

Sermon 73: Why the Resurrection Matters: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable..."

Introduction:

- **The Corinthian Problem:**
 - They believed in an afterlife, but not one that was built on scripture.
 - They struggled with the concept of an eternal physical body.
 - This struggle was primarily a philosophical struggle:
 - How can the physical which is perishable exist in the eternal which is imperishable?
 - How can the physical which is corrupted exist in the eternal which is free from corruption?
 - How can two realms which seem incompatible be harmonized?
- **Their immediate tension:**
 - People in the church had recently died and their current situation was in question.
 - The deeply pagan practices of Greco-Roman culture had negatively impacted their doctrine and practice.
 - The controversy needed to be addressed thoroughly and practically.
- **His basic approach:**
 - **Part 1: The resurrection is an historic fact and a foundational piece of the gospel: 15:1-11**
 - **Part 2: There are inescapable implications to rejecting the resurrection: 15:12-34**
 - **"If:"** The implications if it were not true: **15:12-19**
 - **"Since:"** The implications since it is true: **15:20-28**
 - **"Why:"** The implications if it were not true: **15:29-34**

Summary: Paul methodically picked apart the doctrinal controversy regarding the resurrection, arguing that doctrine and practice cannot be separated without terrible consequences.

Part 1: Ministry implications if this doctrine were not true: 15:12-19

- **Opening Question: 15:12** "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead..."
 - Paul asked a question to emphasize his point and get the church to ponder the truth.
 - The gospel message was being actively preached in the church.
 - Their lives had been changed by it.
 - Many of the people who had proclaimed the message claimed to be firsthand witnesses to the resurrection.
 - They needed to come to terms with the real-life implications of their teaching.
- **Five Real-life implications if there is no resurrection: 15:13-19**
 - **Implication 1: If there is no resurrection, then a key piece of the gospel message is not true: 15:13** "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen..."
 - You cannot have two contradictory and inescapably linked facts true at the same time.
 - Either there is a resurrection or there is none.
 - Either Christ rose from the dead or He did not.
 - Belief in the resurrection and belief in Christ's resurrection are inescapably linked together.
 - **Implication 2: If that piece of the gospel is not true, then the entire message is irreversibly undermined: 15:14-15** "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not..."
 - **Our preaching is vain:** This means that the message they proclaimed was completely devoid of truth.
 - **Your faith is vain:** This means that the object of your faith is powerless to save, making your faith useless.
 - **We are false witnesses:** This means that they were liars trying to convince the people to embrace a message that was not true.
 - **Implication 3: There is an inescapable connection between the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of Christ: 15:16** "If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised..."
 - **Implications 4: There is an inescapable connection between the resurrection of Christ and escaping God's eternal wrath: 15:17-18** "And if Christ be not raised, your

faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished..."

- **Your faith is vain:** This means that the object of your faith is powerless to save, making your faith useless.
 - **You are still in your sins:** This means that the wonderful promises that we rest upon concerning the removal of our sins are not valid.
 - **John 8:24** "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins..."
 - **Ephesians 2:1** "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins..."
 - **They are perished:** This means that the wonderful promises that we rest upon that we are saved from eternal destruction are not valid.
 - **John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life..."
 - **John 10:28** "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand..."
- **Implication 5: If we do not have a valid eternal hope, our lives are more miserable than the world around us: 15:19**
"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable..."
- "Only" the Christian's hope goes beyond this life.
 - If we do not have eternal hope, we have nothing of real value.
 - This is especially true, for those who have sacrificed everything in this life.
 - **1 Corinthians 4:9-13** "I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day..."

**Part 2: Rich theological implications since this doctrine is true:
15:20-28**

- **Opening Statement of Fact: 15:20** "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept..."
 - **Christ is risen: This is a fact**
 - **He is the first-fruits: His resurrection is the first of more to come.**
 - **1 Corinthians 15:22-23** "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming..."
- **Implication 1: Death and resurrection both come through a singular representative: 15:21-22** "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive..."
 - **By man death and resurrection:**
 - **In Adam all die:**
 - **In Christ, all are made alive:**
 - **Romans 5:12** "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned..."
 - **Romans 5:17-20** "If by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous..."
- **Implication 2: This victory over death comes through our union with Christ: 15:23** "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming..."
 - Christ the first fruits:
 - They that are Christ's at his coming:
- **Implication 3: Christ's resurrection, and our participation in that resurrection are the final demonstration of God's sovereignty over all things: 15:24-28** "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things

shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all..."

- **Christ will rule His Kingdom forever: 15:24** "He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God"
- **Christ will crush all rivals to that eternal rule: 15:24** "Put down all rule and all authority and power"
- **All enemies must submit to Him: 15:25** "Put all enemies under his feet... The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death..."
- **This restoration will proclaim God's glory for all eternity: 15:28** "Then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all..."

Part 3: Additional implications if this doctrine were not true: 15:29-34 "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame..."

- **Implication 1: Baptism on behalf of the dead is pointless if there is no resurrection: 15:29** "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?"
 - **Two possible interpretations:**
 - **First:** a vicarious baptism for someone who has died.
 - **Second:** a willingness to submit to water baptism, desiring to be reunited with loved ones who are with the Lord.
 - **His point:** The desire to be converted and identify with the Lord with the motivation of being reunited with deceased loved ones is pointless if there is no resurrection for the dead.
- **Implication 2: Suffering for Christ is pointless if there is no resurrection: 15:30-32** "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me..."
 - **What is the point of enduring all these personal ministry pressures: 15:30** "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?"
 - **What is the point of putting my flesh to death every day: 15:31** "I die daily"

- **What is the point of dying as a martyr: 15:32** "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me..."
- **If there is no resurrection, I might as well live for pleasure: 15:32** "If the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die..."
- **Implication 3: Your worldview has real-life implications: 15:33-34** "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame..."
 - **Even your pagan neighbors understand this concept: 15:33** "Evil communications corrupt good manners..."
 - **Your willingness to entertain false teaching has lulled you into complacency: 15:34** "Awake to righteousness, and sin not..."
 - **You know better: 15:34** "I speak this to your shame..."

Application:

- It is impossible to separate doctrine and practice.
- Christian practice and comfort are inescapably linked to the contents of the gospel.
- There can be no Christianity without the gospel.
- If there is not resurrection, then living a sacrificial Christian life is completely pointless.
- We must keep our hearts focused on the core components of the gospel.