

# Evening Service | 2023.3.26 | Corinthians 15: 20:33

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We are just a few weeks from Easter, and so that's the purpose of spending some time in 1 Corinthians 15, to be able to understand the resurrection, to be able to better see how the resurrection applies to our lives today.

And so if you've been around the church for any amount of time, if you're a Christian, you certainly know the gospel in a nutshell that can be presented in 10 seconds or less, right? Christ came to earth. He lived a perfect life.

He was crucified, dead, and buried. He rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven. In order to save us from our sins. And we look forward to His return when He'll establish this eternal kingdom where we will live forever with Him in paradise.

This is common speak for anyone who has spent any time in the church, right? But one thing I think we need to recognize, for those who haven't spent any time in the church, for those who aren't believers, just how crazy this language sounds to an outsider.

Because we live in this increasingly secular society where biblical literacy is really a thing of the past. What may have been commonplace to understand, have some sort of knowledge of the gospel, is completely lost in our society today.

[ 1 : 0 8 ] And so my former minister from the States, he shared this story before where he knew of this young woman who had grown up as a Hindu.

Then she dabbled in a few other religions before eventually coming to true faith in Christ. And he talked about her conversion experience and the confusion she went through as she was exploring the gospel.

And she actually wrote about this, and he shared one time what her experience was like exploring Christianity. And so this is a few things, a little excerpt of what she said. She said, Christians claim that Jesus was the Son of God and all this stuff about the Trinity, which really I had no idea what they were talking about.

They claim this resurrection which made no sense to me, not that I didn't believe that Jesus could rise from the dead if He were God, but I had no idea what possible relevance this could have to me since I didn't understand about the fall or sin or the final resurrection.

I assumed they were all myths with no more relevant deep meaning than maybe a fairy tale, except maybe metaphorical spiritual meaning. I wasn't even interested because I never understood what importance that event should have to me.

[ 2 : 1 6 ] No Christian ever explained this to me. They would just say crazy stuff like, I'm washed by the blood of the Lamb and now I'm saved. Jesus died for your sins. Don't you want to be saved?

And then they would paint portraits of hell that made zero sense to me. It's just as though someone came up to me and said, my red balloon popped and then candy canes fell out of the sky.

Your rabbit is winking at me. Doesn't all this make you want to buy a new Nissan? I'm not exaggerating. This nutshell gospel message makes absolutely no sense to a non-Christian.

No meaningful sense anyways. You just have no idea what they're so excited about. So Jesus rose from the dead. Big whoop. Good for him. So what? I think it's safe to say that this mirrors the sentiment of many in our society.

Maybe even some in this church that have been around Christianity but still don't understand what the resurrection means and how it applies to us. And so that's what I want us to accomplish tonight is to be able to answer the question, so what?

[ 3 : 21 ] To be able to bridge this gap between just spouting mere Christian jargon to having a true understanding of the resurrection, how it applies to our lives. And so I really want to focus on two questions then that I think this passage answers for us tonight.

What is the importance of the resurrection and what are the implications of the resurrection? And so let's look at that first point. What is the importance of the resurrection?

Starting in verse 20, Paul has just finished making this hypothetical argument in the first part of chapter 15. What if Christ didn't raise from the dead?

And he says if this is true, he didn't raise from the dead, then all our preaching, all our faith is in vain and we should be pitied above all else. But in verse 20 he changes his argument.

He pushes away any lingering doubt and he says Jesus has indeed risen from the dead. And he uses interesting language here. He refers to Jesus as the first fruits.

[ 4 : 23 ] Now this may not have much significance to us nowadays, but to a Jewish audience back then, talking about first fruits would have great significance, especially in an Old Testament context.

Because when you think of first fruits, this would have been the portion of the crops that from a harvest time that would have been dedicated to the Lord, that would have been sacrificed as an offering to him.

This was the first fruits offering. This was the feast of Pentecost. And so the effect of this offering of these first fruits was really twofold. One, it pointed back.

And two, it pointed forward. And so think about it. If you were an Israelite and you had finally entered the promised land, you're farming your vineyard.

Harvest time comes for the very first time and you're able to clip this large cluster of grapes from the vine. Think about the significance that this would have to you. You would have remembered your parents wandering in the wilderness for 40 years.

[ 5 : 23 ] You would have remembered your grandparents and great-grandparents who would have suffered as slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. You would have recalled your own experience crossing the Jordan River, conquering the people of Canaan, setting up your own house and farm, ones that you did not build or grow, and now you have the opportunity to harvest these grapes for the first time.

It would point to you as a promise, as a fulfillment of a promise, a promise that wasn't just made to Joshua or even to Moses, but a promise that dates back much farther to a man named Abram, who God came to and made a promise, this covenant, a promise to him that says that your offspring, to your offspring, I will give this land.

And so these first fruits offered as a sacrifice point back to the promise that God has made to his people. But they also point forward. These grapes are only the beginning of a harvest.

They point to the assurance of the harvest to come, that God has provided and he will continue to provide for his people. And so when we think of first fruits, they wouldn't make any sense, they wouldn't have any purpose if a harvest wasn't to follow behind it.

There's no sense of celebrating a cluster of grapes or a bundle of wheat if it wasn't going to be followed by countless more. And so when Christ is called the first fruits, we see both of these aspects in this name.

[ 6 : 55 ] His resurrection, it first points back to a covenant promise, one that dates back to the time of creation, the time of Adam and Eve, when sin entered the world, when they disobeyed God, and we see the beginning of original sin.

We see then that God didn't abandon them, he very well could have, but he was faithful to them. He promised that he would restore this broken relationship, that he would send a rescuer, someone to redeem them from their sins.

And so this was a promise that's been repeated through the Bible. It was a promise that was repeated to Abraham and to Moses and to David, a promise to establish this eternal kingdom where all nations would be blessed.

And now it finds fulfillment in Jesus and in his resurrection. And so also then, that Christ as a first fruits, his resurrection, it points us forward because it's a representation of the things that will happen in the future.

It's a guarantee of this whole harvest that is to come. So his resurrection is an opportunity for us to identify with Christ because as Christ has risen, we too will rise.

[ 8 : 07 ] And so I think it's an important point to make here because when we think about Christ's resurrection and our resurrection, we may want to think about this as two separate events. But I think it's more accurate to recognize this as one event in two episodes.

Because when we think of first fruits, first fruits are not separate from the harvest. They don't point to another harvest in the future. They point to the harvest that is happening right now. Christ has rose and therefore we will rise.

This is the same event in two different episodes. And so Paul goes on to explain this further in verse 21 and 22. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. And so again, Paul is making this connection between Adam and Christ. It's the same argument that he makes in many of his other letters.

If you were to turn to Romans chapter 5, verse 19, he says this, For as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, and so by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

[ 9 : 16 ] And so we see that through Adam came death. Through Christ comes life. And so Christ comes as a second Adam, as a final Adam, to fulfill the law that Adam could not.

And so Christ comes, he rescues his people through his obedience, whereas Adam came and brought about destruction because of his disobedience. And so then it's important to think about who this all is.

If all are in Adam or all in Christ, well, who is this all? Are they talking about the same people? If we think about all in the first sense, that all are in Adam, this is a universal statement.

All are sinful because of Adam. All are deserving of death. Romans 3, 23, For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But the second Adam, or second all, it's a different all.

It's not talking about all men. It's talking about God's elect. Those who have received Christ by grace through faith. to them only will receive this eternal life.

[ 10 : 23 ] Will they experience the resurrection of the dead? Jonathan Edwards, the Puritan minister, he put it this way. He said, We are all in Adam by nature and in Christ by faith.

And so Paul then goes on in verses 23 through 28 to discuss the order in which this resurrection happens. He says, But each in turn, Christ, the firstfruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him, and then the end will come.

It's a very simple order. Maybe you have orders of things in your own life. In our home, on a school morning, we have some very simple orders, some directions the kids are to follow. They come down after getting dressed, out of bed, they have breakfast, they're supposed to put their dishes in the dishwasher, supposed to pack their snack, brush their teeth.

It's a very simple order. It's the same one every day, every week. It doesn't change, and you would be amazed at how often this order goes awry. When we see in this passage, this is a very simple order, but it's an order that is not thwarted here.

Christ is raised, and those that belong to him are also raised. And then the end comes. And it's interesting here, there's no class distinction among God's people.

[ 11 : 38 ] There's no hierarchy of Christians. Christ is raised. We are raised. Christ. And when it references this order here, when it says each in turn, or this order, it's really a military term.

It's meant to illustrate this definite plan that a military leader would have in bringing their army and walking into battle. Christ is leading his army to victory over death.

And so what does this mean? I want to pause because it still seems like there can be a little bit of misunderstanding or even jargon involved in what we're talking about here. Paul goes on to explain this later in chapter 15. We're not going to cover it all tonight.

But we know that when Christ was raised, he ascended into heaven and he promised to return. And we are now waiting for his return. And so during this time, when believers die, our souls will be present with the Lord, our bodies will be in the grave.

That's what Paul's talking about, as though we have fallen asleep. But when he returns, our bodies will be raised. It says in verse 42 through 44, it will be raised imperishable, glorious, and powerful to be reunited with our souls.

[ 12 : 52 ] And so it's important to recognize that we are created as embodied souls. Our souls and our bodies are meant to be united, just in the same way that Christ's soul and Christ's body is eternally united.

I think some of us may have the misconception that when Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he did so in some sort of bodiless form. No, Jesus will forever have a real and resurrected body, and so will we.

And it says, when this happens, when we are raised, then the end will come. In our book, The Last Battle, when Aslan returns, returns, there's this doorway in a stable that separates old Narnia from the new Narnia.

And it says that Aslan stood in this doorway and he raised his head and roared, now it is time. Then louder, time.

Then so loud that it could have shaken the stars, time. And at his word, as the children are looking on through the doorway, the stars began to fall out of the sky.

[ 14 : 05 ] The true Narnians enter through this door while those rebels are turned away into judgment. It describes these dragons and lizards that then began destroying the land until all vegetation is gone.

And then these creatures themselves, they lay down and they die, their bodies shrivel and they turn to bones. And then it describes this huge wave coming over and covering the land and it says at last the sun is squeezed like an orange until there is total darkness.

Now obviously this is an imaginative portrayal of the end times but this is pointing to what Paul describes here. Christ's resurrection is really twofold in the fact that it ensures eternal victory for his people but also judgment and defeat for his enemies.

And so we see this in verse 25 he says he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. This verse is implying that Christ is reigning now.

We think about his coming resurrection and we know Christ will reign in the future but Christ is reigning now it says and will continue to reign until all his enemies are destroyed and he delivers the kingdom to God the Father.

[ 15 : 22 ] and so we see this kingdom was inaugurated it began at his resurrection and it will be consummated it will be fully fulfilled when he returns.

And so we see just how the totality of his reign in these few verses because we see Paul repeat himself over and over again. In verse 24 he says he will destroy all dominion authority and power.

Verse 25 he will put all his enemies under his feet. A couple of times in verse 27 he has put everything under his feet God will put everything under Christ. Verse 28 when he has done this meaning put everything under his feet then the son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him.

It's almost as if like we want to pump the brakes and just say Paul we get it we understand what you're saying here but what Paul is actually doing he's combining two texts here he's combining Psalm 8 with Psalm 110 we sang Psalm 108 just a second ago and it's a psalm that reminds us of the calling that God gave to man at creation to have authority over the earth to rule over the earth but the fact of the matter is that that man lost this calling Adam lost this calling at the fall but now it's a calling that has been completed and accomplished by Christ and so when we think about all these sinful authorities and sinful powers that are still present in this world it's right to consider things like political powers and social powers and other religious powers and spiritual powers which hold this world captive.

If you're around on Wednesday and can attend the missions night we're going to be hearing from a friend of mine who's been a missionary in Ukraine for over 20 years who's going to be giving us an update about the war in Ukraine it would certainly be right for us to pray that evil be defeated in Ukraine but in addition to thinking about earthly kingdoms and things that are external to us I think it's really important when we think about these kingdoms that will be conquered to recognize internal personal kingdoms these autonomous kingdoms where we ourselves harbor sin and rebellion because it's this sinful morality within us that will also be destroyed the desire to wander from God the desire to turn to our own ways to seek our own glory this too will be destroyed and this is what will allow us to live in perfect union with Christ but I think the phrase that really sticks out here is actually verse 26 because it's the only phrase in this passage that doesn't begin with any sort of conjunction there's no buts or ands or fors it stands on its own the last enemy to be destroyed is death so lest you think that anything will escape the wrath of God even death will be destroyed and so this is good news for us right when we look around us and we think about the effects of sin disease cancer mental illness financial hardship broken families loss of friendship war we don't want these things to just be lessened we pray we don't pray just for for less death we pray for it to be destroyed we want it gone sin and all its defect effects we want it destroyed forever and that's what's promised in this passage here and so the end of this order then the end of this order of events it concludes with

[19:10] Christ presenting this kingdom to the father that God may be all in all and so we see the resurrection of Christ the resurrection of his people the judgment of his enemies the assembly of God's people it all leads to one point the glory of God this is the importance of the resurrection Christ rose from the dead that we may rise as well that he may establish his eternal kingdom in order that God receive the glory forever and so this leads us to our second point that's the importance of the resurrection what are its implications to us today as we lead our lives well we turn to verse 29 and quite honestly it kind of gets off to a weird start he says now if there is no resurrection what will those do who are baptized for the dead if the dead are not raised at all why are people baptized for them there's a lot of ink that's been spilled on this passage there's a question about whether

Paul is he actually referring to some sort of vicarious baptism where people are being baptized for people that have already died is Paul using this language in not quite a literal sense and saying that well it's referring to the dead he's actually meaning Christians who are still suffer death and decay and baptism is of no importance there's lots of explanations or attempts at making explanations that I read I don't know if there's one that I can that I can cling to I think I'm going to go out on a limb and say I just don't know but I think where we can focus in is actually in verse 30 through 33 because he says and as for us why do we endanger ourselves every hour I face death every day yes just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord if I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes what have I gained if the dead are not raised let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die and so I think there's really two main implications we see in this passage implications of the resurrection the first is that it keeps us focused

Paul speaks of this hardship that he's endured for the sake of the gospel he's even calling his enemies his opponents in Ephesus wild beasts we certainly know throughout his letters in the new testament how he has suffered and been imprisoned and shipwrecked for the sake of the gospel but this isn't unique for Paul if we were to jump to the book of Hebrews in chapter 11 which recounts this account of faithful men throughout the history this redemptive history we see the fate of these faithful men they're mocked they're flogged they're in prison stoned sawed in two killed by the sword naked destitute afflicted mistreated homeless now certainly I don't think that any of us will suffer for our faith in the same way but certainly our faith brings with it certain struggles of various kinds we may feel like you've been mocked or ridiculed for your faith you may constantly feel like an outsider maybe you have been rejected by your family or friends maybe you just feel like you always have a target on your back certainly it would be easier for us to just say let's eat and drink and be merry and not worry about the future but Paul's charge here is to remain focused to be willing to endure because we know that this is going to be temporary because our focus is pointed ahead

I don't know if any of you have heard of the marshmallow test before this was a test that was developed a psychology experiment I got that right psychology experiment back in the 1960s and it goes you may have even seen these videos on YouTube they still do it all the time a child is given a big marshmallow and sat down on a table and says look you can eat this marshmallow now or if you wait for me to come back into the room after a certain amount of time and you haven't eaten it I'll give you a second one and so they leave the child in the room the child is videotaped and you watch this internal struggle that the child faces some of them give up right away want the marshmallow stuff it in their mouth and don't get a second one others they see the struggle they try to pinch at it they smell it they see if they want to get it and some then eventually give in and then you have some who are resilient they resist temptation they don't eat the marshmallow and are rewarded with a second one it's ultimately this experiment in delayed gratification and so that's essentially what

Paul is urging these believers in the New Testament to do here if we turn to the book of Philippians listen to these verses from Philippians 3 starting in verse 7 he says but whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Christ the righteousness from God that depends on faith that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings becoming like him in death that by any means possible I may obtain the resurrection from the dead Paul is specifically linking here his suffering with the knowledge of the resurrection and so just in the same way that we identify with Christ in his resurrection we also ought to identify with Christ in his suffering because Christ suffered we too should endure suffering and because

[ 25 : 07 ] Christ rose we can anticipate the blessing of the life to come and so then the second implication I think this passage shows us one is to stay focused and two having proper understanding of the resurrection keeps us pure verse 33 do not be misled bad company corrupts good character come back to your senses as you ought and stop sinning for there are some who are ignorant of God and I say this to your shame and so notice the chain of logic that Paul is presenting here those who are ignorant of God are going to deny the resurrection if you deny the resurrection then you essentially serve a dead God if you serve a dead God you have no reason to follow him and if you have no reason to follow him live however you want like an unbeliever Paul says don't live like an unbeliever wrong theology leads to bad morals if we think like an unbeliever inevitably we will begin to act like an unbeliever and so instead

Paul urges us to come back to our senses in the Greek here it literally means to wake up sober wake up from your drunkenness it's words that seem to be echoed by Isaiah in Isaiah 52 where he says awake awake and put on your strength oh Zion put on your beautiful garments oh Jerusalem the holy city shake yourself from the dust and arise be seated oh Jerusalem loose the bonds from your neck oh captive daughter of Zion this chapter in 52 it's an introduction to a prophecy of Christ's coming and so Isaiah is saying here purify yourselves because the salvation of the Lord is at hand this is what Paul has been spending his entire book this letter to the Corinthian church doing warning the church to guard yourselves about the immorality that's creeping into the church keep the truth of the resurrection in your hearts that it may have deep effect in your life and so he concludes his whole letter in verse 56 excuse me 58 therefore so keeping in mind that the resurrection is real therefore my dear brothers and sisters stand firm let nothing move you always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor and the Lord is not in vain and so we wait for Easter to roll around every year on the church calendar

I think it's important for us to remember the reality is that we constantly live in the season of Easter for Easter again it's this one event in two episodes we look back to the joy of the resurrection of Christ and we also look forward with hope at our own resurrection so as we live in this period of the already and the not yet Paul urges us to remain faithful to our calling as we long for Christ's return let's pray together God we thank you for the season of Easter and to know that it's not a season that comes around once every spring but it is a season in which we live recognizing the resurrection of Christ and also the resurrection to come our own resurrection that is brought by Christ's return and so may that give us great joy may it give us great hope in the future may that motivate us now in how we live

God we thank you for the sacrifice of your son we thank you that you reign now and will reign eternally we thank you that you promise to destroy all dominion and authority and power and even death itself we thank you that we can be your children and so may we live from a position of victory may we always live in light of the cross and in light of an empty grave we pray all these things in Jesus name amen and now since we are without a musician we're going to do a call little audible here we are going to close by singing the doxology together so if you don't know it look it up real fast if you need to if you know it then you can stand and we'll sing the doxology together praise God from whom all blessings flow praise him all creatures here below praise him above ye heavenly hosts praise father son and holy ghost amen and now receive this good word this benediction from the lord and now may the god of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our lord jesus that great shepherd of the sheep equip you with every good thing to complete his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through jesus christ to him be glory forever and ever amen