

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 15:12-24 - But In Fact Christ Has Been Raised

Well, I confess to you that it is always a challenge for me to consider what to preach on Easter morning. It's the same challenge at Christmas as well, to be honest. It's not that I don't know what to say it's that I usually have too much to say.

It's also hard to consider what passage to preach. There are so many great passages that are worthy of our attention. I considered preaching on **Isa 53**, the suffering servant that so vividly describes suffering atonement of Jesus.

I also also considered **2 Pet. 1** or **2 Cor. 13** which are encouragements to all of us to examine ourselves to see whether or not we are in the faith. To make our calling and election sure. All those who claim to follow Jesus need to stop from time to time and ensure that they are truly in the faith.

But as we celebrate the resurrection this morning, I can't help coming back to our passage in **1 Cor. 15**. I didn't plan to be here on Easter Sunday but there really are few places more appropriate for our study this morning than this passage. And I think in God's good providence we happen to be right here.

And the bottom line is this: as Christians, our true hope is that when Jesus comes again, our bodies will be raised from the dead just like his body was raised from the dead. And we will physically, bodily behold him for all eternity in joy and awe and worship. The eternal life we look forward to is being bodily raised from the dead, walking on a physical New Earth in the continual glorious presence of the physically risen Jesus working and fellowshiping with him for all eternity.

This is important to understand because the Bible has a radically different vision of life after death than basically every other religion. Almost every other religion believes that as long as you were good enough in life, that when you die you will go to be with God in heaven forever in some kind of spiritual state, ghostly form. I would also say that this is also what most people who have no religious affiliation believe as well.

They believe that unless you were Hitler or Judas, you'll be in heaven at basically a big family reunion where everyone gets to play games and go fishing. Where God is probably somewhere in the background like the eternal Santa Claus but he's not central to heaven at all. This is why unbelievers often talk about someone who died as being in a "better place" where "at least they're not in pain anymore" rather than saying something like "So and So went home to be with the Lord" or "they are in the glorious presence of Jesus."

But this view that someone dies and just goes to heaven forever is actually fairly common in the church as well. When I was first saved I had no idea about a future resurrection. I thought when Christians died they simply went to heaven forever and when unbelievers died they simply went to hell forever and that was it.

But from cover to cover the Bible paints a more glorious picture. Give me a minute to sketch this out as I hope it will help us understand our passage.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden they had eternal life. They had close fellowship with God in their physical human bodies working and enjoying each other in the presence of God. If Adam hadn't sinned, they would still be there to this day and they would have lived forever in their same bodies working and enjoying fellowship with the Lord for all eternity.

But they did sin and they were removed from the Garden and the punishment for their sin was death. God, in his mercy, did not allow them to keep eating from the Tree of Life because that would have given them an eternal life of sinfulness in broken, decaying bodies. It was both a punishment and a mercy that they died. And because we are born from Adam, we also have a sin nature and we also die.

The wages of sin is death. We die physically and for those who are not saved there is the second death which is the Lake of Fire.

But death is not the end. Very early on in the Bible we get clear understanding that there is a resurrection to come.

Job 19:25-27: For I know that my redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me.

Job is probably the earliest book written in the Bible and he says that there is a day coming when God will stand on the earth. It's long after Job's body is destroyed. But when God does stand on the earth Job will see it with his own eyes. In his flesh he will see God.

How is that possible? Bodily resurrection.

Dan 12:2-3: And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like thee brightness of the sky above and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

Everyone who has died will rise physically. Some to glorious bodies and everlasting life in the presence of God. We will have a glory like the stars in the heavens. But some will rise up to everlasting shame and contempt and torment.

Everyone will rise when God stands on the earth. This has always been the hope of the people of God from the very beginning of the Bible.

It's in the NT we understand specifically that our future resurrection is tied to Jesus, the God-Man. And whether we are resurrected to life or to judgment is based on whether or not we follow him as Lord and believe that his sacrifice alone is the way that God forgives our sins.

Which brings us to Paul here in **1 Cor. 15**.

Apparently, there were some people in the Corinthian Church who were denying the future resurrection of the saints. They did not believe that they would be raised from the dead in the future. We don't know exactly what they believed or why they believed it. But we know that if they continued to deny the future resurrection, they would be denying the faith.

That's pretty loaded. Heaven or hell is on the line with.

What happens if you deny the future resurrection of believers? Paul actually lists 6 things that happen. We're going to go through these 6 things and then we're going to look at the reality.

1) If we deny we will be raised bodily, we functionally deny Jesus was raised. **Read 12-13**

This is probably one of the most surprising arguments that Paul makes in this section.

We'd almost expect Paul to say "If you deny that Jesus rose, then you also deny that you will rise." Which is true, of course. But Paul puts it the other way: If you deny the resurrection of believers, then you deny the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus's resurrection and our future resurrection are so interconnected that to deny one side, is to deny the other.

Now, something I want to point out it that Paul doesn't explicitly say here "the future resurrection." At first it sounds like maybe the Corinthians were just denying any kind of resurrection at all, in just a generic sense.

Read 13

That's sounds a little generic. But as we get further into the chapter, it's clear that what Paul is arguing for and explaining in detail is the future resurrection of believers when Jesus returns. So that seems to be the problem he's addressing.

It's obvious that if someone denies all resurrection that they would also deny Jesus's resurrection. What's not so obvious is that to deny the future resurrection is to functionally deny Jesus's resurrection.

Now, let me just say again: when I was first a believer I had no idea I would one day be raised from the dead when Jesus returned. No one told me that. Was I a Christian? Yes. I just didn't have all the information. If you're a believer and you just now learned that you'll be raised from the dead you're okay. Paul even gives grace to those people who are denying it unwittingly.

But there are some people - even today - who dogmatically deny a future resurrection altogether. They say that there is no future resurrection. Let me be clear: they have abandoned the faith, they are not believers. Because in denying the future resurrection, they functionally deny the resurrection of Jesus.

2) If we deny the future resurrection, then our faith is worthless. Read 14

If there's no resurrection, what is there to preach? A Jesus without the resurrection is exactly what the disciples had Friday through Saturday. They were absolutely dejected and hopeless. Everything seemed to be a sham. They had no good news. They had the worst news: the man they had dedicated their life to for the last 3 years was a fake.

Who wants to preach that? And what is there to believe in?

Literally, Paul says if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is empty and our faith is empty. There's a shell of religion, but there's no real substance to it.

In August of 2015 there was an odd headline that appeared in the British Newspaper the Daily Mail. The title really says it all: "Soldiers forced to shout 'bang bang' during training because of ammunition shortages in the Dutch army." That's pretty sad.

They had all the equipment. They dressed the part, looked the part, even had the actual weaponry for battle. But their weapons were empty. They had no ammunition and therefore they have absolutely no power.

The same is true of the gospel without the resurrection. You can have all the Jesus gear you want, you can go to church a million times and give a million dollars. You can memorize your Bible cover to cover, have all the religious trappings but if Jesus didn't rise from the dead the gospel is empty. Our faith is empty. It has no power to do anything.

The resurrection of Jesus is the weight and substance of the gospel. The resurrection of Jesus is the only thing worth preaching. And it's the only thing worth believing. It is the weighty part of all that we believe.

3) If we deny the resurrection we're lying about God. Read 15-16

The logic here is pretty simple and pretty bulletproof. If we preach that God raised Jesus, but God didn't actually raise Jesus, then we're lying about God. We're misrepresenting him.

We're no better than used proverbial used car salesman. "Oh yeah, the brakes are fine and the engine can go another 200k miles." It doesn't work.

If God didn't raise Jesus and we keep telling people that he did we're liars. We're misrepresenting him.

4) If there is no resurrection, then we are still in our sins. Read 16-17

So this is the second time that Paul links the resurrection of Jesus to our future resurrection. He did it back in **Vs. 13** and he does it here. And it's a 2 way street: if you deny Jesus's resurrection, you deny the future resurrection. If you deny the future resurrection, you deny Jesus's resurrection. They are a package deal.

But here's what we find out: it's more than just Jesus's resurrection and our resurrection that are linked. What we find out here is that everything regarding Jesus is linked together. If Jesus didn't rise, then his sacrifice didn't matter. His death only matters if he is raised.

You know that old song "the Skeleton Dance?" The foot bone's connected to the leg bone. The leg bone's connected to the knee bone. The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone.

Yeah, that's how it works with Jesus. Jesus's deity is connected to his miraculous birth; his miraculous birth is connected with his sinless life; his sinless life is connected with his sacrificial death. His sacrificial death is connected with his resurrection; his resurrection is connected to his ascension into heaven. His ascension into heaven is connected to his rule and authority and his second coming.

Remove any one of those elements and it all crumbles and if it all crumbles we're still in our sins. That's why Paul just goes for the jugular here: no resurrection, then his sacrifice didn't matter. If his sacrifice didn't matter, we're bound for hell.

How do we actually know that Jesus died on the cross ***in our place for our sins***? How do we know that God accepted his sacrifice on our behalf? How do we know that Jesus was for real? He rose again.

For our part what's really on the line with Jesus's resurrection is whether or not we are saved. Whether we are still in our sins, or whether our sins have actually been placed on Jesus and he has paid for them through his death. It's the resurrection that validates what his death did.

Deny the resurrection, deny salvation entirely.

5) If we deny the resurrection those who are dead are lost forever. **Read 18**

Remember that sleep is often a NT description of Christians who have died. And perish here is a euphemism for damnation.

Luke 13:3: [Response to the tower of Siloam] No, I tell you; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Mark 1:24: [Demons say to Jesus] What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God."

Perish is ἀπόλλυμι in Greek - it generally means to be destroyed, but the eternal implication is hell.

If Christ has not risen, then those who have died are eternally damned because there is no hope for them whatsoever. Their sins have not been forgiven; they are utterly lost.

The Corinthians probably didn't make that connection. They probably thought that even though there's no future resurrection, the saints that had died were enjoying heaven. Paul says that's not possible. If it's the resurrection that secures our forgiveness, and they claim there is no resurrection, then all those who have died are forever lost in torment.

Side note: Paul says they are asleep. The Bible does not teach "soul sleep." Soul sleep is this idea that when a Christian dies, it's as though their body is in the ground and they have no consciousness until the Lord returns. It's like taking a big long nap. That's not biblical.

When a Christian dies, their body goes into the grave and their soul goes to be with the Lord.

2 Cor. 5:8: to be absent from the body is to be home with the Lord.

Phil 1:23: if Paul were to die he would depart and be with Christ.

The saints in Revelation who have been martyred are with Jesus in heaven right now.

So right now all the saints of all the ages are in heaven with Jesus. They don't have their physical bodies, but whenever they are depicted they have some kind of bodily form. But what they're waiting for and what we're waiting for is for them to come again with Jesus to the earth.

Look at 1 Thess. 4 for a minute. This is touching on the same reality Paul is talking about. **Read 13-18**

So when a believer dies we don't grieve like the world. It's not good bye forever, it's see you later. It's hard and there are tears and that's normal. But it's not a total loss. Why? Because they're with Jesus right now and they will come with him. When we see Jesus come again, he's coming with the whole host of heaven: all the glorious angels and all the saints that have died. And as Jesus comes, the bodies of the dead saints will be raised and glorified and reunited with their spirits. They are raised first. Christians who are alive when the Lord comes will be glorified after those saints receive their glorified bodies.

This is the great Christian hope, the blessed hope that we set our hearts fully on: the return of Jesus in glory with all the saints, receiving glorified bodies, and living in the presence of God in the New Earth forever and ever.

But did you notice that in **Vs. 14** all of this hinges on Jesus's resurrection. **Read 14**

The resurrection of Jesus has everything to do with the second coming of Jesus and the eternal state of all the saints before us.

If there's no resurrection, there's no hope for us and there's no hope for them.

Look back in 1 Cor. 15. If there's no resurrection, then Jesus didn't rise, our faith is worthless, we're lying about God, we're still in our sins, those who are dead are lost forever.

6) If there's no resurrection we are the most pathetic. **Read 19**

Imagine two people. One person is a gym rat - they go to the gym 12-14 hours a week. They run for miles, they lift weights, they do spinning classes, they watch their diet, eat right, don't smoke, don't drink. It's a miserable existence.

The other person doesn't even know where the gym is or what a vegetable looks like. They eat sugary things all day, they eat all the red meat they want, they like cigars and scotch. And instead of gym memberships they get massages and go on cruises. It's a pretty cush life.

What if I told you that both people looked exactly the same? After 5 years of the gym and 5 years of the lavish lifestyle, you couldn't tell them apart. They weigh the same, same blood pressure, same cholesterol, same muscle mass, no difference at all.

Who wasted their time? The gym guy. I mean, if there's no long term pay off, no health benefit, why go through all the trouble? "The gym makes me feel good!" Well, so does pie and ice cream. And pie and ice cream doesn't make you sweat.

Imagine doing all that hard work and spending all that time for no benefit at all. What a waste of time. What a pathetic existence.

I go to the gym. And yeah, I feel good afterward, but if there's no long term reward or benefit, \$60/month buys an awful lot of ice cream.

That's what Paul says is true of us if there is no resurrection. Why would we give up sin, and worldly pleasures and wealth. Why would we live a life crucifying our flesh and striving for holiness if at the end of the day there is no resurrection.

We'd like that guy at the gym. All that work and self denial and for no benefit.

See, the resurrection not only grounds our salvation, but it is also the driving force of our whole lives. We forsake sin, we strive for holiness, we live in humility, we pursue the interests of others, we give generously to those in need, we are called to run the entire Christian race of faith to the very end because we know that at the resurrection Jesus will reward us for our hard and faithful work here in this life. It's not our work that saves us, it's Jesus's work that saves us. But it is our work that is rewarded.

In fact, that's how Jesus ends the Bible: Jesus says that he is coming quickly bringing his recompense with him. He's bringing his reward. That reward only matters if we're resurrected to enjoy it.

No resurrection, no reward. No reward, we are of **all** people most to be pitied. Think about that. We're more pathetic than drug addicts and slum lords and slave owners and prostitutes and day traders. We are more pathetic than politicians! We would be the lowest of the low. **Read 20-24**

This is the glorious truth we proclaim: That Christ in fact - for real - has been raised from the dead. It is his resurrection that we believe and it is his resurrection that secures our resurrection.

He is the first fruits. The first fruits in the OT were the very first part of the harvest that you'd go collect and then offer to God. You offered them to God because you trusted that God would provide the rest of the harvest.

And so he is the first fruits of the resurrection. He is the first of a massive harvest of humanity who will rise from the dead.

Jesus does exactly the opposite of Adam. Adam brought death because of his sin. And his death spread to all humanity. Jesus does just the opposite. Jesus brought resurrection because of his obedience and that resurrection spreads to all humanity.

All humanity will be raised. Every last person who has ever existed will be raised. Many only to be thrown in the Lake of Fire because of their sin.

But many to everlasting life because they have trusted in the **risen** Lord Jesus for their salvation.

You see because Jesus rose we're not actually the most to be pitied. We are the most to be envied.

We are children of the King of the universe through faith in Jesus.

We are no longer in our sins.

Our bodies may perish, but we will always be with Jesus.

And one day he'll come. He'll come because he rose. And when he comes he will conquer over all.

And so we live our lives between 2 resurrections. The resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection. It's a life of certain hope, that the Lord is coming again to set up his Kingdom forever and ever.

Pray