

If There Is no Resurrection of the Dead, Then...

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[0:00] 1 Corinthians, we're in chapter 15. We'll be reading verses 12 to 19.

! And it is at work in us who believe.

Let's read it together. Starting at verse 12, 1 Corinthians 15. 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. 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 is true that the dead are not raised.

[1:12] 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.

Well, we are continuing in Paul's extended treatment on the resurrection this evening.

Now last week, maybe it didn't strike us as an extended discussion or an inspection of the resurrection. Maybe in the first 11 verses it was there, but it perhaps wasn't what we would think of as the focus.

But we see here it comes into very clear focus beginning in verse 12. And that is because Paul is addressing a very important problem within the church.

[2:14] Now Paul has looked at lots of problems in the church of Corinth, and this is another that he now brings to our attention as well. He gave us the gospel in the first 11 verses of chapter 15.

That good news that is of first importance. That Christ died for our sins. That he was buried. And that he rose again on the third day. And all of this in accordance with the scriptures.

That's the gospel. That's the good news. And in those first 11 verses, Paul himself went to great lengths to prove that indeed, yes, Jesus really has been raised.

He listed all of those people who had seen Jesus after his resurrection in his glorified body. Paul went into detail giving names of individuals, even encouraging the Corinthians to talk to individuals, get their eyewitness stories, get their testimony.

Why do all of that? Why did Paul go to such great lengths? Why take so much time to prove that Christ had indeed been raised? Well, because there were some in the church who were denying the resurrection.

[3:29] Now, it seems that they were denying the resurrection of all the dead in general, saying that nobody would rise from the grave. In the Corinthians day, in that Greek culture, life after death was a popular belief, but life after death in a real human body was not.

The Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but the body was dispensable. The body was something to get rid of, to be done away with. The famous Greek philosopher Plato, he said the soul is imprisoned in the body.

He called it a helpless prisoner, stuck inside, and it can only look through the bars. So if that's your belief about the body, why would you want to get the body back?

Now, of course, sin taints our bodies. Paul will soon teach on what our resurrection bodies will be like. We don't want our sinful bodies back.

We don't want our bodies as they are now. But for the Greeks, the physical body in general, they viewed negatively. The body was to be done away with by the soul in death, like an oyster that was freed from its shell.

[4:41] So this Greek false belief about the body being bad was now influencing the church in Corinth. We often read in the New Testament about Jewish Christians being tempted to return to their Jewish ways.

Think of the book of Galatians. Think of the book of Hebrews. Well, here we see Gentile Christians in Corinth that were being tempted to return to their Gentile ways.

And at the heart of that temptation was a denial of this crucial element of the gospel, the gospel introduced to us in the first 11 verses, a denial of the resurrection.

And that includes the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So this is something that Paul must address.

This is not something that Paul can say, well, you kind of got a little mixed up on that. I'll just make a brief statement and keep going.

No, he gives many verses to this problem. So we're just looking at verses 12 through 19. But really, all the way through verse 58, Paul is combating in some way this false teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead.

[5:51] So tonight, we're going to consider the resurrection. Consider this a foretaste of Easter for us already, a wedding of our appetites for Easter, but in an unconventional way.

In our verses tonight, Paul makes his argument in a way that is perhaps unexpected. He doesn't just come out and say, well, Corinthians, those of you who are saying this, you're wrong. If you believe there's no resurrection of the dead, well, you're wrong.

He could have certainly said that, but he does something far more rhetorically powerful, something that will drive the truth home, something that will make a deep, lasting impression on the Corinthians, and I trust on us as well.

Now, he assumes just for these verses, for the sake of argument, that this false premise is true. He assumes just for a moment, okay, let's say that there is no resurrection of the dead.

And then he shows all of the terrible consequences if this is true. If there is no resurrection of the dead, well, here's everything that follows. In other words, if the good news isn't true, then this is the bad news that will come after.

[7:04] So our passage this evening is really one long hypothetical statement. If this is true, if this actually happens, or if this actually doesn't happen, then all of this will follow.

If this is true, then here are the grave consequences. Now, Paul absolutely denies the premise of this hypothetical statement. The premise being there is no resurrection of the dead.

He categorically rejects that notion. But just for the sake of argument, he says, well, let's pretend for a moment. That's true. Let's pretend that the dead are not raised.

If that's the case, what follows? If that's the case, how does that impact our fate? How does that impact our lives? Does it really matter? If that's the case, are there any consequences?

And the resounding answer is yes. There are many consequences. Devastating consequences, in fact. And Paul lists them for us.

[8:03] If there is no good news, then here's all the bad news that follows. This ripple effect. If there's no resurrection of the dead, then here are six terrible consequences.

Consequence number one. If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. We see this first consequence beginning there in verse 12. Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And then dropping down to verse 16, he repeats, for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

So again, it appears that this false teaching was not directly denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was the denial of the resurrection of the dead in general.

But to deny the general resurrection of all is to deny the resurrection of one specific individual as well. The most important individual to be raised from the dead, Jesus.

[9:11] If none of us are raised, well, then he hasn't been raised either. Now, of course, Paul is assuming something crucial here, that Jesus died.

He's assuming it because that is absolutely undeniable, even to the Corinthians. Jesus really did die, and he really was buried in that tomb. The Corinthians didn't need to go find Christians to find eyewitnesses to the life and death of Jesus.

They could have asked his enemies, and his enemies would have said, yes, he died. We killed him. Yes, he really is dead. So yes, he died.

And so if the dead are not raised, well, then Jesus must be included in that because he absolutely died. If the dead are not raised, then he has not been raised either.

Now, that's a huge deal. Now, we saw last week that the gospel is of first importance compared to all of the other topics that Paul addressed in this letter. None more important than the gospel.

[10:15] Well, we could say this consequence is of first importance compared to all of the other consequences that will now follow. Every other consequence flows from this one because the Christian faith rests on the reality of the resurrection.

To deny his resurrection is to destroy the Christian faith. So Paul leads here with the most important consequence of denying the resurrection of the dead. And he's now going to give us five more consequences.

And each of these consequences can be traced back to the resurrection of Christ. So there's this logical progression here. If you deny the resurrection of the dead, then you deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And if you deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ, these other five consequences will follow.

Beginning with this one. Consequence number two.

Preaching Christ is in vain. And we see that there in verse 14. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain.

[11:21] So Paul hones in on what he's given so much of his time in life as a Christian to do. To preach. To proclaim the message of salvation.

To share the good news of the gospel in a very public way. Doing that would be in vain. Paul says our preaching, but we could certainly say all preaching would be in vain.

It would be futile. We would have no reason to do it. We would have no reason to gather here tonight to hear the word proclaimed. It would be pointless. Now why would that be the case?

Why would Paul's preaching, why would my preaching, be in vain? Why would any proclamation of the gospel, whether from the pulpit or from anywhere else, at any other time, be a waste of time?

Because the message preached, the message proclaimed, is not true. The message that Paul just said he delivered to the Corinthians.

[12:23] That Christ died for our sins. That he was buried. And that he was raised on the third day. If that message is false, well, Paul's preaching has been in vain. Because that is the message that he's been preaching.

That's the message. There's no other saving message that he's proclaimed. There's no other gospel. In Acts 13, we find one of the first sermons that Paul preached, and one of the longest.

It gives us great detail about what he said. Paul's in Antioch, in Pisidia. He's on his first missionary journey. And it's the Sabbath. So where do we find Paul on the Sabbath?

As was often his habit, in the synagogue. He was there with the Jewish rulers, actually giving him the floor to speak. So what did Paul do with this opportunity?

He preached Christ. And how did he preach Christ? By walking the people through Old Testament history. Their history. And showing them that Christ is the fulfillment of God's Word in the Old Testament.

[13:28] By showing them that the Scriptures testify to Christ. They point to Jesus. And do you know what in particular Paul spent the most time in that synagogue teaching about Jesus?

He spent the most time teaching about His resurrection. Listen, beginning in Acts 13, verse 30. Paul says, But God raised Him from the dead.

And for many days He appeared to those who had come up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now His witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, You are my Son.

Today I have begotten you. And as for the fact that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption. He has spoken in this way, I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David. Therefore, He says also in another Psalm, You will not let your holy ones see corruption. For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption.

[14:40] But he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you, therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.

And by him, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. So Paul hammers home the resurrection.

This promised Messiah, this promised Savior who was executed though He had done no wrong, who was buried in that tomb, this same Savior was raised from the dead.

This was where Paul focused the bulk of his sermon. This was the point that he wanted to especially drive home to all of those Jews in that synagogue there. And he appealed to two things there in Acts 13 that he really appealed to as well in 1 Corinthians 15 already.

We saw this last week. The eyewitness accounts and the Old Testament Scriptures. We who have seen Him, Paul says, those of us whom He appeared to, well, we now testify as well that Christ has risen.

[15:49] And the Old Testament Scriptures, they testify that the Christ would be raised. And so He has been. The resurrection, it's at the heart of Paul's preaching.

So, if there is no resurrection, well then the heart of Paul's preaching has just been ripped out. And this is the case not just for Paul's preaching, but for all who preach, for all who proclaim.

The Gospel message is only worth telling because the crucified Savior has risen from the grave. near the end of Paul's life, as he was in prison, he wrote to Timothy.

A younger man, a man whom he had mentored. Timothy was himself a pastor. And what did Paul want to leave impressed upon Timothy? These words.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David as preached in my Gospel. So, Paul preached Christ crucified.

[16:54] We've seen that in 1 Corinthians. And Paul preached Christ risen, as he said to Timothy. And what was Timothy to preach? Well, that very same message of Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

That's the message that we preach as well. And that preaching is in vain if Christ never did actually walk out of that tomb. No reason for the word to be preached from the pulpit.

No reason for the word to be proclaimed at all. Why waste your breath in telling others about Jesus if he is not raised from the dead? That's the second consequence.

If there is no resurrection, our preaching is in vain. Here's the third. Our faith is in vain as well. Our faith in Christ is in vain.

We see this beginning in verse 14 of 1 Corinthians 15. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

[17:53] Verse 17. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. So, if preaching is in vain because the message is not true, then faith in Christ is in vain because receiving this message does us no good.

no sense in delivering the message, no sense in receiving the message, no sense in preaching Christ, no sense in receiving Christ. Putting your faith in a dead Savior, that would be a foolish thing to do.

Think about what Hebrews 12 says. Hebrews 12 tells us to look to Jesus. And how does Hebrews 12 describe him?

What title does it give? The founder and perfecter of our faith. And then he's further described as the one who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

So you see the author of Hebrews ties our faith to this Savior who died and now lives. In fact, he was able to endure the cross because of the joy that was set before him.

[19:15] Well, what joy would be set before one who only died and had no hope of resurrection? What joy would there be for him if it was only death and that was the end? No, it was joy beyond the grave.

Joy that he would be raised and that he would ascend into heaven, that he would then be seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Joy and sharing in that resurrection life with all who are his.

The writer of Hebrews ties our faith to this Savior, the Savior who is the founder and perfecter, the author and the finisher of our faith. And this Savior is now presently seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

He is alive, he is well, and he is seated there. That is who our faith is in. That is who we have placed our faith in. The one who is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him. Why? Since he always lives to make intercession for them. So a Savior who died and remains dead does us no good. We cannot be saved to the uttermost by a dead Savior.

[20:21] It's a living Savior who saves to the uttermost. So there is futility in preaching a message about a dead Savior. There is futility in receiving a message about a dead Savior. about a dead Savior.

The message, if it's not true, why preach it? The message, if it's doing us no good, why receive it? Why put our faith in a Savior who died but does not live?

So that's the third consequence. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, well, then our faith is in vain. And now the fourth, those who preach Christ are misrepresenting God.

We see this in verse 15. Paul 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.

So you see, Paul here is very concerned about his own reputation. If Christ has not been raised, then sure, some will preach the gospel in ignorance.

[21:26] Some will be foolish enough to believe a lie, but they'll still preach it with sincerity, even if they've been led astray. But Paul couldn't claim that. He couldn't say that about himself.

If Christ has not been raised, Paul couldn't play the, well, I didn't know card. No, Paul would be a liar. He would have been knowingly misrepresenting God and bearing false witness about God. And he would have been doing this along with all the other apostles. When he says, we are even found to be misrepresenting God, he's talking about himself and all of the other apostles.

Now, why couldn't they have simply said, oops, our bad, didn't realize that he actually didn't rise again from the grave? Well, because where did Paul and the apostles get their message from? Where did they claim that they had gotten the gospel from that they would then share with the world? Who delivered it to them? Jesus Christ himself. He personally appeared to the disciples.

[22:30] He commissioned them to go and make disciples. He appeared to Paul. Paul said, I received the gospel, how? Through a revelation of Jesus Christ. So, if Christ did not rise from the grave, well, Paul and the apostles are liars.

They're not just mistaken. They're not just misled. They're knowingly misrepresenting God. They're saying that God did something which God did not, in fact, do.

So, Paul's own reputation is on the line. If there's no resurrection of the dead, then Paul's saying, I'm a liar. I've been testifying of the risen Christ. I've testified that I've seen him.

He's appeared to me. His word can't be trusted if it never happened. If Christ has not been raised, then Paul has misrepresented God.

That's the fourth consequence. Now the fifth. We are still in our sins. Verse 17. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

[23:37] Now that might sound a little bit strange because so often we think of our sins being tied to the cross. Even Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15.3, Christ died for our sins.

So if he died for our sins, then why does it matter whether he rose again or not? Aren't our sins paid for? Well, the resurrection is the proof.

The resurrection is the evidence that demonstrated God accepted the sacrifice of Christ himself. So we need that resurrection to accompany the death of Christ.

Indeed, Romans 4.25 ties our justification to Christ and his resurrection. That verse tells us that Christ was raised for our justification.

The resurrection is the proof that his death satisfied the wrath of God. It's proof that the payment was accepted, that his death in our place was an acceptable substitution in the sight of God.

[24:44] We can think of it in the reverse. If Jesus Christ had stayed dead, then God did not accept his sacrifice. And if God did not accept his sacrifice, then God has not forgiven us who are in Christ.

The record of debt still stands against us. We are still in our sins. Our sins still need to be dealt with. They weren't dealt with the first time. Because Jesus didn't adequately pay the debt.

If he didn't rise from the dead, then we can only conclude, oh no, God rejected his sacrifice. It didn't work. The sacrifice offered was not satisfactory to God.

God didn't accept his death as a sufficient payment for our sins. Like getting your card declined at the checkout. That didn't work. But you still have to pay for it.

The death of Christ was not sufficient, and so you sinners still need to pay the price for your sins with your own life. We need a substitute for our sins, or we ourselves must be punished.

[25:52] Someone has to pay. The gospel teaches us that Christ died for our sins. He died in our place. He was the substitute. But if God did not raise him from the dead, then in fact he did not successfully die for our sins.

He died for nothing. And we are still in our sins. We are still dead in our sins. That's how Paul talks about us in Ephesians 2.

We were once dead in our sins, but we have been made alive together with Christ. Made alive with him.

Meaning that Jesus, he too is alive. We share in spiritual life with Christ, who himself is physically alive. And he gives life.

So you see, the physical life of our Savior is tied to our spiritual lives. If Christ is still physically dead, then we are still spiritually dead too.

[26:56] If Christ remained dead physically, then we would remain dead spiritually in our sins. So we see again something of a ripple effect here. as one doctrine of great importance is denied, well then others are denied as well.

If the doctrine of the resurrection is denied, then the doctrine of the atonement is denied as well. If Christ was not raised from the grave, then he did not actually pay the price for our sins.

And we are very much still in need of saving. And that brings us to the sixth and the final consequence. If Christ has not been raised, then we only have hope in this life.

If Christ has not been raised, then we only have hope in this life. Verse 18. 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. So if Christ was not raised from the dead, then everyone who dies believing in Christ, they perish.

[28:11] Now by perish, Paul means that they die and they are condemned. He means they are lost to eternal punishment because they trusted in a Savior who could not save them.

And that means like we just saw, their sins are not actually forgiven. They had hope in this life only and hell awaited them in the next life. And if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then the same is true for us who live now.

We have wasted our lives. We have lived our lives clinging to a lie. We've lived our lives holding fast to a falsehood. We're totally disconnected from reality.

We pity those who are disconnected from reality. People who are not in their right minds. We feel sorry for them, that they're not thinking clearly, that they're not able to function properly in life.

But that is us if Christ is still six feet under, if Christ is still in the grave. We are not in our right minds if that is true. We're disconnected from reality.

[29:21] If the bones of Jesus Christ were found in that tomb where He was laid, then we should be pitied more than anyone else. If we only have hope for this life, then what are we doing eagerly anticipating the life to come?

A life that will not come if Christ has not been raised. How foolish of us. How sad others should feel for us. Because think about the Christian life.

The Christian life is a life of sacrifice. sacrifice. We give up what this world has to offer. We fight against temptation. We wage war against our sin.

We read the Word. We study the Word. We seek to obey what God says in the Word. We seek to please Him with our lives. We give of ourselves.

We serve others. We endure opposition from others. We pray to God. We pray with one another to Him. We encourage one another with the Word. We spend all of this time investing in all of these things.

[30:29] Turns out just an illusion. It's all in vain if Christ is still in the grave. If we only have hope for this life then we should live our lives very differently than we do.

Sunday evenings would be spent very differently for us if we have hope in this life only. We should live for what we can get out of this world. We should live for this world.

We should live for all that we can get out of it. We should love the world and all that the world offers. If there is no resurrection then we might as well indulge in all the pleasures that this world has to offer.

We might as well ignore what Jesus said. We might as well seek to gain the whole world because this life is all that we have. We're really missing out on what we could have while holding out for hope for something more to come.

But if there is no resurrection then there's nothing more to come. As one commentator said, we have renounced this world for the world to come only to discover in the end that there is no world to come.

[31:41] So for us who are in Christ we've renounced this world. We've counted the cost. The Christian life is a life of sacrifice. It's a life of denying ourselves taking up our crosses and following Jesus.

We sacrifice what we could have in this life for what God promises in the next. Like Moses Hebrews 11 describes him he chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the riches the treasures of Egypt for he was looking to the reward. So we see Moses he counted the cost.

He renounced this world. He understood you can't have your cake and eat it. Moses traded the fleeting pleasures of sin for the forever pleasures of God.

But if there is no life to come with God then what a waste to not have at least enjoyed the fleeting pleasures of sin while you can. We should say what Paul says later in 1 Corinthians if Christ has not been raised let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

[33:00] Think about how often in God's word the life to come motivates us. the life to come motivates us to persevere in this life to fight against our sin to fight against despair just as we heard Asaph even in Psalm 73 this morning.

The life to come motivates us to not give in to the pressure to conform to this world. We fight the good fight to the end because of what God says will be ours in eternity.

Now of course there is much joy and peace and contentment that can be had in this life but it's because of what is to come. Strip away the hope of the resurrection.

Strip away an eternity that we will spend with God in the new heavens and the new earth with glorified bodies and that joy and peace and contentment in this life quickly evaporates.

Quickly turns to despair and dread. we put all of our eggs in one basket and then at the end of our lives that basket breaks and we die with egg on our face.

[34:16] If Christ has not been raised we are fools for believing it. We're fools for living our lives according to it. And what's more than that more than fools in this life we have hell to await us.

If Christ has not been raised then we are still in our sins and so when we die like those who have gone before us we will perish we will be lost because we will stand condemned with no savior to save us hope only in this life and hell only in the next if Christ has not been raised from the grave. If if I have said that a lot tonight I am tired of saying that because it is simply not true.

This is though verse 20 but in fact Christ has been raised. That is the reality. We've been shown how wonderfully significant that reality is tonight by considering this alternate universe.

A universe that is filled with despair and futility and condemnation for all but praise the Lord that alternate universe doesn't exist.

[35:31] Christ has been raised. For us who are in Christ we have hope in this life and we have hope for the life to come. If you are outside of Christ tonight come to Christ.

Here is the savior that you need. The savior as he really is the risen savior. Turn to him. Trust in him. Believe that he died on the cross for your sins and rose again and you will be saved.

And then one day he will raise your body from the grave and you will live with him glorified body reunited with your soul for all of eternity. For all of us who are in Christ that is our confident hope.

Not just for today not just in this life but the hope that we have for the life to come and we rejoice in that hope knowing that indeed Jesus did rise from the grave.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we do come praising you this evening as we have meditated on and considered what a terrible tragic reality it would be if your son had not been raised from the grave.

[36:53] Our lives would be meaningless and lost. We would be of all people most to be pitied and we would of all people be most despairing having thought that perhaps there was hope and then realizing no actually there isn't but we thank you Father that it is not the case that Jesus has been raised that you raised him from the dead that you by that same power have brought us to life as well that you've given new life to so many of us here tonight help us to live with grateful hearts that you've done such a work in us we give you thanks that this isn't a bad dream that we live in that we aren't experiencing some kind of alternate reality but we know the truth because you've shown it to us you've given us eyes to see and we rejoice that Christ has been raised that our life is wrapped up in his that he ever lives for us that he saves to the uttermost because he is alive and we worship you we give you thanks we pray all of these things in Christ's name amen a