

Dying Daily with Delight, Not Despair
New Covenant Living Series #28

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Pastor David Sunday

May 8, 2011

God's Word helps us walk by faith that feeds and fuels our faith. Let's turn in our Bibles to [1 Corinthians 15:12-34](#). We're continuing in our series in 1 Corinthians on this great chapter about the resurrection of our Lord and of His people. I'm going to read from verse 12 to verse 34. Let's stand together as we hear God's holy and living Word:

¹²Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ¹⁵We 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. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸When 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.

²⁹Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? ³⁰Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³²What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." ³³Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." ³⁴Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Father, we pray that the words of my mouth, the thoughts of all our hearts will be pleasing in Your sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. God, I pray for the empowering of Your Spirit upon the preaching of Your Word this morning and upon



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all who hear it. We pray, Lord, that as Your Spirit speaks through the Word, we would experience the presence and the life transforming power of the risen Christ so we might live boldly for Him in this dark world. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I trust you have often heard sermons on 1 Corinthians 15. It's a favorite text at Easter time and it's one with so much meat in it that it would require many sermons to capture the essence of it. But I want to explore one strand of this passage this morning and it's found in verses 30, 31 and 32 where Paul speaks of being in danger every hour and dying every day. I want us to consider what the resurrection has to say to us about our experience of hardship and suffering.

1. Without the Resurrection, Misery Breeds Despair

Last summer I read an article by a Memphis pastor by the name of [John Bryson](#). This article intrigued me and it inspired me. I read it about two weeks before Kate's surgery. The article was called, "[Learning to be Miserable.](#)" It has as its title online "Les Misérables" – the miserable ones. The thesis of the article was that those people in the world who are the high performers -- the creative, productive, highly effective leaders – they are all people who eventually have to learn to be miserable. They are people who have to learn to push through the tough seasons of life and endure hardship.

Navy Seals have to learn how to be miserable in order to do the kind of work they do. Football teams -- when they have their two-a-day practices -- are learning how to be miserable. Medical school residents -- when they go through residency -- one of the purposes of that highly disciplined process is to instill this ability to bear misery, to go through tough times, to work hard for long periods of time. And they



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say this is the greatest lesson in training for and learning how to run a marathon. You can be miserable and still move forward and produce and thrive.

Yesterday, I ran a half-marathon with a couple other guys from our church. We were up near my parents' home in Kenosha, Wisconsin. After finishing the half-marathon, I was feeling pretty good. We went back to my Mom and Dad's and had some cappuccino muffins and hot coffee. I had taken a hot shower and then looked out the front door and there were the full marathon runners, still going by my parents' house, an hour and a half, two hours after we had finished the race. I thought, "Those are the ones who have learned to be miserable." I haven't quite mastered that yet!

This applies to Mother's Day, too. The article that I read said this is one of the main things we need to teach our children. In the 21st century American culture that often breeds young people who expect to grow up in their twenty's and expect to have a painless life and a perfect job and a perfect boss and a perfect place with a perfect paycheck. This is a recipe for disaster. Are we teaching our children to bear with the pains and difficulties and hardships of life in a fallen world? The world where there is disappointment and misery? Yet a world in which by God's grace we can cultivate a meaningful and hope-filled life in conditions that are far less than ideal?

That's one of the things the Bible is trying to teach us. Take your Bible and isolate with your fingers Genesis 1-2 and then Revelation 21-22 (the first two and last two chapters of the Bible). Those four chapters are the only perfect-world chapters in the Bible. The Garden of Eden and the New Heaven and the New Earth. There are about 1,185 chapters in between those four perfect-world chapters that

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are designed to teach us to live with hope and be creative and productive and full of faith in a world that is full of misery.

First Corinthians is teaching us this. Paul learned to be miserable. Paul had this hope. He shows us in this chapter that he has learned to be miserable yet he is full of delight, not despair. We see this in verses 30 to 32. Look at these verses again and see what the Apostle Paul is saying here. He says in verse 30 that he is *“in danger every hour.”* That’s his experience in life. Then in verse 31 he says, *“I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord...”* by the fact that we are united together and rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ and this is my greatest joy. I protest on that basis. I want you to know I’m really telling you the truth here, he says, *“I die every day!”* I die every day - death to self. This is what the Christian life is described like by the Apostle Paul - *“dying every day...in danger every hour.”* And then in verse 32, he describes an extraordinarily miserable experience he had in Ephesus where he says, *“I fought with beasts at Ephesus?”*

I know mothering can be hard and perhaps some Moms feel like this sometimes: “I’m fighting with beasts at home!”

We’re not sure exactly what the Apostle Paul went through but as you read the rest of the New Testament, you see in [Acts 19](#) that Paul faced a great riot in Ephesus. People who were hostile to the gospel. And we know in [2 Corinthians 11:23-27](#) Paul describes more fully what these dangers and trials were like. If you would just turn over one book to [2 Corinthians 11](#), let’s read about Paul’s trials and difficulties beginning in the middle of verse 23. He is explaining what it’s like to be in danger every hour. He says,

“I am often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers,



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danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”

This was the lifestyle of the Apostle Paul. It was a life full of difficulty, full of hardship and danger. There is a reality here that every disciple of Jesus must embrace. If we are to follow Christ, Jesus says, we must learn to be miserable at times. It will not be an easy life. In [Luke 9:23](#), Jesus says, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”* What did that mean for Jesus to take up His cross? That’s what it means to follow Him. That’s what being a disciple is about. Jesus said, [“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”](#)

The Apostle Paul in [2 Timothy 2:3-8](#) admonishes Timothy, his disciple, that Timothy is going to need to learn how to live with a measure of misery in his life as a follower of Jesus. Look at what he says: *“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”* That’s what following Jesus involves. It’s like being a soldier. You’re in a war. There’s going to be suffering and hardship. Verse 4: *“No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”*

And then I want you to especially notice verse 8 where Paul goes to motivate Timothy to live this kind of life of hardship. It’s the exact same place that Paul goes in 1 Corinthians 15 where he describes what motivates him to face danger every day and die every day. Look at what Paul says in verse 8: *“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel...”*

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If you could just keep those words fixed in your mind through the rest of the message -- *Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...* -- because Paul is telling us what fuels his endurance. Paul is telling us what enables him to embrace misery and hardship and suffering with delight and not with despair. It's the doctrine of the resurrection. "*Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...*" Timothy, that's what's going to enable you to endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. And that's what Paul is saying enables him to face danger every day and die every day as a Christian because he has not forgotten the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of all those who believe in Jesus. Paul says, "Without this doctrine, my life would be one of misery, full of despair. Without the resurrection, the misery and hardships of this life breed despair."

That's that first point I want us to understand this morning - that without the resurrection misery breeds despair. You see, Paul believes that when Christ was raised from the dead, He became the source of resurrection life to all who believe in Him and that changes everything for Paul. Those who believe they will be raised from the dead with Christ in glory can face anything this life throws at them with delight, not despair. If you believe He's going to raise you from the dead, that He's going to crown you with glory and immortality in His presence forever, you can face the beasts at Ephesus. You can face danger every hour. You can die daily because you know your life has been flooded with the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

"Your life is hidden with Christ in God" and *"when Christ, Who is your life, appears you also will appear with Him in glory."* But without this resurrection misery breeds despair.

I want you to hear a paraphrase of [1 Corinthians 15:30-32](#) by Eugene Peterson that makes this point vividly. He says:

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“And why do you think I keep risking my neck in this dangerous work? I look death in the face practically every day I live. Do you think I'd do this if I wasn't convinced of your resurrection and mine as guaranteed by the resurrected Messiah Jesus? Do you think I was just trying to act heroic when I fought the wild beasts at Ephesus, hoping it wouldn't be the end of me? Not on your life! It's resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live. If there's no resurrection, "We eat, we drink, the next day we die," and that's all there is to it.

See, Paul is arguing here against a false doctrine that infiltrated the church. It's a doctrine that says there is no future bodily resurrection for believers. Some people are saying the resurrection has already happened. Those who believe are not going to be raised bodily from the dead and Paul traces that line of thought down to its core in verses 12-14. He says, *“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead [if believers are not raised], then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised...”* there's misery with lots of despair. Look at the way Paul views life without the resurrection. At Christmas time we often ask the question, “What if Jesus had never been born?” Let's ask the question, “What if Jesus had not been raised from the dead?”

a. Without the Resurrection, Your Preaching is Vain

Look at what Paul says in verse 14: *“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain...”* and in verse 15, he says that our witness is false. We are testifying that God raised Christ and if He didn't raise Him then we're saying lies about God and our preaching is in vain. Listen, if you ever go to a church where the pastor doesn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, you'd be better off going and listening to Oprah Winfrey because when you take out the resurrection, you've lost the gospel. This is at the heart and core of what we believe. Paul says, “If there's no resurrection, I quit as a preacher. I have no gospel left to preach.”

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b. Without the Resurrection, Your Faith is Vain

The second thing he says in verse 14 is “*your faith is in vain*” if there is no resurrection. “*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*” Sometimes people say, “You know, even if Christianity is not true, even if there is no resurrection, even if there really isn’t a heaven after this life, I’d still be a Christian. The Christian life is such a good life. It’s worth being a Christian even if these things are not true.” Paul says, “You know, that sounds so noble but that’s nonsense.”

For one thing, the Christian life is not supposed to be an easy life. It’s not supposed to be a life marked by comfort and ease. It’s a life of danger; it’s a life of self-denial; it’s a life of dying daily. If you take out the truth of the resurrection of Jesus and you take the miracles of Christ out of the Bible, then you say, “It’s just a nice story of the triumph of the human spirit.” But Paul says that you have made your faith futile. Verse 17: “*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...*” It’s empty, and it’s even worse than that. It’s full of despair.

c. Without the Resurrection, You are Still in Your Sins

Look at verse 17 for the third thing Paul says: “*And if Christ has not been raised...you are still in your sins.*” That’s serious! That’s serious because when Jesus died on the cross, He was bearing the sins of those who believe in Him. When Christ died, He died in your sins -- with your sins on Him. And if Christ is still dead, your sins are still on you -- unpaid. If Christ is still dead, what that means is His death was not sufficient to atone for your sins. If Christ is still dead, that means when He said, “*It is finished*” on the cross, God said, “No it’s not.”

But the resurrection is proof that God has accepted payment for the sins of all those who believe in Jesus. The resurrection is God’s affirmation of Christ’s

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atonement for the sins of those who believe. When Jesus said, *[“It is finished”](#)* the resurrection is God saying, “Amen! It is finished!” And that’s why [Romans 4:25](#) is a verse that every Christian should learn. Christ *“was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”* In other words, if there’s no resurrection, there’s no proof that we who believe in Jesus are declared righteous before God. We are not justified; we are still dead in our sins.

d. Without the Resurrection, Believers Perish

Fourthly, if there is no resurrection, verse 18 says that believers who have died have perished. Verse 18: *“Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”* We know that perishing in the Bible involves more than physical death. [John 3:16](#): *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* To perish means to die and come under the wrath of God, to fall under the judgment of God. What Paul is saying here is that “if Christ is not raised from the dead, then every believer who has died is now under God’s judgment.” That’s bad news.

e. Without the Resurrection, We are Pitiabale

And then verse 19, the fifth thing Paul says if Christ is not raised from the dead, we are pitiable fools. Look at verse 19: *“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”* Why? Well, because we’re dying daily. We’re in danger every hour. We’ve paid a high price for following Jesus. If Christ is not risen, I’ve endured all of this for the sake of a dead man and a lost cause.

[Colin Smith](#) says, “The Christian life is so hard that if Jesus has not risen, it isn’t worth it. If there is no resurrection, then the cost of your commitment to Jesus is merely a register of your mistaken choices. If Christ is not risen, you have fought battles with sin. You have struggled and you need never have bothered. You have

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prayed and it's been like sending letters that never arrived. If Christ is not risen, you've given money you could have saved and enjoyed. If Christ is not risen, you've spent hours in service for a cause that amounts to nothing." That's not noble. That's nonsense. That's pitiable. If in Christ, we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

f. Without the Resurrection, Baptism is Meaningless

In verse 29, we have one of the hardest verses in the book of 1 Corinthians. I'm sure you've wondered what Paul means when he comments on being baptized on behalf of the dead. Let me just say a couple of important things about this. First of all, Paul is not advocating any kind of superstition here. So any interpretation of this verse that makes it seem like somehow people who already died can somehow get into heaven if you stand in for them as a proxy and get baptized for them in their place. That would run contrary to the rest of the Bible and it would make no sense with the rest of Paul's teaching. So there's nothing superstitious here.

There are about forty different interpretations of this verse so I hope you'll forgive me if I don't solve it for you today. But I think what Paul is saying is something like this: There are many Christians in the early church who watched believers die well. They saw them expressing hope and triumphing in the midst of great adversity just like Paul -- who once was Saul -- when he saw Stephen, the first martyr. The affect of those believers dying in Christ with such hope beyond the grave, transformed the lives of those who watched. As they watched the believers dying and going to be with Jesus, they said, "I want to share in that destiny. I want to follow that Lord." There were people who actually got baptized because of the example of those who had died in Christ. I think that interpretation is one of the more compelling ones.

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But the point Paul is making here is baptism is meaningless if there is no resurrection. It would be like putting someone down in the water and then keeping them down there and not coming back up out of the water. It would be a symbol of dying with Christ but then what? If there's no resurrection, there's no hope so the point Paul is making here is that there are really only two ways to live. There's a life of following Jesus which involves hardship and difficulty but it's a life of delight not of despair because of the hope of the resurrection. Because we know that in glory with Christ, we will be repaid a thousand fold for every sacrifice that's ever been made in the cause of the gospel. That's the one way to live - a life that embraces a measure of misery for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

2. Hope of the Resurrection Breed a Life of Sacrificial Love Not Self-Indulgence

The other way to live is what Paul describes in verse 32. It's the philosophy of the Epicureans which means they believed in living for pleasure. Paul is saying there's really only these two ways. There's no middle ground. If Christ is not raised from the dead, Paul says, "I'd give it all up and become an Epicurean. I'd eat and drink and be merry because tomorrow I die. I'd live for pleasure if there is no life after death -- if Christ is not raised." Paul is telling us in this passage that the only thing that motivates him to live the kind of sacrificial, self-denying life that Jesus calls us to live is the truth of the resurrection.

I want to ask you, "How are you living? Are you living like you believe in the resurrection? Or are you living as if this life is all there is and the goal of your life is to suck all you can out of this measly little life and avoid as much difficulty as you can possibly avoid because this is all there is? For a Christian to live for this world's pleasures is to deny the reality of the resurrection all together. This teaching was infecting the moral life and holiness of the church. That's why Paul says in verse 33:

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“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’ Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.”

Do you take out the resurrection? Then you’ve lost all incentive for holy living. People who have no knowledge of God say this life is all there is -- eat, drink and tomorrow we die. How are you living? Do you live as if the resurrection makes all the difference in the world? For Paul it does. For Paul, verse 20 is the mountain peak of this passage. Look at it again: *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead...”* -- a triumphant certainty that sustains him in adversity. That fuels his life of self-denial. That gives him joy and hope in the midst of misery. And that truth does the same for us.

I can honestly say that in our lives over this past year -- going through some trials and difficulties -- the truth of the resurrection of Jesus has probably been the most precious, sustaining, hope-giving truth that has fueled our lives. That along with the return of Christ, the promise that He’s going to come again and transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body. There’s going to be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. If you believe that, then you can learn to live with some misery in this life. If you don’t believe that, you will avoid misery like the plague. You’ll want it all to be easy and you’ll pout and whine and whimper when it’s not.

An African Bishop by the name of [Festo Kivengere](#) from Uganda knew what it was like to suffer. He said, “Don’t imagine you can only be a Christian when everything is smooth. Christians shine better when everything is just the opposite. Your faith was born in blood and sweat in the loneliness of Calvary. You can stand any test.” But it didn’t end there. The blood and sweat and loneliness and misery of Calvary was but the prelude to resurrection life. We who are in Christ share in that life. “No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me” we sing. Because His resurrection life already indwells us and nothing -- no misery, no



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difficulty, not even death itself -- can destroy the life of the risen Christ in a believer. If you believe in Christ that life has already begun in you and it will continue through all the afflictions and difficulties of this life. It will continue through death and into eternity. *"Your life is hidden with Christ in God."* Your faith was born in blood and sweat in the loneliness of Calvary but Jesus is risen from the dead and that means you can stand any test, any difficulty, any adversity.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for the blood, the sweat, the loneliness of Calvary that You endured. We thank You for Your misery, Lord Jesus, on the cross, bearing our guilt and shame. We thank You that it was a misery born out of hope and confidence. That through Your death, You were bringing life to millions and millions who would believe in You. We thank You that You, for the joy that was set before you, endured the cross, despising its shame and now you are seated in glory at the right hand of God the Father and You will come again in your resurrection life to make all things new. Lord Jesus, keep this hope alive in our hearts. Use this communion table now to feed and fuel our faith. Prepare us to face any adversity. For those mothers who right now feel like they are going through great misery, perhaps with a child who is lost or in difficulty beyond comprehension, we pray that the hope of the resurrection would revive the hearts of Your humble people today. We come to You, Lord Jesus, feed us, strengthen us in our faith, we pray. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.