
The Importance of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12-28¹

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Introduction

I have been thinking about the Christians in Ukraine and what their Easter will look like this year. Ukrainians celebrate Easter for weeks after Lent, with numerous religious and cultural traditions, many of which are centuries long. The word for 'Easter' in Ukrainian translates to 'Great Day', and it is one of the biggest holidays in the country. Easter in Ukraine originates from the same holiday celebrated in other Christian communities, but it mostly adheres to the Orthodox faith and calendar. The preparation for Easter begins two months in advance, when Ukrainians fast for Lent with strict devotion, as the country is passionate about adhering to their Easter tradition. Everyone awaits Easter day, as a festive mood blooms throughout the country and families come together to celebrate with food. It is fascinating to see pictures of their very beautiful, colorful traditions surrounding the "Great Day" of Christ's resurrection.

I realize that Easter celebrations, like all our Christian holidays are a mix of Christian memorial and man-made traditions. As I considered this, my mind took me back through history, and Easter celebrations during historical conflicts and the persecution of the Church and the difficulty and suffering of many in the church through history.

To be honest, I did not believe Russia would invade Ukraine, and I assumed it was more of sabre rattling and posturing. I was wrong. This invasion has been unsettling because of the realities of the senselessness of it and the destruction of innocent men, women, and children. I had allowed myself to ignore the reality of man's true sinfulness. The current events in the world simply remind me that we live in an Ecclesiastes world, which has caused me to take inventory of the realities of life. Listen to Ecclesiastes 3:16-21;

¹⁶ I also noticed that under the sun there is evil in the courtroom. Yes, even the courts of law are corrupt! ¹⁷ I said to myself, "In due season God will judge everyone, both good and bad, for all their deeds."

¹⁸ I also thought about the human condition – how God proves to people that they are like animals. ¹⁹ For people and animals share the same fate – both breathe and both must die. So people have no real advantage over the animals. How meaningless! ²⁰ Both go to the same place – they came from dust and they return to dust. ²¹ For who can prove that the human spirit goes up and the spirit of animals goes down into the earth?

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What does Easter look like if you are a believer in one of the ten countries where it is hardest to follow Jesus, or one of the countries where Christians face violent persecution? What does Easter look like if you live in a country where 9 in 10 Christians are killed for their faith, or where churches cease to exist lawfully, and if they try to worship, they are attacked and shut down? Or in the Ukraine, it's hard to envision any type of resurrection celebration with the backdrop of destroyed cities, hunger, homelessness, and wartime atrocities.

Ever since the Fall of Creation the world has been in constant chaos and sin. It did not take long for the first murder to take place with brothers Cain and Abel, and although we often try to convince ourselves that we live in a more free, tolerant, understanding, humane, or enlightened state, the reality just does not support that thought. Since 1900 there have been over 264 wars, rebellions and conflicts between peoples and nations. If you consider wars and conflicts just in the 21st century, there have been 127 wars and conflicts, many still ongoing. Our technology has not made humanity any better off or safer, and technology does not cover over the sinfulness of humanity.

All that to say, where is your hope this morning? How can we celebrate Easter in such a sinful, fallen world?

The resurrection is what believers celebrate on Easter. The resurrection is an important part of the gospel message. Unfortunately, some in the Corinthian Church did not believe the Resurrection was real.

Gospel context

You will often hear teachers and preachers in our theological circles say that you should preach the gospel to yourself daily. Paul lays out exactly what the gospel message is in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul explained that Christ died for our sins according to the (Old Testament) scriptures. He was buried and raised on the third day of the week according to the scriptures (if Christ was raised, he was raised with a resurrected body). Christ was seen by many of the saints and all the apostles after he was raised from the dead in his perfected resurrection body. Christ appeared after his death in his resurrected body to over five hundred disciples before he ascended into heaven.

The NLT reads in verse two, *it is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you – unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.*

So why is the gospel message so important to us and how do we use it daily? How does the reality of the resurrection affect the gospel message?

For us today, the gospel message is what we believe in to be saved, and it is what we remind ourselves of regularly. The gospel message runs through all of scripture but understanding the gospel message increasingly as we mature in Christ shows us the gravity of our sin and the glory of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to save his people. The resurrection is a vital part of the gospel message.

There were some in the Corinthian Church who were questioning the reality of the resurrection. For the Jewish believers in Corinth, perhaps there was some past influence from the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection, but more likely, the denial of the

resurrection stemmed from a Hellenistic influence in the Corinthian church. The founders of the Areopagus believed the resurrection of the body was an impossibility and therefore Christ's resurrection was impossible. During the Roman period the Areopagus did have jurisdiction over the introduction of new gods and had the power to impose exile and capital punishment. It was something akin to a combined Senate and High Court of Athens. It was the place of focused thinking, discussion, and judgment of court cases in Athens during Paul's time. Corinthians was an early letter written to the church, so it is likely that Greek thought permeated the culture of the church and helped cause the confusion concerning the resurrection. But Paul explains that the reality of the resurrection and its vital importance to the gospel message are key to understanding our salvation and anchoring our hope for our eternal future.

The gospel proclaimed

(v. 12)

Verse 12 reads, *now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

If Christ has been proclaimed from the very beginning by the apostles as being raised from the dead, how can some say there is no resurrection? Did the apostles and disciples lie about Christ appearing to them after his death? Christ's body was a real, transformed body. Jesus was clearly identified and touched by his disciples. Jesus' scars were still intact for Thomas to feel, thus identifying Christ as the one who was crucified. The eyewitness events of Christ's death, burial and resurrection were vital to the message of the gospel, and eventually became canonized in scripture. So, what if Christ was not resurrected?

If there is no resurrection, then there is no Christ

(vs. 13-15)

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And 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.

Paul argues that if there is no resurrection of the dead, there can be no Christ, and all we believe is futile and empty because we are still in our sin. There is no hope for those who have died, nor hope for those of us still living. If there is no resurrection, then those of us still alive are to be most pitied. Not only that, but the gospel message is wrong if the resurrection is not true, and the apostles have taught error and lies.

If the resurrection is not true, then all we believe is futile and without meaning. And Paul is telling the Corinthians, if they honestly believe the resurrection is not true then they should abandon Christianity altogether, because there is no benefit.

If the dead are not raised, then neither is Christ

(v. 16)

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

If there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised from the dead. Therefore, the real-life implications of Christ not being raised from the dead with a resurrection body is devastating news for believers.

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, there is no Christianity. There is eternal salvation only where death has been defeated and our sins forgiven.

If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is futile (v. 17-19)

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

If Christ has not been raised from the dead then our faith is vain and worthless and we are still in our sin, and those who have already died as believers in Christ have perished forever, and the living no longer have any hope for eternal life.

What are the eternal ramifications if there is no resurrection? For one, we end up as simply spirits, without form or substance. This is much like one of the misinterpretations of the world when it considers eternity. Even old childhood cartoons represent spirits after death, or angels with wings living in the clouds. These ideas are simply not biblical. Paul says the dead simply fail to exist; they perish forever.

The most devastating impact of no resurrection is that we who have believed and trusted in Christ's work are still dead in our sins, and those who have died before us have perished and we have no hope for eternity. Why follow Christ if there is no resurrection because after our death we simply perish forever. Some unbelievers believe this and live their whole life this way, but if you have faith in Christ's death, burial and resurrection for your sins, the resurrection must be true, or we are fools!

Christ has been raised as the firstfruits of the Resurrection (vs. 20-23)

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Paul tells the Corinthians that in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead with a resurrection body, and Christ is the firstfruits of all believers who will receive a resurrection body.

What does it mean, that Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep? The firstfruits is an old covenant agricultural term typically used in relation to sacrifice and holiness. In the Hebrew culture the firstfruits was the first-born child, or animal, or the first and best of any crop. The firstfruits were considered holy and therefore belonged to God. The firstfruits were offered to God as in thanksgiving because they were the first of more to come. In the Jewish sacrificial system, the firstfruits were the best of the offering often set aside for the priests, because they were ceremonially clean and holy in the sight of God.

So, Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of the resurrection of those who have died, the first and holy resurrection. The perfect sacrifice and the perfect firstfruits of our resurrection bodies. The firstfruits of any harvest shows that there is more of the crop to come, and therefore because Christ was raised from the dead, we have confidence that we too will be changed.

Through one man all died, and through one all live (v. 21-22)

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Through Adam death came to all man, and through Christ the resurrection of the dead has come. In Adam all die, and in Christ all will be made alive through the resurrection. Christ is the new Adam.

It is significant that Christ is the new Adam. Where Adam failed and brought death to all, Christ succeeds and brings eternal life to those who are his. Where creation fell into sin and chaos because of Adam's sin, Creation will be renewed because of Christ's obedience. Our new resurrected, perfected bodies will be a part of living in the New Creation, and Christ, as the first fruits and the new Adam, was the first of many more transformations to come.

Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection (v. 23)

But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Christ is not only the firstfruits of those who have died in Christ, but because Christ was the first to experience the resurrection as firstfruits, at his coming those who belong to Christ will receive their resurrection body, first the dead in Christ and second those who are alive. There is order in the resurrection.

Christ was the first to receive his resurrection body and all of those who are in Christ will also receive theirs in time. When Christ returns at the end of age, those who are dead will receive their resurrected body and then finally those who are still living when Christ returns. All will receive their new perfected body.

After the resurrection, the end comes (vs. 24-27)

After the resurrection, the end of time will come when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule, authority, and power. Verse 24 reads, *then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.* So, the resurrection will happen before God hands over the kingdom to the Father. The resurrection is the first step in the end of this world and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. Because our resurrection bodies will be physical bodies, we will live on a real, physical, perfected, and renovated earth.

Reigning until all enemies are defeated (v. 25)

Christ will reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. Christ reigns while currently seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will continue to reign until he has defeated all his enemies. *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*

The final enemy (v. 26)

The final enemy that Christ will destroy is death. The resurrection is proof that the final enemy is destroyed. Paul writes, *the last enemy to be destroyed is death.* Think about the significance of new physical bodies that no longer succumb to disease, aging, injury, and death. In this world of chaos with creation moaning and longing for eternity, as our physical bodies waste away daily, we can be assured that one day death will no longer exist, and we will have eternal life with new resurrection bodies!

The final subjection (v. 27-28)

...for "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

After the resurrection and after Christ has defeated all his enemies including death, Jesus will, in a final act of submission, lovingly give his conquered kingdom into the Father's hands. After Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus was given all authority in heaven and earth, until the end of time, when all of Jesus' enemies are defeated. At that time Jesus will hand that authority back over to God the Father, and they will be all in all. They will not be separated, but one God - Jesus in his resurrected body, victorious, as God the Father and Jesus welcome their brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters into the New Heaven and the New Earth for ever and ever! Theirs is the victory, the glory, and the majesty forever and ever.

Reflect and Respond

Know the truth of the gospel and understand the value of the gospel not only for your salvation, but also for your sanctification and maturity.

Your life should be full of joy and hope because of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Christ's resurrection is the firstfruits and guarantee of our future resurrection.

Let this truth be an encouragement as you leave today, no matter what the world is like when you leave this place, or what the world looks like tomorrow or years later. You have the hope of the gospel and the truth of the resurrection to hold on to no matter how short or long your life is, or no matter how hard or how easy your life is.

Even though we live in a difficult Ecclesiastes world that often doesn't make sense, know that all believers have hope because of the resurrection. Even the though the Ukrainians and believers around the world who cannot celebrate Easter this year in color and comfort because of persecution or war, all still have hope because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Romans 8:23 says, ²³ *And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.* ²⁴ *We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it.* ²⁵ *But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)*

Rejoice in Christ today as you celebrate the Resurrection!