

10/17/10

Results of Believing in the Resurrection -- 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

- Here's a question I bet you've never been asked before...if someone was going to liken you to a national monument...which one would it be?...
 - what place or artifact would capture the essence of who you are and how you live?...
 - how about this one?...
- [show Old Faithful video]...
- you recognize this one, don't you?...
 - and that in and of itself makes the point...everybody knows about Old Faithful, the most famous geyser in Yellowstone National Park...
 - I'm curious – how many of you have actually seen Old Faithful?...
- and there's no question about why it received that name...it keeps doing the same thing over and over and over...
- did you know that Old Faithful received its name in 1870?...how many things could you name that have been functioning in a consistent manner for that long...and perhaps far longer?...
 - if you find a toaster that lasts more than 30 days, you're ready to proclaim that a miracle has occurred...
 - there have been more than 137,000 recorded eruptions of this geyser...
 - the amount of water involved can range from 3700 to 8400 gallons...
 - the average height is 145 feet...and they have even recorded eruptions as high as 185 feet...
 - they last anywhere between 1.5 to 5 minutes...
 - the interval between eruptions can be anywhere between 45 to 125 minutes...the average interval is 90 minutes apart...
- but for many of us...we learned that if you stand there long enough...it will erupt again...it's old faithful...
- now that takes us back to our original question...is someone was going to liken you to a national monument...which one would it be?...and how many others would be named before anything involving faithfulness would come into the picture?
- with those questions in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 15...[page 139 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you)...we're coming down to the end of the study we've been doing this year entitled...**Taking the Next Step...with Joy.**
 - we've just been working our way verse by verse through the book of 1 Corinthians...
- now today we plan to finish up chapter 15, which is the great resurrection chapter in the Bible...
 - now I realize that some folks might be surprised that we have taken four weeks to study the resurrection...but the truth of the matter is that we are really just scratching the surface here...there is so much in this passage because there is no event that is more central to the Christian faith than this one...

- so, think about the main points thus far...Paul started by giving us reasons to believe in the resurrection...- there's the testimony of the church, and the testimony of the Scripture, and the testimony of the eyewitnesses, and the testimony of Christ Himself...
- then in verses 12-19, he challenged anyone who thought that perhaps there was no such thing as a resurrection, of anyone, at any time...
 - some people want to water down their Christianity to only that which is palatable to the modern mind...
 - so anything miraculous has to go...
 - and Paul says—that is a fatal error if you really want to be a follower of Christ...and he encouraged us to think about all the consequences of not believing in the resurrection along with the corresponding blessings and benefits we receive because the resurrection occurred...
- then last week we saw how Paul brought in an agricultural metaphor...and of course this is the perfect time of year to think about that...because he said that Jesus' resurrection is like the first fruits offering...
 - everybody in that culture would have gotten that one...
 - just like at the beginning of the harvest a Jewish farmer would take the very first portion of his grain and offer it to God in thanksgiving for his crop and by faith that God would help him complete the harvest...
 - and Paul says – Jesus' resurrection is just like that – His resurrection guarantees yours...
 - you don't have to act like this is all there is...
 - and everything has to be just the way you want it to be today...
 - lose the pomegranate juice and all those attempts to hold on to every last ounce of life on this earth...this is a small slice of our existence...be encouraged that because Jesus went first, those who are in Him will follow...
 - and the final culmination is when our resurrected Savior establishes His millennial kingdom on this earth is fulfillment of all the old testament promises and prophecies...
 - and then after He has reigned with resurrected saints like you and me...and abolished and defeated all the enemies of God...including our arch enemy, death itself...
 - then our Savior will present the redeemed and reclaimed kingdom to the Father as the culmination of his messianic work...
- Jesus being raised from the dead is central to everything we believe...which is why our adversary the devil has worked tirelessly to try to undermine this important truth...
- now, where does that leave us?...if we really believe in the past resurrection of Christ...and the future resurrection of the unjust to eternal separation from God...and the just to the completion of the Harvest of God's people...then how will that impact us today?...
 - and what does any of that have to do with national monuments?...
- let's read the last nine verses of this chapter and see if we answer those questions...
- **read 1 Cor. 15:50-58**
- this morning, we're going to focus in on the last verse of the chapter, thinking about **The Results of Believing in the Resurrection...**
- let's organize our study around this idea -- **3 ways the resurrection is intended to impact you.**

I. Believing Jesus is Alive Should Make You Consistent.

- 1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable...

A. The meaning of this concept

- **steadfast – to be seated, settled, situated...**

- **immoveable – same idea with added intensity – speaks of something “totally immobile or motionless”**

- we're going to be talking about these two words together because their meaning is so similar....

- Paul is saying that one of the intended results of a belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is consistency...

- God wants us to be steadfast, immoveable...consistent in our walk, and our talk, and our life...

- Now, I probably need to throw a disclaimer in here somewhere so everyone is clear – we're not talking about being...

- pigheaded, or stubborn, or lazy...

- I realize some poor wife might be sitting here thinking – Steve, please don't tell my husband to be steadfast and immoveable—I have enough trouble getting him off the couch as it is...

- you know that's not what we're talking about...

- but one sure characteristic of men and women who genuinely believe that Jesus Christ is alive is that they are growing in consistency...

- now, I think we can also say this – there is a tremendous amount of hope in the fact that God would call us to this kind of lifestyle...

B. This command brings great hope.

- God delights in taking people who are unstable, and inconsistent, and feeling-oriented, and unfaithful, and undependable...and making us men and women who are steadfast and immoveable...

- the good news is...God is strong enough to do that...

- and loving enough to do that...and patient enough to do that...

C. An example of a person God changed.

- do men and women come to your mind whom God changed in this very area?...

- I imagine there's many...here's one that may not have come to mind first...James, the half-brother of our Lord...

- here's a man whom many students of Scripture don't even believe became a disciple of Christ until after the resurrection...

1. John 7:3-5 - Therefore His brothers said to Him, “Leave here and go into Judea, so that your disciples also may see your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be *known* publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.” For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

- now think about that – James lived in the same home as our Lord...and undoubtedly had plenty of opportunities to repent and believe...but for whatever reason he chose not to do that...but instead on this occasion actually mocked and ridiculed the Lord along with his other brothers...until after the resurrection...

- that's why this detail mentioned earlier in this chapter was so important...

2. 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 - and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;

- Jesus made a point of appearing specifically to His own brother...and after the ascension, we see a dramatic change in these men...

3. Acts 1:12-14 - Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son of Alphaeus*, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son of James*. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

- they went from being unstable, and unpredictable...mocking their own brother and refusing to believe in Him...to continually devoting themselves to prayer...

- and as you continue to trace that story, you find James becoming the pastor of the church at Jerusalem...now he has become a consistent, godly man...he's steadfast, immovable...

- and if you know your Bible, you know that the church at Jerusalem played a pivotal role in early church history...

- because when Paul and Barnabas were on the first missionary journey, there was a dispute about whether new testament believers needed to keep any aspect of the OT law...

- and that controversy threatened to splinter the early church into hopeless division...

- and so we read in Acts 15 that Paul and Barnabas came to the elders and apostles at the church of Jerusalem to attempt to solve the problem...

- and it is a classic biblical example of how decisions are made and problems are solved in a church...

- but when everyone had had their opportunity to speak...guess who stands up?...James...

- the story reads like this...

4. Acts 15:12-13 - All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.

- and they did...

- and James proposed a marvelous solution to the issue that unified the body and allowed them to continue to move forward...

- what was required at that moment was a man who was steadfast and immovable...

- and because James really believed that His Lord was alive...he developed that kind of consistent character...

- most of us also think of James because of the book of the Bible he authored, humanly speaking...

- I was using that with a couple recently...and was just struck again with the incredible amount of practice wisdom contained in those 5 chapters...(cf. promising they wouldn't recognize themselves by Halloween...)
- why?...in part because of the writings of a man who allowed God to make him steadfast and immovable...
- now, that part of the discussion was designed to give us a lot of hope...but the other side of this is – we need to see that the verse makes it clear...

D. It is your responsibility to respond this way.

- please note the construction of the verse...
- **v. 58 – be steadfast...**
- so sure, because Jesus is alive, we have all the resources of heaven at our disposal to be growing in this area...but ultimately it's up to us...
- but people who believe that Jesus Christ is alive are willing to take that challenge...
- can I ask you straight up this morning – are you growing in consistency?....
- if you were going to rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 on this issue, how would you do?...
- would the people around you say that you are a person who is dependable..you're a person who can be trusted...you're a person who can be counted on...?
- do you know that there are many people who would call themselves children of God who could not say that?....(do you know the kind of person I'm talking about?)
- they're just up and down...up and down....
 - you never know where you stand with that kind of person...
 - some days they're kind...some days they're mean...
 - some days they're warm...some days they're cold....
 - you never know – are they committed to this relationship or not?...
- that tendency will kill a marriage...I wouldn't be surprised if I'm talking to someone who would say...
 - I really don't know where I stand with my husband...some days we're going to work on the marriage...other days he's not sure...
 - he tells me he's going to do something and then he doesn't follow through...
 - one day we're going to get counseling then the next day we're not...
 - a lack of consistency on the part of a marriage partner very well may demonstrate the presence of something far more sinister – an unwillingness to believe that Jesus is alive....
- this same tendency can kill a family...
 - how many supposedly "Christian" families have one or more of its members who are just as unpredictable as could possibly be?...
 - you never know what it's going to be like when you walk in the door..
 - some days it can be warm and friendly – it sure is nice to have you home...
 - other days it's as nasty as can be – what are doing here, what do you want...sarcasm, coldness, or other behaviors that don't please God....
- you know, it's so confusing to kids who have to grow up in a home like that...

- one day daddy says we're going to live for Christ...we're going to pray...we're going to study our Bibles...we're going to give Christ first place...
 - but there's no follow through...
 - a few days later he's bringing a video home for his family to see that is filled with images and words that don't honor Christ...
- and let's just face it – some of the people who will hear this message today struggle, and struggle badly, when it comes to the matter of being steadfast, and immovable...
- well, can I ask you this...how could that be?
 - according to this text, that may reveal one of two things....
 1. either the person has never genuinely trusted Christ as Lord and Savior....so they have no access to the power of the resurrection which is the foundation of everything we're studying...
 2. or a person's lack of consistency may reveal that they have not allowed the message of the empty tomb to have the impact on their daily life that our loving, powerful God desires for it to have...
- now, here's the other side of that...there's a lot of people around here who are really growing in this area...sure, they're not perfect...but you can count on them...
 - they're consistent...they're steadfast and immovable...
 - so even when a trial comes up...in their personal life, or a relationship with another person, or a problem at church...
 - they maintain their faithfulness, and their loyalty, and their dedication to Christ...
 - and they might feel like gossiping, but they don't do it...
 - or they feel like being sinfully critical, but they don't do it...
 - or they feel like just quitting and washing their hands of the entire matter...but they don't do it...
 - why?...because deep down in the recesses of their heart and soul they believe that Jesus is alive...and they have never gotten over the fact that the tomb is empty...
- now, there's one other point we need to make quickly about this subject...

E. This characteristic begins in the heart.

 - here's a beautiful example of this from the life of King David...when he's trying to be consistent even in the inner man...
 - at the time this Psalm was written, God had communicated to David that he was going to be the next king of Israel...
 - and King Saul, the current king, had gone out of his mind with jealousy and rage...and had chased David and his small band of men all over the country-side...
 - then one day, David and his men were hiding in a cave, and Saul came into the cave unprotected...
 - David had the perfect opportunity to kill Saul, and end his troubles....but he doesn't do it...
 - in reference to that event, he wrote Psalm 57, including these words...
 - **Psalm 57:6-7 - They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down; they dug a pit before me; they *themselves* have fallen into the midst of it. My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!**
 - the question for all of this am is, are we cultivating that kind of heart because of our firm and growing belief in the doctrine of the resurrection?

- now, what's the next piece of this puzzle?...

II. Believing Jesus is Alive Should Make You Productive.

- **1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord...**

A. Meaning of Abound

- this is really a beautiful word in the Bible...

- if you're looking for something to add to your Bible study, I would encourage you to take down your concordance and look up every use of the word "abound" or "abounding" in the Scripture...

- what you'll find is that often the word is used to speak of God Himself, and the way He chooses to treat us, His children...

1. Romans 5:20 - ...but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

- earlier in that chapter, Paul said...

2. Romans 5:15 - ...much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.

- here's one more that is especially delightful...

3. Nehemiah 9:17 - ...But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; and You did not forsake them.

- see, that's the way God has chosen to relate to us...grace abounding all the more, grace abounding to the many, abounding in lovingkindness...

- and that's the way we want to be in our relationship with Him...

- not giving Him the leftovers...and the least possible to barely get by...

- no...if we really believe that Jesus is alive...we'll be always abounding in the work of the Lord...

B. 2 Caveats.

1. Not, working to earn your salvation.

- **Ephesians 2:8-9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

- **Ephesians 2:10 - For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.**

2. Not, human effort apart from an intimate relationship with Christ.

- **Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**

- **Zechariah 4:6 - ...Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.**

C. Key question – are you a productive member of the family of God?

John 15:16 - You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

(if time allows, could talk about some of the basic first steps – trusting Christ, being baptized, joining a church – and the fact that the Corinthians would have understood this phrase in context with the local church....serving....giving (2 Cor. 8:1-9)

- not out of legalistic duty, or as a means to earn our way to heaven...
- but because God treated us with abundance...we want our service for Him...
 - not to be puny, just the bare minimum, to be stingy, or just enough to get by...
 - we want to be abounding in the work of the Lord...

III. Believing Jesus is Alive Should Make You Confident.

1 Corinthians 15:58 - Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

- why should you and I seek to take steps in the areas we've studied this morning?...
- it's because we believe Christ is alive and that our service for Him is going to make a difference...
- no one is ever going to regret living consistently for God...
- no one is ever going to regret living productively for God...
- can you imagine getting to the end of your life and having to conclude that your toil had been in vain?....
- That's one of the points that Scripture consistently makes about idolatry...
- **2 Kings 17:15 - They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and *went* after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the LORD had commanded them not to do like them.**
- contrast that to...**Philippians 2:16 - holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.**