

# When Life Turns to Ashes

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[illegible]

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

And so tonight we're going to focus our attention here at 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 3. And one of the things that we do here at Faith Family is we ask you if you're able to please stand.

I know you just got comfortable, but please stand for just a moment as we honor the reading of God's Word. And let's look here at 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 3.

[ 2 : 23 ] The Apostle Paul here is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And he says, I delivered to you 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 Scripture, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the other 12.

Then He appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

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.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, it was the grace of God that was with me.

Whether then it is I or they, so we preached, and you so believed. Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

[ 3 : 37 ] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.

We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if it's true that the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

This is God's Word. Would you pray with me and for me as I seek tonight to proclaim the good news? Let's pray. Lord, help me now.

[ 4 : 41 ]     Proclaim the truth of Your Word. Give us ears to hear, hearts to receive this great news. Lord, I pray that You would do a supernatural work in this place tonight.

Pray that in these few moments, with any distractions that might be around us, Lord, that we would focus in, and that we would listen to what You are saying to us, and that You would guide us in truth.

And I pray this in the name of the risen Christ, the Lord Jesus, and God's people said, Amen. Amen, you can be seated. Seize the day.

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may. Old time is still a flying. This same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying.

Many of you recognize those words. They're the familiar words of the 17th century poet Robert Herrick and his work entitled To Make Much of Time. But my guess is not all of you recognize those words from literature.

[ 5 : 46 ]     Many of you recognize those words from that famous scene in the movie Dead Poets Society. It's the scene where Mr. Keating, played by the late Robin Williams, gathers his class of boys around the hallway trophy case, and he challenges them to think about their lives.

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may. The Latin term for that sentiment is carpe diem. Now, who knows what that means?

Carpe diem. That's seize the day. Very good. Mr. Meeks. Meeks. Another unusual name. Seize the day. Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.

Why does the writer use these lines? Because he's in a hurry. No. Ding! Thanks for playing anyway. Because we are food for worms, lads.

Because believe it or not, each and every one of us in this room is one day going to stop breathing, turn cold, and die. I'd like you to step forward over here.

[ 7 : 01 ]     And peruse some of the faces from the past. You've walked past them many times. I don't think you've really looked at them. They're not that different from you, are they?

Same haircuts. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they're destined for great things, just like many of you.

Their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because you see, gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils.

I want you to think about what Mr. Keating's trying to do in that scene. He's trying to get those boys to recognize something that all of us in this place tonight understand.

And that is that one day life will turn to ashes. To use the language of the film, one day we will be food for worms. Over the last several weeks here at Faith Family, we've been talking about things in life that can turn to ashes.

[ 8 : 16 ]     There are seasons when our hope or our dreams or expectations or opportunities can turn to ashes. But God is at work in all of them. And yet there remains a reality over every single one of those things.

And that is, there are not just things in life that turn to ashes, but life itself will turn to ashes.

Which, of course, begs the question, what is one to do given this reality? How are we to live given that this is true? And once again, Mr. Keating tries to point and guide his class in a direction on this matter.

On another occasion, he huddles the boys together and tells them this. Huddle up! We don't read and write poetry because it's cute.

We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life.

[ 9 : 34 ] But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for. These are what we stay alive for.

I want you to put the message of that together. In other words, what he's saying is this. Listen closely. Since there is a day when you and I will be food for worms, life will turn to ashes, then you had better find something in the meantime to live for.

In other words, gather ye rosebuds while you may. Find out something to do in the meantime that you can focus your life on. And I would submit to you, Faith family, that every one of us here tonight, in one way or another, does this.

We look to someone or something to occupy our minds, given this reality. For some of you, it's nature. You live for that beautiful fall day, the blowing of the leaves, springtime in Minnesota, that walk in the park, that trip to the lake, to go hiking in the mountains, or to take that trip to the ocean where you get lost in the bigness of things.

Maybe for you, it's not nature. Maybe for you, it's food. Like, you live for that hot dog at the ballpark. You live to have mom's home cooking when you go home for Thanksgiving.

[ 11 : 03 ] Here's what it is for me as it relates to food. And if you agree, say amen. A good steakhouse. And all God's people said, amen.

Filet, medium, maybe a bone-in ribeye where it's juicy, makes you want to smack your mama. Like, man, you live for stuff like that. Or maybe for you, it's not nature or food.

Maybe it's literature. I mean, for you, there's nothing better than a good book or poetry. You're the type of person that likes to think about big ideas. You like to get lost in fiction.

For me in this category, I love to study theology and to try to understand the things of God. Maybe for you, it's none of those things. It's sports.

Like, you live to go to the game and experience the crowd and the moment and the loss. You live to take just a few days off for March Madness and just get absorbed in all that takes place in the tournament.

[ 12 : 07 ] You love to get caught up in the drama, the competition. Like, you live for that thrill of the victory. And there's nothing worse than the agony of defeat.

For some of you, like, you live for music. You love to get lost in the song. You love the mood that music puts you in, how it says things that you don't have the words to be able to say.

Again, most of you know my love for country music, but you put that aside. Give me some Sinatra. Any amens? Right? You know, fly me to the moon.

Like, I can get lost in that. Maybe for you, it's not music. Maybe it's relationships. You love to just pour your life into your kids. You love family vacations and spoiling those grandbabies.

It's the feeling of falling in love and having that wonderful time out with your best friends. As Brad Paisley would say, Yeah, I live for little moments like that.

[ 13 : 17 ] These. You knew I'd work country music in somehow, right? Most of you are not surprised. But I live for little moments like that.

And of course, I've only scratched the surface. There are so many things in life worth living for. Amen? I mean, would you not agree with me tonight that life is beautiful?

And there are many things in life that are worth living. Would you agree? And that is why what I'm about to say is going to bother some of you. Notice this on the screen.

Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, nothing in this life is worth living for. Not nature, not food, not literature, not sports, not music.

Yes, grandparents, not even grandbabies. Let me put it in a more positive way and then I'm going to back it up. Don't think I'm going to make such a statement without backing it up. Here it is in a more positive way.

[ 14 : 19 ] Only the resurrection of Jesus Christ makes life worth living. And that is not my argument. That is actually the argument of the Apostle Paul here in 1 Corinthians 15.

Notice the contrast that Paul makes here. First in verse 16. Look at chapter 15 and verse 16. Paul says, For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

And if Christ has not been raised, listen to this language, your faith is futile and you're still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. In summary, what Paul is saying here is, if this life is all there is, your faith, if you're a person of faith, is meaningless.

Those that have passed on have perished. And we are of all people most to be pitied. If this life is all there is, what's the point?

[ 15 : 34 ] But now notice what he goes on to say in verse 55, chapter 15. He says, Let me put this together.

Here's what Paul is saying. If this life will turn to ashes, and that's all there is, game over, then that makes this life one of vanity.

But if there is hope beyond the ashes, then our labor, that is the things that we do in this life, the things that we enjoy in this life, are not in vain.

They have purpose and meaning to them. Let me unpack this just a little bit further. See, here's something that all of us understand. All of us know this. Notice this point.

Nothing ruins life more than death. Would you agree with that? I mean, there's no bigger bummer in life than death. And Paul says in verse 22 that in Adam all die.

[ 17 : 04 ] As Robert Herrick again says, this same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying. Life will turn to ashes. And the reason that's a problem is that death, if you allow yourself to think about it, has a way of taking the flavor out of life.

Bob? Yeah? Are you afraid of death?

Yeah. Me too. There's no way out of it. You're going to die. I'm going to die.

It's going to happen. And what difference does it make if it's tomorrow and 80 years? Much sooner in your case.

Do you know how fast time goes? I was six like yesterday. Me too. I'm going to die. You are going to die.

[ 18 : 16 ] What else is there to be afraid of? Poor Siggy's right. I mean, there's nothing that ruins life more than death.

And if you stop to think about that for very long, it begins to put you in a bad mood. It takes the flavor away from life. Henry Hargraves is a photographer who did a series of photographs that he called No Seconds.

What he did is it was a collection of pictures of the last meals of prisoners on death row. So, for example, John Wayne Gacy, for his very last meal, he asked for original KFC, French fries, shrimp, and a pound of strawberries.

Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, for his last meal, what he asked was for three pints of mint chocolate chip ice cream. Ronnie Lee Gardner asked for his last meal for lobster, steak, apple pie with ice cream while watching the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

And there were other examples that he gave, but here's the question that I want to ask you. Here's the thing I really want you to think about. How do you think that last meal tasted? Don't you think it tasted just a little bit different than all the others?

[ 19 : 38 ] Here's what I mean. No amount of comfort food can comfort you in the face of death, no matter how delicious it is. Death has a way of taking the taste out of life because nothing ruins life more than death.

And it's why most of us, if we're honest, we do everything that we can not to think about death. You're hoping there's a different point to this sermon than this one.

We try to romanticize death. So we'll say things like, well, you know, death is just a natural part of life or death just makes you appreciate what you have or things like that.

But of course, that doesn't change the reality that we will turn to ashes. Or maybe we try to minimize death. Christians do this a lot, unfortunately. We try to act like death isn't a horrible thing or, well, they're just kind of in a better place.

But biblically, death is a problem. Death is something to be grieved. Jesus did what upon the death of Lazarus? He wept and he wept bitterly.

[ 20 : 44 ] He was grieved over that. Or maybe you try to ignore death. That is, you try to have as much fun as you can to try to keep death off in the distance.

You kind of treat death like this. You can't triple stamp a double stamp. You can't triple stamp a double stamp. Lloyd, you can't triple stamp a double stamp. Lloyd, Lloyd, you guys! Of course, sticking your head in the sand or sticking your fingers in your ears and acting like death isn't a reality doesn't solve the fact that it is a reality.

Or maybe you try to postpone death. So you eat healthy and you exercise and you try to act and dress younger than you are. Or maybe you dye your hair.

Seriously, Wayne, you're not fooling anybody, right? I mean, you'll do anything that you can to put the brakes on of what is going over the cliff. You do anything you can to postpone this reality.

Or maybe lastly, you obsess about death. You're the type of person that thinks that maybe if I just think about it all the time, it will never happen. Here's my point. Come in, come in, come here.

[ 21 : 50 ] None of these strategies actually keep you from death, which in and of itself impacts your ability to enjoy life.

You know this. If you do not believe that this is true, listen, the next time that you're enjoying a book or a sunset or a steak or a game or time with those grandbabies, stop in that moment and think about the fact that you will one day be food for worms and tell me it doesn't ruin the moment.

Are you tracking with me? Nothing ruins life more than death. Death and its reality takes the flavor of life away.

My point here, faith family, is this. You and I are fighting a battle we cannot win. And that's why we need someone else to win it for us. Let me say that again.

We are fighting a battle that we cannot win. And that is why we need someone to win it for us. And that is the good news of Easter, is it not?

- [ 23 : 00 ] Verse 21. Look at verse 21. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.
- For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Jesus was victorious over death.
- Paul here says that in Adam we turn to ashes. In Adam we die. But enter Jesus, who dies, is raised from the dead, never to die again.
- To which you might ask, okay, but how does the resurrection of Jesus make this life worth living? Well, I'm starting to get excited. Are you noticing I'm starting to get excited?
- Now we're getting to the good news. Watch what Paul does as he takes the resurrection of Jesus and applies it to our life. Verse 54.
- [ 24 : 01 ] When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.
- O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Therefore, because we have this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, our labor is not in vain.
- Here's Paul's point. Notice it on the screen. What happened to Jesus will happen to those who belong to Jesus.
- That's what Paul does. He takes the reality of what Jesus did, the victory that Jesus has over the grave, and he says what is true of Jesus is true of you.
- [ 25 : 03 ] You share in his victory. In fact, notice the metaphor that Paul uses in verse 20. Chapter 15, verse 20.
- It says, But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead the, say it, first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Now, that term, first fruits, it's a harvest term.
- It's the first round of the harvest, if you will. In other words, the first round of the harvest is telling you what the full harvest is going to be like.
- In other words, this is what Paul is saying, and this is the exciting news. Look at it on the screen. The life of Jesus is the first fruits of our life in Jesus.
- He's telling you, that is what happened to him, he is telling you what the future harvest is going to be like. When Jesus walks out of the grave, when Jesus is victorious over the dead, that's the first fruits of what's going to happen to you when you are resurrected.
- [ 26 : 15 ] And the perishable puts on imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality. Faith family, I may be the only one excited tonight, but what Paul is saying here is that what happened to Jesus 2,000 years ago is a guarantee of what's going to happen to you in the future.
- That's the good news of Easter. And I'm going to be honest with you, this has actually helped me understand the tension that I've held for quite some time, even as a pastor, even as a preacher, particularly on weekends like this.
- Here's the dilemma or the struggle that I would have. I would celebrate victory over the grave, but realizing we still die.
- Think with me for just a moment. I would come into moments like this, and I would say, we have victory over the grave, knowing that as a pastor, I'll do a lot of funerals this year. And it felt a little bit, well, but where's the victory?

If there's victory over the grave, why is there still death? Are you tracking with me at all? And I would struggle with that tension. And the more I begin to understand this idea of first fruits, that namely that what happened to Jesus is what will happen to me, then it began to click.

[ 27 : 37 ] Watch. Jesus' life turned to ashes. Jesus died. He died. And three days later, he was raised imperishably and victoriously.

And if he's the first fruits, if he's the foreshadowing of what is true for us, it means that yes, my life will turn to ashes.

But in Christ, it will be raised victoriously because his life is my life.

And that's good news. Now, if you're tracking with me, you're saying you still haven't answered the question. You still haven't solved the issue.

Pastor, you said that without the resurrection, there is no hope for living. There's no reason for living. That is, only the resurrection of Jesus makes this life worth living.

[ 28 : 41 ] It's great that we have future hope, but how does that impact my now? Once again, verse 58, we're almost done. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast and movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

Are you with me? Come in here for just a moment. Here's what Paul is saying. Because of the victory of Jesus, what you do now in this life is not vanity.

Let me put it another way. Notice this on the screen. Your future death makes it hard to find a reason for living, but your future resurrection makes this life worth living.

Nature, food, literature, sports, music, they take on a whole new flavor. And meaning when you realize that life doesn't end in the ashes, it ends in victory.

Every time I came to this in my notes this week as I prepared, it got me excited. Look at this on the screen. Here's the point I'm making. Your last meal won't lose its flavor because you won't have a last meal.

[ 29 : 56 ] Instead, you can rest assured that your last meal is an appetizer, preparing you for a future feast.

Don't you understand the resurrection of Jesus makes this life taste sweeter? It makes us enjoy it all the more because we know that when life turns to ashes, it will not be the end.

It is the resurrection of Jesus and only the resurrection of Jesus that makes life worth living. Now, as I close, let me just say, I know that there are some of you here and you would be skeptical at the idea of resurrection.

And what I would just say to you is that you already believe in the resurrection and you may not even realize it. You already accept the resurrection in so many ways in the world around you.

And Paul points us to that. Last verse here, look at verse 35, chapter 15, verse 35. But some will ask, how are the dead raised?

[ 31 : 08 ] With what kind of body do they come? You foolish person, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

In other words, here's what Paul does. And it's so helpful is he actually takes the resurrection and shows you how you see this reality in creation all around you.

Let me give you just a few examples. Take, for instance, a seed. You take a seed and you plant it in the ground and what happens? It dies. And upon dying, it then comes back to life and it produces something new.

There's new life. You see this all the time. Or take, for instance, the seasons. There's the dying of fall. We definitely know this next one.

The death of winter. And then there's the blooming of spring, which leads to full life of summer.

[ 32 : 19 ] I mean, does anybody not know this more than people from Minnesota? Like we, listen, we are constantly being shown death, resurrection, death, resurrection in creation and life all around us.

In other words, all around us is evidence of the resurrection. That creation is declaring to you the reality of dying, the reality of death, the reality of resurrection, and the reality of new life.

And I would ask you tonight, how can you be skeptical of something you already know is true? How can you be skeptical of something you already see around you all the time?

Maybe you should be skeptical of your skepticism. Maybe there is a beauty around you declaring the good news of the gospel.

And through the eyes of faith, you can see it. One thing we all know is true is this. One day, our life will turn to ashes.

[ 33 : 33 ] We will eventually be food for worms. And the best advice that this world can give you is this. Gather you rosebuds while you may. Find something to live for and enjoy it while you can.

But I tell you tonight, listen, no matter how good the things of this life may taste, your inevitable death will change its flavor. The gospel offers you far greater news for this life and in the life to come.

The gospel says this, because Jesus faced the ashes of Friday, and because Jesus was raised from the ashes on Sunday, your life is not in vain.

Life is worth the living just because he lives. And all God's people said, amen. Pray with me. Lord, we thank you for the truth of your word.

We thank you for the reality of the resurrection and what it means, not just in the life to come, but what it means in this life now. It allows us, yes, to rest in the hope that we have victory over the grave, but it allows us to enjoy those relationships and enjoy that meal and enjoy that music in a way that no one else can.

[ 35 : 05 ] Because rather than death taking the flavor away from life, resurrection adds flavor to this life. It is not in vain. As Paul would say, if we hope in this life only, we are to be pitied.

If this really is all we have, where is the meaning? But in that empty tomb is where meaning is found.

And if there is somebody here tonight and they have never found the meaning of life through trusting in the risen Christ, I pray that tonight would be that moment.

I pray right now that they would look to you by faith and that they would find what life is truly all about. And for those here in this place tonight who are followers of Jesus, I pray that you would help us truly rest in the hope of the gospel.

The hope that even though life will turn to ashes, Jesus' life is our life and we will be raised.

[ 36 : 25 ] So we can go enjoy that meal and enjoy this life knowing that it's not in vain. In Jesus' name we pray.

And God's people said, Amen.