

# IF THERE WERE NO RESURRECTION

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1 Corinthians 15:12-19

## Introduction:

We're back in 1 Cor. 15 again this morning. In the previous message we looked at the first 11 verses of this chapter as we considered *"The Heart of the Gospel."* Paul gave a clear, but brief, synopsis of the gospel message in vv. 3-4. The gospel is centered in the ministry of Jesus Christ – he died to pay the penalty for our sin, he was buried to suffer the punishment we deserved and that he was raised to offer us new life, eternal life. But the motivation behind the gospel, the very heart of the gospel is the grace of God – v. 10. Paul says, everything I am and everything I do is only by God's grace – the unmerited favor that he extends to me and to you.

But without the resurrection of Jesus, there would be no gospel, no good news. It is his resurrection that gives us hope that our bodies too will one day be raised to life again. That is the real thrust of this chapter. But the idea of the resurrection seemed to create a problem for some of the Corinthians. I would like to look at a historical perspective for a few moments.

In the book of Acts, you find Paul's coming to Corinth in chapter 18. In the previous chapter he had been in Athens – turn with me to Acts 17. Note verses 16-18 – *read them*. So they took him to the Areopagus, and reasoned further with him. But note what the key theme of his message was – the resurrection. Look at the closing words of his message in vv. 30-31 – he focuses on Jesus being raised from the dead. And in v. 32 we have the response of the people of Athens – disbelief and mocking, for the most part.

You see, the ancient Greeks did not believe in a bodily resurrection. They were convinced that "Dead men don't rise." Oh, they believed in an afterlife. There was a belief that the spirit lived on in some kind of mystical, ethereal world, but the idea of the resurrection of the body was not only unthinkable, it was considered undesirable.

To the ancient Greeks, there was no reason to want to be reunited with a body. Greek philosophy generally taught that the material world was evil and the spiritual or immaterial was good. So the body, being material was something to be rid of. In fact, Plato, a philosopher from Athens who lived and died about 4 centuries before Paul's time, thought of the body as a prison. The goal of life was to be released from the prison of the body. So, why would anyone want the body to come back to life after it had died.

Now, that was Athens. But Corinth was just down the road from Athens – about 80 kilometers. There is no doubt that the same kind of philosophical thinking would have been prevalent in Corinth. It was into that kind of world that Paul came, bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ, and preaching the truth of the resurrection. And the Corinthians accepted the gospel, many believed, and a church was established there.

Certainly, those Christians in Corinth believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is at the very core of the gospel and they could not truly be Christians without believing that.

Romans 10:9 says, *"...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* The resurrection of Jesus is crucial to salvation.

But it seems that there were those in the Corinthian church who, because of the influence of their pagan background, questioned or doubted the idea that there was a bodily resurrection for believers. So, Paul confronts that theological error and gives several arguments to try to correct their thinking about resurrection. That is what we are going to look at for the next few minutes this morning.

He begins by pointing out the incongruity of their thinking – *read v. 12*. Just a couple of paragraphs earlier Paul pointed out the process by which the gospel came to them – vv. 1-2. I preached it, you received it, you stand in it, you are being saved by it, if you hold fast to the truth. And the foundation of that gospel was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul says, we preached the resurrection of Jesus, you received it and believed it. So how can you say there is no resurrection of the body. You can't say that Jesus rose again if there is no resurrection.

*Read v. 13* – it's that simple. If dead bodies do not rise, if there is no possibility of resurrection, then Christ did not rise from the dead. And that thought has all kinds of implications and tragic repercussions. In the next few verses, Paul lays out 5 critical consequences that would be true if Christ did not rise from the dead. Let's look at those for a few minutes this morning.

## **If Christ Did Not Rise**

### **Our preaching is in vain.**

If Christ is not risen, then there is no reason or purpose for our preaching. We have no message, at least nothing that makes any difference. The very heart of the message of the apostles was the resurrection of Christ. Just go back to Acts 2 and Peter's message – *read from Acts 2:23-24, 29-32*.

We have already mentioned Paul's message to the Greeks in Athens. It was the message concerning the resurrection of the dead that confused them and caused them to mock his message. It was the message of the resurrection that Paul brought to Corinth.

And Peter, in his first epistle, says, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*" (1 Pet. 1:3) The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the source of our hope.

If Christ did not rise from the dead, then we have no message. Our preaching is vain, it is empty. Not only that, but Paul goes on to say...

### **Your faith is in vain.**

The message you received, the focus of your faith was a risen Savior. His resurrection is the validation of his finished work on the cross. If he did not rise from the dead, then your faith is futile, it is empty. You have believed a lie. But there is more...

### **The apostles are false witnesses (liars).**

*Read v. 15* – if it is true that there is no resurrection, and that Christ was not raised from the dead, then, Paul says, we are spreading a lie.

The very heart of the apostles' ministry and message was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, apart from being called and appointed by God, do you recall what the key qualification was for an apostle? In Acts 1, after Judas Iscariot had taken his own life, as the eleven remaining apostles met with the other disciples in Jerusalem, Peter addressed them about choosing someone to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle.

*Read Acts 1:21-22* – the key requirement and ministry of an apostle was that they had been with Jesus and they were witnesses of his resurrection. Their ministry and message was wrapped up in the resurrection of Jesus. So, Paul says, if Christ is not risen, then we are misrepresenting God. Our ministry is a lie, our whole life is a lie.

### **You are still in your sins.**

*Read vv. 16-17*. Paul repeats the thought that your faith is vain, empty, futile, but then he adds the thought that if Christ was not raised, then sin remains unforgiven.

The resurrection was the validation that the work Christ set out to do on the cross had been completed. Jesus, when he walked the roads of Galilee and spoke with his disciples about what was to happen, continually told them that he was going to Jerusalem where he would suffer and be put to death, but that he would rise again the third day. If he did not rise, then his work was never finished. It would be an indication that God was not satisfied with his sacrifice, and our sin would remain.

In Romans 5-6 Paul talks about the connection between sin and death. Sin came into the world through Adam, and death came because of sin. The only way to defeat sin was to defeat death. Without the resurrection, the death of Jesus becomes just a hollow mockery, a symbol of defeat. His death would have accomplished nothing, if he had remained in the tomb. And we would still be in our sins.

### **The dead in Christ have perished.**

*Read verse 18* – If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then all those who died believing in Jesus, just like those who are still alive, are still in their sins. They are under eternal condemnation. They are all in hell. Without the resurrection there is no hope. They died believing a lie and are suffering under eternal wrath.

But what does the Bible say? Think of Paul's testimony in Philippians – Justin has referred to this often. Phil. 1:21 – For to me to live... what? Christ; and to die is... what? – gain. Our hope as believers is that there is far more awaiting us on the other side of death, than what we enjoy even now.

But, Paul says, if Christ is not risen then there is no hope. Those who have died believing in Christ have perished under eternal judgment.

## Conclusion

So, if there is no resurrection, then Christ did not rise from the dead. And if Christ did not rise, then:

- Our preaching is in vain
- Your faith is futile and empty
- The apostles are liars, proclaiming something false as being true
- You are still in your sins
- Those who have died believing in Christ have perished

*Read v. 19* – If Christ is only of value for this life, then what is the point. Yes, Christ can make you a better person. You can serve him in the here and now, but if that is all there is, then, Paul says, we are the most pitiful of creatures. John MacArthur puts it quite eloquently:

*"If Christ is only good for this life ... you're pitiful because Christians have come to Christ not on the basis of what He's going to do for them in this life, but on the basis of the promise of what He's going to do for them in eternity... If there's no resurrection, we've wasted our entire lives. That's pitiful. We literally lived an illusion, all the way to death, only to end up in hell. Here we fight against temptation and struggle against sin, seek to please Christ, obeyed the Scripture, bear the cross, suffer reproach. And in the end, for what? ...if Christ didn't rise, then it's only for now and it has no implications for the future... That is pitiful."*

Well, we need to wrap this up, but we can't stop there – *read v. 20*. That is what changes everything. Christ did rise from the dead, and because he did, we know that we will too, if we are walking in faith.

Do you have the hope of eternal life, resurrection?