

“Hope In the Resurrection”

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

I read in a devotional recently where every year, thousands of people travel to a place in the Italian Alps where they climb a mountain trail known as the ‘Via Crucis’ which in the Catholic tradition depicts the various stations of the cross, symbolizing the path Jesus walked on His way to Calvary. Eventually, they come to the foot of an outdoor crucifix. The story is told of how one day, a tourist noticed a trail leading away from the cross. Curious as to where it would lead, he made his way through the thicket that surrounded the path. And to his surprise, he came to a shrine devoted to the empty tomb. But the underbrush had grown up around it and it had been neglected. So almost every visitor that passed that way had come as far as the cross...but they went no further.

Now, I wonder how many people have done the very same thing spiritually speaking? They have been to the cross for the forgiveness of sin, but they’ve not yet understood what is meant by the resurrection life of Jesus now living in them as a believer. Turn with me in your Bible this morning to 1 Corinthians 15. There are certain chapters in God’s Word which are known for a particular emphasis. For example, Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter, 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter, Isaiah 53 is the Servant chapter, and so on. 1 Corinthians 15 and its entire 58 verses could very well be referred to as the resurrection chapter of the Bible because more than any other chapter, it presents the most detailed teaching on the subject of the resurrection. Not only is this chapter about the resurrection of Jesus, but it is concerned with the future resurrection of the believer.

This subject of life after death is most often the subject matter of religion. Each of the world’s religions and their adherents have something to say about what comes next. Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism see life as being cyclical and hold to a certain belief in reincarnation. There are other religions that believe in annihilation and that death is the ultimate end. Universalism sees everyone going to heaven after they die. Materialism sees this life as all that there really is, and it is foolish to place your hope in something beyond it. Christianity is unique in the sense that Scripture

teaches a bodily resurrection. That is, eternity does not consist of a disembodied state of existence, but that salvation means my soul is saved, so also will be my future body. God has a plan for the human body, and it has all been made certain by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the point that is being made here in 1 Corinthians 15—victory over death!

15:54—“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event to have ever happened, for it changed the course of human history. The gospel is not simply that Jesus died for sins. Yes, Jesus died in the sinner’s place on the cross. Were it not for His death, my sin debt would not be paid. But if He is not raised from the dead, I would have no righteousness. I would have no hope. And there would be no salvation. Jesus died, but Jesus is not dead. The gospel is that Jesus died for our sins and rose to life again. We are saved by His endless life. Romans 4:25 says that He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. That is, I am justified because He lives!

Hebrews 7:25—“He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”

Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who trust in Him have no need to fear death. The truth that Jesus conquered the grave gives confidence to our lives. For this reason, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to Christianity. Without it, we would have no gospel worth preaching. Nor would we have any hope for life beyond death. If Jesus Christ were not raised, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that we would still be in our sins. And those of us who believe would be, of all people, the most pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised, and this wonderful truth changes everything. (Read)

For the last 2,000 years, the one ultimate question for the Christian faith and for our individual lives is this—Did Jesus Christ actually rise from the dead? Either He did, or He did not. If He did not rise, then we as Christians are meeting in vain. If He did not

rise, our faith would be no more than superstition. If He did not rise, there is no need for you to give sacrificially to His cause, no need for you to engage the world with His message, and no purpose behind our relationships with one another. But if Jesus did in fact rise from the grave, then the situation is drastically different. If He did rise, nothing is more urgent than the proclamation of His message. If He did rise, nothing is more important on earth than the local church living out the Great Commission of making disciples. If He did rise, there is hope for every man, woman, and child. That is precisely the point Paul makes in this chapter. From the first several verses, I want to show you how we have hope in the resurrection. Notice first of all how the resurrection serves as:

1—The FOCUS of apostolic preaching (15:1-2)

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”

In verse 1, Paul puts the Corinthians in remembrance of the message that he had preached when he had been with them. He reminds them that it was the gospel—literally the ‘good news’—of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This was the same point he made in the very beginning of his epistle. He had said in chapter 2:1-2, “When I came to you, brethren, I didn’t come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The gospel alone had the power to save those who believe. Now, Paul had to deal with a lot of ‘stuff’ in his letters to the Corinthian church. Their deviation in belief and behavior had shown a subtle drift away from this apostolic focus. Evidently, there were some in Corinth who were questioning the truth of bodily resurrection. The ideas of the culture had crept into the church.

The city of Corinth was a Greek city, and Greek philosophy did not allow for the resurrection of the dead. When Paul had preached the resurrection at Athens, which was only 45 miles to the east of Corinth, his message was met with a skeptical response. He stood before the men of Athens and declared that God:

Acts 17:31-32—“He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.’ Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.”

In the first century, the Greeks held to a philosophy which said the body was material, temporary, and a distraction from one’s true being—the soul. Thus, what happened to the body was irrelevant to the soul. The Bible teaches that the physical body was part of God’s original good creation and is an essential part of humanity. Though the body is now subject to corruption, sin, and death in a fallen state of existence, God’s plan is not to annihilate the body or free our souls in a disembodied existence. Rather, God’s plan is to restore and glorify the physical part of our humanity through bodily resurrection. (see Acts 18)

Chuck Swindoll—*“Located near Athens, Corinth was greatly influenced by this Greek mind-set. Being a city that valued pleasure above learning, Corinth left the thinking to her Athenian neighbors, adopting without question their attitudes toward the resurrection of the body.”*

An eagerness to appear ‘wise’ in the eyes of the world had been a constant snare for the Corinthian church. Evidently, some within the church were tempted to succumb to the pressure of philosophical respectability by denying the truth of bodily resurrection. Such refusal to be swept up by the predominant philosophies of the day is a constant battle for the church that prioritizes the gospel.

Colossians 2:8—“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the world, not according to Christ.”

And so you can well imagine the concern Paul has as he is writing. He says in verse 1, “Now I would remind you, brethren, of the gospel which I preached to you.” The word ‘remind’ means to gain thorough knowledge of something. It is the idea of making something clear. He had been clear in his declaration of the truth. The ‘good news’ he

preached is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures. Had Jesus only died, it would not have been good news. Paul says that it is good news because the One who died for sin also conquered death by His own resurrection. They had ‘received’ his message, which is another way of saying that they welcomed it in their own hearts. In other words, they had believed it and were continuing to stand in its truth. These believers were not to cave into pressure coming from outside influences who were seeking to undermine and weaken their faith. They had received the gospel that he preached, they were continuing to stand in it, and then he goes on in verse 2 to say that it is this gospel “by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”

“Are Being Saved” — *present tense verb*

Belief in the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection not only means that I have been saved, as in past tense. But it also means that I am being saved, present tense, and that I will one day be saved, future tense. Three tenses to your salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification. Those who are being saved ‘hold fast’ to the gospel. There is an endurance that is characteristic of their faith. It is not merely something that they believe in an intellectual sense. It is genuine belief that is demonstrated through a life that has been changed. Again, you can go back to Acts 18 and see how the church had been born in Corinth in what was one of the greatest evangelistic harvests recorded in Acts. They had not believed in ‘vain.’

“Vain” — *word means without success; no yield*

Not all professions of faith are genuine. There are always those who make superficial responses to the gospel that are not authentic. This is the point that Jesus made in the parable of the sower and the soils. As for the church in Corinth, their faith had not been in vain, but was legitimate and was bearing fruit. And the fact that so many lives had been changed during Paul’s ministry there was evidence of Christ’s resurrection power. It still is! Some of you this morning may be hearing the gospel for the first time, and it still has the same power now that it had then. It will radically change your life.

2—The FULFILLMENT of divine promise (15:3-4)

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

The resurrection of Jesus is the focus of the apostles’ preaching, but notice secondly how it is in fulfillment of divine promise. The entirety of Scripture points us to the pivotal truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is dependent upon our belief in the basic fundamental truth that Christ died for our sins and that He rose again. It is all ‘in accordance with the Scriptures.’ The resurrection is direct fulfillment of Old Testament truth and was clearly argued to be such. It was the subject of:

- Peter’s preaching (Acts 2:22-32)

Acts 2:22-24—“Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.”

He then references David’s words in Psalm 16:8-11. But it was also the subject of:

- Paul’s preaching (Acts 13:26-37)

Acts 13:35-37—“Therefore He also says in another psalm: You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, and was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.”

The point that both Peter as well as Paul make in Acts is that the Old Testament pointed to the fact that Christ would die and be gloriously resurrected. Christ died according to the Scriptures, He was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

To take it a step further, consider the prophetic statements made by Jesus Himself that points to His resurrection. As a perfect prophet, every word that He spoke was true and accurate. The Old Testament demanded that if a prophet said something that did not come to pass, he was a false prophet and was to be stoned to death. Jesus mentioned so many times during His ministry that He would rise from the dead that He would be an impostor if He had not risen as He said He would. No less than seven times He is on record in the gospels:

Matthew 12:14—“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Matthew 16:21—“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Matthew 20:18-19—“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!”

Matthew 26:32—“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

Luke 9:22—“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day raised to life.”

John 2:19-22—“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ The Jews replied, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and You are going to raise it in three days?’ But the temple He had spoken of was His body. After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said.”

John 10:17-18—“The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”

After His resurrection, He appeared to two of His disciples while walking on the road to Emmaus and said:

Luke 24:25-27—“How foolish you are, and how low of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.”

This is what Paul meant when He said that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and rose on the third day according to the Scriptures. The resurrection was not God’s reaction to the to the death of Jesus—it was the plan of God all along. The law and the prophets point us to this pivotal moment in redemptive history.

Consider how the ‘third day’ is of monumental importance and serves as a pattern:

- In the creation account, it was on the third day that life sprang up with plants bearing seed (Gen. 1:11-13)
- When Abraham was told to offer up Isaac at Moriah, it was on the third day that they arrived (Gen. 22:4)
- It was on the third day that God descended upon Mt. Sinai in the sight of the people (Ex. 19:10-11)
- The first fruits were to be offered on the third day after the Passover (Lev. 23:11)
- Hezekiah was healed on the third day (2 Kings 20:5)

Jesus said that the prophet Jonah was a sign that pointed to His death and resurrection, for Jonah had experienced a resurrection of sorts when it was on the third day that he emerged from the belly of the fish. Other prophets wrote:

Psalm 16:10-11—“For You will not abandon My soul to Sheol, or let Your Holy One see corruption. You make known to Me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Isaiah 53:10-12—“When His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul he shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous One, My Servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Hosea 6:1-2—“Come, let us return to the Lord; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him.”

Whether it was direct prophecy, or through prophetic type and imagery, the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day is fulfillment of divine promise. Something else we see:

3—The FACT of eyewitness testimony (15:5-8)

“And that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me.”

Not only is there the testimony of the Scriptures, but the eyewitness evidence that supports the resurrection is well established. The New Testament records at least ten post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Notice those that Paul mentions here in verses 5-8. Others include appearing:

- to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)
- to the other women at the tomb (Matthew 28:8-10)

- to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)
- to Peter (Luke 24:34)
- to ten of the other eleven apostles (Luke 24:36-43)
- to all eleven apostles (John 20:26-31)
- to seven apostles on the shore of Galilee (John 21)
- to more than 500 at once (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- to James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- to the apostles at the ascension (Acts 1:3-11)
- to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-9)

Prior to the resurrection, the disciples were huddling in fear in an upper room. After encountering the resurrected Lord, they were sent forth into the world with power.

Ken Latourette—*“It was the conviction of the resurrection of Jesus which lifted His followers out of the despair into which His death had cast them and which led to the perpetuation of the movement begun by Him. But for their profound belief that the crucified had risen from the dead, and that they had seen Him and talked with Him, the death of Jesus and even Jesus Himself would probably have been all but forgotten.”*

Without the resurrection, the best we could hope for is a crucified martyr who died for a lost cause. But there is an empty tomb outside the city wall of Jerusalem to prove to our world that He is alive. He cannot be avoided, nor will He be canceled. The testimony of the gospel stands for itself, as there is plenty of evidence that leads to the truth that Jesus Christ, rather than the grave overwhelming Him, He overwhelmed the grave.

4—The FRUIT of a changed life (15:9-11)

“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it

was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

One of the greatest witnesses to the resurrection was Paul himself. As an unbeliever, he had been soundly convinced that Jesus was dead. So great was his animosity toward the faith that he determined to rid the world of the fledgling church. But something happened that forever changed the course of his life. Paul gets personal in verse 8 and tells us what the resurrection means in his own life.

Paul tells us his own personal testimony of how the risen Savior had appeared to him. Apart from the truth of the resurrection, there is no explanation for radical change that transpired in the life of Saul of Tarsus who becomes Paul the Apostle. Paul's own salvation story represents the fruit of a changed life, a man who had been transformed by the gospel, a man who had gone from being the leading persecutor of the faith to its leading proponent. Formerly, he had been a committed enemy of Christ, but he is now a commissioned apostle. And he attributes it all to the wondrous working of God's grace. In grateful response to his calling, Paul determined that the grace of God would not be in vain. He worked harder than any, not in an effort to earn his salvation, but to show his love toward the One who had saved him.

Luke 7:47—“He who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Paul goes on to describe the reality of the resurrection and the great theological importance it has for life and for the hope of salvation. If Christ is not risen, we have no message to proclaim. If Christ is not risen, we are still in sin. And if Christ is not risen, we are to be pitied as fools. But Christ is risen, and is become the 'first fruits.' That means if you are a Christian, your life is secure. Your salvation is steadfast, kept by the enduring power of the living Christ. You have nothing to fear in life and death, for your future is secure.

There's no need to fear death, and there is no need to fear what may or may not be just ahead. Why? Because we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, gave His life for us, and ever lives to make intercession for us. There is no one here this

morning who has not at some point felt the pain of death, perhaps while standing beside and looking down into a gaping hole in the ground, soon to be a loved one's grave. The gospel means that He knows every ounce of heartbreak, sees every tear that streamed down your cheeks. At the cross, God took on every pain and every disappointment and every sorrow and every sin you have ever or will ever experience out of the broken existence of this fallen world. He felt it all, He carried it all, He controls it all, and Easter is proof He is making all things new. When tragedy strikes, the likes of which we have never seen before, it is only the truth of resurrection that gives us hope. In a world of pain and turmoil, this is our consolation as the people of God:

John 11:25—“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live.”

The promise upon which we stake our lives and our hope is a Person. Jesus is my resurrection life, and no matter what happens to me in this life, or to the ones I love who are in Christ, I am saved and eternally secure. Folks, we need to understand the very practical implications this has for us. What does it mean? Write these down:

- First, we have **confidence** for our lives

The fact that Jesus is risen brings great confidence to my life as a Christian. It means that Christianity is not simply some religious system that was founded by someone who lived, died, and convinced His followers of a lie. The truth of Christ's resurrection makes Christianity unique. You can pretty much visit the grave of every other world religion's founder, and there you will find his remains. The religions are not dependent upon the founder's resurrection. But without the resurrection of Jesus, you have no Christianity.

The resurrection is proof positive that my sins have been forgiven as someone who trusts in Jesus. The Son's sacrifice has been accepted by the Father. It gives me the confidence that I need to know that I will never cease to have a High Priest who gives me complete and total access to God. It provides me with the confidence that I need to know that I have an Advocate who always lives to represent me before my Father. It

gives me confidence to pursue personal holiness in my life knowing that I am being changed into the likeness of Christ.

- Second, we have **power** for our ministry

Before the resurrection, the disciples are huddled in fear in an upper room. After the resurrection, the disciples see Jesus and are then indwelt with His Spirit. The mission of taking the gospel into the world and making disciples would be bookended by the promise of Christ's power and by the reassurance of His presence. All authority has been given to Him, and He will be with us always, even to the end of the age.

The resurrection empowers you and sends you to a world that desperately needs to hear the truth of its message.

- Third, we have **certainty** for our future

By His resurrection, Jesus Christ has emptied the grave of its power and has rendered death defeated once and for all. Because He died, my sins have been crucified and buried and are no longer remembered. Because He lives, I too now live through faith in His name. My future is secure, and I have no need to live my life in fear or worry about what might happen.

I can face tomorrow!

All fear is gone!

Because I know He holds the future!

And life is worth living just because He lives!

The enduring life of Jesus Christ reminds you and me that this world is not all there is. If all of our hope is bound up in the temporal things of this world, then we have no hope in the face of tragedy, no expectation for the future. Without the resurrection, nothing makes sense in life.

Tim Keller — *“Each year at Easter I get to preach on the Resurrection. In my sermon I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can't believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for*

the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? However, if the resurrection of Jesus happened, that means there's infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world."

The chief priests went to Pilate and asked him to make the tomb as secure as possible. And in what has to be the most ironic verse in all the Bible, Matthew 27:65, "Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.'" And so they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. Evidently, they didn't make it secure enough because the Bible says just a few verses later, "There was a great earthquake. An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it, and his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men and the guards shook for fear. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He lay.'"

Friend, you can't confine the risen Christ!

Men still think that can roll a stone in front of the tomb and keep Christ in. Throughout history, there are those who have used all kinds of 'stones' in an attempt to deny His resurrection. There have been plenty who wanted to keep Christ in the tomb. But I like what the hymn writer said:

*Vainly they watch His bed, Jesus my Savior,
vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!
Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus my Savior;
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!*

*Up from the grave He arose;
with a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
and He lives forever, with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!*

Has the truth of Jesus Christ gripped your heart and changed your life? I'm talking about something that is far more than an abstract understanding. I am referring to personal application of this truth. I'm not just talking about mentally assenting to a set of facts—I'm talking about you personally surrendering your life to Christ. There is a huge, huge difference.

Romans 10:9—“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

After looking at the evidence for yourself, have you come to personally believe that Jesus Christ is risen? Know that the gospel says that there is more involved here than just ascribing to the facts. All over the Bible belt, the majority of people will say they believe in the resurrection of Jesus, yet undoubtedly there are plenty of them who are not saved from their sins. Mere intellectual assent does not save. If you were to ask Satan himself if he believes the facts, he would say 'yes.'

Scores of professing Christians have only believed half of Romans 10:9, and they think that they have been saved from their sins, when in reality they are not. They give lip-service to Jesus as Savior, but they have yet to surrender their life to Him as Lord that He is, worthy of their worship and full devotion. The crucial question to be answered is this one—“Will you repent of your sin and surrender your life to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord?”