

The Most Important Event Ever
1 Corinthians 15:3-6
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It is an event unlike *anything else* in our memory. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our way of life in unprecedented ways. There have been other pandemics, some of them more deadly than this one, but none ever resulted in the type of lock downs happening all over the world. Even during WW2, people in our country went to church, school and baseball games. Now, even weddings and funerals are being postponed. We don't know what the ultimate cost of this pandemic will be in terms of lives lost and it is hard to even imagine how significant the economic impact will be. We don't know when life will return to normal, and frankly, we cannot even be sure what the "new norm" will be. I suspect for a long time we will be using the phrases "before the virus" and "after the virus" to describe various occurrences in our lives. **The COVID-19 pandemic is a big event in human history, but insignificant compared to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the event we are focusing on this morning, Easter Sunday.** In fact, as we look down the corridor of history, all the wars ever fought, all the economic booms and busts, all technological advances and all pandemics *put together* are not as significant as what happened that Sunday morning after Jesus' crucifixion.

Do you buy that? Do you believe that? I encourage you to stick with me for the next twenty five minutes or so as we consider if that is really the case. The Bible text we will look at today is 1 Corinthians 15: 3-6. If you have a Bible, you can turn there. Otherwise, these verses will be on your screen. Let's pause and pray the Lord would lead us to the truth this morning.

1 Corinthians 15:3-6 For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep.

Let me paraphrase what the Apostle Paul said. **The most important teaching, the most important truth I am sharing with you is this: Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, just as the Old Testament prophets predicted. He was then buried, making it clear he was really dead. Yet, within three days he was very much alive, risen from the dead, just like he said he would be. There are all sorts of people alive that can tell you that this is indeed what happened.**

Why is the resurrection of Jesus the most important event in the history of the world?

The first reason is that the resurrection is an event that really did occur. One of the common criticisms of the traditional story of Jesus' resurrection is that it is based on legend, not history. That claim is based on the idea that the Gospel accounts were written as propaganda by men trying to spin what had happened to this man called Jesus in 33 A.D. These folks say these New Testament books were written over sixty years later, giving time for legends to develop. It also meant eyewitnesses who could refute this incredible story were dead. But a look at a time line of events tells a very different story.

We know Jesus was killed between the years 30-35 A.D. The inconsistency in ancient calendars makes it difficult to pinpoint the precise year, but to keep it simple, we will go with the traditional date, 33 A.D. Then we have these verses from 1 Corinthians 15, a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to that church in 54-55 A.D., just over twenty years after Jesus' crucifixion. He explains that Jesus rose from the dead and there were many, over five hundred, eyewitnesses to that fact, most of them still being alive at the time of his letter. His point is you could go ask them about it. Now, liberal theologians dispute the authenticity of many of the New Testament books, claiming, for example, that Apostle Paul did not really write the book of Colossians. They say that after Paul died, someone else wrote that letter and attached Paul's name to it. "Pastor Dan, that doesn't make any sense!" Well, it doesn't make any sense to me either, but it is what some believe.

Yet, here is the point: Scholars are pretty much unanimous in acknowledging that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in 54-55 A.D., just over twenty years after Jesus' crucifixion. This means there was not enough time for a legend to develop.

But there is more to the story.

1 Corinthians 15:3 says: I passed on to you as most important what I also received.

Paul did not invent the story of Jesus' resurrection in the year 55 A.D. This is a teaching he heard from the other apostles. When did that happen? Probably when he was with them in Jerusalem in 37-38 A.D., which was maybe a year or two after his conversion. The bottom line is 1 Corinthians 15: 3-6 clearly indicates that within four or five years of Jesus' crucifixion, the apostles were proclaiming he had risen from the dead. Yes, this is what the Bible teaches, but it is also a historical fact. It is pretty clear the apostles were convinced that what they were preaching was true. They were willing to die for that message. This was not a scam they came up with. They were confident Jesus really had conquered death. Now, maybe you are not so confident about that. If one of your basic assumptions is that dead people stay dead, this resurrection stuff likely seems way over the top. If you have doubts as to whether Jesus really did rise from the dead, I would love to chat with you about that and explain why I am convinced the evidence points to Jesus' resurrection as an event that really did occur. You can contact me through phone, text or e-mail.

The second reason Jesus' resurrection is the most important event in human history is because it shows that Jesus' claims about his unique identity are true.

In Romans 1:4 Paul writes: And he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord.

When Jesus was on earth he made some remarkable claims. He said he had the authority to forgive sins and determine what the Bible really means. He claimed to be Israel's Messiah, a prophet greater than Moses and a king greater than David. He said he existed before the

patriarch Abraham who had lived 2,000 years earlier. He insisted he had a totally unique relationship with the Father, saying things like, "I and the Father are one," and "He who has seen me has seen the Father." These types of claims have caused Christians from the 1st to 21st centuries to view Jesus as God the Son, the second person of the Divine Trinity. He also claimed to be the only one who could provide eternal salvation.

John 14:6 – Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me.”

These are incredible claims. But, how do we know they are true? Why would we not think they were simply the rantings of a psychotic with a god complex; or the words of a con artist seeking to pull off the ultimate scam? The answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is how we know there is substance behind his seemingly incredible claims. It is how we know them to be true.

Knowing those claims to be true puts Jesus in a completely different category from every other religious leader or philosopher. Some people like to include Jesus in a lineup of great spiritual leaders; Confucius, Moses, Plato, Muhammad, and Jesus. They might add Gandhi, the Dali Lama, and maybe Oprah. If we did, "One of these things is not like the others, one of these things just doesn't belong," the answer is obvious. The resurrection of Jesus makes that all seem rather silly. His claims of being the eternal Son of God put him in a totally different category and his resurrection from the dead shows that is exactly where he belongs. Especially during times of crisis like the current pandemic, people want to find the lowest common denominator that will allow all religions to unite as one to provide comfort and encouragement. Yet, Jesus just doesn't fit in that box. He is the most important person to ever walk on this earth. His resurrection from the dead reminds us he is not someone that can be ignored.

The third reason Jesus' resurrection is the most important event in history is because it guarantees we will receive great benefits through Jesus' death for us on the cross. When Paul says he is passing on what is most

important, he is actually referring to both Jesus' death and his resurrection. Neither has much meaning without the other. As human beings, our biggest problems revolve around our separation from God.

Romans 3:23 – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

That is the boat we are all in. Ultimately, this means we deserve to be eternally separated from God, experiencing hell because of our rebellion against him. There is also so much in this life that gets messed up because we are alienated from our creator. We struggle to find peace and joy in our lives because we are getting a taste of the wrath we deserve for failing to love God and other people as we should. Yet, as a song says and the Bible teaches, "On the cross where Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied." Those who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are not objects of his wrath, but objects of his love. Because of Jesus' death in our place, we approach God, not as rebels facing condemnation, but as children whom he loves.

The resurrection of Jesus provides proof that all this is true. Yes, the ripping of the huge curtain in the temple that separated the Holy of Holies, the most Holy Place from the rest of the temple signified that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was accepted by the Father. It meant he had become our high priest and initiated the New Covenant and all the freedoms and hope that brings. Yet, Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate proof that he accomplished all the Father intended and all that we needed by suffering and dying in our place. We can now be confident that Jesus has conquered the forces of darkness, the curse is being reversed. As happened in Narnia, "Death itself is beginning to work backwards. "Friends, do not misunderstand. We are not in heaven yet. We still have to deal with the messes resulting from our own sins and the sins of others. We still experience many of the results of the curse inflicted upon this world because of sin. COVID-19 and all that goes with it is one of those results.

The resurrection of Jesus points to what Francis Schaeffer called "the substitutional healing" believers can experience right now today because of what Jesus accomplished through his death and resurrection. Sometimes that involves

healing for our bodies, but more often it involves healing for our souls. No matter what we are struggling with in life, the resurrection of Jesus lets us know that his path is the one to follow if we are to win that battle. Even when we are in the midst of the struggle and feel like we are taking some hard hits, the resurrection of Jesus lets us know we are going down the right path if we are trusting the Lord to help us. So, friend, if you struggle with an addiction, the resurrection of Jesus says you can overcome that addiction. When you know the Lord you don't need that stuff. If you struggle with guilt, shame, or regret, the resurrection of Jesus says there is full and free forgiveness to all trusting in him. If you struggle with anxiety and fear about the future, the resurrection of Jesus says don't be afraid, be confident, because the future is in the hands of your loving heavenly Father. If you struggle with relationships, or feel a lot of insecurity when you are around other people, the resurrection of Jesus says because God accepts and loves you, because he says you are O.K., it doesn't make that much difference what other people think. If you struggle with depression, the resurrection of Jesus gives you hope that someday you will find that elusive joy.

Friend, whatever your struggle is, the resurrection of Jesus assures you that he has procured ultimate victory for you on the cross. You may not experience that fully right now, you may even have to wait until heaven to experience a full victory. But you can get a taste of it right now, today, as you apply the Gospel and allow what Jesus has accomplished through his death and resurrection to impact your life. That is why the Apostle says it is a matter of first importance and why I say Jesus' resurrection is the most important event in history.

The fourth reason that Jesus' resurrection is so important is that it gives us hope in the face of death. It is the foundation of God's promise of eternal life to those who trust in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus has conquered death, we will conquer death as well. That is Paul's theme in the remainder of 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22 - But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection

of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15: 51, 52 - Listen, I am telling you a mystery: we will not all fall asleep, but we will 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 incorruptible, and we will be changed.

This is the basis of the statement that Jesus himself made to his friend, Martha, after her brother had died.

John 11:25, 26 - Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die. Do you believe this?"

Friend, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ, it is your privilege to say, "Yes, this is what I believe!"

The world around us and other religions and philosophies offer substitutes to what the Gospel, Biblical Christianity, provides. They are often poor substitutes, but they can seem plausible. True meaning and significance in life is found

through trusting and following Jesus. Yet, plenty of other folks say, "No, this is the path to follow. If you get a good education and are successful in your career, then your life will have meaning." Genuine, unconditional love, something which we all long for, is found in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Yet, a lot of people think, "If I can find a true soulmate, or if I can raise a close knit family, then I will experience that love." The only way to get rid of the guilt and shame that stains our souls because of our sins and mistakes is through turning to the Lord Jesus. He offers free and full forgiveness. However, a lot of people think the way to deal with guilt and shame is to go to therapy and have someone help you dig through your past and find all the different ways your soul has been wounded. Not a great substitute, but a plausible alternative.

Then there is the big problem with which every human being has to deal—Death.

Unless the Lord returns first, each of us will die someday. Through Jesus' resurrection, he

enables Christian believers to face death with hope and courage. We don't have to like death, but we don't have to be afraid of it. Jesus has conquered death and promises eternal life. So, what about the substitutes others offer? What is a plausible reason for hope other than the Gospel which is built on the foundation of Jesus' resurrection? I would suggest there is no other plausible reason for hope. Some opt for cryogenics, freezing a dead body, hoping that one day scientists can bring it back to life. That is more bizarre than plausible. Others choose a vague hope, "She will always be with us," or "He is in a better place." Those are pretty much just empty platitudes. The most common response is to immerse ourselves in diversions so we don't have to think about the reality of death. The result is the 85 year old man I talked to who said, "I have never thought about what will happen to me after I die." There is little basis for hope in the face of death other than the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When a mother stands beside the grave of her daughter who was killed in a car accident, it is only the resurrection of Jesus that gives her hope. When a 53 year old man goes to the doctor and is told the cancer has spread and he probably has two months to live, it is only the resurrection of Jesus that gives him hope. Whenever a friend or family member dies or has a serious illness, whenever we ourselves are hit with the reality of our mortality, it is only the resurrection of Jesus that gives us the courage to keep living each day.

Friends, COVID-19 is a big deal, but it is not as big a deal as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing is more important than Jesus' resurrection because it is an event that really happened, because it shows Jesus is who he claims to be, the unique Son of God, because it guarantees we receive great benefits from Jesus' death on the cross for us, and because it is the only source of hope in the face of death.

Friends, those are great reasons to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus today, on Easter Sunday, and to celebrate it every day of our lives!