

Because Jesus Lives
I Corinthians 15:1-23, 51-58

George Bailey and Clarence the angel are in a discussion when George admits to his new acquaintance that it would have been better if he had not been born. Clarence then takes George on a trip through Bedford Falls to show him what life would have been like if that were true.

So it is we come to our passage today on this Easter morning and wonder what life would be like had the resurrection never taken place. In the passage Paul presents some compelling testimony through irrefutable proof that the resurrection took place and that it is of great benefit to us because He did. This passage also presents some adverse ramifications to consider if the resurrection never took place.

The testimony for the resurrection
The trouble without the resurrection
The triumph through the resurrection
The transformation because of the resurrection

Turn to I Corinthians 15.

I. THE TESTIMONY FOR THE
RESURRECTION – vs. 1-11

How do we know that George Washington lived or that he became our very first President?
What evidence is there of the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution or Bill of Rights?
What proof do we have of the speech delivered by Abraham Lincoln at the Gettysburg battlefield?
We know these are true because we have either historical evidence or the original documents preserved for us.

Paul presents two testimonies for the validity of the resurrection. The first testimony is in the Word, what we call the gospel.

A. A True Testimony from the Word – vs. 1-4

He presents his case by reminding the church of the gospel he first preached to them. It was of first importance. There was nothing else of greater significance. Now by its very definition the gospel is a word that simply means good news. Followers of any religion will tell you they also have a gospel or good news to tell. They believe they have truth.

The gospel for Muslim believers are the 5 pillars of Islam which are the basic acts they are to follow in daily living.

The gospel for the Hindu is to follow the 4 Purusarthas, which are the proper goals or aims of life.

The gospel of Mormonism is found in the Book of Mormon.

Every world religion has a gospel it teaches and Paul wanted to clarify to the Corinthians the gospel he had proclaimed to them. While there are many gospels, there is only one true gospel that saves.

First of all we see that it was a gospel they had received.

Corinth was a well-established city built on a beautiful harbor that allowed it to become the gateway for culture and trade. It was a center for pagan idolatry and it was there that Paul visited and proclaimed the gospel, a gospel they received. It's a word that means to accept, believe, or experience. They heard what Paul proclaimed and they believed it. And not only did they believe it, it was that gospel that they stood on meaning it was something that was firm, something established.

They believed that the gospel he preached.
They stood firm on the gospel he preached.

Then he begins verse 2 by noting that it is this gospel by which they are saved. As I said, there are many gospels, but there is only one gospel that saves and it was the gospel that Paul was reminding them of.

Apparently there was some concern about the genuineness of the salvation of some in Corinth.

That's why he says what he does in verse 2: "if you hold firmly to the word I preached." It does not mean that a person could lose his or her salvation but wondering if their faith was genuine. How do you know if your faith is genuine? You know it by holding fast to it.

There are some who will disagree with me, but I believe that what Paul is saying here is that a person who gives up their faith may not have been saved in the first place, that it was only an intellectual ascent and not a belief of the heart.

Romans 1:16 tells us that this gospel is the power of God to save everyone who believes. In chapter 10 Paul will write "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Rom. 10:9-10)

If you don't hold firmly to that gospel then your faith is vain, futile, empty, of no consequence. It is not genuine, saving faith.

So what is this gospel, this Word that bears testimony for the resurrection? Paul lays it out simply and succinctly. There are three important components to this gospel.

1. Jesus died.
2. Jesus was buried.
3. Jesus rose again.

Every other world religion has a founder that died and was buried. Only Christianity has a living founder.

You can't believe just that Jesus died for your sins. You can't believe just that Jesus was then buried. Christianity rises or falls on His resurrection.

Without that we have no basis for our faith.

That is the gospel Paul preached – His death, burial, and resurrection are all central to the gospel.

When we believe on Jesus Christ to be saved it implies that we believe He died, was buried, and that He rose again. That, my friends, is the gospel. If you believe that, if you stand firm in that belief you will be saved.

And Paul affirms the resurrection based on Scripture. So to what Scripture is he referring? Well, to the Old Testament.

"Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." (Hebrews 11:19) Old Testament patriarchs and prophets believed in a resurrection of people.

Genesis 22:1-5

Job 19:25-27

Isaiah 26:19

Daniel 12:2, 13

Hosea 13:4

While those speak of the resurrection of others, there are Old Testament prophecies about Christ.

Isaiah 53:11

Psalm 16:8-11

The essence of the gospel which the Corinthians stood firm on was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection is seen in the true testimony of the Word, and also in the true testimony by witnesses.

B. A True Testimony by Witnesses – vs. 5-11

We accept the validity of George Washington's existence not only by the testimony of what has been documented about him by reputable historians; we also accept it by the eye witness accounts of those who knew him when he was alive. While we cannot interview anyone today about their encounters with Washington, we do accept their written testimony of being an eye witness that is trusted and valid.

The same is true about Christ. We accept the written testimony of those who were eye witnesses. He appeared to Peter.

He appeared to the 12. It was another name for the original disciples even though at this time it was only 11 after the suicide of Judas.

He appeared to over 500 followers at once and Paul adds that many of them were still alive at the time of his writing this letter to Corinth.

He appeared to James, the half-brother of Jesus.

He also appeared to Paul during his encounter with the risen Savior on the road to Damascus.

Criminal investigators have written about whether or not the resurrection was a hoax. Based on their experience investigating the truthfulness of someone's testimony they claim that if the resurrection was a fraud with so many alleging to have seen Jesus alive that the deception would have unraveled by the end of the 1st century.

They didn't see a ghost.

They didn't see a spiritual manifestation.

They didn't have a dream.

They saw Jesus alive and the proof of it was evidenced in their faith and life.

I have at times wondered why after His resurrection didn't Jesus drop in on the religious leaders or march around the temple or knock on Pilate's door early one morning. I have come to a conclusion about that from the story Jesus tells in Luke 16 about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man died and went to hades. His deplorable condition prompted him to be concerned for his living brothers. He wanted someone from the dead to go back and warn them that if they didn't change they would end up in the same place. Here's the response and the reason I believe Jesus revealed Himself only to His followers.

"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:31)

They quite simply would choose not to believe even if He stood right there in front of them. Over 500

people were witnesses of His resurrection. They believed. They are a credible testimony.

Because the gospel about Jesus Christ includes the resurrection, by our very belief in Jesus Christ as Savior there is an implied testimony that we also believe He rose from the dead. We receive and believe it. Our very faith in Christ is a witness that we believe in His resurrection even though we have not yet visibly seen Him.

We cannot just believe in the atoning work of Christ and ignore the resurrection for that is as much a part of the redemptive act as is the shed blood on the cross. It is in the resurrection that we come to understand that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was accepted by God. If it was not accepted as God's requirement or payment for sin, then Christ is still in the tomb and we are still dead in our sin.

If that is the case then there is trouble without the resurrection.

II. THE TROUBLE WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION – vs. 12-19

Bernie Madoff is spending the rest of his life in prison for what possibly is the biggest Ponzi scheme in history. He milked millions from innocent investors. I can't imagine how all those people must have felt when they found out that they had lost all that money. There must have been feelings of utter despair at being taken advantage of. Being swindled like that must have left them with a great sense of personal violation.

Imagine for a moment if the resurrection was just a hoax. How would that make you feel that you have placed all your faith in such a ruse?

Paul explains logically what will happen if the resurrection is false. If it isn't true then there is no hope anywhere for us. If there is no resurrection, seven things would result.

1. If there is no resurrection, then not even Christ is raised. If that's the case then either Christ wasn't a man or He was not fully man. There are those who believe that Christ was only God when He was here on earth and that He only appeared as human.

John 1:1, 14 refutes that theory.

The gospels provide clear evidence of His humanity.

He was tired.

He was hungry.

He was thirsty.

He was tempted.

He sweat drops of blood.

He bled and died.

He expressed emotions.

He exhibited all the traits of being human, because

He was human.

2. If there is no resurrection, then preaching the gospel is pointless. We might as well go home and sleep in every Sunday. If there is no resurrection and Christ is still in the grave then the gospel message of Him conquering sin and death and hell is false. There is no point or purpose to our gathering or my preaching.
3. If there is no resurrection, then our faith is worthless. It has no value, there are no benefits, no eternal joy, no inner peace, no reason to demonstrate benevolent acts or exhibit moral behavior. If the resurrection isn't true than it's just as ludicrous to believe a marshmallow peep or fairy dust could save us. John MacArthur suggests that such misguided faith "would have believed for nothing, lived for nothing, and died for nothing."

Isaiah 49:4 "But I said, 'I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.'"

We would come to the same conclusion as Solomon as he wrote in Ecclesiastes that it's all vanity, just a chasing after the wind.

4. If there is no resurrection, then we are just a bunch of big, fat liars. We not only have believed a lie, but we deceived others to believe that lie as well. It's the greatest con around and we are nothing more than deceivers.
5. If there is no resurrection, then we are still in sin. Sin has not been conquered, but instead sin continues to conquer us. We are still in sin and we would still deserve death. John 8:21 "Once more Jesus said to them, 'I am going away, and you will look for Me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.'"
6. If there is no resurrection, all previous believers, like the one's written about in Hebrews 11, are eternally punished, there is no hope of another place awaiting us for our faith. There is no hope of a future reunion awaiting those who have died before us.
7. Finally, if there is no resurrection, Christians are to be the most pitied for believing and preaching such a preposterous fairy tale.

If there is no resurrection and Christ still remains in the grave then the statement German philosopher Karl Marx made is true that "Religion is the opiate of the people." That indeed is trouble, with a capitol T, if there is no resurrection, that is.

It is unfathomable to me that anyone could preach the Bible and yet not believe in the resurrection, yet there those who do who also preach that there is no virgin birth or that Christ was not deity.

But praise the Lord the resurrection did happen. We see it through the testimony of the Word. We see it through the testimony of the Witnesses. We see it

through the testimony of the changed lives of people from the time of Christ who have believed the gospel message that Jesus died, was buried (proving His death) and then rose the third day. That is good news which leads us to the next point.

There is the triumph through the resurrection.

III. THE TRIUMPH THROUGH THE RESURRECTION – vs. 20-23

Circle that first word in verse 20. This is fundamental to our faith. If this were not true then everything I just said is. It is essential that our faith hold firmly to the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. To deny the resurrection of Christ is to rip out the very heart of the gospel and Christianity on which our faith hangs. The resurrection is the hinge in the doorway of the gospel. Otherwise our faith would be empty and we are worse off than other religions that worship a dead man because we believe ours lives if in fact He doesn't.

But praise God for the resurrection.

Praise God for the power over sin, and death, and the grave.

Praise God that our Savior lives.

Praise God that I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today;

I know that He is living, whatever man may say.

I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer, And just the time I need Him, He's always near.

Praise God that whereas sin and death came by one man, the first Adam, so forgiveness and eternal life came by one man, the last Adam – Jesus Christ.

Matt Maher - "Christ Is Risen"

Let no one caught in sin remain
Inside the lie of inward shame
We fix our eyes upon the cross
And run to him who showed great love
And bled for us
Freely you bled, for us

Christ is risen from the dead
Trampling over death by death
Come awake, come awake!
Come and rise up from the grave!

CCLI 1292471

When Christ rose from the grave this day 2000 years ago it was a validation that the sacrifice He offered on the cross three days earlier was accepted by God. Without the resurrection we are still alienated from God and dead in our sins and if there is no resurrection, then the pagans are right and the cross is foolishness. But with the resurrection of Christ, death has lost its poison. Death has lost its power.

Bible scholar and author R.C.H. Lenski rightly concludes that "what looks like a victory for death and like a defeat for us when our bodies die and decay shall be utterly reversed so that death dies in absolute defeat and our bodies live again in absolute victory." All because Christ rose from the dead.

There is indeed triumph through the resurrection. So what is our response to the resurrection? Let's close by considering the transformation because of the resurrection.

IV. THE TRANSFORMATION BECAUSE OF THE RESURRECTION – vs. 51-58

Acts 4:24 "With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all."

We believe by faith in the resurrection. Because of that there will be a future transformation that gives us confidence.

A. A Future Transformation That Gives Us Confidence – vs. 51-57

The resurrection is truly a mystery because we don't know what we will be like. All we know is that

there will be a transformation that will fit us for heaven. That transformation will occur instantaneously.

This week with the news that I shouldn't run any more left me to ponder the reality that I'm closing in on getting senior discounts when I go out to eat. Over time my body has continued to age slowly, but the change Paul is talking about will be faster than the blink of an eye. John concludes that we don't know what the change will be like when Christ returns except that we will be like Christ.

At that moment of change those who died believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ will be raised up and changed, fit for heaven – this mortal will put on immortality and the finality of death's defeat will occur and the sting of death will be broken. God has given us victory over sin and the grave through His resurrected Son Jesus. That deserves our thanksgiving, our praise.

This future transformation is final. We will exchange what is temporal and imperfect for what is eternal and perfect. That's a transformation I can live with and it will be permanent. The tense of verse 57 is that He keeps giving us the victory.

Not only is there a future transformation that gives us confidence but there is also a fixed transformation that gives us courage.

B. A Fixed Transformation That Gives us Courage – v. 58

We are given to responsibilities. The first is to stand firm and the second is to sever faithfully.

With the certainty of Christ's resurrection and ours, Paul encourages us to stand firm or be steadfast in serving the Lord. It means to be firmly settled, immovable. It is the same idea as in verse 1 but more intense in meaning. Until Christ returns, and until our resurrection, be busy sharing the gospel that Jesus died, was buried, and rose

again. Such service is not a vain, empty or useless activity. It will be met with reward upon His return.

I prefer the KJV reading of this verse because it describes our activity of service as abounding. That means our service should exceed the requirements, be overflowing, driven by heartfelt desire, but notice it's not just any work, it is to be work that is done for the Lord. Our work is to be an energetic, wholehearted, willing, unselfish use of our spiritual gifts. The resurrection gives us courage to keep going, to keep growing, and to keep serving.

I believe the gospel that Christ died according to the scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Do you? If so, stand firm and fully give yourself to serve the risen Savior. If not, consider once again the truth of the resurrected Christ. There is only one gospel that brings with it eternal life.

Ken Ham in his book *The Lie* writes: "To preach the gospel without the message of Christ as Creator and the entrance of sin and death is to preach a gospel without a foundation. To preach a gospel without the message of Christ and His crucifixion and His resurrection is to preach a gospel without power. To preach the gospel without the message of the coming kingdom is to preach a gospel without hope."

Beneath the weight of all our sin
You bow to none but heavens will
No scheme of hell, no scoffer's crown
No burden great can hold you down
In strength you reign
Forever let your church proclaim

Christ is risen from the dead
Trampling over death by death
Come awake, come awake!
Come and rise up from the grave

Oh death! Where is your sting?
Oh hell! Where is your victory?
Oh Church! Come stand in the light!
The glory of God has defeated the night!