

SERMON: *Why the Resurrection Matters*
 SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 15
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
 DATE: April 4, 2010

So that you can't say that you didn't get anything out of the sermon this morning, I'd like start out with the practical right away. I've pulled a few health and wellness tips for you off of the internet that caught my attention. I hope they will do you some practical good.

- A brisk half hour walk 5 days/week can reduce your risk of developing diabetes.
- If you always wear sunscreen you'll reduce your risk of skin cancer.
- Eating a small dose of chocolate every day can reduce your risk of stroke or heart attack – thank goodness for all Easter candy you received this weekend.
- Not flying reduces your risk of being in a plane crash.
- Running reduces your risk of dying.

Let me read that last one for you again. Running reduces your risk of dying. Do you agree with this? I don't know if this was a typo, or if the person who wrote this lives on a different planet than the rest of us. But the last I checked the death rate is the same for everyone; its 100%. If you believe there is something you can do to reduce your risk of dying I have an assignment for you: visit a graveyard this week. Graveyards remind us of the brevity of life. Whether we wear sunscreen or not, exercise regularly or not, eat small or large amounts of chocolate, we will all eventually die; each of us has a terminal condition.

What is your view of death? Are you afraid of death? What is your view of life? Is there anything in your life that you would be willing to die for? Your view of death will shape your view of life. The Bible speaks in great detail about these things, especially when it speaks of the resurrection of Christ. Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15 is the longest chapter in Paul's epistles, and the resurrection is the only topic covered in the chapter. The resurrection is actually found in every book of the NT either explicitly or implicitly.¹ Easter Sunday, which celebrates the resurrection, is the most widely attended church service of the year. The resurrection is obviously important in the Bible and in the churches around this country, but why? What's the big deal with the resurrection? Let's look together at 1 Corinthians 15 to see what the Bible says about the resurrection. There are 58 verses in this chapter. Since this is only a 30 minute sermon, I do not have time to cover them all. Instead, we'll focus the bulk of our attention on verses 1-5 and 16-22.

In verse 12 we learn that some of the Christians at Corinth were saying "*there is no resurrection of the dead.*" They believed that *Christ* had been raised from the dead by God. They also believed in eternal life, however, they didn't believe that they *themselves* would be raised physically when Christ returned. They were likely influenced by Greek thinking at that time which placed a high value on the spiritual life, but saw little value in the physical; therefore they saw no value in a physical resurrection. Paul uses a logical argument to show them how dangerous their thinking is. He says in verse 16, "*If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not*

¹ Kreitzer, 1993.

been raised either.” In Paul’s mind, if Christ has not been raised then we’re all in big trouble, however, if Christ has been raised then it should change the way we live our lives. This morning we will explore three reasons why the resurrection matters.

1. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. (1-5, 17-19)

15:17 *If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*

When Paul says “*your faith is futile*” he is first of all saying if Christ has not been raised the Gospel itself is false.

15:1-5 *Now, brothers, 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 were saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.*

15:11 *This is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

The central message of the Christian faith is the Gospel. And the resurrection is at the very center of Gospel, after all Paul says the death and resurrection of Christ are of “*first importance.*” So if part of the central message of the Christian faith is false then these Corinthian Christians believed a lie. And if they believed a lie then their faith in the Gospel is foolish! The Christian faith is based on historical events that actually took place in time and history. If the resurrection didn’t actually take place then we would be fools to believe that it did.

No other major world religion is based on the truth of a historical event.² If you could somehow prove that Buddha never lived it would in no way destroy the credibility Buddhism, because Buddhism doesn’t depend on any historical person or event. The same is true of Hinduism. If you could prove that the great Hindu god Krishna never existed that would in no way destroy Hinduism because Hinduism doesn’t depend on the historical existence of any one of their millions of gods.

History is important to Islam, but not in the same way as it is to Christianity. If you were to ask a Muslim if Allah could have given his revelation to someone other than Mohammad, they would have to say that revelation is entirely in Allah, and Allah *could have* given it to anyone he wanted. There is nothing intrinsic in the historical person of Mohammad that is critical to Islam’s theology; he is a mere conveyer of Allah’s revelation.

But if you could somehow prove that Christ was not raised from the dead you would completely destroy the Christian faith. The entire Christian faith is built on the historical fact that Jesus died, was buried, and was raised on the third day. There were actually witnesses to these

² This statement and the following explanations come from Carson, 2003.

historical events. After Jesus was raised he appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve, then to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time. Faith is only valid if the object of one's faith is true. If Jesus was not raised from the dead then anyone who believes he has risen is a fool.

But the Christian faith is not only historical it is also theological. That's why the second part of verse 17 says, "*If Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins.*"

It's a well known fact that all of us are sinners. The Bible says, "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23); we all stand guilty before a holy and glorious God because of our sin. The Bible says the penalty for our sin is death (Rom. 6:23). But the Bible also says there is forgiveness available because Jesus paid the penalty for our sin when he died on the cross. So, if the cross brought forgiveness of sin, then why do we need the resurrection? Why does Paul say, "*If Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins*"? Isn't it the cross alone that takes care of sin? Well, yes, but no. The cross covers the *guilt* of our sin, but only the resurrection can overcome the *power* of sin, which is death.³

I have an image in my mind, which is probably informed in large part by the inordinate amount of television I watched as a child. Picture a scenario where a criminal is on death row. This criminal is going to be put to death in a gas chamber. In fact this criminal is even now in the gas chamber and a timer has been set; a red digital timer, which has a very pronounced tick, to be exact. The timer is ticking down and when the timer goes off the gas will be released into the room where this criminal is and he will die.

But, as would be expected in a scene like this, something changes at the last minute which breathes hope into the story. The criminal's attorney finds new evidence in the case, which proves the man is "not guilty." The judge changes his verdict and the attorney rushes to the gas chamber to inform the guards of the new verdict. He calls out to the guards to let the man go free. The man's family rejoices as the plot comes to its climax!

But there is a problem. The keys to the gas chamber cannot be found. And the keys to the room that controls the red digital timer cannot be found. This man is free of guilt and he is free to go, but there is nobody who has the *power* to release him from his imminent death. And so the timer runs out, the gas turns on, and the man dies. This man was declared "not guilty," but he suffered the penalty of a guilty man.

This is a ridiculous story because it is unrealistic. But this is what happens theologically if we leave Jesus in the grave. If there is no resurrection then death will have the last word when our time runs out. Even though there is forgiveness for sin available to us through the cross, if there is no resurrection there is no means to overcome the power of sin. In the Bible when the Gospel is preached the death *and* the resurrection of Christ go hand in hand; they cannot be separated. Without both the cross *and* the empty tomb we are "*still in our sins.*"

Think about how serious that is. If there is no resurrection then as Paul says in verse 18, "*those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.*" The Easter lilies on display here this morning

³ This thought is influenced by Ridderbos, pg 55.

are memorials to many of our loved ones. Most of these lilies represent someone who put their faith in Christ before they died. But if there is no resurrection then we will never see our loved ones again, even if they had faith in Christ. But if the resurrection did happen, not only will our loved ones be raised, we all will be raised.

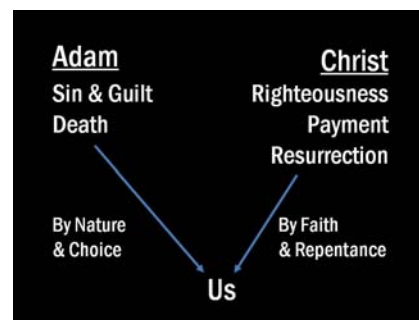
15:19 *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

Why are we to be pitied? That brings me to the second reason the resurrection matters.

2. The resurrection is the only basis for life after death. (20-22)

15:20-22 *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Let me explain these verses by using a chart. Adam was the first man, and whether we like it or not he serves as the head of the human race. The choices he made in the garden have impacted all of us. Adam was created by God and created for the purpose of bringing glory to God. Adam was given freedom, but he was also under the authority of God. Adam rebelled against God, and rejected his authority; he ate the fruit he was forbidden to eat. This is what theologians refer to as the fall of man. Adam sinned; he fell short of the glory of God and as a result he was cursed; he was banished from the presence of God and given a death sentence.



Adam's sin and guilt before God and the penalty that accompanied his sin have been transferred to the whole human race by nature and by choice. By nature we inherited Adams sin and guilt, but by choice each of us rebel against God, we reject his authority, and we seek our own glory. We are guilty of sin and are under God's curse. In our sin we are alienated from God and will one day die and be separated from God eternally. This is bad news, but there is good news for you as well. All have sinned and deserve the penalty of sin; all that is except for one.

Jesus Christ became a man (verse 45 calls him the last Adam). He was both fully God and fully man. Jesus was human in every way, except for the fact that he was without sin – he was righteous. Jesus lived the life that the first Adam failed to live; he fulfilled the purpose for which man was created. He lived his life for the glory of his heavenly Father and under the authority of his Father. Jesus not only lived the life that *Adam* failed to live, he lived the life that *each of us* has failed to live because of our sin.

But that's not all. Even though Jesus was innocent and without sin, he paid the penalty we deserve to pay for our sin, when he died on the cross. His death on the cross serves as a substitute for the death we all deserve. But Jesus not only died for our sins, he overcame the power of sin when he rose from the dead, and made it possible for us to have life after we die. His resurrection is the only basis for life after death.

Adam is the head of the human race and the choices he made have impacted all of us. But Christ, the last Adam, is the head of redeemed humanity. The life and work of Christ can overcome the guilt and power of sin. Adam's sin, guilt, and death were transferred to us both by nature and by choice. But Christ's righteousness, his payment for our sin, and his resurrection can be transferred to us by faith and repentance. If we believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead then his righteousness can be ours, as well as his power over death. "*In Adam all die, but in Christ all will be made alive;*" that is all who put their faith in him.

Verse 20 says Christ's resurrection is the "*firstfruits*" of the resurrection. What this means is that Christ was the first to be raised. Now, if you know your Bible you may disagree with that statement, for other people in the Bible were raised before Christ. For example Lazarus was raised from the dead. But Lazarus was raised with the same body he had always had, and eventually he died again. When Christ was raised he was given a new body – a glorified physical body; an incorruptible body, that will never die. Christ is the "*firstfruits*" of that kind of resurrection. And Christ's resurrection serves as the guarantee that we will one day be raised as well, with an incorruptible body that will never die. The thought of being raised in these same corrupt bodies we have now is nothing to look forward to, but the idea of being raised with a new body is something worth looking forward to. I don't have time to cover the section in this chapter where Paul describes the nature of our new bodies. You can study verses 35-57 on your own to learn more.

The point I want to make for now is that Christ's resurrection from the dead gives us an objective hope that we will one day be raised *with him* if we place our faith *in him*. This hope for life after death should change the way that we live before we die. That brings me to the third reason why the resurrection matters.

3. The resurrection is the reason to live out the Christian life. (58)

I have heard some people say that if Christianity was proved to be a lie they would still live the Christian life because the Christian life is a better life than any other life. Paul disagrees with this thinking. In verse 19 Paul says if the resurrection didn't happen then we are to be pitied. In verse 32 Paul says, "*if the dead are not raised let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*" I don't think people who say "the Christian life is better than any other life" actually understand the nature of the Christian life.

I think we sometimes adopt the world's view of spirituality, not the Bible's view. Secular self-help books tell us we need a "spiritual" *compartment* in our lives, if we're going to live in *balance*. But that's not the type of life Jesus lived and that's not the type of Christianity Paul has in mind here. Christianity is not supposed to be compartmentalized. Paul said at the beginning of 1 Corinthians he "*resolved to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (2:2). The Gospel is the dominant category for the Christian life; everything is informed by the Gospel. This is the Bible's view of the Christian life.

Christ crucified, buried, and risen should define and shape every aspect of the Christian life, if you actually believe Christ was raised! The Christian life should model the life, death and

resurrection of Christ. If you don't believe in life after death, you surely wouldn't want to live your life like Jesus did. His life was marked by humble service and sacrifice and suffering – his life ultimately ended in a cruel and unjust death. But the Christian life should follow Christ's lead. We are called to live our lives like Jesus, in humble service and sacrifice and suffering. We're called to pick up our cross daily: to die to self daily, to die to the world's way of life daily, to die to sin daily, and in some cases, we might even be called to die a martyr's death. Is this type of life worth living if the dead are not raised? I don't think so.

In verses 30-31 we are reminded that Paul suffered greatly for his faith in Christ. History tells us that Paul, like Christ before him, was put to death because of his faith. What enables Christians to live this kind of life? Belief in the resurrection is the only thing that will enable someone to live their life now with no fear of death. Belief that there is a better life after this life is the only thing that will enable someone to willingly suffer loss in this life.

Most of us here this morning believe in life after death. And most of us believe in the resurrection, *in our minds*. But is there any evidence of this belief, *in our lives*? How we live our lives proves what we believe. If we live just like the unbelieving world, then maybe our core beliefs aren't any different than the world's. If we don't *believe* in the resurrection there is no reason to live a life of humble service and sacrifice and suffering. A life of pride and pleasure and power would suit unbelief much better.

What does your life say about what you believe? The Christians at Corinth were not giving themselves fully to the work of the Lord. Instead they were quarreling and living immoral lives. One reason for this was they didn't have an adequate view of the resurrection. Do you have an adequate view of the resurrection? Are you willing to give yourself fully to the work of the Lord? Or are you half hearted? Do you use your time and your talents and your resources for the Lord's work or do you spend more time and money and energy pursuing your own interests and your own comfort? Are you afraid that giving your life fully to the Lord will cost you too much, or are you convinced that the promise of eternal life is worth the sacrifice?

I want to challenge you to think about what you believe this week. But keep in mind that what you believe about life after death will be shown in how you live your life before death. So, think about how you live as well. Death is certain, there is no debating it. But the resurrection is also certain for those who have faith in Christ. As I said at the beginning, graveyards remind us of the brevity of life. But that's only the first part of the equation. Graveyards remind us of the brevity of life, but the resurrection reminds us of the brevity of death.⁴

You do not have to fear death if you believe that Christ's death and resurrection have secured your salvation. Do you believe that?

You can receive Christ's salvation this morning by responding to the Gospel. Simply believe that Christ has paid the penalty for your sin and repent. When I say believe what I mean is that you must trust that it is Christ's work on your behalf and not your good works that earn your salvation. And when I say repent what I mean is that you must turn from your old life of sin and

⁴ Garland, 2003.

toward God; you must submit your life to his authority. If you believe and repent you will be saved. As 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.”*

Those who do not believe in the resurrection are heading toward a hopeless end. But those who do believe in the resurrection should have endless hope.⁵ Listen to the way Paul concludes this chapter.

15:54-57 *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

And this hope of victory over death should change the way we live our lives before death. I leave you with Paul’s closing challenge:

15:58 *Therefore my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

⁵ Garland, 2003.

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