's easier to buy the fake gospel that when we die, we go to be with the Lord. End of story.

So what's the big deal with this different gospel?

Taking Down the Fake News

An empty story:

It's been said that one of the ways to tackle Fake News is to dig deeper than the headline. Get into the details of the story. This is precisely what Paul does with the Fake News gospel in Corinth. He takes the Fake News gospel premise and ruthlessly exposes where it takes us:

First Point: this false gospel is ultimately *empty* of meaning and purpose:

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1 Corinthians 15:13-14 NIV [amended]

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 empty and so is your faith.

The false gospel in Corinth *disconnected* Jesus' resurrection from our own resurrection. Paul says, not so fast! The two must go together. The *whole point* of Jesus' resurrection was that it demonstrated that God had begun to restore and redeem His Creation, starting with you and me. The resurrection of Jesus points to you! Take away our future resurrection and you take away Jesus' resurrection as well.

The Good News becomes nothing but an empty shell. God conquered Death for Jesus, but not for you. Believing in Jesus' resurrection is a dead end: an empty exercise of faith.

A false god:

Second Point: If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then the biblical whole notion of God is false:

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1 Corinthians 15:15 NIV

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

Paul proclaimed that God is not only the Creator of all things, but that God put into motion His rescue plan to redeem His world and destroy Death itself. This is the big story behind our little stories. This is the bigger plan behind even the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

But this story is a lie if there is no future bodily resurrection of those who have put their faith in Jesus the King. There is no rescue mission. Snatching souls out of dead bodies so that they can live in Heaven means that God gave up on His good Creation. Such a god is a false god.

A useless story:

Third Point: This empty story with its false god serves no purpose. It is useless.

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1 Corinthians 15:16-17 NIV [amended]

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins.

Did you ever go to the closet to get a flashlight, only to find that it won't turn on? The problem: the batteries, of course. The batteries are (1) *empty*. They have no electricity left in them. And that means that they are (2) *useless*. Because they are depleted, they serve no purpose. Flip the switch all you want; you're still in the dark.

This is Paul's third point. He repeats his initial argument, but this time the focus is on the fact that this false empty gospel won't turn on the light of salvation and forgiveness. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He demonstrated to us that Sin had been once for all taken care of. Sin died with Jesus. We are not out of exile and on our way to His Promised Land.

But if there is no bodily resurrection for Christians, then Jesus was not raised; Sin is still in control of us and Death – Sin's penalty – has the final word.

Which Gospel?

Alone in the dark:

Paul concludes his argument by describing what this means for the living and the dead:

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1 Corinthians 15:18-19 NIV

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.

Those Christians who have already died are gone. Period. They have no future. There is no future. There is no New Creation of a New Heavens and New Earth.

And the rest of us? Well, we're marching to a fool's drum on a fool's journey. It's a journey to nowhere, ending in death with no future. Permanent exile.

Two gospels:

We saw last week the true Gospel:

- Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.
- Christ was buried.
- Christ rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures.
- Christ appeared to many, physically raised from the dead.

This true story tells us that if we put our faith in Jesus as Christ – Messiah – His death for sin becomes our death for sin, and His resurrection becomes the prototype of our own future resurrection. This is how God is restoring His Creation.

Now we see a false Gospel:

- There is no resurrection of the dead.
- Therefore Christ is not raised.
- God is not restoring anything.
- We are still in our sins – in exile.
- Faith is pointless.
- When you die, that's the end. You're lost.
- And while you're alive, you're pathetic.

Which Gospel?

Which story do you choose? Which gospel is the one that you choose to trust and believe? Your choice will determine how you see God, how you see the world He created, and how you see yourself.

Think about it: you spend each and every day in this world that He created. You work hard; you build relationships with others. You *invest* your very life in God's Creation. But if God has no future for this world, then why bother? We're just wasting our time.

God's story says exactly the opposite. Paul writes:

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Philippians 3:20-21 NIV

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

This is how the Gospel story ends: not by our going to heaven forever, but by heaven coming to earth. Our future is like Jesus' future: a transformed body that is like His glorious body. Our home will be in God's New Earth. Our mission will be to at last reflect God's presence into all of His world.

And that is *not* Fake News!

LIFE Group Lesson for “Fake News”

Ice Breaker

- What’s your favorite kind of music? Any favorite composers or song writers?

The score or the performance?

- A piece of music, whether it’s a song or a symphony, starts in the heart and mind of the song writer or composer. The writer gets a musical idea – maybe a melody or the beginnings of a poem. Bit by bit the music comes to life *in the composer’s head*. He or she can hear it in their mind. And then one day they write it down as a musical score.
- But for the music to truly come to life, someone has to take up that score and play or sing the music in real time. Music only happens when sound waves are created by voices or instruments.
- So, which is more important: the score or the performance? (Both!)

God’s musical score/God’s performance:

- God created us to perform His music in this world.
- You might think of our spirit as the score and our living out of our lives as the performance.
- So which is more important: the score or the performance? (Again, both!)

Example:

- Imagine a composer who has produced a magnificent symphony, only to find that the orchestra is filled with amateurs playing old and decrepit instruments. The instruments are out of tune. The members of the orchestra struggle to read the notes. Nobody seems to be paying attention to the conductor/composer. What a mess!
- How do you fix the problem?
 - One way is to fire the orchestra and throw away the bad instruments.
 - Rather than botch the beautiful symphony, just let it exist in the perfection of the written score.
- The other way to fix the problem:
 - There is, of course, another way.

- It involves patiently working with each member of the orchestra to help them tune their instruments, play them properly, read the notes and pay attention to the conductor.
- It takes time and effort.
- It takes an unflinching commitment to the goal: playing the symphony the way it was meant to be played so that the score becomes what it was always meant to be.

God's rescue mission:

- You and I are God's orchestra. We were created to make His music in the world – the ultimate symphony of His love and justice, His beauty and power.
- But like the untrained and unruly orchestra in the example, we do not make God's music on our own.
 - Our lives are out of tune; our minds wander from the conductor.
 - Worse than that, we have a bad habit of making up our own music right in the middle of what's supposed to be God's symphony.
- He started the rescue of the orchestra by having Jesus come and play the music the way it was supposed to be played. At long last the world could hear God's symphony.
- When the world tried to drown out the symphony by killing the conductor, God raised Him back to life. Only then was the symphony complete. It is the music that conquers Death itself.
- And the same power that conquered Death for Jesus is present to conquer Death for you and me. That's the only way we will ever play the whole symphony that God created.

Transformation:

- This is what Paul is talking about when he writes to the Philippians about the transformation that God has in store for us:
 - *Philippians 3:20-21 NIV*
 - *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*
- What would be one aspect of your life that God is transforming right now? Take time to pray for each other about what God is doing.