

Resurrection Life

1 Corinthians 15:16-23

This morning, we are gathering along with Christians around the world to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord! We celebrate because Jesus is no longer dead and in the grave. He has risen! The penalty for sin has been paid and Jesus is alive! Our hope is secure. He has won the victory, and by rising from the dead he reigns in victory over death, over sin, and over Satan.

This is a very important celebration, but I want us to see that it's not just a celebration of an event; it's a celebration of how Christ's resurrection is influencing our lives today and will influence our lives forever and ever. And that's what I want us to look at this morning. What is Christ's resurrection doing for us today? And what will it do for us in the future?

One of the Bible passages that talks about these things is 1 Corinthians 15. In it, the Apostle Paul writes about the resurrection and he begins by listing all the eye-witnesses who actually saw Jesus after he rose from the dead – over 500 people. He did this because he was defending the validity and importance of the resurrection against a teaching that was circulating in the city of Corinth by people who claimed that there would be no resurrection.

After listing the eyewitnesses, he continued by writing about how problematic it would be for everyone who believed in Jesus if he hadn't risen from the dead. And that's where I want to begin reading this morning.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:16-19.

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.

You can see that in Paul's understanding, if Jesus had not risen from the dead, it would completely dismantle the Christian faith. He elevates the importance of the resurrection to the highest level for Christians.

But I've often wondered why? Why is the resurrection that important for us? And the reason I ask that is because even if Christ wasn't raised, he still lived a perfect life and died on the cross. That means he still paid the penalty for our sins and cancelled our debt and removed our guilt. Our sins should still be forgiven, our hearts and consciences should be cleansed from guilt, and our record of wrong erased. His death accomplished all these things, so why is his resurrection so critical for our salvation?

I've asked myself this question over the years and I've landed on a few good answers. I realized his resurrection is critical because it fulfills the promises he made to his disciples - he told them he would rise from the dead and if he didn't, he'd be a liar and that would be very problematic for Christianity. By rising from the dead he fulfilled his promises and proved his legitimacy. He was who he said he was and did what he said he would do. And that makes it really important.

Another good answer is that by rising from the dead it proved that the penalty he paid for sin by dying on the cross was full and complete. No more suffering or sacrifice was needed. "Jesus paid it all" as the song says, and having paid it all, there was no need for him to stay dead. If he was still dead it would indicate his suffering wasn't enough and we'd still be in our sins. But in a powerful declaration that the payment for sin was perfectly fulfilled by his death on the cross, God raised him from the dead.

So those are really good reasons for why the resurrection is important, but they still don't seem to address what Paul is saying in the verses we read. And it wasn't until this week that I think I finally understood what he had in mind. When Jesus rose from the dead, he wasn't just proving his validity and that his death was a sufficient sacrifice for sin, he was also accomplishing something for us beyond his death on the cross that was necessary for our salvation – something that's directly affecting our lives today and will fully transform us in the future when he returns. In other words, we couldn't actually receive salvation without Christ's resurrection and what it accomplishes for us.

You can see that's what Paul is getting at with the problems he raised in the verses we read. He points out 3 major problems if Christ didn't rise from the dead: First he says our faith would be futile and we would still be in our sins.

Second, he says that those who have fallen asleep in Christ would have perished – they wouldn't be saved. Any hope they had when they died of salvation and eternal life would be worthless because it wouldn't happen. And finally, he says we wouldn't have any hope beyond this life and therefore should be pitied more than anyone else on earth.

These are monumental problems! – clearly showing us that in Paul's mind, if there's no resurrection there is no salvation. Why would Paul say these things? What does Christ's resurrection accomplish that leads to our salvation? Paul begins to give that answer in the next few verses.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Paul introduces a key concept in verse 20 that people in a 1st century agricultural society would have understood. He described the risen Christ as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The ESV Study Bible says “*the ‘firstfruits’ refers to a first sample of an agricultural crop that indicates the nature and quality of the rest of the crop; therefore, Christ’s resurrection body gives a foretaste of what those of believers will be like.*”

So Christ's resurrection body is a preview of what our bodies will eventually be like when Christ returns and we are raised from the dead. *But it's not just a preview.* And Paul hints at that in verses 21-22. He says in verse 21 that through the resurrected Christ comes the resurrection of the dead. And in verse 22, that all who belong to Christ and die Adam's death, which is physical death, will be made alive in Christ, or made alive through the resurrected Christ. So there's something about the resurrection life of Christ that is actually going to give life to those who have died in Christ when he returns.

In order to understand this we have to look at a couple other things Paul writes in different places. One is later on in this chapter where Paul describes

what our resurrection bodies will be like. Because Jesus is the “firstfruits,” his body will be just like our resurrection bodies, which is what we're going to see Paul describe. We're going to see that our resurrection bodies are very different than the bodies we now have, and so it was with Christ.

When Jesus died on the cross and his body was laid in the tomb on Friday, that same body is not what walked out of the tomb on Sunday. It was changed. His physical body that died did not just come back to life like Lazarus and the other people he raised from the dead earlier in his ministry. They had the same body as before. But Jesus came back to life in a different kind of body – one that has never been seen before or since, and here’s a description of what that body was like...

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-49.

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

When Christ rose from the dead, he rose with a completely new kind of body and a new kind of existence – he no longer had a natural body like he once did or like we do now, but a spiritual body - one that Paul says is imperishable, filled with glory, and full of power. And notice how he describes the resurrected Christ in verse 45: “*the last Adam (which is Christ) became a life-giving spirit.*” So not only is Christ alive, but he's also a life-giving spirit, giving his new kind of life to those who belong to him; people of faith.

That’s what’s going to happen one day when Christ returns and the dead are raised. All those who have died in Christ will rise from the dead, only they won’t have the same natural bodies that they had when they died; they will

have spiritual bodies – imperishable, full of glory and power. And where will they receive those bodies? They will come from the One who died and rose again, from the “live-giving spirit,” who is the risen Christ. Jesus will give life to our new, glorified bodies through the life that the Father gave him when he rose from the dead. That’s what his resurrection will accomplish for us!

But our new resurrection life won’t only be given on that day when Christ returns – the Bible also tells us it is being given to us right now, in part, from the moment when we first believe. When we put our faith in Christ, we are given a deposit of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. We receive a new heart and a new spirit that is spiritually alive. We receive the gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, which Ephesians 1:14 says, “is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.”

Christ’s resurrection life is giving spiritual life to us right now, for those who belong to Christ. That is why we’ve been born again; that is why we aren’t they same as we used to be. Our bodies are still the same, but our hearts are changed forever. Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17: *“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

Christ’s life is already in us transforming us from the inside out, more and more into his image. And that process of spiritual growth and transformation will continue throughout our lives. It is the guarantee that we will make it until the day we go home to be with the Lord. And on that day, the process will be brought to completion when Christ returns, and we receive our new, glorified bodies to live with him forever.

That’s what Christ’s resurrection accomplishes for us, and that’s what we celebrate today. Christ our Lord has risen in victory and he’s pouring his life into ours so that one day we too will rise and become like him to live with him forever and ever – hallelujah!

Now, you may be here this morning and have never put your faith in Christ or experienced the transformation I’ve been talking about, and you are looking

for hope, forgiveness of your sins, eternal life, and a relationship with God. Jesus has invited you to come to him and he may be personally calling out to you, in your spirit, to come to him. He has accomplished everything you need for salvation through his life, death, and resurrection and now you must turn to him.

Are you sick and tired of the way your life has been and ready to start something new with Jesus? He is calling you to leave your life behind and follow him. You can speak to him right now in the quietness of your own heart. Tell him you're ready to turn to him to receive forgiveness and start a new way of life. And if that's what's happening to you this morning, I'd like you to find me and tell me after this service or call or e-mail me sometime this week, or at least tell someone you know or came with that you know as a follower of Christ.