

# Resurrection: The Future Hope

Devotional Reading: Luke 24:1–12

Background Scripture: Luke 24:1–12; 1 Corinthians 15:3–20, 50–58;  
Revelation 22:1–5

Today's Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58

## I. The Resurrection

### 1 Corinthians 15:13–15

**13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:**

**14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.**

**15 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.**

**16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:**

**17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.**

**18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.**

**19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.**

**20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.**

13. Some members of the church of Corinth disputed the reality of future *resurrection*. Paul reasons that, if their belief is true, then either Jesus' crucified body is still in Joseph's tomb, or there's credibility to the rumor that Jesus' disciples stole it. Thus, Paul begins to examine their faulty logic.

14a. Paul sets forth what we might call a "chain reaction of consequences." These if-then statements emphasize the importance of Christ's resurrection on the Christian faith. In this verse, Paul says if Jesus didn't rise, then Paul's preaching and that of others like him amounts to nothing at best. It is downright deceptive at worst.

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus "died for our sins" and "rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Paul likely had in mind passages such as Psalm 16:8–11 that claim God's "Holy One" will not "see corruption." Paul is saying that if there is no resurrection and Jesus is not alive, then the Old Testament Scriptures presenting the Messiah in these terms are also worthless.

14b. A hypothetical deception such as this says something negative against both the preachers and those who accept their message. They (and we) put faith in a lie if Jesus is not raised.

15. The chain-reaction argument continues. If Jesus is not risen, then those who boldly proclaim Jesus' resurrection are *false witnesses of God*. They violate the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16).

The collection of people who become false witnesses if Christ is not raised includes Cephas, the rest of the twelve disciples, a group of 500 believers, James,

all of the apostles, and Paul himself. Two of those witnesses, Cephas and John, did not hesitate to voice their unshakable convictions before the Sanhedrin: “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

16–17. As if to underscore the seriousness of his argument, Paul repeats words from verses 13–14 above. Then he adds an independent clause: *ye are yet in your sins*. Paul’s argument personally affects his listeners. Presuming Christ did not rise, then they are holding to useless faith, and the hope of forgiveness and new life is gone.

Jesus’ death and resurrection are inseparable. Jesus “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Without the resurrection, Jesus’ crucifixion is nothing more than the death of a self-deceived, self-named Messiah. In this scenario, He, too, is a false witness of God. The ultimate tragedy of such an alternative is that humans are, therefore, still dead in *sins*.

18. Paul moves from the tragic results of “no resurrection” for living Christians to addressing the dire consequences for Christians who have already died. The Greek word translated *asleep* is used in both biblical and non-biblical literature. It can mean literal, ordinary sleep or figuratively represent the idea of passing away. In the New Testament, the former usage appears four times and the latter thirteen times. We see one sense confused with the other in the case of Lazarus (John 11:11–15).

19. Earlier in the letter, Paul lists *hope* among the three qualities that “abideth” (1 Corinthians 13:13). He writes, “We are saved by hope” (Romans 8:24). Hope for the future sets Christians apart from “others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

20. The gloom of the previous verses is replaced with Paul’s declaration that *Christ is risen*. Paul supplements his declaration with a noteworthy affirmation:

Christ is *the firstfruits of them that slept*. The term *firstfruits* is derived from the Law of Moses. After the harvest, the people of Israel were to bring the first portion of their crops to the priest as an offering to the Lord (Leviticus 23:9–11).

This practice emphasized two realities. The first: harvests come from the Lord. The Israelites are just tenants or stewards of the land God gave them, and He blesses them with harvests. The second reality is that more harvests will follow; the *first* fruits are just that—the rest is yet to come.

## II. The Mystery

### 1 Corinthians 15:51–57

**51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,**

**52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.**

**53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**

**54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.**

**55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**

**56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.**

**57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

51. The Greek word that is translated as *mystery* in this verse occurs 27 times in the New Testament, most often by Paul (20 times). When Paul uses the term “mystery,” he is not speaking of an unsolvable

problem with no resolution. His definition indicates a vital spiritual truth that was hidden for a time but is now revealed. In the text before us, the mystery he's talking about concerns what the future holds for Christians. *Sleep* is a euphemism for death. Paul says the collective experience will not be death but rather *change*. His teaching here is consistent with what he writes elsewhere on the subject (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

52. A feature of the Lord's return will be the sounding of a *trumpet*. A trumpet blast is associated with the coming of God's judgment throughout Scripture.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul states that the trumpet's sound will be accompanied by a shout from Jesus and the voice of the archangel. At that time, *the dead shall be raised incorruptible*, no longer subject to the problems and limitations of a broken, sin-cursed world. When Jesus returns, the remainder of the "crop" following the "firstfruits" of His resurrection will be "harvested." *And we shall be changed!*

53a. Our physical bodies are perishable; they are *corruptible*. Since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50), a radical transformation is required. That transformation will happen at the resurrection. The corruptible will give way to *incorruption*.

53b. We must take care to understand this phrase correctly. When we *put on immortality* we will not become gods ourselves. To believe otherwise is to confuse the word *immortality* with the word *eternality*. The former means "without end"; the latter means "without beginning or end"—an attribute that is only God's.

54. The word *mortal* reminds us of words like *mortuary* and *mortician*, which have close associations with death. But such vocabulary has no place in our promised transformation.

The saying *Death is swallowed up in victory* is likely drawn from Isaiah 25:8. The second half of that verse features God's promise to wipe away all tears. We see the promise's ultimate fulfillment in the glimpses of heaven given in Revelation 7:17 and 21:4. The absence of tears in heaven is a by-product of Jesus' *victory* over death.

55. Paul personifies *death* and the *grave* and addresses them to highlight Jesus' triumph. He adapts the words from Hosea 13:14. Death and the grave cannot respond to Paul's challenge, for death is a defeated enemy.

56. God warned Adam that *death* was the consequence of disobedience (Genesis 2:17). "The wages of sin is death," writes Paul in Romans 6:23. Additionally, God's *law*, as seen most clearly in the Ten Commandments, gives *strength* to *sin* by making sins undeniable. Sin ensures we can never measure up to the standards set by God's law.

57. The death and resurrection of *our Lord Jesus Christ* gives us *victory*. The threats mentioned in the previous verse are all dismantled. The cross and empty tomb of Jesus are victorious. We say with Paul, *thanks be to God*.

### III. The Work

#### 1 Corinthians 15:58

**58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.**

58. The word *therefore* links the crucial truths of Jesus' resurrection to the mechanics of how the Corinthians (and all Christians) are to live. It links doctrine with practical counsel. The doctrine of our future resurrection is the foundation for present-moment kingdom service.

# Involvement Learning

## Resurrection: The Future Hope

### Into the Lesson

Do an internet search to find an example of a great victory. Examples may come from history, current news, a sports or personal achievement story, an industry advancement, etc. Write down details of the example.

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Today we will examine the greatest victory of all time. We will consider the wonderful comfort this victory provides to all who believe in Jesus.

### Into the Word

Read 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58. List all the promises in this text.

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What is the “mystery”?

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What is the “victory”?

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What does the resurrection provide believers?

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How does Paul ask believers to respond to the truths in this passage, and why?

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What word or phrase from today’s text stands out in a new way?

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How does Christ’s resurrection bring you comfort?

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### Key Text

Now is Christ risen from the dead,  
and become the firstfruits  
of them that slept.  
—1 Corinthians 15:20

### Into Life

List trials in life (such as a loss, death, health diagnoses, or financial stress). Then write encouraging words, phrases, or verses from today’s text that help us face those trials.

*Trials:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Encouragement:* \_\_\_\_\_

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### Thought to Remember

Christ is risen!