

**11/23/25 The Cost of Denying the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:12-19**

Welcome...

We are studying the book of First Corinthians. In Acts 18 the apostle Paul went to Corinth and had preached the good news of the gospel. Those who were saved believed that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. But now five years later, some held to the resurrection of Jesus in particular but not the resurrection of believers in general.

Why would they say there is no resurrection from the dead for Christians? Well, they could not imagine rising from the dead. They have never seen any of their friends rise from the dead. And now they were starting to say, "There is not going to be any resurrection from the dead."

This skeptical attitude had somehow invaded the church, and Paul had to face it head-on. The truth of the resurrection had doctrinal and practical implications for life that were too important to ignore.

You cannot say that believers will not be raised from the dead but Christ has been risen, since being in Christ, we are linked with Christ, and our destiny is the same.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19...

Notice the following words: vain, false, worthless, pitied.

Here is a question for you to consider: If there is no resurrection of the dead, then how much of your life is vain, false, worthless, and to be pitied? We will return to this question at the end of my sermon, but let's consider:

Main point: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 explains six consequences of denying the resurrection so that we will understand and believe Christ is truly risen and know that our faith, our forgiveness, and our future are secure.

If there is no resurrection:

Our Message Is Meaningless verses 12–14

Our Witness Is Worthless verses 15–16

Our Faith Is Foolish verses 17a

Our Sin Is Sovereign verse 17b

Our Loved Ones Are Lost verse 18

Our Existence Is Empty verse 19

My prayer is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ will convince your mind and your heart that your life is meaningful and you will be a faithful witness to His resurrection power at your work in your life.

Let's begin with verses 12-14 and point one, if there is no resurrection then:

I. Our Message Is Meaningless

Our text begins in verse 12 with a question...

In the church community in Corinth, some were saying, “There is no resurrection of the dead.” Period. Nobody rises from the dead. So, in verse 13 Paul points out the obvious: “If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.”

Beginning in verse 14, Paul lays out the consequences of a still-dead Jesus—of a Savior who is still in the tomb.

“And if” is a first-class condition assumed to be true for the sake of argument. That is, if one thing is assumed to be true, then the conclusion must be true. Verse 14 “And if Christ has not been raised then (logical conclusion) the first consequence would be that preaching of the gospel would be vain, completely meaningless. The word vain means - without content, of no purpose, fruitless, void of effect, to no purpose, characterized by “nothingness,” absolutely void, imaginary.

Look at 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Here is the heart of the gospel message. “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” The heart of the gospel message is Christ’s death and resurrection on our behalf.

But if the skeptics reasoning were correct and Jesus was not resurrected, then our message is meaningless. In effect the “Good News” is really “Bad News.”

How is that so? Let me give a few examples of what we preach and what you believe and show you how that becomes completely vain, empty, and meaningless if Christ has not been raised.

For example, we preach eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus said in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Think of the multi-billion-dollar industry that is working on ways to improve and prolong physical life. And yet we know that sooner or later each person will die.

But we preach and what we believe is what Jesus promises in John 11:25 Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”

If there is no resurrection from the dead, then to believe this would be vain. Your preaching is vain and your faith is also vain.

What about the second coming of Christ? We preach and we believe that Jesus is coming again. We preach and believe what Jesus said in John 14:2-3, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

But if there is no resurrection, then Christ has not risen, and He has not gone to heaven to prepare a place for us, and He certainly is not coming back to get us. All our preaching and believing is in vain, it only wishful thinking.

How about eternal judgment? We believe and preach that one day the wicked will be judged, and we also believe that we who believe, and love, and trust in Christ will not be judged. Why? Because Jesus promised in John 5:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

What is the proof that there is a just judgment? Acts 17:30-31, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

The proof that one day that God will one day judge the wicked is God raising Jesus from the dead. But if Jesus is not raised, then there will be no judgment of the unrighteous or even a judgment that we as believers will escape.

How about what we preach and believe about the Holy Spirit?

We preach and believe that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the body of Christ. Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation. The Holy Spirit indwells all believers, He sanctifies, He convicts us concerning what is sin and what is righteous. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Scriptures so we can understand and apply the Word of God. He gives us gifts and empowers us for service, and seals us unto the day of final redemption. (1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13)

But remember, Jesus promised in John 16 that He was returning to God the Father, and Jesus said, “If I do not go away, the Helper, the Holy Spirit will not come to you.”

The way Paul put it in Romans 8:11 is this: “If the Spirit of Him (the Holy Spirit) who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

But if there is not resurrection of Jesus, then there is no presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

What do we preach and believe about the church? Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

But if there is no resurrection, then Jesus is not building His church, and all that we are doing is pretty much a waste.

What about the rapture of the church? Look at 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 with me. We preach and believe 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

(What are we to do with these words?) Verse 18 says, “Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Guess what? If there is no resurrection, then there is no comfort from these words. It is just empty talk, hot air.

If Christ has not been raised, Paul says, “our preaching is vain” and our message is meaningless. It’s empty. Hollow. Like a drum with no sound. Like an ice cream cone with no ice cream. Like a car with no wheels. It’s going nowhere.

Our preaching, our faith rests on the truth of the resurrection.

Listen, when we preach Christ, we are not sharing good advice or religious philosophy—we proclaim the living Lord who triumphed over death. Your faith rests not on the cleverness of a preacher but on the reality of an empty tomb.

Paul continues in verses 15-16... Here is the second consequence of denying the resurrection:

II. Our Witness is Worthless

The Greek wording for “false witnesses” in verse 15 is actually a combination of two words. The first word is pseudo, which means “false.” A pseudo-intellectual is someone who thinks he is smart when he really is not. A pseudonym is a false name.

The other half of that Greek phrase gives us the English word martyr. Originally the word meant “witness.” Simply put, if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then those of us who are witnesses of the gospel, who are sharing and proclaiming the gospel, are liars. We are guilty of spiritual perjury. How bad is that?

Proverbs 6:16 says, “There are six things which the Lord hates. Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him. (one of them is) “A false witness who utters lies.”

If the dead do not rise, then we are telling lies, and we are an abomination to God.

Paula and I were on a flight to go visit our daughter, son in law, and grandchildren. Our flight from SLO to LAX was delayed and so we missed our connecting flight to Honolulu. It is always disheartening to miss a flight and now we had a four-hour delay at the Los Angeles airport. We went to the gate for our next flight and next to it was a coffee shop. We got a cup of coffee and sat at a picnic style table across from an airline pilot. So, I started a conversation with him, “Excuse me sir, are you a United airlines pilot...”

But if there was not resurrection of the dead then instead of praising God for this delay, this good work which God had prepared beforehand for us to share the gospel with this gentleman. We actually would be condemned for misleading this man and speaking lies to him. Because if there is no resurrection then we would be guilty of being false witnesses.

The whole truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ hinges on the resurrection. In verse 16 Paul restates his major argument: If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. A dead Christ would be the chief disastrous consequence from which all the other consequences would result.

If you there is no resurrection, then Our Message Is Meaningless, Our Witness Is Worthless, and third:

III. Our Faith is Foolish

Verse 17a, “and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless.”

If Jesus is still dead and buried in the tomb, it strikes a deathblow to even the very concept of Christian faith. Not just in what you believe but in how you live.

The Jesus who is worthy of our faith is a resurrected Jesus. The Jesus who makes it worthwhile to live a life of unashamed and sacrificial faith is a resurrected Jesus. The one who serves as the foundation of our faith, gives feet to our faith, and replaces fear with faith is only a resurrected Jesus.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:30, “If there is no resurrection from the dead, then why am I in danger every hour?”

What kind of danger? Listen to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, Why am I often in danger of death?

24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.

26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;

27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

If there is no resurrection from the dead then Paul asks why I am putting myself through this living hell?! Why??

Hebrews 12:2 tells us the answer, “Jesus for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

There was no joy in the cross, Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame he endured. The joy set before Jesus was the resurrection, the same joy that empowered Paul so that he can say in Galatians 2:20...

But if there is no resurrection, if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, our faith is foolish, since faith's value can be no greater than the object of the faith.

All the faith in the world will not allow you to fly a plane with no wings, or to ride a train with no engine, or to sit safely in a two-legged chair.

If there is no resurrection,

Our Message Is Meaningless verses 12–14

Our Witness Is Worthless verses 15–16

Our Faith Is Foolish verses 17a and then the fourth cost of denying the resurrection:

IV. Our Sin Is Sovereign

Look at verse 17 continues.... Here Paul states the most devastating consequence: “You are still in your sins.”

If Christ did not rise:

His death accomplished nothing.

The cross failed.

There is no atonement.

No forgiveness.

No justification.

No reconciliation with God.

Romans 4:25 says, “Christ was delivered over [to death] because of our transgression [sins], and was raised [from the dead] because of our justification.” In other words, the resurrection of Jesus is the proof that His death was sufficient to cover all our sins.

Your forgiveness is not based on your performance, your emotions, or even your faith's strength. It is based on the historical reality that Jesus lived, died, and rose again on your behalf. No accusation against you can stand because your Savior lives. Romans 8:1 declares...

We sang this morning:
Guilty vile and helpless we
Spotless Lamb of God was He
Full atonement can it be
Hallelujah, what a Savior
Hallelujah, what a Savior

But if Jesus wasn't raised, then His death is useless as the basis of forgiveness. and we are still in the guilt and condemnation and bondage of our sins. If there is no resurrection:

Our Message Is Meaningless verses 12–14
Our Witness Is Worthless verses 15–16
Our Faith Is Foolish verses 17a
Our Sin Is Sovereign verse 17b

So far if you asked the question, “If there is no resurrection, how much of my life is vain, false, worthless, and to be pitied?” The answer would be “All of it.”

All my preaching, all my witness, all my faith and works of faith are not to be envied but to be pitied if there is no resurrection from the dead. But what about all of our Christian loved ones who have died before us? Here is the fifth consequence of denying the resurrection:

V. Our Loved Ones Are Lost

Verse 18...

Often at funerals or memorial services of fellow Christians I will read 2 Corinthians 5:8. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"

And 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, “DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?”

However, without the resurrection the sting of death would remain, with lasting painfulness.

A dead Jesus offers no hope for those of us who are living, but would a dead Jesus give us any hope for those believers who have died before us? No, because verse 18 says ...

The Greek verb Paul uses here, *apōllumi*, denotes not just physical death but spiritual death, a final death, condemnation and damnation.

In other words, if there is no resurrection then death still has its sting; the grave still has its victory. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead, there is no hope now, there is no reconciliation to God, and there is no assurance of eternal life with the Lord in heaven.

If there is no resurrection, then:
Our Message is Meaningless

Our Witness Is Worthless verses 15–16

Our Faith Is Foolish verses 17a

Our Sin Is Sovereign verse 17b

Our Loved Ones Are Lost verse 18 and sixth:

VI. Our Existence Is Empty

Look at verse 19...

If there were no Resurrection, the unbelievers would be right. The “foolishness of the Cross” (1:18) would be just that, and men such as Paul and the apostles who had suffered for the gospel (4:9–13) could only be pitied. Those who lived for the pleasure of the moment in this world would be right and the sacrifices of Christians would only be cruel, self-inflicted jokes.

Thomas Schreiner writes, “If Christ was not crucified and is not risen for their sins, believers have wasted their lives in believing fables.”

But now look at the first word of verse 20, “But.” That is a big but! Look at the remainder of verse 20...

Paul is persuaded that Jesus did rise from the dead, and that Christ’s resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection – that’s what “first fruits from those who are asleep (those who are dead)” means.

Earlier we heard Pastor Steve read Philippians 3:20-21 which teaches the glorious news that Christ’s resurrection body is the pattern of our resurrection body: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.”

When we die our soul immediately goes to be in the presence of the Lord. And when Christ returns, then the bodies of those who belong to Christ will be raised with Him in everlasting life and ever-increasing joy. and so we shall always be with the Lord and we can comfort one another with these words.

As we sang: When He comes, our glorious King
All His ransomed home to bring
Then anew this song we’ll sing
Hallelujah, what a Savior

So let me return to my opening question, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then how much of your life is vain, false, worthless, and to be pitied?” The answer: If there is no resurrection then all of my Christian life is vain, false, worthless, and to be pitied.

But let me ask you a second question, “If Jesus did rise from the dead, and if He promises a future resurrection for all who are born again in Christ, then how much of your life is vain, false, worthless and to be pitied? The answer: None of it, not a shred is vain, false, worthless, hopeless, and pitiable! Instead, all your life in Christ is full, meaningful, true, rich, valuable, wise, blessed, full of hope and purpose, and most to be envied!”

There is in every one of us the longing that our lives be well spent - that our lives count for something, that they have significance and usefulness.

Paul knows this. That's why he ends this whole chapter on the resurrection with the words in verse 58: "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil in the Lord (your labor for the Lord) is not in vain."

Being a Christian is being so in love with our Risen Savior, so satisfied in God alone, and so driven by His Spirit that you live on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and every day in such a way that the only explanation for your life is the fact of the resurrection and the fact that God has raised you from the dead.

But let me ask a third question to all who are here and to those who are listening who don't yet know Christ as Savior and Lord, "How much of your life is vain, false, worthless, and to be pitied?" If you don't have Christ in your life, how much of your life is vain, false, worthless, and pitiable? The Bible would say, "all of it." Because you are still spiritually dead and don't have any eternal hope.

If Christ is not alive in you, if you are not born again, here is the good news: Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ today and you will be saved. God will make you a new creature in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and as you read God's Word, the Bible, you will begin to understand the truths of God and your purpose in life, and He will change your life from the inside out.

Jesus has been raised and is alive and reigns as King forever! May we be confident and unashamed that our message is meaningful, our loving witness is necessary and worthy, and our faith is pleasing to God, our sin has been paid for, our dearly loved fellow believers who have died are not lost but in the presence of the Lord and our existence is not empty but rich, full, purposeful and all our sacrificial service is not-to-be-pitied, but is to be envied!

Let's pray...

Come, behold the wondrous mystery
Slain by death, the God of life
But no grave could ever restrain Him
Praise the Lord, He is alive
What a foretaste of deliverance
How unwavering our hope
Christ in power resurrected
As we will be when He comes