

The Resurrection - Part 1

1 Corinthians 15:1-34

INTRODUCTION:

So far, Paul has dealt primarily with practical issues within the church at Corinth. In chapter 15 he makes a shift to a more doctrinal matter - the issue of Resurrection.

The modern church has relegated the issue of resurrection to one out of 52 Sundays a year - Easter. This was not the case in the ancient church. The doctrine of the resurrection was something that was visited on a weekly basis. It was the theological key for the entire religion.

The concept of celebrating the birth of Christ, or Christmas began after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Dec. 25th was considered the "Dies Solis Invicti Nati" or the "Day of Birth of the Unconquered Sun". So the Roman Church, "Christianized" that pagan holiday as the date of the celebration of Christ's birth.

I'm glad they did - the birth of Christ is certainly something we should celebrate. It is, however, never commanded in the NT. Not one time are we told to remember the birth of Christ. Paul hardly mentioned it at all in his epistles.

The early church was not fascinated with the birth of Christ, nor was it fascinated with Mary the earthly mother of Christ.

It is, however, fair to say that the early church was **OBSESSED** with the Resurrection of Christ.

Resurrection was the key factor that separated Christianity from all of the other world religions.

- Confucius died and he was buried.
- Lao-tzu, the father of Taoism wandered off into the wilderness and died with his water buffalo.
- The Buddha rotted away with food poisoning.
- Muhammad died in 632 and his body was cut up and spread all over the Near East.

Jesus Christ died and lived again, and lives today. Consider the fact that somewhere there is a Heaven, and in that Heaven a Temple, and in that Temple a throne, and on that Throne sits a living, breathing, resurrected GOD/MAN. His earthly mother was a Jewish Peasant girl, His Father the Ancient of Days.

ILLUSTRATION: The Ancient **Greek Philosopher Epicurus**, was the founder of the school of philosophy called Epicureanism. His goal was to help people achieve maximum happiness and a total freedom from fear. But he kept running into one major problem. DEATH.

People simply could not get free from the fear of death. Why? Simply because no one really knew what came after.

- Epicurus presented the concept of **Annihilationism**, the idea that after death was nothing, so there's nothing to fear. You are non-existent. He said, "*your state after death will be like your state before birth – you will not exist.*" But people continually asked the same question – can you be sure? What if there is a future after death, worse yet, what if there is accountability? Retribution? Judgement?

- **Shakespeare wrestled with this concept in Hamlet's Soliloquy**

To be or not to be, that is the question – he's contemplating suicide.

*But that the dread of something after death, The undiscovered country,
from whose bourn No traveller returns, puzzles the will, And makes us rather bear those ills
we have, Than to fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience does make cowards of
us all,*

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ was Heaven's resounding answer to the deepest questions ever pondered by the hearts of man.

John Locke, the 18th-century British philosopher, said, "Our Saviour's resurrection is truly of great importance in Christianity, so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it."¹

CONTEXT: But in the Church of Corinth there was a THEOLOGICAL RUMOR circulating that there was no resurrection. Paul found it necessary to dive deep into the concept. *He begins with a reminder about...*

1. The Essence of Christianity

1 Corinthians 15:1–58 (ESV)

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that

- a. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
- b. ⁴ that he was buried,
- c. that he was **raised** on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

So there you have it the threefold majesty of the good news of salvation. The substitutionary **death**, **burial** and **resurrection** of Christ in payment for our sins. But Paul continues and notice which aspect of the Gospel Paul emphasizes.

- ⁵ and that he **appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve. (The Witness of the Apostles of Christ)
- ⁶ Then he **appeared** to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (The Witness of the Church of Christ)
- ⁷ Then he **appeared** to James, then to all the apostles. (The Witness of the Apostles of the Church)
- ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he **appeared** also to me. (The Special Witness)

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

So notice that Paul grounds the Christian faith, not in a leap in the dark, but rather in the testimony of eye witnesses. Many of who went on to die for their faith.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [1 Corinthians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 398.

That's important. Occasionally, someone will say, "If you will prove to me that Christianity is true I will become a Christian". But what they tend to want is scientific proof, concrete, measurable, reproducible evidence.

But that is not how you PROVE a truth claim. Truth claims are proven through a Judicial approach. The way you would prove someone is guilty of murder. In other words, you call for eye witnesses to testify, you see if the testimonies align, you see if the empirical evidence support the witnesses testimony. They you call for a verdict that can be stated beyond a reasonable doubt.

That is why Paul is calling for witnesses that could be contacted, interviewed, verified. You see? It's not some wild leap in the dark based on an ancient rumor.

Look at the day of worship - on of the 10 commandments stated that the Jews were to worship on the Sabbath day right? But what do you see the early Christians who were mostly Jews doing? Changing the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. Why? Jesus was raised on a Sunday. That's the sort of empirical evidence that matters. AND it aligns with the testimony of hundreds of eye witnesses.

Lawyer Sir Edward Clarke said,

As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter day. For me, the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect; the gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.²

So Paul is correct in suggesting that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the very essence of the Christian Gospel.

The Essence of Christianity, secondly...

2. The Error of the Materialist

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

For some reason, certain individuals in the Church at Corinth had drifted into the heretical error of denying the resurrection.

- Perhaps it was a result of the influence of the **Epicureans** who believed in life ends with annihilation.
- Perhaps it was the **Gnostics**. The Gnostics believed that anything material was evil and only the spiritual was good. So they didn't like the concept of resurrection. Freedom from physical

² John F. MacArthur Jr., [1 Corinthians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 402.

restraints was their goal. So the Gnostics held that that the resurrection was merely spiritual and not literal.

- Perhaps it was the influence of the Jewish sect of **Sadducees** who denied resurrection in Jesus day. Remember they persistently tested Jesus with riddles that they hoped would disprove the concept of resurrection.
- Perhaps it was one of those **false prophecies** Paul warned against in the previous chapters.

Whatever the reason - the suggestion that there was no resurrection was gaining ground and Paul had to REFUTE it. Notice four problems Paul suggests if there is no resurrection.

a. Our Preaching is Profitless -

¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

Now the word **vain** means empty, futile, with no purpose, a colossal waste of time.

Listen ladies and gentlemen, if there is no Resurrection:

- We are wasting our time by being here.
- I'm wasting my time by preaching
- And you are wasting your's by listening,
- and we all ought to do something else.

Our preaching is vain, it is futile, it is worthless. It is profitless.

If the remains of Jesus Christ continue to decay in some dark cave outside of Jerusalem, we all should have stayed home and watched Soccer.

Not only is preaching profitless...

b. Witnesses are Worthless -

¹⁵ We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

Think of it, in Paul's day people were dying for their testimony that Jesus was alive! Now listen, a person might die for something they believe to be true when it actually isn't, but only the certifiably insane would risk their life for a lie, they know to be a lie.

Yet, dozens of men were put to death in the most horrible was imaginable bearing witness that they had seen Jesus of Nazareth alive from the dead.

But if he wasn't raised... preaching profitless... Witnesses are worthless...

c. Faith is Futile -

¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

You see the resurrection was the evidence that Christ's payment for our sins was sufficient. It was the receipt. The check cleared.

But if Christ was not raised, there is still work to be done. You are still as lost as you ever were.

preaching profitless... Witnesses are worthless... faith is futile...

d. Death has Dominion -

¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

I know that many of you like me were aware of some empty seats around the table this thanksgiving. My Father wasn't there, Julie's Father wasn't there. Only one of my grandparents remain. It this life is all there is... what a pitiful sad thing it is.

But friends, for a Christian death is temporary. It's just a matter of time! What a thanksgiving meal that will be.

- I'll break bread with my father again! Oh the stories we will tell.
- Julie's dad, will tell those corny jokes and will probably still be wanting to talk about Hillary and Benghazi.
- My uncles will dust off their instruments and they will play like never before.

But if there is no resurrection.. that is all just the pathetic superstition of a hopeless man.

There is no place in Christianity for a denial of the resurrection.

It is The Essence of Christianity, secondly...the Error of the Materialist...

3. The Expectation of Resurrection

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ 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.

This is what theologians call the Doctrine of Federal Headship or Imputation.

- That is ADAM was the federal head, or representative for the human race. You see, woven into the created order was the fact that like begets like. When Adam sinned, all of his progeny were destined to be sinners. Remember what God told Adam? The day you eat of the **fruit of the tree** of the knowledge of good and evil - you will surely die. The wages of sin is death. So when Adam ate that fruit he did so, not just for himself, but for you and me. ADAMS SIN and the Consequence was IMPUTED to your account.
- But CHRIST was called the Second Adam. He did not inherit Adam's sin because it was passed through the male lineage. Jesus was born of God. Death couldn't hold him because he was perfectly sinless. NOW - by faith in Jesus, His righteousness and it's consequences (resurrection) are CREDITED to your account. His holiness is imputed to you by faith. So, your resurrection is wrapped up in His resurrection.

23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

24 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 is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 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.

Now next week we are going to see in detail exactly what the resurrection body will be like. But for now, just understand that the day is coming when followers of Christ will be raised.

29 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?

Now that is a mysterious verse. But it seems that there was a practice of, "stand in" baptisms. Imagine a person came to faith in Christ but was martyred prior to water baptism. Perhaps a member of the church would stand in and be baptized in his place. This was not commanded, it was simply something Paul observed.

Logically, he is suggesting that the practice was senseless if there was no resurrection. Those people are gone forever.

30 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! 32 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." 33 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.

Make no mistake unless Christ returns first, Your death is inevitable. I spoke with a man recently who found out that he has an inoperable tumor. They gave him a time frame that he could pass within a year. It occurred to me, we all have an expiration date... he just got to peek at his. You have one too. I have one too.

ILLUSTRATION;

A story is told of a Bagdad merchant who sent his servant to the market to pick up some goods for him. While the servant was making the purchases in the market place he found himself face to face with Death! In great fear he returned to his master and told him that Death had given him a menacing look and that he must have a horse so he could escape to Samara, a city some distance away. The master quickly gave his servant a horse, then went to the market place to find Death. When he found him he asked, "Why did you give my servant a menacing look?" Death replied, "I wasn't looking

at him menacingly, I was merely surprised to see him here in Bagdad; for, you see, I have an appointment with him tonight in samara."

Death is inevitable... resurrection is not. There is only one option in regards to death. But there are two in regards to resurrection.

• **Hebrews 9:27**

*27*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

**3 people die every second,
180 people die every minute,
11,000 people die every hour,
260,000 people die every day
95 million people die every year**

1 Samuel 20:3

Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death." (NIV)

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

The heart is what Doctors call an, "Involuntary organ". You don't have to think about it for it to beat.

- At sometime in the past the cells that formed your embryonic heart began to quiver pumping blood throughout your little body. I remember when we went to see the ultrasound when Julie was around 12 weeks along with Carly... her heartbeat was 160 beats per minute. I said, "Julie, she's going to be a Pentecostal". Your's was the same way.
- You grew as a child, never conscious of your heart beating. Playing at recess. Resting at night. They entire time your heart beating.
- Then you saw that special someone and your heart would beat faster.
- And here you are today... it's beating like it is supposed to.
- Each day about 2000 gallons of blood are pumped by your heart.
- In a 70-year lifetime, an average human heart beats **more than 2.5 billion times.**

BUT the day is coming when it will simply stop. Perhaps doctors will try to get it to start back... but that final heartbeat is coming... and every second it's getting closer.

The only hope you have is the testimony that someone found a way out of death. Friend, that is the testimony of 2000 years of Christian history.

In John 11:17–26 (ESV) Jesus came to the funeral of Lazarus his dear friend. We are told he wept for his friend's death. Jesus said to Martha...²³ ..**"Your brother will rise again."** ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, **"I am the resurrection and the life.**

Martha, when I walked in the resurrection walked in.

25b. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

I ask you that same question today... do you believe this..