

1 Corinthians 15:12-19
2009 Resurrection Sunday

Resurrection Sunday is a highlight of the Christian calendar

- It celebrates Jesus' physical, bodily resurrection from the dead
- It provides assurance and confidence that after death, we too will be resurrected

But not everyone shares this view of life after death

- There are differing opinions about what will take place after a person dies¹

Some believe in soul sleep

- After death, the body simply disintegrates while the soul rests

Others believe in annihilation

- Nothing human survives after death
- We will all deteriorate and cease to exist

A number of religions teach reincarnation

- The soul or spirit of an individual is continually "recycled" from one form to another
- Perhaps a human to an animal or vice versa

Another odd belief is that of absorption

- After death, "the spirit...returns back to its source and is absorbed back into the ultimate divine mind or being"²

One advocate of absorption teaching has written this

- "Would it really matter if I were lost like a drop of water in the ocean, if I could be one shining particle in some glorious wave that broke in utter splendour in perfect beauty on the shores of some external sea?"³

That isn't exactly the hope that I am living for

- How about you?

The church at Corinth was far from the model church

- It had its share of problems and misunderstandings

Here is a just a sample of the issues that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians

- They were divisive
- They were partial to particular teachers
- They were prone to boasting
- They were spiritually immature
- They were tolerating immorality
- They were suing one another in secular courts
- They were misunderstanding God's purposes for marriages
- They were abusing their Christian freedom
- They were repeating the same mistakes of Israel

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, 408.

² Ibid., 408.

³ Ibid., 408.

- They were abusing the Lord's Table
- They were misunderstanding spiritual gifts
- They were misunderstanding the doctrine of physical resurrection

Yet God uses this group of immature and undiscerning believers to teach us

- Because at times, we can be guilty of some of the same sins that characterized the Corinthian believers

God can oftentimes use a bad situation to bring about good

- He did it with Joseph and his brothers
- He did it with Jesus and the crucifixion
- And He can do the same in your life, if He so chooses

The apostle Paul, in chapters 12-14 of 1 Corinthians, discussed the issue of spiritual gifts

- The purposes of spiritual gifts
- The right use of spiritual gifts
- The wrong use of spiritual gifts

Beginning in 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul discusses the issue of physical resurrection

- Just because this topic occurs later in the epistle does not imply that it is unimportant

I would venture to say that the doctrine of physical resurrection is of utmost importance

- Far more than spiritual gifts
- Far more than other issues mentioned already

The Gospel message can be simplified by looking at verses 3-4 of chapter 15, “**For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures**” (15:3-4)

- The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ

We celebrated the death of Christ on Good Friday

- We celebrate the resurrection of Jesus today on Resurrection Sunday

From verses 5-11, Paul chronicles some appearances of the resurrected Christ to various individuals

- Verse 6 tells us that during one of these appearances, “**more than five hundred brethren**” saw the resurrected Jesus

Certainly, Jesus wasn't being secretive about His resurrected status

- He wanted to show everyone that He was, in fact, alive from the dead
- Just as He had told His disciples

But again, not everyone believes in Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead

- There were believers at Corinth who were misinformed about the importance of this issue
- So Paul writes to clarify this issue

Let's read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

As we have seen, Paul takes the first eleven verses of this chapter to show that Christ had been resurrected

- He shows the importance of Christ's resurrection
- He shows the witnesses to Christ's resurrection

Here in verse 12, Paul says, "Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead"

- The "if" is not used to signify doubt

It was a way of stating a truth for the sake of an argument

- "If – *and let's assume that this is true for the sake of argument* - then"⁴

Paul will use this approach six (6) times in our passage this morning

- Verses 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 19

The factual basis of Christ's resurrection had been proclaimed throughout Corinth and beyond

- Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (2:1-2, emphasis mine)

Paul highlights the significance of Christ's resurrection by saying, "He has been raised from the dead"

- The verb tense points out the past, historical nature of the resurrection that has lasting significance for the present⁵

Paul is shocked that some of the Corinthian believers are so quickly discounting the reality of Christ's resurrection

- So he asks, "how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

There is a bit of a mild rebuke inherent within Paul's words

- The believers knew better than to deny the reality of physical resurrection
- They had clearly not thought through the ramifications of such a denial

In 1 Corinthians 15:13-19, the apostle Paul lists seven (7) deadly consequences that would result in the denial of a physical resurrection⁶

- Christ would not be risen
- Preaching of the Gospel would be meaningless
- Faith in Christ would be worthless
- All witnesses to and preachers of the resurrection would be liars
- All men would still be in their sins
- All former believers would be eternally damned
- Christians would be the most pitiful people on Earth

⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 690.

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, 539.

⁶ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, 409.

I. Christ would not be risen (15:13)

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised:

Here is the first consequence of denying physical resurrection

- “if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised”

To presume that Christ was not resurrected was to attack the very core and foundation of the Christian faith

- Remember, the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ
- You can't have the Gospel without all three of these

The denial of physical resurrection would, by default, deny that Christ Himself was raised from the dead

- This would be a major blow to the Christian faith

The Sadducees were a group of religious leaders who denied the reality of a physical resurrection

- So this wasn't a new issue that was surfacing with the Corinthians

Undoubtedly, some of the Corinthian believers were being influenced by outside groups

Paul speaks against Hymenaeus and Philetus, in 2 Timothy, saying that they “**have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some**”

- False teachers may have been infiltrating the church⁷

Greek philosophy also may have impacted the Corinthians

- It taught that the soul is immortal, and returns to God, after death
- But the body was mortal and was annihilated at death

But Christ rose physically from the dead

- He told His disciples after His resurrection, “**See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have**” (Lk 24:39)

Today we have plenty of people who deny the supernatural

- Denying the miracles in the Bible
- Denying the physical resurrection

But in the book of Revelation, the apostle John heard these words from Jesus Himself, “**Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades**” (1:17-18)

First, Christ would not be risen

II. Preaching of the Gospel would be worthless (15:14b)

14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain.

Following from verse 13, there arises another deadly consequence of denying the reality of physical resurrection

- Christ Himself would not be resurrected
- But also “**our preaching is vain**”

⁷ Kistemaker, 540.

Let's be honest

- If Christ Himself is not raised, then we have no Gospel

We have no Good News

- Only bad news

If Christ hasn't been physically resurrected, then our preaching is "vain"

- Fruitless
- Pointless
- Without effect

Our preaching is intricately tied to the Person and work of Jesus Christ

- But if He Himself wasn't resurrected, then our task in preaching is just smoke and mirrors

But we have been told that Christ appeared to more than 500 people

- And that was in one appearance!
- There were plenty of eyewitnesses who verified Christ's resurrection from the dead

The Old Testament required two or three witnesses to confirm a fact

- Jesus went well beyond this, with more than 500 witnesses testifying to the reality of His physical resurrection⁸
- *Christ would not be risen*
- *Preaching of the Gospel would be meaningless*

III. Faith in Christ would be worthless (15:14c)

your faith also is vain.

If Christ was not physically resurrected, then our preaching is pointless

- We have nothing worthwhile to proclaim

But Paul goes one step further

- Not only is our preaching vain
- But "faith also is vain"

Our preaching is tied to our faith

- What we preach is tied to what we believe

Denying the reality of physical resurrection attacks the very heart of the Christian faith

- This is why this issue is so crucial
- It is not a secondary issue

Last Sunday, we learned from Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"

- But if there is no resurrected Christ, there is no saving faith
- It's just a lie

⁸ Ibid., 542.

Without the resurrection from the dead, Hebrews 11 would be a farce

- Instead of being the hall of faith, it would be the hall of folly

Without the resurrection, there is no incentive for holy living, obedience, or persecution!

- *Christ would not be risen*
- *Preaching of the Gospel would be meaningless*
- *Faith in Christ would be worthless*

IV. All witnesses to and preachers of the resurrection would be liars (15:15)

15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

The list does not get better

- It only gets worse

If there is no physical resurrection, then

- Christ Himself was not resurrected
- Preaching the Gospel is pointless
- Believing the Gospel is pointless

Fourth, Gospel messengers and proclaimers run the real risk of being “**false witnesses of God**”

- This is tragic!

Imagine being so deceived that you think you are proclaiming the right message

- When, in fact, you are preaching the exact opposite of the truth!

This has happened throughout the history of the world

- Various individuals have given their lives for the sake of a cause
- Only to find out that that cause is not the most important issue!

Paul includes himself in verse 15

- He himself is guilty of being a false witness
- *If God did not raise Christ*

We know from the Old and New Testament how God views false teachers, false prophets, and false apostles

- The punishment in the Old Testament was stoning!

God wants His messengers to preach the truth

- He doesn't want lies to be heralded forth

Besides, if the apostles and prophets lied about the resurrection, why should they be believed about anything else they wrote?⁹

⁹ MacArthur, 412.

- *Christ would not be risen*
- *Preaching of the Gospel would be meaningless*
- *Faith in Christ would be worthless*
- *All witnesses to and preachers of the resurrection would be liars*

V. All men would still be in their sins (15:16-17)

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

Verse 16 is really just a repeat of verse 13

- He repeats this most basic concept to remind the believers at Corinth of the importance of this issue

Sometimes we can hear a truth once and not catch its significance

- This is why repetition is stressed so often in Scripture

Listen to how Peter opens the third chapter of his second epistle, “This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *spoken by your apostles*” (3:1-2, emphasis mine)

- The apostle Peter wasn’t afraid to repeat certain truths
- And neither should we

Parents, you know the importance of repetition

- It drives home certain lessons that you want to reinforce

Students, you know the value of repetition

- It helps you memorize certain facts for a test

17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless;

Verse 17 is very close to the wording of verse 14

- With one main difference

In verse 14, Paul wrote, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain”

- The word for “**vain**” denoted something empty, pointless, and fruitless

Here in verse 17, Paul writes, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless”

- The word for “**worthless**” is slightly different¹⁰

The word in verse 17 has the connotation of deception

- If Christ has not been raised, then our faith is built on deception

If Christ is not resurrected from the dead, then He is still dead

- “a dead Christ is unable to justify believers”¹¹

So the justification of sinners is intricately tied to the resurrection of Jesus

¹⁰ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, “mataios,” 571.

¹¹ Kistemaker, 544.

you are still in your sins.

If our faith has deceived us, then Paul brings out a terrible conclusion

- “you are still in your sins”

This is the real danger of false teaching!

- One’s faith can be based on wrong information
- That wrong information will not bring about forgiveness of sins!

We have seen earlier in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (emphasis mine)

- Christ died “for our sins”

If Christ was not resurrected, then His mission on Earth was a failure

- He lived a perfect life
- He died a substitutionary death
- But He didn’t rise from the dead – if there is no physical resurrection

If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then He is no different from any other religious leader

- Make some religious claims
- Gather a following
- But remain dead in the grave¹²

Listen carefully to Paul’s words in Romans 10:9, “if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (emphasis mine)

- You can’t be saved unless you believe in the literal, physical, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!

If there is no physical resurrection of Christ, there is no Gospel

- If there is no Gospel, then
 - o Sin still reigns over us
 - o We are enslaved to our lusts
 - o We have no hope of forgiveness

But what had Paul spoken about these believers at Corinth?

- “the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their *Lord* and ours” (1 Cor 1:2)
- “called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9)
- “Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9-11)

These believers were washed, were sanctified, and were justified

- Their sins were forgiven
- They were made holy

¹² A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol IV*, 190.

- *Christ would not be risen*
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- *All witnesses to and preachers of the resurrection would be liars*
- *All men would still be in their sins*

VI. All former believers would be eternally damned (15:18)

18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

Paul then brings the issue of a physical resurrection to a very personal level

- He brings up the issue of previous loved ones “**who have fallen asleep**”

This was a common way of referring to someone who had died

- It does not refer to soul sleep

Many unbelievers have a hope beyond the grave, don't they?

- They think that their loved ones will go to heaven

Granted, unbelievers don't always have a right understanding of how a person goes to heaven

- Doing good works
- Attempting to live a moral life

Can you imagine someone standing up at a funeral and saying, “Well, Joe lived a good life and helped everyone he met. But he's gone now, and that's about it.”

- That isn't hope!
- That is sad!

At every funeral service, people want to be reassured that their loved one is in heaven

- But that isn't always the case, is it?

Paul points out the sixth consequence of denying a physical resurrection

- Those loved ones who have preceded us “**have perished**”
- They are gone!

This does not apply only to our loved ones, but to heroes of the faith, such as

- Abraham
- David
- Peter
- Martin Luther
- David Brainerd
- Charles Spurgeon

If Christ is not risen from the dead, then God must condemn every person to everlasting punishment because of their sins!

- Remember, a dead Jesus can't be the living Lord

If Christ is not risen from the dead, then no one will enter heaven

- Our bodies will remain in the grave
- We will suffer eternal wrath from God Himself

And if you take this thought to its logical end, even Christ Himself would be dead forever

- *If He had not risen from the dead*
- *Christ would not be risen*
- *Preaching of the Gospel would be meaningless*
- *Faith in Christ would be worthless*
- *All witnesses to and preachers of the resurrection would be liars*
- *All men would still be in their sins*
- *All former believers would be eternally damned*

VII. Christians would be the most pitiful people on Earth (15:19)

19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Verse 19 is both the seventh consequence and the summary statement of denying the physical resurrection

- If Christians have hope in Christ only in this life, then we should be pitied

If Christ isn't risen from the dead, then we have no Gospel

- With no Gospel, there is no need for preaching
- If there is no need for preaching, then there is no need for faith
- If there is no faith, then our hope is only in this life

If that is true, then we are no different than many cults and false teachings

- As a matter of fact, we may be worse

Think of all the times that you haven't done something sinful

- Those times when you have been obedient to the Word of God
- Even when you *really* wanted to choose sin

If there isn't a physical resurrection, all of those times were in vain!

- We should have chosen sin and enjoyed this life

If there isn't a physical resurrection, then we should "eat, drink and be merry!"

- Why?
- Because tomorrow we may die

I find Paul's logic to be fascinating

- Paul grounds our morality on the hope of immortality¹³

Those who don't believe in a physical resurrection

- Aren't concerned about a future judgment, but only for present enjoyment
- Aren't concerned about heaven and hell, because this Earth is their heaven or hell
- Aren't concerned with rewards, because their reward is enjoyed here on Earth

When you deny the reality of the physical resurrection, morality is not a chief concern

- According to this view, there is no standard of morality, is there?

¹³ Ibid., 190.

Consider what is being tolerated today, in our own generation

- Abortion – not just tolerated, but legislated
- Marriage – redefining what God said
- Religion – tolerating everything but Christianity

Unbelievers are described as those having “no hope” (Eph 2:12; 1 Thess 4:13)

- This is why they try to get as much pleasure out of this world

Believing or denying the resurrection is not a secondary, superficial issue

- Rather, it is one of the most important issues in the Christian faith

To deny the physical resurrection is to open up a Pandora’s box of consequences

- Christ would not be risen
- Preaching of the Gospel would be meaningless
- Faith in Christ would be worthless
- All witnesses to and preachers of the resurrection would be liars
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Is this how we end a message on Resurrection Sunday?

- Am I advocating that we vote on whether we think this is an important issue?

Certainly not

- Neither will I end this sermon on a note of uncertainty and hopelessness

Paul has shown us the consequences of not believing in a physical resurrection

- But remember, Paul was not saying that there was no resurrection

Look with me at verse 20, “**But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep**”

- There is no doubt in these words
- There is no hint of hopelessness in these words

Christ has been raised from the dead!

- Christ is alive
- There is a physical resurrection!

What are the consequences of this fact?

- Christ has been risen
- Preaching of the Gospel is meaningful
- Faith in Christ is full of value and significance
- All witnesses to and preachers of the resurrection have the greatest news to share
- Believers are assured that their sins are forgiven
- Former believers who have died already are guaranteed that they will be with Christ forever
- Christians are the most blessed people on Earth

This is the exact opposite of what we have looked at this morning

- All because of our hope in the reality of a physical resurrection

Listen to the chorus of the song, Because He Lives, by Bill Gaither¹⁴

- See if this is your hope

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living, just because He lives.

Jesus Christ has been raised

- He never has to face death again

Because God raised Jesus from the dead, He will also raise believers at the end of time

- Our hope is not in this life only

Our hope is far beyond the grave

- All the way into eternity!

Perhaps you are here this morning, still refusing to believe in Jesus Christ

- Dear friend, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6)
- He is the Gate to heaven; there is no other way

You have heard the importance of the resurrection this morning

- You can't claim ignorance on Judgment Day

I pray that you will humble your heart, embrace Jesus Christ, and submit your life to Him

- **“WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED”** (Rom 10:13)

¹⁴ http://www.hymnlyrics.org/mostpopularhymns/because_he_lives.html