No Resurrection? No Hope
Sunday, April 20, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 -- Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Introduction: The pastor of a Baptist church had called all of the little children to the front of the church and had them sit around him. He said, "**Today is Resurrection Sunday. Do you know what the resurrection is**?" After a few seconds, one little boy raised his hand. The pastor said, "**Okay, Johnny, please tell us what the resurrection is**." Johnny scratched his head, appearing to be a bit confused, but then said in a clear, loud voice, "**Well, to be honest with you, I'm not really sure, but I know that when you get one lasting more than four hours, you gotta call a doctor**!"

Well, in case there's any confusion, this is the day we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. He died on a Friday and on the third day, He rose from the grave! Here's a summary of the story taken right from the gospels. On the first day of the week, at early dawn, **Mary, the mother of James, Mary of Magdala and Salome** went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared to anoint the body of our Lord. When they arrived, they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but they did not find the body of Jesus in it. The Bible says they were perplexed about it until two men (clearly, they were angels) stood by them in DAZZLING APPAREL. Of course, the women were frightened and that's when the angels said to them, "**Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise**." Then the women remembered his words and returned from the tomb and told everything to the disciples. Yet at least one of them still found it hard to believe. I'm thinking of Thomas, who said, "**Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.**" **Later, he saw the resurrected Christ for himself, and that's when he finally acknowledged it to be true. It turns out that, at least in the case of the resurrection of our Lord, seeing is believing because that was the result for everyone who saw the Lord for himself after His resurrection ... they believed**.

Unfortunately, not everyone had the same reaction upon hearing that Jesus had risen from the dead. When the chief priests learned that the tomb was empty, they called the men who had been guarding it and offered them money to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body during the night (**Matthew 28:11-15 -- Behold some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, "*Tell people His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep*"**).

Some refer to this as **the first Easter Conspiracy**, but it certainly wasn't the last. **Throughout the centuries, many have sought to attack the legitimacy of the resurrection. Why have they been so passionate about disproving it? Because if they succeed, there's really not too much left of Christianity**. Think about it for a moment. ***Doubters don't trouble themselves with the events of Good Friday***. It's not a problem for them because everyone understands death. We read about it in the papers, watch it acted out on TV, and even experience the death of family members and close friends. **In fact, the death rate so far is 100%**! We understand that death is real and always with us. So, when Christians say that Jesus died on the cross, people rarely seem to be bothered by that claim.

What bugs cynics, however, is not that Jesus died, but that Christians say He rose from the grave just as He said He would (**Luke 9:22** -- (*Jesus said to His disciples*) **The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life**). **I mean, come on, death is an everyday occurrence, but rising from the dead? Hardly**. Yet belief in the resurrection may be the single most important factor in the faith of any Christian. The words of **John S. Whale** come into play here. "***The Gospels do not explain the Resurrection; the Resurrection explains the Gospels. Belief in the Resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian faith; it is the Christian faith***." Listen ... If our Lord's body is still in the grave, though He promised to rise from the dead, then how do we know that anything else He taught was true? **We would have no response to the skeptic who claimed that Jesus was just a mere man, a good teacher who provided some principles to live by on the level of Gandhi or Confucius, but certainly not the Son of God**.

In our text for this morning, which comes out of 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, the Apostle Paul deliberately takes a contrary approach to the resurrection, but not because He doesn't believe it. How could he doubt when Jesus had appeared to Him on the road to Damascus? That's why he could confidently say to them, **Have I not seen the Lord? – 1 Corinthians 9:1**)? **No, Paul takes this approach to show us how much of our faith in Christ hangs on His bodily resurrection.** In playing the Devil's advocate, Paul uses the word "**if**" six times in verses **thirteen through nineteen** to demonstrate just how important the belief that Christ rose from the grave is and how much of our faith depends on it. Join me now as we consider ***four disastrous consequences*** if Christ has not been raised.

If Christ has not been raised, we have no good news to share. That's Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 15:14-15 -- If Christ has not been raised then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. Focus on the word "**vain**" for a moment. It means "**empty**" or "**useless**." It is used to describe something that has **no value**. **What Paul is inferring is that everything we've been taught, including the Gospel message itself and everything we've taught to others is a waste of time and energy if Christ has not been raised**. All of the sermons you've ever heard, the books about Christianity you've ever read, and the sum total of all your personal study in the Bible amounts to a big fat zero. For me, it means that my three years of seminary training, the 10,000 pages of material I read every ten weeks, all the papers I wrote, the exams I studied for, the time I put into learning to use Greek and Hebrew in my studies, what I learned in my theology classes and everything else I managed to absorb in the time since has been for naught. **Paul goes on to say that not only would all of this prove to be useless, but anything we've taught to others from the Bible about the Gospel and the Christian life has actually misrepresented God**. Wow -- that's not good!

That's the first implication, if in fact, Jesus is still in the grave and is not the resurrected Lord. **Our good news is really bad news if it's not true**! NO ONE LIKES BEING SCAMMED. Did you know that **almost half of all Americans** (48%) believe that the rise of artificial intelligence has made them less "**scam-savvy**" than ever before? **With AI working its way into education, finance, and even science, a new survey finds people admitting they can't tell what's real anymore**. A poll of U.S. adults revealed that only 18% feel "**very confident**" in their ability to identify a scam before falling victim to it. **As the United States enters a new era of tech, AI is continuing to blur the line between reality and an artificial world**. Between creating fake news, robo-callers with realistic voices, and sending texts from familiar phone numbers, the possibility and probability of falling victim to a scam is causing anxiety for many Americans. **We've even fallen victim to this kind of deception here at River Ridge as some scammers have sent out emails pretending to come from me, soliciting money for some cause**. **BOSS Revolution VP Jessica Poverene** said in a statement, "**As AI technology advances, so do the tactics of scammers who exploit it. It's crucial for consumers to stay vigilant**."

No one enjoys being misled. **It not only creates opportunities for personal loss, but it potentially causes others to see us as fools because we failed to discern what's real and what's not**. The Apostle Paul says that if those of us who preach the good news that Christ is risen are nothing more than deep fakes, how are we different from any other scammer? (**Review: we have no good news to share**)

If Christ has not been raised, we have no forgiveness of sin (**1 Corinthians 15:16-17 -- For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins**). The word for "**futile**" is different from the word for "**vain**." **It refers to something that yields no profit**. It's like a bunch of seeds planted by a farmer in a field that produces no crop. ***Paul uses it here as a way of saying that even though we believe we are forgiven of all our sins through faith in Christ*** (**Hebrews 10:17 -- Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more**), **it's just not true. We are still in our sins**. Christians have long believed that when Jesus said, "**It is finished**," as He hung on the cross, His work of atoning for our sins was completed. But how do we really know? If the Lord's body is still in the grave, how can we be sure that His death was sufficient to pay for our sins? Isn't it at least possible that He was no different than the rest of us, but talked a good game? In fact, we could ask, "**What was finished?" "Perhaps He meant His life or His suffering**?" Whatever He was referring to, ***the only thing we can say if there is no resurrection is that He* might have believed He was dying as our substitute to atone for our sin, but it's highly doubtful**. (**Review: If Christ has not been raised, we have no good news to share, and we have no forgiveness of sin.)**

If Christ has not been raised, we have no hope of eternal life. Christians believe that the very moment we begin a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we inherit eternal life (**1 John 5:11-12 -- God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life** -- *present tense -- true right now*). Eternal life isn't what we get when we die, but what we gain when we pass from spiritual death to spiritual life at the moment we put our faith in Jesus. Here in **1 Corinthians 15**, ***Paul wanted his readers to understand that if the resurrection never happened, then what he said in verse eighteen is the dismal and gloomy reality for all of us*** -- **Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (i.e., been fully destroyed)**. It would be as if he were saying, "**Sorry, death wins**."

Now, of course, this isn't what the Bible teaches about believers who die. It uses the metaphor of having **fallen asleep** to describe them. When you go to sleep, you expect to wake up at some point. That's why Christians have always believed that Christ conquered both sin and death through His resurrection. "**Death is swallowed up in victory! O Death where is thy sting? O Death, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ**!" The belief that Christ has been raised from dead as the first-fruits, means that we can expect to be raised as well. **But if Christ was not resurrected, then our bodies are just going to rot in the grave, and, it turns out, our atheist friends are correct ... we live, we die, and after that we're just food for the worms**. (**Review: we have no good news to share; we have no forgiveness of sin; we have no hope of eternal life**)

If Christ has not been raised, we have no higher purpose to live for (**1 Corinthians 15:19 -- If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied**). Why would this be his conclusion? **If there is no resurrection, then we have been badly duped into basing our entire existence on living for a higher purpose, when in fact none exists**. You may have heard someone say, "***Even if Christianity were proven to be untrue, I would still live my life based on its principles***." But I would ask, "**Why**?" Christians are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow in the footsteps of our Lord. That's not an easy life! It often results in hardship and even persecution at times**. If none of this is true, I can find no good reason for not doing everything I can to look after myself and my interests**.

I think I'd probably become a **hedonist** (i.e., a pleasure seeker) **and** just reach and grab for all the gusto I can. And who cares if I have to step on others to get what I want? After all, they're not human beings made in the image of God, but obstacles keeping me from getting what I want. ***Listen: People need a sense of purpose and God gives it to us, but only if the resurrection is real***. Did you know that Governments around the developing world are worried that the birth rate is declining at a troubling rate? Birth rates in the United States have been trending down for nearly two decades, and other wealthy countries are experiencing the same. **Among those proposing solutions to reverse the trend, the conventional wisdom goes that if only the government were to offer more financial support to parents, birth rates would start ticking up again**. But writing in ***The Atlantic*, writer Christine Emba** notices the need for something deeper, something governments cannot provide—meaning. She writes: That need is

for meaning. In trying to solve the fertility puzzle, thinkers have cited people's concerns over finances, climate change, political instability, or even potential war. But in listening closely to people's stories, I've detected a broader thread of uncertainty—**about the value of life and a reason for being**. Many in the current generation of young adults don't seem totally convinced of their own purpose or the purpose of humanity at large, let alone that of a child. It may be that for many people, absent a clear sense of meaning, the perceived challenges of having children outweigh any subsidy the government might offer.

For the last two millennia, Christianity has said that purpose is found in a relationship with God. We are eternal beings created in Christ Jesus for good works which He has in store for us (**Ephesians 2:10**). But if Christ is still in the grave, if He is not the Son of God, then everything we've believed is called into question. If there is no resurrection, Christians have nothing to offer this generation when it comes to a meaningful life that can impact eternity. The truth is that we're as lost as everyone else!

No good news to share ... No forgiveness of sin ... no hope of eternal life ... no higher purpose to live for. All of these are the logical consequences of no resurrection. **If you happen to be feeling pretty depressed right now, don't despair, because here's the good news found in 1 Corinthians 15:20 -- But Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep**. Wow! Just when you were starting to feel really bad, here comes the best possible news! Jesus **is** the resurrected Lord of the universe. ***No other historical claim has ever been more scrutinized and still affirmed***. And He is merely the **first-fruits.** This is a term that referred to the first part of the harvest that was offered to the Lord. **It was a happy day when you presented the first-fruits because it meant that there was a lot more harvest to come**.

And so, we know today that any person who puts His trust in Christ as Savior and Lord will be raised with Him ... **immortal, incorruptible, perfected, completed, glorified, free from sickness, with a clear mind, an unconflicted will**, and **an undivided heart**. How about you? Do you know with certainty that you will join in the resurrection on the last day? You can! But it requires that you **repent of your sin and believe in Jesus Christ** … that as the resurrected Lord, He conquered sin and death for you. **Then He will set you free to live with confidence in the gospel message, knowing you're forgiven, with hope for eternal life and a real purpose and meaning right now**.

Conclusion: On **January 28, 1945**, as World War II was groaning to a close, **121 elite Army Rangers** liberated over 500 POWs, mostly Americans, from a prisoner of war camp near **Cabanatuan** in the Philippines. The prisoners, many of whom were survivors of the infamous **Bataan death march**, were in awful condition, physically and emotionally. Before the Rangers arrived, the primary guard unit had left the camp because of Japan's massive retreat from the Philippines. The new situation was precarious. Japanese troops were still around and in the camp, but they kept their distance from the prisoners. The men of Cabanatuan didn't quite know what to make of their new freedom—if freedom was in fact what it was. And then, without warning, **the American Rangers swept upon the camp in furious force**. One of the most interesting parts of the story was the reaction of many of the prisoners. They were so defeated, diseased, and familiar with deceit that many needed to be convinced they were actually free. Was it a trick? A trap? Was this real? One prisoner, **Captain Bert Bank**, struggling with blindness caused by a vitamin deficiency, couldn't clearly make out his would-be rescuers. He refused to budge. Finally, a soldier walked up to him, tugged his arm, and said, "***What's wrong with you? Don't you want to be free***?" Bank, from Alabama, recognized the familiar southern accent of his questioner. A smile formed on his lips, and he willingly and thankfully began his journey to freedom. LISTEN TO ME FOR ONE MORE MOMENT. The resurrection of Christ is God's way of offering freedom from bondage to sin and death to all who are willing to receive it. **Through faith in Jesus we can be forgiven of our sins, inherit eternal life that begins right now and find purpose and meaning beyond anything the world could ever offer**. The only question left for any of us to answer is, "**Do we want to be free**?" If so, I can think of no better time to trust in Jesus than right now.