

If Christ Has Not Been Raised *I Corinthians 15:1-28*

There are a number of chapters in the Bible that are memorably identifiable by their content. For example: I Corinthians 13 – the Love Chapter; Psalm 23 – The Shepherd Psalm; Hebrews 11 – the Faith Chapter; and even our text this week and next: I Corinthians 15 – the Resurrection Chapter.

This chapter deals with the hope of afterlife. It addresses the vexing issue that faces every human being – death and what lies beyond. This reality shapes people's view of life and the afterlife.

Mark Twain became very weary and depressed. Shortly before his death, he wrote this: "A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle;...they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; ...those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. It (the release) comes at last--the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them--and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence, a world which will lament them a day and forget them forever."

Sounds pretty sad, doesn't it? And death can be pretty sad for many people.

Four friends were talking about death. One of them asked the other three, "When you are in your casket and people are mourning you, what would you like to hear them say about you?" The first man said, "I'd like to hear them say that I was a fine physician in my time and a great family man." The second fellow said, "I'd like to hear that I was a wonderful husband and a school teacher who made a huge difference in our children of tomorrow." The third man replied, "I'd like to hear them say, 'Look, he's moving!'"

The issue Paul addresses in First Corinthians 15 is what happens after death. There was confusion among believers in the church in Corinth regarding the resurrection due to the influence of Greek thinking.

Here's how Paul states the issue at hand – **I Corinthians 15:12**

Chapter 15 divides into two main sections. The first deals with the reality of the resurrection; the second is an explanation of the nature of the resurrection. Paul opens the first section with the fact of the resurrection. His intent here is not to

prove the resurrection; that was a given to him. But it is to tie in the resurrection to the heart of the Gospel message that he had preached to the Corinthians.

I. The Fact of the Resurrection

Paul begins with a reminder to the Corinthians – **15:1-2**.

This wasn't new information to the Corinthians; it was the heart of Paul's message from his first day in Corinth. Paul appeals to these believers to hold fast in their belief of the Gospel. Then he goes on to describe the content of the Gospel. When we use the word "Gospel," which simply means "good news," what does that mean? This isn't just a religious platitude, a religious formula. There is real content, content that is critical for salvation.

I Corinthians 15:3-5

Let's break it down into its essential points:

- Christ died

There are two critical truths here:

- 1) Our sins: the reason for Jesus' death.

The reality is that it was our sins that necessitated Christ's death. Paul states in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death."

When God created Adam and Eve and set them in the midst of Eden, he gave them one command which required absolute obedience. They were told they could eat of the fruit of all the trees in the Garden, but not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they disobeyed, they would die.

They did disobey and death entered into the human experience: physical death and spiritual death. Adam sinned as the representative head of the human race, and the consequences of his disobedience followed all who came afterwards. Paul refers to this devastating reality in Romans 5 where he writes:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— (*Romans 5:12*)

2) God's Son: the sufficiency of Jesus' death

The Bible is clear that there is nothing that we can do to escape the sentence of death because of sin. In Ephesians, chapter two, Paul describes every human being as "by nature a child of wrath." That is, we stand under God's wrath because of our sin. But here's the good news; he goes on to say:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.... – *Ephesians 2:4-5*

The only way for sin to be dealt with is that a death must take place. Justice must be served. And justice can only be satisfied if God himself takes the fall; and that is exactly what God did. Look at Paul's explanation in Second Corinthians, chapter 5:

For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God. – *II Corinthians 5:21*

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, paid the penalty for our sins. In doing so, he satisfied God's justice, freeing him to forgive sinners.

- Christ was buried

This speaks to the fact of Jesus' death. He was truly, physically dead. This was a human death, followed by human burial. But, in the words of famed broadcaster Paul Harvey: "Now, the rest of the story."

- Christ was raised

Death could not keep him down because as the perfect Son of God, his death was acceptable to God and perfectly satisfied the requirement of death. So in his very death, death was defeated. As proof of this, Jesus was raised from the dead.

- Christ was attested – **I Corinthians 15:5-7**

To *attest* means "to bear witness to, to give proof of." Luke makes this point in the beginning of the book of Acts: "(Jesus) presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (*Acts 1:3*)

Paul speaks of his own experience seeing the resurrected Christ as the basis of his apostleship – **I Corinthians 15:8-11**

This then, the Gospel, is the content of our faith – faith residing in the person of Jesus Messiah and his redemptive work on our behalf. To be a Christian is to believe the Gospel and place your trust in Christ’s work alone for your salvation. The “good news” is Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Now, Paul comes to the issue at hand. And I want you to see the way he so masterfully uses logic to speak of the significance of the resurrection.

II. The Significance of the Resurrection

I Corinthians 15:12-19

If there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, there are all kinds of implications. It is like this line of dominoes. Once one falls (tip the first domino), they all fall!

The ancient world believed in life after death, but in Greek thought, it involved only the soul, not the body. We saw that this philosophy of dualism was part of the influence upon the Corinthians that Paul had to deal with regarding sexual immorality – that the body did matter. In the theology of dualism, the body was simply discarded; it was of no significance. But Paul says the body does matter; it will undergo resurrection. And the basis of such a resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul will argue that the Christian faith is worthless without the resurrection. So, follow Paul’s logic as he argues why the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential to the content of our faith.

If Christ has not been raised:

- 1) The Gospel is false. What the Corinthians heard and received is void of truth and the message they believed is a lie. There is no point in continuing in a faith that is based upon a falsehood. Why pretend?
- 2) Your faith is worthless. You have believed a lie and it will do nothing for you. To believe a lie is utter foolishness.

3) Those who preach the Gospel are untrustworthy. They are charlatans; workers of evil, propagating a message that is patently false and untrue. Do not trust them! Therefore, everything we know from these followers of Jesus is suspect. Why should I believe anything they teach, if they fail to be truthful in this most central point?

4) There is no forgiveness. That's right, you are still in your sins. You will still die, perishing forever.

5) There is no hope. And we who have believed this lie should be pitied as fools, clinging to a myth that there is something beyond the grave.

The resurrection does matter! It is the focal point of all spiritual reality. It is the heart of the Gospel. Without it, there is no "good news." To apply Woody Allen's statement: "Mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

It doesn't matter what you choose, they all end with death and nothing beyond. If this is true, then the Epicurean philosophy that Paul quotes in verse 32 is the only thing that makes sense: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

In the 1960's Peggy Lee sang a song that amazingly is still popular today. It goes like this:

Is that all there is? Is that all there is?
If that's all there is my friend, then let's keep dancing.
Let's break out the booze and have a ball, if that's all there is.

Paul goes on in this section to show the consequences of the resurrection.

III. The Consequences of the Resurrection

I Corinthians 15:20-28

If Christ has been raised, then all who have believed in him will also be raised. Your future resurrection is tied to Christ's resurrection. If you have trusted in him, your future is secure; it is guaranteed. And it will be a resurrection of the body just as his was.

If Christ has been raised, then death, itself, is defeated. Death need have no fear. We face our mortality, but there is good news.

So, what does this mean to you and to me?

If you have believed the Gospel – that Jesus died for your sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day, God has forgiven your sins; you have been born into his family, and in the future, your body will be raised in the likeness of Christ's body and you will live forever in the presence of Christ your Savior.

This is true because God says it is true. And that truth is backed up by the death of Jesus in your place, and the resurrection of Jesus as the basis of your future resurrection.

This needs to change the way you view life and death. Paul Azinger, professional golfer and now golf broadcaster, was diagnosed with cancer at age 33. He had just won a PGA championship and had ten tournament victories to his credit. He wrote, "A genuine feeling of fear came over me. I could die from cancer. Then another reality hit me even harder. I'm going to die eventually anyway, whether from cancer or something else. It's just a question of when. Everything I had accomplished in golf became meaningless to me. All I wanted to do was live."

Then he remembered something that Larry Moody, who taught a Bible study on the PGA tour, had said to him. "Zinger, we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living."

Azinger recovered with chemotherapy and returned to the PGA tour. But that bout with cancer deepened his perspective. He wrote, "I've made a lot of money since I've been on the tour, and I've won a lot of tournaments, but that happiness is always temporary. The only way you will ever have true contentment is in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that nothing ever bothers me and I don't have problems, but I feel like I've found the answer to the six-foot hole."

Jesus is the only answer to that six-foot hole. The resurrection has taken the guesswork out of the future. Apart from this great event, we are simply left with resignation or despair.

That also means that we have a story to tell others – a story of hope, a story whose ending transcends the universal fact of death and transforms fear into certainty. The Gospel writer John records these words of Jesus:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. – *John 5:24*

The simple story of “good news” has the power to change lives.

Now, Paul’s teaching in First Corinthians 15 is directed towards those who have placed their trust in Christ for salvation. There is also a resurrection for those who have not trusted in Christ, for those who reject the Gospel and place their faith in other things: church attendance, doing good things, trying hard to live a good life. But that is a resurrection not to eternal life, but to eternal judgment.

If you have not trusted in Christ, I want you to know that God loves you dearly. The proof is that he sent his Son to die for you. But if you will not believe, you are under God’s condemnation. Look at these two facts as they intersect in John, chapter three:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. – *John 3:16-18*

Popular movies and popular theology portray heaven as a place where anyone and everyone will reside. It comes with no strings attached; it doesn’t really matter what your life was like. After all, God loves the world. Therefore, he will always accept everyone regardless of what they believe or if they believe.

But that is not the God of the Bible. God is a holy God; he is a just Judge. As such, he must judge sin and the sinner. He is a God of wrath. Wrath is his response to sin – to anything contrary to his perfect and holy character.

This is why the cross and empty tomb is the only escape for those who have sinned. It is the only way of salvation. It is the only way of eternal life.

If you are here today and have not believed in Christ, would you put your faith in him today? There is a resurrection that awaits you, but which one.

I want to close this morning by asking you to make a decision. You have heard the Gospel this morning: Christ died for you; he was buried; he was raised on the third day.

If you will turn from your sin and trust in Christ, God will forgive you; he will make you his child; and he will give you eternal life. It is his promise; it is his guarantee.

PRAYER

If you placed your trust in Christ, I tell you on the basis of God's promises that he has forgiven you; you have become his child. You will never come into judgment for your sin. This decision is just the beginning of a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.