

Up from the Grave: The Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1–20

Most world religions are based on philosophical propositions. Only four are based on their founders: Judaism (Abraham), Buddhism, Islam (Mohammed), Christianity (Jesus). All four of those founders died and all were buried. But the Christian faith is unique in that it alone boasts an empty tomb. Only Christianity claims a founder that was raised and lives eternally.

This is the greatest truth of this conference. We preach Christ risen from the dead. The resurrection is the chief point of the gospel (Calvin).

No article of faith is more essential than this one.

Paul wrote this chapter to respond to something that was happening in Corinth (cf. v. 12). Where would the idea of the denial of the resurrection come from? It came from the culture and the Greeks, who taught that the body was a prison — “why would you want to regain your prison?” That kind of Hellenistic dualism found its way into the church. Some teachers taught that once a believer died they lived eternally as a spirit.

In vv. 1-11 Paul reminds them that the resurrection is a central tenet of the gospel. The gospel preached by Paul was not something of his own creation but something he had received (v. 3; Gal. 1:11-12). The gospel he is about to summarize is not *his* gospel, but the gospel taught to him directly by Jesus Christ. It is of first importance and is essential and indispensable.

In verses 3-11 Paul summarizes the gospel. In these verses Paul reduces the gospel which he preached and the Lord gave to him to four basic propositions.

- ✓ ***I delivered to you that He died for our sins*** — His life was a ransom payment to God, instead (ἀντὶ, in the place of) of the many. God cannot let a single sin go unpunished. God credited our sins and guilt to Christ. Cf. Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21. This wasn't something that Paul invented, but it was ***according to the Scriptures*** (e.g., Gen. 12:3; 22:17-18; Is. 53:5-6, 8, 10-11). Messiah died as substitute for *our sins*.
- ✓ ***I delivered to you that He was buried*** — All four gospels explain the burial of Christ. At least four female followers observed that burial. Why is that a crucial part of the gospel? It validated His death. It was further evidence of His death — and *also* of His resurrection. The empty tomb only had meaning because there was much testimony to the burial of Jesus. He really was dead.
- ✓ ***I delivered to you that He was raised*** — All four gospels reach their crescendo in the resurrection. The Christian faith and the salvation it promises stand or fall on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Father raised Him. ***He has been*** (pfct. tense) ***raised***. He has been raised and is still alive — He now has the power of an indestructible life. But Jesus was not raised with the body of those whom He brought to life; it was a glorified body — no longer subject to human illness and weakness and death. Notice Is.

- 53 — though He died as a guilt offering, yet *He will see His offspring...*
- ✓ *I delivered to you that He appeared* (vv. 5-11) — there were at least 14 post-resurrection appearances in at least 10 locations, to a total of more than 500 people. These verses account for six of those appearances. The good news we embrace is not a blind leap of faith. It relies on the eye witness testimony of 500 individuals who saw the Savior.

The heart of the gospel is captured by these core events from our Savior's life.

Paul concludes this section with the statement, *this is the gospel we preach*.

Notice v. 12 — if you deny the resurrection, then no one has been raised and not even Jesus is raised and the result is catastrophic. If Christ is not raised, all is lost and Christianity collapses on a heap of rubbish. Paul identifies five tragic consequences if Christ is not raised:

1. There is No Legitimate Gospel (v. 14)

If Christ has not been raised, then the gospel he has just explained, the gospel is empty. Either the tomb is empty or the gospel is empty. The resurrection is what supports the gospel. If there is no resurrection, the gospel is just an ancient fiction.

2. There is No Reasonable Faith (v. 14b)

If Christ is not raised, then not only is the gospel vain, but so is your faith. It is worthless and without any value. Contrary to postmodernism, what you believe matters. No amount of faith helps if the object of your faith is flawed. Our faith is in a risen Lord and if He is still dead, then our faith is hopeless!

3. There is No Reliable Revelation (v. 15)

The vb. *we are found* is used to describe the true nature of someone. If Christ is not raised then everyone who has preached Christ then every preacher of the gospel is discovered and found out to be a liar — and even worse, to be found as a false testimony (liar) against God. If Christ hasn't been raised then all of those who have preached Christ are no better than any other false prophet and they are under the condemnation of God. Who does that include, if Christ is not raised? The women at the tomb, Paul, and all the Apostles would be classified as false prophets.

But Paul's indictment is even more than that — he indicts the OT as untrustworthy because the OT claimed a resurrected Messiah. And he further indicts Christ because Christ clearly testified His resurrection. If there is no resurrection, then nothing Christ said can be trusted. If Christ has not been raised, then the Bible we have is no more trustworthy than Confucius or Joseph Smith.

4. There is No Real Forgiveness (vv. 16-17)

Worthless is that which brings no results. It doesn't produce real forgiveness of sins. The death of Christ accomplished nothing in regard to your sin. The NT often connects justification to the resurrection (cf. Rom. 4:25) — the resurrection was necessary to secure our justification. It is not *just* through the resurrection, but also through the blood. What is the connection? The resurrection demonstrates that the Father was satisfied with the work of Christ on the cross; if He had not been raised, then it would demonstrate that the Father was not satisfied with the Son's work; we would still be dead in our sins.

The resurrection was God's official seal of approval on the sacrificial death of Christ. On Friday, Christ called out, "It is finished." And all Heaven waited to see what God would say. On Sunday morning, with the resurrection, God the Father declared, "It is finished."

Spurgeon: "It is not possible for God to reject the sinner who pleads the blood of Christ, for to do so is to deny Himself... He must ungod Himself to reject you."

5. There is No Eternal Life (v. 18)

Then implies that this is the inevitable consequence. If the Corinthians were right about the resurrection, then those who died have died in their sins and *perished*. To perish is to exist eternally under the punishment of God. If Christ has not been raised, then they are lost for good in the eternal suffering of Hell.

He summarizes this passage in v. 19 — we are *most to be pitied* if Christ has not been resurrected.

But then comes v. 20. *Now* is not chronological but logical. It brings us back to reality — it's not true that Christ isn't still in the grave. *He has been raised* — welcome back to reality. All those terrible consequences are not true. In fact, the opposite is true!

We can have great confidence in these realities because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What do we do with this great truth? What are the implications?

- ✓ Remind yourself and your people that the gospel always includes the resurrection. You must believe in the resurrection of Christ from the dead; it is to believe that He is the Son of God, Redeemer, and all that He claimed to be.
- ✓ Remind yourself and your people that the resurrection proves the claims of Jesus (cf. Jn. 2:19; Mk. 14:61 — "I am!" Rom. 1:4).
- ✓ Remind yourself and your people that the resurrection secures all the promises and blessings of Christ (Rom. 5:10; 8:34; Heb. 7:25)
- ✓ Remind yourself and your people that all who die in Christ will be raised from the dead; we preach Christ risen and Christ has removed the sting of death and the grave. We can face it even with joy and confidence. Cf. 15:55.
- ✓ Tell sinners that the resurrection means that Jesus will be their Judge (Acts 17:31). A simple application of the resurrection is to repent! If there is no repentance, there will be

- a day of wrath (Rom. 2:5). They must repent or face the wrath of the risen Lamb.
- ✓ Remind yourself and your people that the resurrection drives us to a life of faithful ministry (15:58). Be steadfast on your conviction of the truth of the gospel because Christ was raised...

Brothers, we preach Christ, risen from the dead.