

I Corinthians 15:12-26 “Secure Forever in Christ”

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- How I long to breathe the air of heaven. That's what I want us to do this morning. I think we've started.
- I think that's what you're tasting a little bit of. You're breathing in the air of heaven where pain is gone and mercy fills the streets.
- Can you imagine? Because you're not completely able to breathe it in right now, right? Pain's not gone all the way. And you feel that.
- Can you even imagine that day? What we're going to see this morning is that union with Christ is the air of heaven.
- [1 : 0 0] That's what you breathe. Today's the end of our summer series on what so many have called the most glorious theological truth of all.
- That by grace, through faith, we are inseparably connected to Jesus in an unbreakable union.
- And my heart for us, I believe God's heart for us, has been to make this theological truth a personal experience.
- That Jesus not be merely throwing us good gifts from a great distance away, but that he truly be the closest relationship that we know.
- He marries himself to us, the Bible says. That close. Before we add one final link to the chain this morning, I want to take a look back at union with Christ the last few weeks.
- [2 : 0 6] I want to encourage you as we do to pick one of these images that helps you to see yourself in Christ and Christ in you.
- Something that you can cling to, that he's always near for you. We began this summer by saying that God has located his people in Christ so that whatever happens to Jesus happens to us, right?
- When you're on the plane, you go where it goes. Then we saw God's design was that this location in Christ be what primarily defines Christians.
- Our identity, our value, our significance settled as we are hidden, covered in Christ.
- Like entering into the sprocket costume for a new identity, right? That's where the reality of our relationship with God, our justification is settled once and for all.
- [3 : 1 4] As we are blessed in Christ. That our union with Christ is like the stocking out of which flow all sorts of gifts. Like forgiveness and adoption and inheritance.
- All because we're connected to him. In particular, we're loved in Christ with an unstoppable love that nothing can separate us from. Just as nothing can stop God from loving Jesus, his table reminds us.
- These are once and for all realities. But that's not all that comes in union with Christ. Union with Christ is for life now as well, isn't it?

Even when the waves of suffering crash against the ship of our life, being in Christ is enough to hold us fast.

Remember? Union with Christ is the source of not only our justification, being made right with God, but also our ongoing sanctification, being made like God.

[4 : 22] Since we abide in him moment by moment, like Rick Hoyt, abiding in his father, depending on his power, rejoicing in his victory, so that we bear fruit in Christ, right?

That's the way to grow, to change, Jesus tells us, the only way. Likewise, we fight sin in our lives in Christ because he is always with us so we can fight sin because we can't imagine dragging Christ into sin.

And we can rely on his power when we fall short in the battle. Last week, we saw that we are never alone in this battle because we are connected in Christ to one another.

If he is our brother, we get lots of other brothers and sisters in his family sharing that deep bond. And we glimpsed the glory that Jesus is inviting us into with him and his Father and Holy Spirit, all of us together.

And that's where we're landing this week. We've hinted at this repeatedly through the summer. But this relationship with Christ, it's no temporary relationship, is it?

[5 : 44] It's no contingency plan. It's no short-term feel-good story. That's not it. Our union with Christ is so inseparable that it carries us from beginning to end, united by God's grace before our birth.

And now as we look ahead to heaven and the future, beyond our death, union with Christ gives us eternal hope.

It makes us secure forever. Think back to that first image of a plane with the word united there, so helpfully placed just for us, for the purpose of this summer.

The assurance we have today is that having been seated in that plane, in Christ, we will reach our destination.

There will almost certainly be turbulence around us. There will surely be fears and doubts within us, but we can rest assured that we will arrive in heaven with God.

[7 : 00] How do we know? How do we know that? Perhaps the Bible's best, most reassuring answer to that question is, because the plane made it.

Christ made it home. To hear this glorious truth, to breathe some more of heaven's air, we go to Easter. And we turn to 1 Corinthians 15.

It's a classic passage about Jesus' resurrection. I'm going to read it beginning at verse 12 to get us up to speed a little bit in Paul's conversation.

Then I'll slow down for our purposes this morning. This is the eternal, infallible, enduring word of God.

Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

[8 : 08] And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching's in vain, your faith is in vain. We're 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.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. Do you hear what? Paul's assuming union with Christ already, isn't he? What happens to Jesus happens to us.

So if we're not raised, he's not either. Paul says twice, right? Verse 17. 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 this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. Oh, so we died with Christ.

Is that it? Is that the end of the story? Verse 20. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

[9 : 15] The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 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.

But each in his own order. Christ the first fruits. Then at his coming, those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Father, what a glorious hope that is. God, would you give us a deep breath of the air of heaven today.

Fill our souls with your joy and hope in Christ. We ask in his name. Amen. Apparently, the Corinthians are having some discussions surrounding life after death.

[10 : 34] That's pretty understandable, right? I bet some of us have questions about that. What's it like? What will happen? We'll see they're wondering about what resurrected bodies would be like.

But most importantly, they want to know, will the dead be raised? It's a big question. And Paul is really eager to build their faith.

And he does it in this passage by assuring them that Christ himself has risen from the dead. He's just told them that this is at the heart of the good news.

And that you can count on the fact that Jesus rose in part because of all the eyewitness testimony. Jesus appearing to individuals like Paul. To smaller groups of 12, for example.

To large groups, 500 plus at the same time. And that the Roman soldiers couldn't find his body to save their lives. Many of his followers insist on having seen him alive even when it costs their lives.

[11 : 42] Religious leaders spend their lives trying to disprove his resurrection, but they can't. Paul says, Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead.

And he's the first fruits. Which idea means the full harvest is coming. For as in Adam, all die.

In Adam, meaning in sin. In death. That's all of us stuck there when we're covered in Adam, identified in Adam.

And he says, So also in Christ shall all be made alive. You see the difference, right? In Christ. Christ, the first fruits.

Then he comes back and all of those who belong to him, all of those in Christ, rise with him. Friend, I want to say to you this morning, if you have not stepped on the plane, trusted in Jesus by faith in his life, and his death, and his resurrection in your place, then you are still in Adam.

[12 : 59] In the terminal, if you will, where we all start. And it's not a good place to be. I want to warn you of that because I love you and I care about you.

Being there means being in sin. It means facing death on your own. And I don't want that for any of us. Because the way to safety and the life is found by being covered by Jesus.

It is the only way. But if you have come aboard, so to speak, you can be gloriously certain, completely confident, just as confident as you are, that Jesus is in heaven today, that one day you will be too.

If Christ died and you died with him, then as Christ lives, you live with him. Never to die again, Paul says elsewhere.

This is a wonderful truth. Charles Wesley was celebrating it when he wrote this great hymn we sing almost every Easter. Christ the Lord is risen today.

[14 : 20] Hallelujah. And look down at that second verse. Soar we now. Where Christ has led, following our exalted head.

Man, he's got good theology, doesn't he? He reads his Bible, Charles Wesley does. Okay? Jesus is our head. We are members of his body.

So where the head goes, the body goes, right? No other tricks. The head goes, the body goes. We follow him. Made like him. Like him we rise.

Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. Hallelujah. Man, when you sing that this Easter, I hope you remember union with Christ. Crucified with Christ.

Buried with Christ. Raised with Christ. He lives, you live. There's, it can't be any other way, can it? You're that united to him. It's the certainty Paul writes about in Romans 8 when he assures us there is, therefore now, no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus because all those in Christ are adopted into God's family, his children, which verse 17 says means we are co-heirs with Christ.

[15 : 36] Christ. Wow. And we suffer with him. He suffered. We experience suffering, don't we?

Oh man, yeah, can't deny that. As surely as you experience suffering, you can trust. Christ. We will be glorified with him.

Remember, at the end of the day, neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, not even death.

That same promise is said differently to the Colossians. Your life is so hidden with Christ in God that when Christ appears, you also will appear with him in glory over and over.

God wants you to know that you are secure forever. Your eternity is gloriously certain in Christ.

[16 : 53] But there's even one further step God is wanting to make sure we don't miss. You hear all the talk of glory in these passages? You'll appear with him in glory, glorified with him.

So, there is a quality to this eternal hope that you and I can hardly imagine. We really can't comprehend and that's that because of our union with Christ, we will be gloriously alive.

I can't even put it into words for you. We can hardly fathom this glory. Okay, so we're made alive. We've read that.

In Christ, we're made alive. That's wonderful enough, isn't it? Just to be alive. But then, Jesus starts ruling and reigning over all of his and our enemies.

He's the conquering king and finally, he destroys death. None of us has experienced this, but that is the power of being united to Jesus, his life, without any specter of death hanging over any of it.

[18 : 15] Can you even imagine? And Paul goes on to explain in the rest of this chapter, our physical, bodily resurrection is as certain as Christ's, the one who himself was touched by so many.

They felt the scars in his hands and his sides and he has this glorious new body. even if it was only from a physical perspective, can you imagine?

We long for this. I know you do. Friends, dementia is no match for this restoration of the body. Chronic pain that some of you have known every day of your life, it's not as lasting as this relationship that we have in Christ.

Even death is not as powerful as this life, Jesus destroys death forever. Gone.

That's what we noticed way back at the start of the summer when we looked at Ephesians 2 that one of the primary reasons that God raised us with Christ and seated us with him was because he had more, if you can imagine, more glorious grace to pour on us.

[19 : 30] Verse 7, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace poured out in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

That's the nature of God in his grace, that there's always something more to come. There's always something better ahead for us.

In fact, 1 John 3 says that part of that gracious, glorious restoration is that we will be not only with Jesus, but also so connected to him that we will actually be made like him.

The perfect image of God restored in us all the way through. See, Christ is actually that near to us, not some distant hope who is so amazing, but we could never be like that.

Pastor, you're crazy. Sin clings too tightly. My passion burns too lightly for that. Satan accuses me too rightly.

[20 : 41] I know it. No. No. You will be like him. How?

That's crazy. Listen, connect the dots. Who's the highlight of heaven? It's not you. Jesus is the highlight of heaven, and you will be always with the Lord, which means that all of the joys of union with Christ, all of the blessings, all of the fruit of union with Christ that we've discussed this summer and so much more that we haven't, it all continues forever with nothing to hinder their growth, nothing to hinder your joy, nothing to hinder your reflecting Jesus in ways that you never have before.

You are defined forever in Christ, blessed forever, loved forever, bearing fruit forever, connected to one another forever, therefore secure forever in Christ.

In Christ shall all be made alive, not just life like you know it, first Christ himself to this new life, never more to die, and then all who belong to Christ made alive, never more to die, eternally to enjoy, not some disembodied existence playing a harp floating on a cloud, no, no, no, personal, physical, loving, sin-free, fruitful, adventurous, communal, joyous, purposeful, pain-free, glorious life with no sin, no tears, no heartache, and all of Jesus, all of joy, all of Jesus all the time, inseparably, unbreakably, eternally united to him who makes heaven heaven, heaven, right?

You see his face and it's not way out there somewhere, but you say, Jesus, you're mine, you're right here with me and I'm with you forever.

[23 : 16] forever. Just listen to great British preacher Charles Spurgeon. Breathe in the air of heaven for a minute. We do not know yet, beloved, of what happiness we are capable.

Oh, may I be there if I may but see the king in his beauty, in the fullness of his joy, when he shall take by the right hand her for whom he shed his precious blood and shall know the joy which was set before him for which he endured the cross despising the shame.

I shall be blessed indeed. Oh, what a day that will be when every member of Christ shall be crowned in him and with him and every member of the mystical body shall be glorified in the glory of the bridegroom.

A day will come, the day of days, times crown and glory when the saints arrayed in the righteousness of Christ shall be eternally one with him in living, loving, lasting union, partaking together of the same glory, the glory of the Most High.

What must it be to be there? What an eternal hope. Breathe deeply of that glory.

[24 : 39] Feel him right now. Take you by the hand and know for certain that he will never let go forever. Briefly, three thoughts about today in light of that eternity.

It's that good and we're not there yet, but it's already breaking in and it must to where we are. Pastor, does this matter to me before I die or Jesus returns?

Can I just put this on a shelf and when Jesus comes back I'll enjoy it? No, no, no, I hope it matters for all of us today. First, we must have this hope in the everyday.

Here's what I mean. I often think that glory will be the Clemson football team winning the national championship this year again.

That will be glory and that's what you think too, isn't it? Thank you. And then let me get serious and imagine that you're there in heaven and you've been there a million years with Jesus.

[26 : 10] Do you think I'll even remember? If I can remember because my memory is perfect somehow, do you think the joy will even register compared to the surpassing worth of being in Christ?

Christ? For you, maybe glory feels like fitting into a smaller dress size or your golf score dropping a stroke.

Oh, yeah, that would make your day. An extra hundred dollars in the bank or that guy likes me or pays attention to me.

really, we feel that's glory, don't we? In many of our days, even our years, that would make it. For just a moment, can we all admit how laughable you mocked me, how meager, how small our conception, our thoughts of glory are, how easily distracted we are every day from the true glory.

It's why God tells us to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. What is seen is temporary, it's fleeting, it's gone fast.

[27 : 43] What is unseen is eternal, it's lasting. It's why He tells us to set our minds on things above, see that's your reality, don't be confused, you've been raised with Christ, God wants to lift your head child of God because He loves you to see the glory you have in Christ so that what you'll long for today is just an extra minute with Him now, just another chance to share His love today, a lasting glory beyond all comparison, place your hope there every day, not anywhere else.

we also really need this eternal hope in the face of tragedy. Just get in your mind for a moment the last personal tragedy you experienced or the tragedy you saw in the news and you couldn't breathe.

You had to avoid thinking about it so that you wouldn't find the thought just unbearable or despair of life. When tragedy strikes, when someone I love dies too soon, isn't it always?

When I grieve the loss of someone even before he dies, I need a hope beyond this life.

that's the only kind of hope that will do. Otherwise, to be honest, none of it makes sense. It's unjust. It's heartbreaking.

[29 : 24] It is too final. Unless it's not final. Unless there's this kind of glorious life that we've just been describing and it's really a thing and it really goes on forever and the sufferings of this life somehow in a way we don't understand achieve an eternal glory that far outweighs anything in this life, then I can breathe.

I have to breathe the air of heaven and there's eternal hope, isn't there? You've tasted it. God's hope of union with Christ speaks into our uncertainty.

We all wonder what's ahead, don't we? Perhaps even more we wonder why we can't control so much of it. Death is especially fearful for humanity.

If you know that feeling, that fearing and uncertainty around death, God says you have that feeling because you weren't made for death or for experiencing the death of others.

You were made not for separation but for an inseparable relationship. But because all we know here is relationships with an expiration date, we wonder what if I fail big time?

[31 : 03] what if I struggle with doubts about God? What if I stop following Jesus as passionately as I once did?

What will become of me when I die? I wonder. I want to say to you so that you hear on the authority of God's word, child of God, man or woman who has put your faith in Jesus, boy or girl who trusts Jesus even though you have so many questions, more questions than you feel like you have answers.

I want you to know that what God is telling you is he will not let you go because you loosen your grip on him. He won't. He will not stop blessing you because you squandered the first blessing he sent into your life.

He will not quit loving you because you became unlovely. You are inseparably united to his perfect beloved son, the one who once took all of your sins and so many, many other sins all the way to the grave with him and then he rose victoriously from the grave to glorious never ending life.

He will bring you home out of whatever you're in right now and that home will be glorious. in Christ the best is always yet to come.

[32 : 52] That's the kind of eternal hope Jesus wants you living with today and every single day with him. Looking forward, he wants your eyes fixed on that day, that day when all bow before him, when death will be no more, when we see Jesus face to face.

that's the day he wants you to have in your mind today. I know that because Jesus himself looks forward to that day when he gives us this supper to remind us of him.

Matthew who was there that night records what Jesus said. As they were eating Jesus took bread.

After blessing it, he broke it and gave it to them as I ministering in his name. Give this bread to you. He said, take, eat, this is my body.

And in the same way after supper, he took the cup and said, drink of it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[34 : 12] then he said this, I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.

Until that day Jesus said. Jesus as he goes to the cross is thinking of that day when we will drink this cup with him at the wedding supper of the lamb where we are the bride united to him forever.

Now don't be confused about this. Jesus by his spirit is present eating this supper with us today. but the physical personal bodily resurrected son of God will drink this with you your physical bodily resurrected personal child of God self on that day.

He'll drink it with us. If that's your hope right now he says eat and drink look back and remember what he's done for you. Look forward to life with him forever and live now in light of that eternal hope.

If you're here today and that's not your hope my heart for you is that you would not leave hopeless today.

[35 : 47] Don't come eat bread and wine that will mean nothing of hope to you but would you consider the offer of Jesus he's offering you an eternal hope that no matter what happens nothing could ever take away from you that you would be so connected to him that whatever happens to him and that's a lot of good stuff happens to you what a joy it would be for us to get to talk with you more about our relationship with him let's pray and we'll come to this table together what blessed assurance that Jesus is mine what a foretaste of glory divine father that you give us in this bread and wine would you take common elements would you use them to help us taste heaven to build our confidence our anticipation our wonder at our great savior do that by your spirit meeting with us we ask for Jesus sake amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org