

If Christ Is Raised, What Then? – 1 Corinthians 15

Two thousand years ago, some middle-aged guy died. He looked nothing like us. He lived nothing like us. He spoke nothing like us. He never saw a car; he never turned on a laptop. He never tried to start his lawnmower. He never sat in a cubicle. Along with billions of other men and women in the history of the world, he died. Three days later, a group of his friends said that he had come back to life.

Isn't it strange that after two thousand years, the claims of these friends would be so significant that we'd set aside a day each year to celebrate and remember what they reported? The report of the resurrection of Jesus from Nazareth turned the world on its head. We come here because we too have heard the report of those first Apostles that Jesus did not stay dead, but he's alive. And now our lives have been turned on their heads, and we come to pay homage this morning to our Risen King.

Read 1 Corinthians 15

Paul spends all of chapter 15 defending the reality of the resurrection. Then in verse 58 he concludes all of this by saying that *the reality of the resurrection of Jesus* has the ability to take a life of labor out of the realm of vanity and place it into the realm of meaningful, purposeful, and significant. ("Vain" means living a life that is empty. Lives of work, sacrifice, blood, sweat, and tears, that in the end are all useless and without purpose.)

Lots of people live a life that feels void of any purpose or significance. So many lives can be summed up like this: we get up and work hard. We try to provide an inheritance for our children. We're working to save for retirement. We're building up our farm. We have get together with friends once or twice a month to eat dinner and talk about politics. But is that *it*? Is that all there is to life? Is there nothing of ultimate significance? Paul describes that life as a life of vanity! It is without ultimate meaning. It's a *wasted* life.

But then he says that the reality of chapter 15 can take that life from useless and pointless to meaningful and purposeful. **So what is this reality that Paul says saves a life from vanity?** There are three things that make all the difference in our lives. These three things go together like a totem pole. The second one is built on the first, and the third is built on the second. Three realities make all the difference in going from a wasted life to a life that counts for eternity.

- 1) The first reality = the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - a) The post-cross resurrection of Jesus is of essential value to Paul. He says it is of first importance, in verse 3. In verses 3-11, he begins to remind them that the resurrection of Christ is real; it is historical.
 - b) *Clarification*: what exactly does it mean that Jesus was resurrected.
 - i) His resurrection is very different from mere resuscitation (like that of Lazarus).
 - ii) When God brought a person back from the dead in the rest of the Bible, he was returning them to *their former state* of physical life in this fallen, sinful world. Since they are brought back into this world just like they were before, they are still sinners, and their bodies will still die. Every soul brought back to life by the miraculous work of the Lord was brought back to die once more.

- iii) All save one. On the morning of the third day when Jesus came back to life and prepared to leave his death chamber, he wasn't simply restored to his former way of life.
- iv) He certainly still had the same body as he had before, but now, this body was very different! The Father gave to the Lord Jesus a glorified body. That's what Paul is describing in verses 42-49. When he arose, his old body was transformed and glorified (made fit for glory).
- v) It was now imperishable for all eternity. The Holy Spirit now imbibed the body of Jesus and this is the version of his body he will have for the rest of time. It was not subject to sin, to decay, to death, it would never get cancer or the flu; it was perfectly incorruptible.
- vi) So again, the resurrection of Christ was no mere resuscitation. He did not come back so that he could die some time later. Death was done. He will never die.
- c) That's the bottom piece of our totem pole. And I reiterate that this *actually* happened because for many, this seems like one of these nice religious stories that give us hope so we don't worry about whether it actually, historically happened. If it didn't happen in history, it has no significance for your life. If it didn't happen in history, this sermon stops right here. Nothing we say from now on would apply. But in fact, the Word of God cannot lie. Christ IS risen! Not just spiritually, but physically. He is alive.

2) The second reality = our resurrection.

- a) This *second* point is the reason the *first point* was so significant.
- b) Jesus' resurrection means our resurrection. If Jesus overcame death and is alive, then we too will not stay dead but we will rise. If he is still dead, we will remain dead forever. That's the connection. Paul makes this connection in verses 17-20.
- c) If Christ is still dead then everyone who ever died has perished. Meaning nothing will ever more come of them. But if Christ is raised then those who have died in Christ will all be raised just like he was.
- d) Here's my attempt at explaining the connection between Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection.
 - i) Death is not good and it is not natural. The *reason* death is in the world is not because it's part of life, but rather because death is God's response to sin. Death is part of God's wrath toward the human race.
 - ii) The reason Jesus died (remember, he didn't die his own death because he didn't have a death to die; he was sinless) was because God imputed [*charged to his account*] all the sin of those who would ever become God's people to Jesus, as if Jesus was the one guilty of all that rebellion. Then he punished that rebellion and sin in Jesus on the cross. Jesus was bearing God's wrath in our place, and he died. He That's why we say, "He died for our sins."
 - iii) He died on a Friday and they put him in the grave. He remained dead in that tomb the rest of Friday, all day Saturday, and into Sunday.
 - iv) **But wait**, as long as Jesus stayed dead, it seemed he was still bearing the punishment for our sins!
 - (1) If Jesus is dead today, then the penalty for my sins is not yet gone. There is still wrath and payment to be given for my rebelliousness against God.
 - (2) But if Jesus bore the full weight of my sin, and if Jesus is in fact *not dead*, but if on that very next Sunday morning, his dead body was miraculously filled with life, then the

weight of my sin must be fully paid! If his death was payment for my sin, and if his death is over, my sin must be over.

- e) Here's the whole point: Jesus' resurrection *means* my resurrection. Just as Jesus didn't stay dead when he died, when I die, *I won't stay dead*. If I do, then my sin payment isn't paid. And if my sin payment isn't paid, then Jesus is still dead too.
- f) I know I'm going to die, but I don't plan on staying dead. When I die, my soul will go to heaven with the Lord because I have repented and gave up serving my sin in this life, and I've turned to Jesus and said, "Save me Jesus, forgive me and give me your righteousness by your grace because you're my only hope." So my soul will leave my body at death and my body will go into the ground as my soul will go to heaven. But if I stay that way forever, then it's as if my body is still paying the punishment for my sin (because death is the result of and curse for sin).
- g) Because my sin is paid and the curse is lifted, although I will still taste death, I won't stay dead and I won't experience death forever. Our bodies will be raised just as Christ's was raised.
- h) We won't be resuscitated. My soul will rejoin my body and it will be changed. We'll be raised to new life with a new, heavenly-body that, like Jesus' new body, won't know or experience death and pain and hurt. Our bodies, our hearts, our minds, and our souls, we'll be fit for an eternity on the new earth dwelling in the presence of God.

3) The third reality = our hope. The third piece of our totem pole. The truth of our resurrection is built on the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection. And on top of *our* resurrection, the third and final reality here is *our hope*.

- a) If the certainty of *our* resurrection is linked to the resurrection of Jesus, well his resurrection is already historical *fact*. That's why Easter is a day of great joy.
- b) It's a day where we remember, it's not a matter of *if* we'll be raised and united to glorified bodies and dwell in the presence of the glorious God for eternity, if we are members of his Kingdom today, then as sure as the dawn, verse 49, "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." *We shall bear the image of Jesus, of the resurrected Jesus*.
- c) We shall be like him, and we shall be with him forever. This isn't our flimsy, "this might hopefully come to pass" hope. This is our *deep-rooted Bible* hope. Hope as in, we're *sure* of these things, and so we're counting on them, and we're looking forward to them, and we're waiting anxiously for them, and our lives today are lived in light of these things we know are coming. This is our hope!

4) Okay, now all three pieces are in place, and now we can see why Paul says that these three things, Christ's resurrection, which guarantees the sure hope of *our* resurrection, these things take a person from living a life that's all in vain, to living a life of purpose and meaning and significance.

- i) The reason for this is simple: without the historical resurrection of Jesus enabling and guaranteeing the hope of my future resurrection, then Paul says in verse 32, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"
- ii) If Easter is just a clever little religious story, then nothing matters. What I do doesn't matter. Where I work today, how many people I serve, it's meaningless. It's all in *vain*. What's going to come of any of it? Tomorrow I die! And that's it for me. I might as well live for myself. (That's what the saying, "Eat, drink, etc." means)

- iii) But if Jesus rose from the grave, and if, as his follower, I'm *guaranteed* resurrection like him, then everything I do today counts for tomorrow! This world and this life and my time now are just the proving grounds for eternity. It's not my whole life. It's just the beginning!
- iv) That's why Paul closes this whole spectacular chapter telling us to know with certainty that in this life, our labors, our blood and sweat and tears for the Kingdom of God, they're not in vain.
- v) If *we* will be resurrected and if we will stand before our Christ on that day, then we can live today for his eternal Kingdom instead of for ourselves. We can live for Christ, our King, and for the advancement of his Kingdom. That has worlds of significance. That means what we do today, as his disciples can count for eternity.
- vi) The hope of our resurrection and living for the Eternal Kingdom can take a life out of the vain ordinary and put it into the realm of eternally significant and meaningful!
- b) For those who have the assurance of the resurrection, we are living our lives today in light of eternity. We are living our lives *today* with eternal goals and eternal purposes and the eternal Kingdom in mind. What could be more meaningful and purposeful, what could be any *less of a waste* than seeing your labors have eternal fruit?
- c) And what could be any *more of a waste* than living your life for you with only today in mind, with no hope and no assurance in your relationship with Christ? Living for yourself, for your Kingdom, for your glory, all of which dies with you?
- d) **The resurrection of Christ makes *all the difference!***
- e) Don't waste your life! Christ died for the sin of God's people, and Christ rose victorious from the sin of God's people.
- f) Believe and trust that he is the only way for you to be reconciled to God.

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