

In the 1991 movie City Slickers, Jack Palance is Curly, the old Cowboy coaching Billy Crystal on the meaning of life. And at one point, he says “Do you know what the secret of life is?”

“This” – Your finger? “One Thing just one thing... stick to that.” And Billy says “That’s great... whats the one thing?” And Curly says “That’s what you’ve got to figure out.”

OH, frustrating and brilliant all at the same time. Because in this life, we get all kinds of things that get our underwear in a knot. That give our souls stress. That shout for our attention and give us pain and get us off course. But what is the one thing? The one thing that makes everything else worthwhile and meaningful... the one thing that defines our existence – in alignment with the universe. What is the ONE THING? Well, Paul tells us in what we now know is his climax to the book of 1 Corinthians. And it is perfect for holy week. Open up your Bibles or phones or apps or internet to 1 Corinthians 15.

15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ²By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

- What is the Gospel? This is the big reminder. What is the summary? What is the main thing? What are you standing on and saved by? The gospel. Hold on to it firmly otherwise, you are believing in vain.
- Now that is a big deal statement. The rest of the stuff – lawsuits, sexual morality, marriage, singleness – all helpful, but none of it is THE thing.
- All of 1 Corinthians points to this climax. The petty stuff all pales in perspective compared to this overwhelming idea. And when you grasp it, all of life fades into shadows. Not only that, but when you understand the gospel – and the resurrection... and you realize that all of life is pointing in this direction, it makes sense of WHY Paul talks about wisdom and righteousness and sexuality the way he does in Chapter 1-10 and why the worship setting is the way it is in 11-14. It all points to this and if you miss it, you have believed in vain.

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Stop here. Because you could summarize the gospel message according to these two verses. If you want to mark something in your Bible as super important, memorize it... mark these two verses. Paul even gives you a marker that this is of FIRST IMPORTANCE! Bold, Caps Italicize it!

- **Christ** – the anointed one... the king... the Messiah we have been waiting for. The good news is that he came, just like predicted.
- **Died for our sins** – It was a substitutionary swap-o-rama. Jesus death for your sins. Never has there been a better deal in all humanity – trading your sins for God’s grace. And all you have to do is have the courage to admit your sins and trade them in. Jesus already paid the price, you just need to make the exchange.
- **According to the Scriptures** – This was predicted and forecast long ago. Interestingly, it is not just the political hopes of a nation under oppression, it is the deep and personal needs of humanity. Deliverance not just from Rome, but from sin and Satan. Hope not just for economic success, but for deep joy and purpose. God knew our need from the point of the fall and had a plan to reverse the very curse on humanity. In pictures as varied as the Passover lamb, the Levitical sacrifices, and Isaiah 53... dozens of passages pointed to this moment.
- **He was buried** – Not a metaphor of death or a symbolic death. It was real and physical and lead to burial. He was killed horrifically, speared in the side where blood and water came out separately, signed off on a death certificate by a roman centurion, wrapped up in linens and spices and laid in a brand new tomb.
- **That he was raised on the third day** – Now this is the “YOU'RE KIDDING” moment. He was raised? Like physically and bodily raised? Like walking and talking raised? Like you can touch him and ask questions raised? Yes. For real raised from the dead. And can I just pause to say... this is what makes Christianity utterly unique. You may have friends that say “Ya know, all religions are basically the same, like they all say to love people and honor God and that’s pretty much it.” I am telling you, only ignorant people think all religions are the same. For example. Jesus rose from the flipping grave – and nobody else has that. In fact, all of Christianity hinges on it. Later in the passage, Paul will say “if the resurrection didn’t happen, our preaching is useless and your faith is in vain. The resurrection is not the only thing that puts Christianity in a class by itself, but it is the biggest thing. It is the only religion that solves the problem of SIN by the cross and the problem of DEATH by the

resurrection. And it assures you and me that we will similarly be raised from the dead to NEW bodies in a New Heaven and a New Earth.

- According to the Scriptures –

Paul tells us that the resurrection is ‘according to the Scriptures’, which to him is the Old Testament. Paul, a Pharisee had always argued for a resurrection from the dead. This is one of the debates that the Pharisees always had with another sect, the Saducees. The saducees did not believe in the resurrection, and that is why they were Sad-you-see?

Pharisees point to passages like:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)

Psalm 16:8-11, Psalm 49:13-15, Psalm 71:20 Isaiah 26:19-20

Third Day – Hosea 6:1-2, Exodus 19:11, Jonah 2

But in Jesus, the Pharisees views were vindicated. Because Jesus was laid in a rock-hewn tomb. I call this the “**Empty Factor**” Solid rock side of a mountain tomb. A 1-2000lb stone was rolled in front of it and a squad of soldiers were placed in front of the tomb. And this was Good on Friday and Saturday, but on Sunday, the stone was rolled away, the guards had run away in fear, and when you look inside, the tomb was “empty”. And the women peered inside and they found it to be “empty” and then Peter and John ran to the tomb and they looked inside and found it to be “empty.” Now the Romans and Jewish leaders were happy that Jesus was dead and when rumors came about that he was raised from the dead, there was just one thing they needed to do to prove that he was dead... find the body. But they went to the tomb and found that it was “Empty”.

Now that is part of the evidence. I mean, the stone, the guards, the seal – the fact that it was guarded, sealed and stoned. Nobody is stealing that body. Yet, it was empty! The empty factor.

Plus, the people to discover the empty tomb were women. I call this the **Estrogen Factor**. If you were making up this story, you would definitely have the most credible people discover the empty tomb. And since women could not testify in court, you would never ‘make up’ a story that women discovered the body. The only thing that makes sense is that women actually were the ones who discovered it. And maybe... that God had an agenda to increase the credibility of women in general by having them be the first eyewitnesses of the worlds most important discovery.

And one other piece of evidence that people often miss. I call it the **Chrysallis Factor**. That is, the body was gone from the tomb, but the shell of linens and spices was still there. Not

unwrapped. Just a shell. With the separate head piece slightly separate from the body. It did not look like a mummy unwrapped himself... it looked like someone got zapped out of his graveclothes.

Now, this was pretty good evidence that Jesus rose from the dead, but not really good enough. I mean not good enough to stake your life on it. So Jesus started showing up: the **He Showed Up Factor** check it out starting in v. 5

⁵and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Now, there is no single exhaustive list of appearances of Jesus in the Bible. Matthew has some, John does, Luke does and then there is this passage. But if you add them all up and subtract out the doubles, you will find.

Chart of resurrection appearances.

Again, this is not just a spiritual appearance – like a dream. Jesus is physically showing up. Touch me, lets eat some fish. Lemme cook you breakfast. He is both inspirational and funny. And he calls people to a new level of belief based on the evidence of him showing up. And note that the historical sources include Matthew, Luke, John and Paul. There are few facts in ancient history that have this many eyewitness accounts. It is a fact of history that simply must be accounted for. In fact, I argue that it is THE most important fact of all world history.

All 11 of the remaining disciples believed these appearances. It wasn't a psych job or group delusion – not that there is any such thing as a group delusion. Ten of these 11 eyewitnesses died horrible deaths and never recanted. I am always frustrated by the classic skeptic argument that the disciples made up a tale about a resurrection to gain money and power. Cuz they never got money and power. They got persecution and death. It wasn't made up by them because nobody will die for a lie. Maybe for something they thought was true... but not something they made up. No, Paul says "I believe it because I saw Jesus myself – on the road to Damascus."

⁹For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Paul is contending that this moment changed his life. From persecutor of the church... to a guy who received the grace (or gift of life) of God to a man on a mission to preach and reach people. And his preaching was based on the resurrection. This was of first importance!

I want to talk to you for a minute if you have never wrestled this one down. So, let's say you grew up as a church rat. You always heard people say "just believe by faith". You heard about Jesus and morality and the hope of eternal life, but to be honest it just seemed fuzzy. Ethereal. Implausible. Wishful thinking. Then let me challenge you to dive into the evidence around the resurrection. Because if this is a lie, then don't believe in Jesus, don't believe in miracles, don't follow the Bible and for goodness sake, don't come to church. All of the Christian faith rests on this single fact – that Jesus rose from the dead.

Of if you are from an unchurched background, you may have peered around the curtain looking in at Christians and found them to be ... well, weird. I mean singing out loud to an invisible God. Praying to the sky. And believing in things like talking snakes and walking on water... Yeesh... Let me encourage you to start with the resurrection too. Examine the documents, look at the history, visit the tomb in Jerusalem if you need to. Because if this is true, everything else falls into place. If this is true, then God does care. He did visit. His claims are validated. And he can break through death for humanity. If this is true, then your 'happily ever after' is determined by your faith in his resurrection. Guys, this is deadly serious! If you don't ever wrestle with anything else in life, get this one right.

In fact, I think it could be said that the **cross and resurrection** of Jesus is the absolute central fact of Jesus life – that is why Paul said it is of "first importance." But it is more than that – The death and resurrection is the central fact of **world history**. I challenge you to think of any other event in history that has had broader implications. In fact – just a basic fact of every day life... to this day, we date our papers, our checks and our legal documents according to this single life.

Well, Paul continues on with an even bigger 'so what'?

The Resurrection of the Dead

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, 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.

Now to understand this passage, we need to wrap our mind around a word that is not common in the USA. Firstfruits. The concept is actually simple. When a harvest comes in, lets say an apple harvest, you get your very first bushel of apples. These are the first fruits. They are awesome to consume, but they are also a promise of more to come. The whole orchard is left and you may get 1000 bushels, but there has to be a first one.

Well, Jesus resurrection is a 'firstfruits'. There will be Billions of his followers that will be a part of the fuller harvest. Jesus is just number one. He is the one who blew the doors open on death when he blew the stone off of the empty tomb.

Then, Paul does something amazing. He ties together three phases of salvation history. Did you see them? Adam, Christ and the end. So, Adam was the one who introduced death to humanity... Jesus is the one who reversed death. Adam was the firstfruits of death, Jesus was the firstfruits of resurrection. And everybody who belongs to Jesus gets the same deal. Phase One Adam, Phase Two Jesus resurrection, but then he flashes ahead to what is coming. Don't miss this cuz it is super cool.

In the end, Jesus will destroy all "dominion, authority and power." What are those? Those are three words that discuss the systems of evil that oppress people and wreck the world. Now this would include world systems of evil. Political systems of evil. Media systems of evil. Economic systems of evil – all eliminated. But it is also spiritual forces of evil – the whole hierarchy of the demonic and those who trust in them. Are you tracking on this.

Jesus uses the same power as the resurrection power to start knocking off our enemies – poverty – war – destruction – abuse – death – hatred – and finally, death itself is swallowed up. It is all of the evil, demons, and destruction of this world put into isolation. And the pure and perfect world set up for the new heavens and new earth to be united and emerge.

Music kicks in

Now, I don't know about you, but I want to be on the side of Jesus and life and justice and goodness when this happens. I don't want to be chilling with death and destruction and hatred... I want resurrection power to be working FOR me. And Jesus says there are two sides – there is the side of Adam, that leads to death. Every human starts there. OR, you can transfer your allegiance to life and resurrection power. But you have to make the transfer. You have to CHOOSE life or you will DEFAULT to death because of your sin and sin in general.

Invitation