

THE GLORY OF THE RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:20-34

Introduction:

He is risen ... He is risen indeed. This is Easter Sunday morning. Usually, we would be looking at one of the gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus, but this morning I would like to go back to the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. Over the past year we have been going through this epistle written by Paul to the church in Corinth.

This chapter is devoted to the truth of resurrection. The reason for this discussion was a belief by some of the Corinthian believers that there was no such thing as resurrection of the body. This came out of pagan Greek philosophy that believed that once the body died, it was gone forever, but the spirit lived on in some mystical, ethereal state.

Paul addressed that false belief, by going back to the gospel and the implication of that thinking. The gospel is centered on Christ and his death, burial and resurrection. Without the resurrection, there would be no good news.

So, Paul's argument in verses 12-19 is that if there is no resurrection, then you cannot say that Christ rose bodily from the dead. And if Christ did not rise, that has serious implications for us. I will not rehash what we looked at last time, but will simply list the things that Paul reminds us would be true if Christ did not rise:

- Our preaching is vain – we have no message
- Our faith is vain – we're believing something that is not true
- The apostles are misrepresenting God, teaching a lie
- We are still in our sins – there is no forgiveness
- The dead in Christ have perished – they are in hell

And he concludes by saying that if this is the case, and our hope in Christ is good only for this life, then we are people most to be pitied.

However, that all changes in v. 20. He turns the corner with that amazing word, "But..." *"But...Christ has been raised from the dead..."*

The horrendous ideas that are raised in vv. 14-19 are only an unspeakable nightmare that disappears in an instant when we awaken to the truth that Christ is alive.

One can only imagine the joy that was felt by the disciples on that first day of the week when their nightmare came to an end with the realization that their master was not in the tomb but was alive. But for us today, realizing the *eternal* implications of the thought of there being no resurrection, the horror is even greater.

But the reality is that Christ is risen. He is alive. And in the verses that follow, Paul addresses some of the implications of that truth. And that is what I want to examine together with you this Easter Sunday morning. In this passage I see three specific assurances that come to us because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. First...

It Assures us of our Resurrection vv. 20-23

Read vv. 20-23 – Christ is the firstfruits – In Jewish culture—in fact, in Jewish law—they were required to bring the first portion of the harvest as an offering to the Lord. I know that the Corinthian church was primarily Gentile, but they would be familiar with the concept of firstfruits even from their pagan culture. Many of them offered the first of their crops to their pagan gods. The idea of bringing the firstfruits to God was a recognition that it was God who provided the harvest and they were dependent on him to bring in the rest of the harvest.

So, in referring to Christ's resurrection as the firstfruits, Paul is reminding us of the promise that there is a whole harvest to come. There will be a great harvest of resurrection. Christ's resurrection assures us of our resurrection.

But Paul's argument extends beyond the concept of firstfruits. He reminds us that death came to us through Adam, but life comes through Jesus Christ, and his resurrection. A few verses later he gives us an even stronger link between Adam and Christ. In verse 45 he refers to Jesus Christ as the "last Adam." *Read 1 Cor. 15:45.* – the first Adam received life when God breathed into him. The last Adam, Jesus, gives life.

Let's examine that link a bit more – Romans 5 – *read vv. 12, 18-19.*

The trespass of one—the first Adam—led to condemnation and death, but the righteous act of one—the last Adam—led to justification and life. So, back in 1 Corinthians, Paul says – *read vv. 22-23 again.*

The fact that Christ has been raised from the dead assures us of our resurrection, which will occur when Christ returns.

It Assures us of Victory over Death vv. 24-26

Read vv. 24-26 – The resurrection of Jesus Christ assures us that He has defeated every enemy, including death itself. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of Christ's superior ministry and also assures us that there is no longer any reason to fear death, because Jesus has gained the victory over it.

Go to Hebrews and read 2:10-15 – Jesus Christ has destroyed Satan's grasp on us and has delivered us from the power of death and the fear of death, by defeating death at the cross.

When Jesus gasped his last breath on the cross and the life drained from his body, I am sure that Satan and all his forces were dancing and shouting with glee. They were convinced that they had won—they had done away with God's promised Messiah. But how wrong they were.

In the gospel of John, Jesus gives us a glimpse of what really happened that dark day at Calvary. *Read John 10:14-18.* You see, Satan did not destroy Jesus or put him to death. Yes, the Jewish leaders called for him to be crucified, but they did not kill him. Yes, the Roman soldiers drove the nails through his hands and feet, but they did not kill him. No one killed Jesus. He voluntarily gave up his life on his own terms and in so doing he cheated death and he defeated death.

And his resurrection is our assurance that death has been forever defeated, and we are forever delivered from the power of death and the fear of death.

It Assures us that Christ is King vv. 27-28

Read vv. 27-28 – what a marvelous assurance, that Jesus Christ is king. The Apostle Paul quotes the psalmist in saying that God has placed all things under the feet of Jesus.

In Psalm 8, speaking of the son of man, a term referring to the Messiah, David says,

"... you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet," (Ps 8:5-6 ESV)

Over in Hebrews chapter 1, the writer tells us... *read vv. 2, 7-9, 13.* Every enemy, every created being, every created thing is placed under Christ's feet, to serve him as King of kings. In Revelation 11, in John's magnificent vision of the end times, we read,

"Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign." (Re 11:15-17 ESV)

The resurrection of Jesus assures us that he is victor over all things, over every enemy, and ultimately everyone and everything will bow at his feet – Philippians 2:9-11 – "...God has exalted him..." – *quote it.*

Conclusion vv. 29-34

So, then the question is: how does this affect us now? What difference does Easter and the resurrection make for us today. I would suggest that it changes everything. The hope and assurance of the resurrection changes the way we live and how we view things here and now.

I would like to briefly look at a few thoughts from vv. 29-34 as we wrap this up. Three things...

1. We follow after the hope of those who have gone before – v. 29
Read v. 29 - I would love to be able to tell you exactly what Paul meant when he wrote those words. However, I cannot. I can make some suggestions. And I can certainly tell you some things he did not mean. Any suggestion that Paul is saying that one can be baptised in the place of someone who has already died in order to

secure their salvation is clearly violating the truth of Scripture, for two reasons. First, baptism does not save anyone. Second, the Word is clear that once a person dies, his eternal destiny is sealed. A couple of suggestions:

The ESV Study Bible says that some interpreters *"...argue that by 'the dead' Paul means the bodies of living Christians, which are subject to death and decay: they are baptized 'on behalf of their dying bodies,' showing hope that their bodies will rise. On this view, Paul argues here that the baptism of perishing bodies is useless if the dead are not raised."*

John MacArthur, in his Study Bible says, *"A reasonable view seems to be that 'people baptized' refers to living believers who give outward testimony to their faith in baptism by water because they were first drawn to Christ by the exemplary lives, faithful influence, and witness of believers who had subsequently died. Paul's point is that if there is no resurrection and no life after death, then why are people coming to Christ to follow the hope of those who have died?"*

Based on these suggestions, I am simply saying that those who have died before us have set the example, and the hope of the resurrection changes the way that we live our lives as we follow their example.

2. We risk everything, even our lives, because of the hope of the resurrection – vv. 30-32

Read vv. 30-32 – Paul says, if there is no hope of resurrection, if this life is all there is, then what is the point in what we are doing? If there is no resurrection then the risks that people have taken to spread the gospel, the dangers that have been faced, and the abuse that has been endured were all for nothing. If there is no resurrection, then let's party and enjoy life here and now. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

3. We counter the claims of those who do not believe – vv. 33-34

Read vv. 33-34 – There are, and always will be those who deny the truth and live their lives accordingly. The hope of the resurrection is a sanctifying influence. It leads to a life of righteousness and integrity. If there is no hope for resurrection, then as Paul said, we might as well just live for today, enjoy all this life has to offer with no thought of tomorrow.

It appears that there were some in the Corinthian church who had allowed their belief that there was no resurrection to corrupt their morality. Their lack of godly knowledge led to immorality and corruption.

So, what is the glory of the resurrection? Well, the wonderful truth that Christ has been raised from the dead assures us of our own resurrection – Christ is just the firstfruits of those who have died. It assures us that every enemy, including death has been defeated. And it assures us that Jesus Christ is the eternal victor and the King over all kings and Lord over all lords.

And most of all, the hope of resurrection changes the way we live our lives here and now. It gives us a reason to risk everything in this life because we know that there is so much more to come.

Are you living in the hope of the resurrection this Easter morning?