

“Living in Light of the Resurrection”

1 Corinthians 15:20-34

11/30/25

Welcome...

We are continuing our study in First Corinthians this morning. Last week John Marc preached on verses 12-19, and in those verses, John Marc reminded us that Paul had traveled to Corinth in Acts 18 and preached the good news of the gospel. Those who were saved believed that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. Five years later, some held to the resurrection of Jesus in particular but not the resurrection of believers in general. John Marc went on to explain six consequences of denying the resurrection. He said, “if there is no resurrection: Our message is meaningless, our witness is worthless, our faith is foolish, our sin is sovereign, our loved ones are lost, and our existence is empty.”

This morning, we pick up the passage in verse 20 with Paul stating that there is a resurrection from the dead.

Let’s read 1 Corinthians 15:20–34

Christian hope rises or falls on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since Christ has been raised, everything changes—our future, our purpose, and the way we live each day. In 1 Corinthians 15:20-34, Paul shows that the resurrection is not only a past event but a present power and a future promise. Jesus is the “first fruits,” guaranteeing our own resurrection. His reign continues until every enemy, including death, is finally destroyed. And because Christ is alive, our lives have meaning, direction and eternal significance.

This passage calls us to walk with unshakeable hope, to live with holy purpose, and to follow Christ with courageous obedience. The resurrection gives us confidence in the face of death, strength to endure sacrifice, and discernment to pursue influences that shape us toward godliness rather than away from it. As we consider these truths, we learn what it truly means for God to be “all in all” and for our lives to be anchored in the victory of the risen Christ.

Main point: 1 Corinthians 15:20-34 provides three truths of Christ's resurrection so that we will live with unshakeable hope, holy purpose, and courageous obedience.

I. Christ's Resurrection Guarantees Ours v. 20-23

II. Christ Will Reign Until Death is Destroyed v. 24-28

III. Christ's Resurrection Gives Our Lives Purpose v.29-34

My prayer is that prayer this morning is that these three truths of Christ's resurrection will cause you to live with unshakable hope, holy purpose and contagious obedience.

Let's look at verses 20-23 and the first of the three truths.

Truth #1: Christ's Resurrection Guarantees Ours

Last week, John Marc stated in verse 12 that *"In the church community in Corinth, some were saying, 'There is no resurrection of the dead.' Period. Nobody rises from the dead. And in verse 13 Paul points out the obvious: 'If there is not resurrection from the dead, not even Christ has been raised.'"*

But verse 20 we read Paul saying, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."

The church believed and confessed the reality of Christ's resurrection. But Paul adds the phrase "first fruits." What are these "first fruits"?

Christ Himself is the "first fruits." At the moment of His resurrection, He became the first installment, the pledge, and the guarantee of what is to come for believers. Paul is drawing an analogy from an Old Testament practice. Leviticus 23:10 says, *"Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.'"* The first fruits were offered to the Lord before the full harvest could be gathered. They were a representative sample from the same crop, signaling that the rest of the harvest was certain to follow.

Paul uses this metaphor to communicate, as one commentary puts it, "that Christ's resurrection could not have been in isolation from ours. His resurrection requires

our resurrection, because His resurrection was part of the larger resurrection of God's redeemed." Christ's resurrection was unique and permanent, unlike the temporary restorations of life experienced by Lazarus (John 11), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5), or the widow's son of Nain (Lk 7)

Notice also that Paul calls Christ the "*first fruits of those who are asleep*." "*Those who are asleep*" refers to believers who have died—their bodies rest in the grave while their spirits are with the Lord. Christ's resurrection, then, is the pledge, promise, and guarantee of their future bodily resurrection. His resurrection guarantees ours. And only the God-man could be the "first fruits"—fully human to represent us, and fully God to secure the resurrection power for us.

In verses 21–22 Paul gives additional explanation through another analogy: "*For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive*." Here Paul presents two representatives: Adam and Christ. Adam, the first human, brought sin and death into the world through one act of disobedience. Everyone identified with Adam—that is, every person born into the human race—inherits a sin nature and is subject to death.

But those who are identified with Christ—those who have been born again by trusting in Him alone—receive resurrection and eternal life because of what Christ accomplished at the cross. Romans 5:19 says, "*For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous*." Christ brings deliverance and life. In Him, all who believe inherit eternal life and will be made alive.

Because of Adam, all are born into sin. Romans 3:23 says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*." And Romans 6:23 adds, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*." The good news is that God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins and rise from the dead so that we no longer have to remain identified with Adam. We can find our new identity in Christ.

What must you do to be saved? Believe in Him—the One who died and rose again.

In Biblical counseling cases, one of my favorite parts of the sessions is when I get to share the gospel to a counselee who does not yet know Christ. I share that man is a sinner who needs a Savior and that Jesus is that wonderful Savior. I share that

Christ died, was buried and rose again and that He offers the free gift of eternal life to those who put their trust in Him for salvation. I ask if they want to trust in Christ. When they say yes, it is such an exciting moment. They come to Christ and experience their new identity in Christ. How about you? Have you put your trust in Christ alone for salvation.

Look at verse 23...Paul is laying out God's divine schedule for His Resurrection Plan. Verse 23 says, "*But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.*"

Notice the phrase "*each in his own order.*" Christ is the first fruits and those who are Christ's at His coming are the full harvest. We don't know when Christ will come. Matthew 24:36 tells us, "*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.*" Verse 42 says, "*Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.*" Verse 44 says, "*For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.*" Verse 50 says, "*the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know.*" And Matthew 25:13 says, "*Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.*" We don't know the time of the resurrection, the generation or the moment, but we do know the order.

Christ is first in the order. He is the first fruits and the representative of all who will follow. Next in the order are "*those who are Christ's at His coming.*" Scripture presents the resurrection of believers as occurring in several stages.

The first stage will be the resurrection of the church age believers who have come to faith from Pentecost to the rapture. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "*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.*" These resurrected believers, together with the living saints, will meet the Lord in the air.

The second stage will be the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs (Revelation 20:4) and Old Testament believers (Daniel 12:2), which occurs at the end of the seven-year Tribulation.

The third stage will be the resurrection of believers who die during the millennial kingdom when Christ reigns on earth for one thousand years.

Do you long for Christ's return? I do. When I see or experience suffering, sickness, and death. When I look at the state of confusion the world is in. I hope for Christ's return often.

After all believers are raised, the only resurrection that is left is that of unbelievers. They will be raised to damnation and eternal punishment at the end of Christ's thousand-year reign (Revelation 20:11-15). Believers will have been raised to eternal life, but the unsaved will be raised to eternal death.

Paul has shown us the certainty of our resurrection, and now he shows us the certainty of Christ's reign.

Truth #2: Christ will Reign Until Death is Destroyed

Look at the first part of verse 24. *"Then comes the end."* This is not the end of existence, but the end of the present age. Christ's final act will be to conquer permanently every enemy of God, every contending rule and authority and power. Paul is showing us that the risen Christ is not passive. He reigns with purpose. He is actively moving history toward the moment when every opposing power is crushed under His feet. The second part of verse 24 says, *"when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power."* Christ will carry out this final reign over the thousand-year Millennial Kingdom on earth. This is Christ fulfilling every promise, finishing every assignment, restoring the kingdom to the Father exactly as the Father commanded Him to do."

And Christ must reign. Verse 25 says, *"For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet."* This is divine necessity. Christ must reign because the Father has ordained it, Scripture has predicted it, redemption requires it, justice demands it, and God will not leave a single enemy standing. When Paul says, Christ will "put all His enemies under His feet," it means none of His enemies will survive, escape, challenge His rule, and all opposition will be crushed forever in total conquest. In the ancient world, conquering kings would place their foot on the neck of their defeated enemies to symbolize absolute dominance. Psalm 110:1 says, *"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'"*

Verse 26 says, *“The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”* Death is the final defeated foe. Death is the greatest enemy of humanity. You can’t negotiate with it, escape it, or override it. But Christ will destroy it.

Over the past few years, I have seen up close family members and friends die. It’s hard to watch loved ones go through that. It’s hard to lose loved ones. I’m thankful that those family members and friends knew the Lord and I am going to see them again someday in glory.

Christ destroyed the power of death at His resurrection, but He will destroy the presence of death when believers are raised bodily and death is permanently removed. Death entered through Adam, is defeated by Christ, and will be eliminated at the end of His reign. Christ will reign until death is destroyed.

Look at the first part of verse 27. *“For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.”* Paul is quoting Psalm 8. Paul is showing us that Christ is the One to whom the Father has subjected all things. Every force, every enemy, every power, physical or spiritual, is being brought under the sovereign rule of Christ. Nothing is outside His authority or His control. Christ reigns over everything.

The second part of verse 27 says, *“But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.* “Paul wants us to understand that the Father is the One placing all things under Christ. The Father is not subjected to the Son. This is not about superiority or inferiority. It is about role. The Father subjects all things to the Son, and the Son joyfully receives that authority.

Verse 28 says, *“When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him.”* This does not mean Christ becomes less than God. It means that Christ, having perfectly fulfilled His mission as the “God-man”, having conquered every enemy, having redeemed His people and having crushed death, will hand the kingdom back to the Father. This is Christ completing His assignment as an obedient Son presenting a fully redeemed creation to the Father who planned it.

The last part of verse 28 says, “so that God may be all in all.” What does it mean that God will be all in all? One commentary describes God’s being “all in all” as being “utterly supreme over everything, everywhere.”

Christ will reign until death is destroyed and God is all in all. That is the future. But Paul does not leave this truth in the future. He brings it into the present. Because the risen Christ reigns, your life is not meaningless or wasted. Which brings us to Truth #3...

Truth #3 Christ’s Resurrection Gives Our Lives Purpose

I want us to see three purposes from verse 29-34.

Purpose #1: The Resurrection motivates us toward salvation.

Look at verse 29. *“Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?”*

While this verse seems confusing, we can be certain about what it does not mean. It does not teach proxy baptism for the dead. The idea of being baptized on behalf of someone who has already died—taught by ancient gnostic sects and practiced today by the Mormon church—is unbiblical. Scripture is clear that salvation is by grace through faith *alone* (Eph. 2:8–9) and that baptism is the outward testimony of an inward, personal faith in Christ.

In the New Testament, baptism always follows salvation. John the Baptist baptized repentant believers (Mark 1:2–5). Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples and then baptize them (Matt. 28:18–19). Acts 2:41 shows this pattern: *“Those who had received his word were baptized.”* Only believers were baptized, and their baptism pictured Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

In the early church, baptism and salvation were so closely linked that asking someone, “Have you been baptized?” was essentially asking, “Are you saved?”

The Greek word that is translated “for” in verse 29 could also be translated “because of” and in light of the context and of Paul’s clear teaching elsewhere, Paul may have simply been saying that people were being saved (baptism being the sign they were saved) because of the exemplary lives and witness of faithful believers who had died before them.

I love seeing baptisms at Cornerstone. It's a powerful reminder of how Christ changes lives. Often we hear in baptism testimonies how other believers have impacted the person's life and how the Lord used other believers lives to draw this person to Christ.

Paul's message in verse 29 is unmistakable: The resurrection motivates sinners to seek salvation in Christ. Without the resurrection, salvation would be pointless, but because Christ lives, sinners can be saved and live with the assurance of eternal life.

Purpose #1: The Resurrection Motivates Us Toward Salvation.

Purpose #2: The resurrection motivates us toward service.

Look at verse 30-32... *“30 Why are we also in danger every hour? 31 I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.”*

Paul's suffering and danger for the sake of the gospel would be pointless without the resurrection. Paul endured hardship, beatings, and persecution because of his hope in the resurrection. He was in constant danger (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). And he asks, “why would we put ourselves in danger every hour if the resurrection were not true?”

Notice Paul says in verse 31, *“I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* What is Paul boasting in? This is not a self-serving boast. Paul is boasting in what Christ has done in the lives of the believers as a result of Paul's serving Christ. Paul is boasting in Christ. Paul didn't save Himself. Paul didn't save the believers. It was Christ who did a work in Paul and through Paul and it was Christ who did a work to save the people Paul ministered to.

Notice the question Paul asks in verse 32, *“If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?”*

Paul risked his life for the gospel in a hostile crowd that behaved like a raging mob of animals. And Paul's point is this: If there were no resurrection, facing this kind of

danger would be insane. Why suffer for Christ if death is the end? Why serve Christ?

A few years ago, I was part of a team that went to Kyrgyzstan to teach at a pastors' conference. Several of the pastors who attended crossed borders from other "stan" countries where Christians are persecuted. Some of those pastors shared how they got stopped at the border for having a Bible, but how God protected them and allowed them to get to our conference. It could have ended very differently. These men risk their lives for the gospel regularly.

If there were no resurrection from the dead, Paul tells us what we should do in the last part of verse 32. *"If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE."* This was a direct quote from Isaiah 22:13. In Isaiah 22, God calls Judah to repentance because of coming judgement. In Isaiah's day, Judah responded to God's call with, *"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"*, a worldview of hopeless pleasure because they believed nothing awaited them beyond death. Paul uses that same line in 1 Corinthians 15:32 to argue: If there is no resurrection, that hedonistic mindset would be logical.

Do you know people who live with that philosophy of life? Eating and drinking. Hanging out at bars. Constantly striving for pleasure. Their worldview is hopeless pleasure. They don't know Christ.

But Christ is risen and we know Him. we as believers reject that empty philosophy and live lives of eternal purpose. We are called to know Christ and make Him known. Let's be faithful to not only love Christ but love unbelievers enough to share the gospel message with them. Let's be faithful messengers and ambassadors for Christ with our neighbors, coworkers, classmates and people we meet in daily life.

Purpose #2: The resurrection motivates us toward service.

Purpose #3: The resurrection motivates us toward sanctification

Now let's look at verse 33-34...33 *"Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."* **34** *Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame."* If the resurrection is not true, then why should we serve the Lord or others? Why should we live lives that

are holy and pure? But because Christ is risen, Paul now shows that the resurrection doesn't only motivate salvation and service, it also motivates sanctification, the pursuit of holiness.

The Corinthians were being influenced by people who denied the resurrection. They were spending time with the wrong crowd. And the bad theology of that crowd was affecting their behavior. Paul warns them, *"Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals."*

In Biblical counseling, we often counsel people about friendships. Friendships are important, but who is influencing who? If a counselee is spending time with people who don't know Christ and encourage them to pursue their worldly pleasures, this must stop. God calls us to live holy and obedient lives.

You see, Paul wants the Corinthians to know that correct doctrine demands holy living. He tells them, *"Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning."*

Have you ever watched someone enslaved to alcohol or drugs then become sober? It is quite something to watch the transformation. When I talk to someone who is sober vs intoxicated, it is like I am talking to two different people.

In verse 34, God tells the Corinthians and He tells us, to sober up! Wake up from your spiritual drowsiness. Come back to your senses. Stop thinking like the world. Stop drifting morally. Stop letting false teaching dull your spiritual senses. *"And stop sinning."* If Christ is risen, then sin is not trivial. If Christ is risen, then holiness matters eternally. If Christ is risen, then we cannot live like people *"who have no knowledge of God."* When the resurrection is denied, people will naturally fall into the world's pattern. They "eat, drink and be merry," they suffer moral compromise, they are careless with sin, they drift into ungodly relationships, and they live for the moment rather than for eternity. The resurrection rescues us from that kind of empty living. It calls us to purity, clarity, obedience and moral seriousness.

Paul *"spoke this to their shame."* They had the truth. But because they did not fully believe it, they did not fully follow it.

Purpose #3: The Resurrection motivates us toward sanctification.

Conclusion:

To live in light of the resurrection is to let the risen Christ shape everything about our lives...our hope, our purpose, and our obedience. Paul has shown us that because Christ has been raised, our resurrection is guaranteed, His reign is certain and our lives are filled with purpose.

The resurrection motivates us toward salvation, toward sacrificial service, and toward a life of sanctification.

So as you leave today, ask yourself...1) Am I living like Christ is truly alive? Am I facing trials with unshakable hope? 2) Am I serving others with courageous obedience? 3) Am I fighting sin with the seriousness that the resurrection demands?

Christ's empty tomb is not just a past event. It is the power that shapes us and helps us to grow and change every day of our lives. Let us be a church that lives fully, joyfully and boldly in light of the resurrection, until the day we join the full harvest and see our risen Savior face to face.

Let's Pray...