

A Sure and Certain Hope

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[0:00] Please be seated. You'll have to bear with me this morning. Mike isn't working, so I'll have to yell really loudly.

! I do want to say that there is a children's chapel for kids. If the parents want them, they're welcome to go downstairs. There'll be somebody to mind them there. They're also welcome to stay.

We love the voices of kids, so that's fine. As well, if they want to stay with the parents. All right, I invite you to open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15.

It's on page 1142 of your pew Bible. For those who are visiting us this morning, we've been going through Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians.

And we are almost done. We're in the second to last chapter. This has taken us so far. We started, I believe, last year in the spring. And now we're almost done now.

[1:01] We took breaks during Advent and Christmas. And we've taken breaks during Easter as well. I have a question for us before we start this morning.

Christian, what do you believe about life after death? Where does your hope lie? We just confessed just a moment ago in the Creed regarding Jesus.

That on the third day, he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. Those words were taken straight from 1 Corinthians.

I hope you noticed them as we read our epistle this morning. But I hope that those are not just empty words that you say every Sunday.

Bye. I hope that those are not just empty words that you say every Sunday. I hope it's something that shapes your life as you confess the creeds, as you come and gather with the saints every Sunday.

[2:12] You know, the truth is that what we believe about the future tremendously impacts how we live in the present. I want to make a distinction between belief and dreaming here.

Right? Because you might dream of being a basketball player one day. If you're under 5'10 and you can't catch a ball, that's most likely wishful thinking.

You might want to be a doctor someday. But if you can't stand the sight of blood, that might not be a suitable reality for you. But what we're speaking about here, believe it's different from dreaming, wishful thinking.

In another sense, the whole letter is leading actually to the point we're in right now as Paul begins in this chapter to talk about resurrection. Paul started, remember, when we started this epistle a long time ago, last year.

Remember that Paul started with what? The cross of Christ. He reminded the Corinthians of the message he brought to them regarding the crucified Christ.

[3:29] And he said to them then that that was a message of foolishness to those who are perishing. For it is a message of divine power to those who are being saved. So, starting with the death of Christ and what it means, Paul now comes to the end of the letter and talks about the resurrection and what it means to us.

Go to the Corinthians and the time he's writing it to them. And to us, as we hear it this morning, here and now. In summary, one might say that 1 Corinthians is about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

These two pillars of our confession of faith shape and direct every aspect of the Christian's life. So Paul writes to the Corinthians to remind them of this truth of the resurrection, which as he says, beginning in verse 1, is, I preach this to you.

You received it. You are in which you stand. And by which you are being saved. So right off the bat, Paul states that this issue, this matter that we're discussing, is central.

It's at the very center of the gospel proclamation of the Christian faith. What he delivered to them is something of first importance. Paul was not the originator of this truth.

[4:59] He didn't invent it. But it is the truth that he himself received. It was the truth that was proclaimed to him by the risen Lord, no doubt. And by Ananias, God's messenger to him, after the Damascus Road encounter.

And so Paul says, I received this according to the scriptures. So when we hear that phrase, according to the scriptures, we think, of course, that Paul is referring to what he's writing right now. Scriptures. And Paul does. Paul does believe that his writing, and the New Testament writing, is holy scriptures. But that's not what he means when he says, whenever you read in the New Testament, according to scriptures, he's really referring to the Old Testament books.

And so, imagine what Paul is saying here. Essentially, Paul is affirming what our Lord himself said on the road, when he met those two disciples.

Do you remember? In Luke 24, on the road to Emmaus, what did Jesus say to those two men? He said to them, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

[6:20] How the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead. Resurrection. On the third day. In essence, the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It speaks of the whole promise of God, of his plan of salvation, which is centered on this very fact of the death and the resurrection, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

And this is not news for the Corinthians, as they read Paul's letter. It's not news for many of us this morning, as we sit here. But still, in verse 3 to 4, Paul wants to give the basic facts of the resurrection.

And in verse 5 to 11, he gives the evidence of the resurrection. And I want to invite us, whether it's familiar territory for you, or you're hearing it for the first time this Sunday, I invite you to listen, and not gloss over the foundational truths that are in these verses.

So let's look in verse 3 to 4 at the fact of the resurrection. Paul says, beginning in verse 3, I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

[7:57] Notice here. He died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day. Those are historical facts about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And then in verse 5 to 11, he gives the evidence. So he says, he appeared. More than once, he said, he appeared. And Paul lists all these witnesses to whom Jesus appeared.

So those words coming, imagine when he says he appeared. Those words coming after he died and was buried are meant to imply, as you hear them, an empty tomb.

After all, he died, and he was buried, but then he appeared. It's meant to imply an empty tomb and a risen body.

And this is no mere apparition. It wasn't a resuscitation. We know the facts of Jesus' death, right? Died, pierced through, on the side, water and blood comes out.

[9:12] If you were to, don't do it, but if you were to, like, pierce through me right now, it's not water and blood that will come out. What will come out? Blood. But why does water and blood come out when you pierce somebody?

When does water and blood come out? They're dead. There's no circulation going on anymore. Right? The Roman soldiers are experts in killing.

They don't make mistakes. In fact, their life depended on it. He was buried. All of these are proofs that he died.

It wasn't a resuscitation. And it wasn't an apparition either. Like, you've heard all these tired, old arguments that try to explain away the miraculous event in history of the resurrection of our Lord. And oftentimes when you hear them, when you hear those excuses against the facts of the resurrection, the excuses often defy reason. And I'm not just saying that because I'm a Christian and I'm a pastor.

[10:17] Read the facts of the resurrection compared to the excuses that people give. It doesn't hold up. So are we to believe that first century people can't tell the difference between an apparition and a physical body?

Well, we have the accounts in the Gospels, don't we? See, Jesus appeared bodily to his disciples. They walked with him. Right?

Like the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, they walked miles with him. And they sat down to eat with him. He cooked for them. He ate fish with them. That's not an apparition.

Well, some say, you know those primitive people of the first century world. They're not like us in the modern age. They were probably hallucinating from religious ecstasy.

But if you tell me that 500 plus people had the same hallucination, reason or common sense compels me to correct you and say, that's not how hallucinations work.

[11:31] If 500 people see the same thing and attest to it, many of them on their life, then the most reasonable answer is that it really happened.

And look at the witnesses that Paul gives us in these, verse 5 to 11. These are irrefutable witnesses. These are the kind of witnesses that will hold up in the court of law.

So, Paul tells us he appeared to Cephas. Who is Cephas? Peter. That's his Aramaic name, Peter. Then he appeared to the 12. That is, the 12 apostles. Then these are his closest friends and confidants.

They know him well. They know him well enough not to mistake him for anyone else. And then Paul tells us that he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time.

By the way, the practice, the custom in those times is to only count men. So imagine, 500 brothers, there's probably more than 1,000 people here. Not counting women and children. Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, Paul tells us.

[12:50] Though some have fallen asleep. Know what Paul says there. Over 500 people can confirm the evidence that he is risen. Most of them, as I'm writing this to you, 1 Corinthians, most of these 500 people are still alive.

You can go ask them. You can verify my claim. And then Paul then goes on. He says, Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Now when you read James here, this is not James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee. That's not that James. This is James, the brother of Jesus.

He was not among the believers in the Gospels. But he came to faith. We saw that in Acts. In fact, he was the leader of the Jerusalem church.

But he came to faith, and later in the epistles, we see that he was pivotal, one of the leaders of the church. Now imagine for a second, trying to convince your brother, a skeptical one at that.

[13:56] Imagine trying to convince your brother that you've risen from the dead. What would convince him to believe you? Can I surmise that only the truth can do that?

Only the physical, bodily risen Lord, appearing to his unbelieving brother James, can cause him to believe that indeed Jesus is God, and he's God's Messiah.

So, Jesus has appeared to his friends, his closest friends, who would know him, if it wasn't, if it was somebody else that, you know, a body double, they know who Jesus is.

They've walked around with him for three years. He appeared to 500 people at a time. They saw him. And he appeared to a skeptic, like James, who was his close brother, who grew up with him, who knew him as well.

He's appeared to friends, and he's appeared to unwilling believers. Now, he's appeared to skeptics.

Then, Paul tells us, verse 8, Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me, for I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

[15:19] The word untimely born, in verse 8, is *ekroma*, in Greek. And more accurately, forgive me for the imagery, but the word actually, more accurately, means aborted fetus, or miscarriage.

That's how Paul describes himself. Why would he say that? He describes it as, he appeared to me as one who could never have life. What does Paul mean?

Well, because Paul knows that such is the miracle of the resurrection, and its power, that it gives life to the dead, and transforms the unworthy.

And Paul was unworthy. Paul is the greatest proof of the resurrection. He was a committed enemy of God. He was a zealous persecutor of the church.

his life was so bent away from Christ, that he was bent on killing all the followers of Jesus, hunting them from town to town.

[16:27] And he considered himself the most undeserving. Yet, he was the recipient of the life-giving grace of God that brought him from death to life.

So, do you doubt the resurrection? Look at Paul, an arch enemy of God's people, transformed by the irresistible grace of God into the most prolific apostle and evangelist.

So, Paul lays out the evidences. Now, having laid it down in detail, the facts and evidence of the resurrection, Paul now comes in verse 12 to the heart of the issue.

He says in verse 12, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? Now, this is the problem after all with the Corinthian church.

They likely, they did believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Meaning, they, like us, confess it as an article of faith. they confess it as an article of faith, but they don't really believe it enough to stake their life on it.

[17 : 47] Sound familiar? Just last year, in 2023, a research poll showed that 66% of Americans believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, as stated in the Bible.

I was quite surprised. I didn't think it was going to be that high. But, unfortunately, out of that 66%, a majority don't think it has anything to do with their lives.

And an apologist being interviewed about the poll commented on this, and she says, and I quote, it's out-breaking because the idea that someone will say they believe Jesus actually rose from the dead, but that this belief would have so little impact on their life is truly tragic.

This exposes the danger of cultural Christianity, the vague ascent to Christian beliefs without any evidence of actual faith in Christ.

So, when you say the apostles are the Nicene Creed, which we say every Sunday, and hopefully if you're doing the daily office, you say every day, the apostles' creed, those are familiar to you.

[19 : 13] When you say those, confession of faith, do you believe what you confess? Are they just a declaration of a content of belief, or can you stake your life on them?

the church in Corinth, plagued by arrogance, they thought they'd gone beyond the meaning of the words in that confession about the resurrection of the dead.

They think they've graduated from that. And that's why Paul asked them in verse 2, go back to verse 2, that's why he asked them, are you old and fast to the word?

That is, are you old and fast not only just to the things you say, but to the substance of the gospel? Are you old and fast to that? The word that I preached to you, unless you believed in vain, Paul asked them, unless you believe without clear consideration of what it is that you're saying and you're believing in.

So let us, this morning, consider clearly what Paul is saying. Because Paul says in verse 13, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

[20 : 37] So God promised that his Messiah will conquer death and defeat sin. So if Jesus is risen, then death is defeated and the tide has turned for all those who believe in him.

sin. Now follow Paul's logic here. He's saying to us that if the dead in Christ will not be raised bodily, then not even Christ has been raised.

Because for Paul, after all, why did he die? What for? To what end did he die? Paul has already said in verse 3 that he died for who's sins?

Our sins. He had no sins to atone for. He was perfect. He was without sin. He died for our sins. And if that is true, which it is, then he has satisfied the wages of sin, which is what?

Death. He has paid the price in full, and thereby he has loosened forever the hold of sin, which is what?

[21 : 54] Death. He's loosened the hold of sin over us. So if you say, Christ has risen from the dead, can you not see that his victory over death is yours as well?

And if you deny your bodily resurrection, if you're in Christ, then what you're saying is that Christ hasn't risen. Because he has risen, because he has ascended, so you too will rise again.

If you don't believe this, then you might as well be on a golf course this morning. Or whatever else people do on a Sunday morning, apart from being in God's house.

You might as well be doing that this morning. Of course, if it is true, and you believe it, then you better be nowhere else when at church on a Sunday morning, if you can help it.

But if you don't, what are you doing? And that's Paul's implication here. What are you doing? I hope if you don't, and you're here this morning, I hope you will recognize the words of the gospel here, and listen, and come to faith.

[23 : 09] So, I am happy you're here if you don't believe, but I hope that you don't stay an unbeliever. That you hear the words of Christ's death and resurrection for you, for your sins, and

you will believe and trust in him.

But if you're a Christian, you come every Sunday, and you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, but you don't believe in your own body of the resurrection, why? Paul goes on in verse 14, if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. He says we are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised.

Paul essentially is trying to show the futility of it all, if the resurrection isn't true. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen, then we are liars, Paul says.

Holy Trinity, everything we've been looking at in this book of 1 Corinthians, and every book of the Bible, for that matter, everything is a lie, and Paul is a liar, and I am a liar, if there is no resurrection of the dead.

[24 : 29] Do you see the consequence of unbelief? Paul says in verse 16, for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile.

No faith. You have no faith. You have no substance in it, and you are still in your sins. if Christ isn't risen from the dead, and there is no resurrection of the dead.

You are still in your sins. You have no forgiveness. And then verse 18, then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ, they also have perished.

There is no future if Christ is not risen, and there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul finishes in verse 19, if in Christ, we have hope in this life only.

We are of all people, most, most to be pitied. Paul believed in the resurrection of the dead, precisely because he believed Jesus rose bodily from the dead.

[25 : 49] For him, it's not mere empty words. It's the event that changed everything for him. he staked his life on it. If you were to see St.

Paul before us this morning, if he were standing before us, you will see on the apostle's body the mark of that belief.

He staked his life on it. Not only him, his fellow apostles staked their life on it. many saints after them have staked their life upon this belief of the resurrection of the dead.

You know, in the Old Testament, there's a day called the Day of Atonement. We Jews still celebrate it today. They call it Yom Kippur.

It comes once a year. And what happens on this Day of Atonement? The High Priest, after making bull sacrifices for his sin, now it takes two goats.

[26 : 59] And one of the goats is taken as an atoning sacrifice. The other goat is taken as a scapegoat, which bears the sins of the people away into the desert.

And these things were merely just a shadow of what Christ accomplished as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world. But I want you to observe the echoes of the gospel in that very act in the Old Testament.

The High Priest goes on Yom Kippur into the most holy place. The first goat is sacrificed and its blood is sprinkled on the Ark of Covenant.

For what purpose? It's sprinkled to appease the wrath of God against the people's sin to propitiate God's anger. And then the other goats, the High Priest lays his hand on the other goat and confesses all the sins of all of Israel.

And then they send the goat out into the desert to signify that the sins of the people are being removed from them by God, at least for the year.

[28 : 17] These were meant to be merely living parables for the people, to remind them of God's promise that he will one day come to deliver them.

So in the Old Testament, people knew that the sacrifice offered was accepted when the High Priest comes out of the most holy place. They knew at the sight of the High Priest coming out of the most holy place that God has accepted the offerings that they've offered.

The priest's life is forfeit because for a man to go into God's holy presence, he's as good as dead. So when he goes in, his life is forfeit.

But when he comes out, it signifies what? God's grace extended to the High Priest, giving him his life back as he comes out.

If he were not to come back alive, it would not only be bad news for him, because it would mean that he's dead, but not only bad news for him and his family, but it would also be bad news for the people, for all of Israel as well.

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