

How the Resurrection Changes Everything

Easter Sunday / 1 Corinthians 15:12-28 / March 31, 2024

Introduction:

It is highly likely that many of us have heard the story of Jesus rising from the dead after three days in the grave, following His crucifixion, but I wonder how often we have paused to truly consider its importance in the gospel story. Our goal this morning is to think deeply on what this event, that we remember each year, truly means for us. Before we get to our passage, in 1 Corinthians 15:12-28, we should note how Paul opens chapter 15. Look at verses 1-11 with me, “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. 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. 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. 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.” The apostle Paul longs to ensure the church in Corinth truly understands and holds fast to the gospel he preached so their belief would not be in vain. What he preached, which he says is of first importance and includes three vital truths, Christ’s death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection, all of which take place to fulfill the scriptures. Following this, in verses 4-11, Paul describes how Christ appeared to the twelve apostles, over 500 people, and finally to himself, sharing specifically how God’s grace in him has proven not to be in vain because of how it has worked in his life after he heard and believed in these truths that he now preaches. Family, like the church in Corinth, these are truths we must believe and should hold fast to so our faith, like Paul’s, would not be in vain. After he lays this foundation, the resurrection becomes the central theme of the rest of this chapter because of a teaching that crept into this church suggesting there is no bodily resurrection of the dead. His argument shows how foolish that teaching is and the importance of the resurrection to the gospel story by focusing on the connection of our resurrection with the resurrection of Christ. In verses 12-28, I see two ways Christ’s resurrection anchors our hope in the gospel. The first is in verses 12-19, where Paul shows how,

Christ’s Resurrection Confirms Our Faith is Profitable

Paul starts his argument by taking up the hypothetical position that there is no resurrection of the dead and showing what it would mean for the gospel if that were true. Look at verses 12-13, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.” Paul begins by showing a fundamental flaw in this hypothetical position. How can Christ have been raised if there is no resurrection of the dead when our lives are explicitly united with Christ’s? He will make this point four times in verses 12-16. Because we are united to Christ as we believe in Him, our future is inseparable from His. Notice then how Paul turns his attention to the implications of Christ not being raised in verses 14-15, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 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. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.” The first implication is their preaching would be in vain. Paul likely means the content of their preaching. This would mean everything he declared in verses 3-4 is empty and useless. He could also mean the activity of their preaching is in vain since it would have no basis in the truth.

In verses 15-16, we see what else this would mean about their preaching which is even more serious. When the apostles preached the resurrection of Christ, they declared God was the one who raised Him. However, if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised, and they would be lying about the work of God. It would be dangerous to lie about the work of God. Yet, it is the second implication, at end of verse 14, that should get our attention, “If Christ has not be raised...your faith is in vain.” Church, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our faith is empty and useless. There are people who try to say believing that Christ was actually raised isn’t necessary to our faith, but Paul clearly shows it is vital to it. Why? Look at verses 17-18, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” Verse 17 expounds on our faith being in vain. The term translated “futile” indicates our faith would ultimately lead to nothing, because “you are still in your sins.” Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have no forgiveness, no reconciliation with God, and are still under the power and condemnation of sin. This means, in verse 18, that those who have died have perished, meaning they died in their sin with no hope of salvation. Romans 4:25 says Christ, “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Romans 5:10 says, “if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” Do you see how Christ’s resurrection is important to our faith? As Gordon Fee comments, “in Rom. 4:25 and 5:10, the death of Jesus as “for us,” including both justification and sanctification, is inextricably bound together with his resurrection. To deny the one is to deny the other” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 743–744). Family, without the resurrection of Jesus, His death on the cross has not atoned for our sin. If He has not been raised, He is not our redeemer, we have not been justified, and we have not been released from the bondage and condemnation of sin. This is what leads to Paul’s final conclusion in this argument. Look at verse 19, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” I remember hearing a pastor when I was growing up say that if everything about Jesus turned out to be wrong, he would be okay, because he would simply die and cease to exist. But Paul has no concept of that as an option, especially when it comes to the resurrection. He says, if the resurrection has not happened, we have not been forgiven of our sins and have no hope beyond this life. And if that is the case, believers should be the most pitied of people because we are wasting our lives and believing in a lie. Church, don’t fall into the trap of thinking the Christian faith is worth it if there is no resurrection of the dead, because if there is no resurrection of the dead there is no resurrection of Christ and we are left in our sins. This doesn’t mean the Christian faith is only future focused and has no advantage in this life. It shows the loss of hope in the future means the loss of hope in our past and present as well. Without the resurrection of Christ, the gospel losses its power, there is no chance to overcome sin, and those who have died in the faith are under God’s condemnation forever. Now, I intentionally phrased this point to focus on the alternative to this foolish teaching Paul is combating. Family, because Christ has been raised, our faith is not in vain, meaning it is useful and profitable. Because Christ has been raised, His death on the cross has secured forgiveness. Because Christ has been raised, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Because Christ has been raised, those who believe in Him are not left in their sins and the power of sin has been broken. Because Christ has been raised, those who have died in faith have not perished but stepped into eternal life. Because Christ has been raised, we who believe in the gospel have hope beyond this life and are never to be pitied. Oh family, dwell on the importance of the resurrection and see how it has changed everything, confirming our faith is profitable. The second way Christ’s resurrection anchors our hope in the gospel is in verses 20-28, where Paul shows how,

Christ’s Resurrection Ensures Following Christ in this Life will be Worth It

When you are studying God’s Word, make sure you notice terms that indicate a contrast because the meaning is found in the contrast being made. After showing our faith would be futile and we would be pitied if Christ has not been raised and there is no resurrection the dead, Paul uses a term of contrast to shift to our attention on the undeniable truth of the resurrection and what it means for us.

Look at verses 20-23, “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.” Paul says Christ has in fact been raised from the dead and calls Him the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. The term “firstfruits” brings connotations of a harvest. Paul then describes what he means in verses 21-22 giving two reasons written in perfect double parallelism (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 749). He starts by showing that just as death came into this world by a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come by a man. He then defines those men and what it means to be connected to them. The testimony of scripture tells us all of humanity finds their existence to be in Adam. Because of Adam’s original sin, all of humanity is born in sin and the penalty of death comes to all. Yet, those who believe in Christ are now found to be in Christ, and because of Christ’s atoning work and perfect righteousness, resurrection comes to all who belong to Him. However, verse 23 shows there is an order in God’s plan. Christ, who has already been raised, is the firstfruits, and then all who belong to Him are raised when He returns. Christ, as the firstfruits, is both the first to have been raised and a representation of all who belong to Him, guaranteeing a full harvest of resurrections at His coming. Look at what this coming entails in verses 24-28, “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 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 [God the Father] is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to [God the Father] who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” For the sake of time, we won’t unpack all of what Paul is teaching. I simply want to focus on the main point he’s making. Paul shares the final plan of God to establish His eternal kingdom where all things are finally united under Him and He is “all in all.” As Ephesians 1:9-10 says, God, in the gospel, has made “known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” The end, described in Ephesians 1 as the fullness of time, brings about the fulfillment of God’s perfect rule and reign over all, uniting all things in Christ. Look back at verses 24-28. Paul says this takes place after Christ has “destroyed every rule and every authority and power,” and after God has “put all his enemies under his feet” through Christ’s reign, with death as the final enemy “to be destroyed.” After all of this, God’s purposes will be fully realized as He will “be all in all.” Paul is showing how the historical event of Christ’s resurrection firmly set into motion the inevitable fulfillment of God’s sovereign purposes that includes our resurrection and the defeat of death. Church, the resurrection of Christ changes everything and ensures that everything we face in this life as we follow Christ will be worth it because the sting of death has been removed and we are guaranteed to take part in the everlasting kingdom of our God. And listen to how Paul describes what this will look like for those who belong to Christ at the conclusion of this chapter in verses 51-57, “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh family, set the truth of the resurrection firmly on your heart today and let its assurance of your victory over sin and death lead you to follow Christ wholly, knowing it will all be worth it.

Conclusion:

As the worship team and choir is coming to lead us in our time of reflection and response, here is my encouragement for you today.

Live Your Life in Light of the Resurrection

The truth of the resurrection shouldn't be something we simply understand intellectually. And it shouldn't be something we only contemplate once a year. As Gordon Fee says well, "The resurrection of Christ has determined our existence for all time and eternity. We do not merely live out our length of days and then have the hope of resurrection as an addendum; rather, as Paul makes plain in this passage, Christ's resurrection has set in motion a chain of inescapable events that absolutely determines our present and our future. Christ is the firstfruits of those who are his, who will be raised at his coming. That ought both to reform the way we currently live and to reshape our worship into seasons of unbridled rejoicing" (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 760). The resurrection changes everything, leading the conclusion of Paul's entire argument in 1 Corinthians 15. Look at verse 58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." Family, let this passage draw you deeply into to the saving grace of God today, leading you to faithfully follow Christ. If you haven't trusted in His grace, today can be the day of your salvation. All that He requires is to trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sin on the cross and ask for Him to forgive your sin, believe His resurrection secured your forgiveness. Then you will be counted with those who belong to Christ and your resurrection will be just as sure as His. If you are trusting in Christ, let the truth of His resurrection lead you to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Let it lead you to love like He loved, fight sin and temptation, engage in the world differently, serve the lowly and needy, live in hope, and worship in unbridled rejoicing. During this time of response, you are welcome to come and kneel before Him or come to receive prayer from our prayer team who will be worshipping on the front rows or the bottom of the stairs in the back. We are going to respond by rejoicing together through a couple of songs before observing people declaring their trust in Christ and symbolizing their connection to the death and resurrection of Christ through baptism. Will you stand with me as we lean into this time of rejoicing together? Let's pray as we seek His grace together.