

The Hope of the Resurrection

(1 Corinthians 15:12-34)

Does living in a modern civilization bring peace, happiness and civility among people? We live in a technologically and scientifically advanced age. But despite the advancement in medicine and technology societal ills not only remain, many are getting worse. Suicide, anxiety and depression are all on the rise. Violent crimes in many cities are increasing. Drug addiction and homelessness is more predominate today than ever. Among Christians and non-Christians pessimism about our children's future is much greater in recent days.

Although the advancement in science and technology has brought much good to our society, like for example, lifesaving surgeries and the information age, many of our social ills have also been fueled by these modern advancements. For example, viruses can spread throughout the world much faster because of the advancement in travel and economic globalization. The increasing polarization and tribalism today to a great degree has been propagated through social media. These human advancements that are supposed to make our society better, have also created new problems and exasperated old ones.

Martin Luther King Jr., once said, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." Why are societal ills increasing despite great human advancements? Because the problem is not a lack of modern advancements, but rather the problem is a lost of hope. We can afford to lose many things in our modern society, but to live a meaningful and purposeful life we can't afford to lose hope. And this is especially true of our Christian faith.

Prosperity not persecution has been the greatest threat to the church, especially in modern times. Today Christianity is spreading the fastest, not in countries where there is great freedom, but where there's great opposition to the preaching of the gospel. And the reason this is so is because in times of prosperity, there's a tendency for us to become more earthly minded and look to things like technology to do for us what only God can do.

But in those places where the gospel is advancing despite persecution, Christians look to the risen Christ where infinite hope is found. In a world where lawlessness is increasing and the love of many is growing cold as Jesus predicted, this world desperately needs infinite hope and that hope is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Main idea: The entirety of the Christian faith and the power to live it out hinges on the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

To unfold this theme, we are going to examine how the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which is central to our Christian faith, makes life truly worth living.

1. The Solid Foundation of His Resurrection.

The first reason why the entirety of the Christian faith hangs on the resurrection of Jesus is because of the solid foundation of His resurrection. Remember that in 1 Corinthians 15:4-5 Paul lays out two essential facts of the saving message of the gospel along with their corresponding evidences. The two essential facts are that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the prophetic scriptures and was raised on the third day from the dead in accordance with the scriptures. Paul further adds that the historical fact of Christ's resurrection was verified by eyewitnesses, who are listed in verse 5-8, and includes Paul's own encounter with the risen Lord and his miraculous conversion to Christianity.

Now having explained the two essential facts of the saving message of the gospel with an emphasis of the resurrection, Paul asked the question: *"Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"* (1 Corinthians 15:12).

It appears that the reason Paul is clarifying the importance of the resurrection to the Christian faith is because there were some in the church of Corinth that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It's important to note here that they may not have directly denied that Christ rose from the dead in some form. Remember Christ's

resurrection was clearly an established historical fact that was verified by over 500 eyewitnesses, many of whom were still alive in Paul's day.

But apparently what some of the Corinthians did not affirm was the concept of a bodily resurrection. In the first century, virtually everyone, especially the people of Corinth, believed in the afterlife. Yet their concept of the afterlife, which was influenced by the Greek culture, was limited to the disembodied immortality of the soul. Their pagan culture valued the soul but devalued the body. Therefore by disregarding the concept of bodily resurrection in general, some were also disregarding a foundational element of the saving power of the gospel (v.13).

So, to those who questioned the resurrection from the dead, Paul continues: *“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:13-14).

The apostle Paul makes it very clear that to deny the resurrection of Jesus is to empty the gospel of its transcendent power and infinite hope. In verses 13-19, Paul explains that if Christ did not indeed rise from the dead, then his preaching, which was centered on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, would be empty, and their faith would have no substance (v.14-16).

The author of Hebrews described faith as the assurance of things hope for (Hebrews 11:1). It's the assurance of things hope for, because true faith is not wishful thinking. What gives us eternal hope is not faith in our faith, but faith in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. But if Christ had not risen, Paul said, not only would their faith be futile, but they would still be in their sin, (v.17), which means they would still be under the penalty and power of sin.

As we learned last week, death is the judgement of sin. And if Christ only died for our sins, but did not rise from the dead, we would still be under the condemnation of sin. But Jesus did rise from the dead and His resurrection authoritatively validates that our sin debt has been

paid in full so that all who believe can be reconciled forever to a Holy God.

This brings us to a second reason why the entire Christian faith hangs on the resurrection namely, the sure facts of His resurrection.

2. The Sure Facts of His Resurrection.

After explaining that to deny the resurrection, which is foundational to Christianity, would be to deny the gospel itself, Paul continues: *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”* (1 Corinthians 15:20). Remember that Paul began his treatise on the saving and sanctifying power of the gospel by **reminding** the Corinthians about the two essential and historical facts of the gospel, namely Christ’s substitutionary death for our sins and His resurrection. And along with laying out the essential facts of Christ’s death and resurrection, Paul gives two irrefutable evidences for both. They include the prophetic scriptures, which explain the significance of Christ’s death, and His burial, which proved that He really did die and the many eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive after His death.

Concerning these eyewitness accounts, one Christian author explains, “Many have sought to explain away these eyewitness accounts. The most common theory is that they were simply made up by the New Testament writers. But here in this well-attested, early public document, Paul says that most of these witnesses were still alive and readily accessible. Such claims would have been impossible if the witnesses never existed.” (Hope in Times of Fear, Tim Keller).

Now in addition to the eyewitness, which included the apostle Paul, another evidence of the historical facts of the resurrection, is that, like Paul, these eyewitnesses were willing to die for what they knew was true. It’s true that some people have died for a lie. But you will be hard pressed to find a group of men anywhere who would willingly and gladly die for a lie if they knew it was a lie. What made these believers willing to die? They knew that their Savior, because of His great love,

not only willingly gave up His life for their sin, but that three days later He arose and walked out of that tomb.

Notice also that Paul explains that Jesus, who rose from the dead is “*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Corinthians 15:20). What did Paul mean when he referred to the risen Christ as the firstfruits? In biblical times the term “firstfruits” represented the very first portion of any harvest. And that very first portion, which was considered the best of the harvest, was set aside as holy to the Lord. The time of first fruits was also a reason to celebrate because it pointed to the fact that harvest time had arrived and there was much more reaping yet to come (Leviticus 23:9-10; Numbers 18:12).

Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus was the firstfruits because it not only proved that Jesus had the power to conquer death for Himself, but that all who believe in Him would know the fruit of the resurrection power of Jesus. Jesus’ resurrection was the first and the best. And it’s also the guarantee that all who believe will also rise again.

But you might ask, didn’t others rise from the dead before Jesus? Yes, but others like Lazarus, who Jesus raised from the dead, would die again. But Jesus was the first to die and come back to life never to die again. Christ’s resurrection is not a one-time miracle that would never be repeated again; instead it is the firstfruits—the beginning of the greater redemptive plan of God yet to be fully fulfilled.

Now to further explain how Jesus is the firstfruits of all who believe and are asleep in Jesus, Paul continues, “*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ*” (1 Corinthians 15:21-23).

What Paul is saying here is that like the first Adam functioned as the first head and representative of the human race from which all inherited death because of sin, Jesus, the second Adam is the new head. And as the new head, all who are in Christ by faith will

experience His resurrection power not only in their past when they first believed, but in the present through the Holy Spirit and in the future when Jesus returns to awaken those who have fallen asleep.

Now when the greater redemptive plan of God is fulfilled, Paul writes, *“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.²⁷ For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he [God] is excepted who put all things in subjection under him [Jesus]. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him [God], then the Son himself will also be subjected to him [God] who put all things in subjection under him [Jesus], that God may be all in all”* (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Notice that when the end comes, which happens after Jesus returns, raises those who belong to Him and eventually reigns on the earth with the saints for 1000 years, Paul says that Jesus will deliver the kingdom to His Father. And He will do so after destroying every rule and every authority and power. In other words, Jesus will defeat all opposition to His reign in the universe—both human and demonic.

In one sense the reign of Jesus has already begun in His people who know the resurrection power of Jesus working in and through them by the Holy Spirit. But there will come a day when Jesus in His glorified body will establish His kingdom on the earth. And after defeating every opposing power, Paul says, the last enemy, which is death, will be destroyed also (v.26). The Apostle John adds in Revelation 21:4 that God, who will then be dwelling among His people, “will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death will be no more.” The redeemed people of God will never again have anything to fear for all eternity. And after putting down every rule and authority, and destroying death itself, Paul explains that Jesus, after accomplishing His Father’s redemptive plan and delivering the kingdom to God, remains subject to the Father (v.27-28). Although God the Son is equal in essence to God the Father, He remains functionally under the authority of His Father.

As one bible teacher illustrates. “Imagine a great king in a far-away land who had obtained the dominion of a far-away country. He does not go and claim it to himself personally. Instead, he sends his son as his prince to bring it under his rule. His son obtains for his father the rights over the land and the people, and teaches the people the ways of his father and his rule. He subjects all his father’s enemies to himself and brings all opposing forces under subjection. And he is even given the crown of that land. And then, when he returns home, he does not keep it all for himself. He is a ruler under submission. And so, he presents the crown to his father; so that the father is made king over all. That’s what the Lord Jesus will do for His heavenly Father. He is forever submitted to His Father. After he has reigned and brought all rule and authority under His feet, He submits it all to the Father.” (Greg Allen).

Now what is the ultimate result of all that Christ has accomplished on our behalf and to the glory of God? Paul explains, “*When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all*” (1 Corinthians 15:28). This means that when all is said and done all the saints will enjoy in their glorified resurrected bodies all that God is for them in Christ for all eternity.

Keep in mind that this future resurrection hope is not only something we should look forward to, but it’s a hope that should be affecting the way we live our lives today.

This brings us to a final way that the entirety of the Christian life hangs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

3. The Sanctifying Fruit of His Resurrection.

In addition to the solid foundation and sure facts of His resurrection, our entire Christian life rests upon the resurrection because of the **sanctifying fruit of His resurrection**. Having explained to the Corinthians why the fact of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is essential to our hope for resurrection, Paul asked: “*Otherwise, what do people*

mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?" (1 Corinthians 15:29).

Now it's important to note here that most bible commentators agree that what Paul means by *being baptized on behalf of the dead* is not easy to determine. There is no other place in the New Testament where Paul or any other biblical author uses such terminology. When coming to a difficult passage like this, it's vital that we apply good bible interpretive principles. One of those principles is to always interpret an obscure passage, such as this one, in light of its immediate context and the clear teaching of scripture.

We know for example that the bible clearly teaches, as Paul also makes clear in this chapter, that you can only be saved by personally receiving the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ by grace alone through faith alone (1 Corinthians 15:1-3; Ephesian 2:8) But although the saving message of the gospel is clear, there are some well known religious cults that teach that you have to be baptized to be saved. And they point to this verse to teach that if a friend or loved one died without being baptized that you can actually be baptized in their place.

But now I believe that a more biblically plausible understanding of this text is that Paul is speaking of being baptized with a view that one is taking the place of faithful believers who have gone on to be with the Lord. You see, in the original language the words translated "*on behalf of the dead*" can also be translated "*in place of the dead.*" So Paul is not saying that believers were "baptized for the benefit of the dead" but rather "baptized in place of the dead." In other words, what Paul is saying is that there have been many faithful believers who have gone before us and have fought the good fight of faith. Under the threat persecution and in the face of death they boldly proclaimed the gospel of the grace of God. And they declared their faith and allegiance to Christ by being publicly baptized. But these faithful soldiers of Christ have gone on to be with the Lord and were no longer actively serving the kingdom of God. And since they have finished their race and have gone on to be with the Lord, we are called upon to join the company of

the faithful upon this earth and publicly declare our faith and allegiance to Christ through baptism, and take the place of those who went before us in the service of King Jesus. It is in this sense that believers on the earth are “baptized in place of the dead.” We are taking the place and occupying the ranks of those who have gone on before us.

One bible teacher, who I gleaned much from, put it this way: “Imagine that the church of our Lord is one great army—stretching back centuries before us. Many have lived for Jesus—and have declared their faith in Him by being baptized. They were “Christian soldiers—marching as to war; with the cross of Jesus going on before!” And they have fought the good fight, died in their time, and have now left this earthly scene. But if there is no resurrection ahead for them—if there is no ‘living hope’ in Christ—then they would have wasted their lives. And it would be a foolish waste of time for you and me to then stand up, and be baptized in their place, and take our stand in the army of our Lord. That is what Paul means by asking, “what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all?” What would they gain? What good would it do? Why bother at all?” (Greg Allen)

But now on the other hand, if Christ as the firstfruits has risen from the dead and we are in Christ by faith, then we have great hope. We can take our stand with those who have gone before us knowing that not only will His resurrection power be with us, but whatever loss we may suffer for doing so, it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

Notice that after questioning the Corinthians about why they symbolically were being baptized in the place of the faithful saints that have gone before them, if they did not believe in resurrection, Paul continues: “*Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!*” (1 Corinthians 15:30-31).

In other words, Paul is asking, why would he and other faithful saints live in jeopardy 24/7 if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead? In answer to his question, Paul goes on to explain that in the same pride he had in

the Corinthians because of Christ, he protests the notion that Jesus did not rise for the dead by affirming that he died daily. In other words, Paul presented himself daily as a living sacrifice to Christ, willing to give his all, because he lived his life in view of the grace of God and the sure hope of the resurrection.

With this same sentiment, Paul continues: *“What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”* (1 Corinthians 15:32). When Paul speaks of the beasts he fought with at Ephesus, he is likely not referring to wild animals, but to the violent persecution he experienced. And his point is, why would he bother to endure such violent persecution, like beatings and imprisonment, if his hope in the resurrection was baseless. If the dead are not raised and we only have hope in this life, then we might as well live for all that this earthly life can give us. We might as well live for the here and now, as many today do, if this life is all there is and tomorrow we die and cease to exist.

But it was precisely because Paul and all who know Christ have a real, living and other worldly hope, that they are willing to take risk and endure persecution for the cause of Christ. It’s been said, if you don’t know the living Christ as your Savior, then this temporary life is the only heaven you’ll ever know. But if you know the living Christ, then this life is the only hell you’ll ever know.

Now in view of the certain hope of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul admonished the Corinthian: *“Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”³⁴ Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame”* (1 Corinthians 15:33-34).

Brothers and sisters, like the Corinthians, we live in a world where many are living only for the temporary things of this life. And if we are not careful, like the Corinthians, we can allow bad company to turn our hearts away from the infinite hope that we have in Christ. In light of this, Paul urged those who were losing sight of the hope of the resurrection, to wake up from their drunken stupor (v. 34). In other words, to fail to live in the light of the hope of the resurrection is to be

like a drunk who is not fully aware of where he's going and consequently stumbles and falls.

The hope of the resurrection gives us meaning and purpose for living that enables us through the Spirit to put sin to death and live for righteousness and the greater glory of Jesus Christ. Therefore Paul concludes: *“Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame”*(v. 34).

Not only bad company, but also bad theology about God and the things of God will lead to shameful living. But how many of you know, its not enough to just have good theology. We must be awakened. We must live in the light of the glorious knowledge of who God is and the hope that we have in Christ by renewing of our minds daily so that we are transformed to bear the fruits of Christ and resist conformity to this world (Romans 12:1-3).

Conclusion

No matter what you're going through, if you have received the saving grace of Jesus Christ, you have a living hope. And although weeping may endure for a night, because of the living hope we have in Christ, we can trust that joy will come in the morning.

But perhaps you're here this morning and although you profess faith in Christ, you have not been living in light of the hope of the resurrection of Christ. Instead, you've allowed bad company or bad theology to misdirect your hope, which has led you down a road of moral compromise. If that's you, turn to the God of all grace in repentance and ask Him for the strength to redirect any misplaced hope in your life unto the certain hope of His saving grace and resurrection power.

May we not waste our lives living only for this temporary world. But instead let us give ourselves sacrificially to knowing Christ and spreading His hope in dependence on the Spirit's resurrection power within and with our eyes fixed on the day when we will see our risen

Savior face to face. As the precious hymn declares, “One glimpse of His dear face and all sorrows will erase, so bravely run the race, till we see Christ.” It will be worth it all!