

1 Corinthians 15

The Resurrection of Christ

¹ Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. ² It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

He's suggesting that if they don't accept this, they don't really understand the Gospel... Accept what exactly? Well he explains...

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said.⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

If you're gunna open with that...Paul is clearly setting up here. Why's he bringing up the good news? And why is he trying to validate it?

He's talking to a group of philosophical, cosmopolitan folks, which just meant they were knowledge seekers and at ease with or accepting of a variety of cultures. And they didn't like the idea of believing anything as literal and physical as the Gospel- which includes this amazing non-works-based justification and this supernatural resurrection of Jesus' body from the dead and, later, the resurrection of our bodies with him.

They're having a hard time with that. We have a hard time with that! Like is there any evidence of this? They know from scripture that this is truth and possible and real. But that's a book. Pics or it didn't happen, right? Paul gets that. Witnesses or it didn't happen. So he goes on to say,

⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve.⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles.

-He REALLY wants the Corinthians to believe this.

Have you ever had that friend who is like, Yo I just did a backflip! And you don't buy it, so he's trying to get someone to say they saw it.

Witnesses are so necessary! Why? First, it serves as verification- yes, it did happen. And second, it facilitates the spreading of belief.

If I saw Rahul do a backflip, when I tell Annie that it happened, she's going to believe that Rahul did a backflip and she's going to vouch for him next time someone doesn't believe even if I'm not there. We see this same wording in 2 Tim 2:2 which says, "You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others."

-They need to believe for themselves, and for the ability to share with others confidently.

⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. ⁹ For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

-Woah, Paul! How are you the least? You wrote half the Bible! You started all these church plants! He says he's the least for 2 reasons- the first one we know. He used to persecute Christians. Kinda hard to climb up the awesome people ladder when you started at negative "I killed people" points. He recognizes that to persecute a believer, IS to persecute Christ himself. And second- he didn't meet Jesus when he was alive the first time. He had the super cool knock you off your donkey encounter with not only Christ but the Holy Spirit! So he goes on to say...

¹⁰ But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me (that's what knocked him off his donkey)—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace. ¹¹ So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed.

Wow. Paul's life is SO CHANGED by his encounter with Christ, that he's dedicated his life to sharing the good news of the Gospel! He gives all the credit to God alone, because we as people are impure, lazy, liars and it is by God's grace alone that we are able to fervently share His truth. And again, he emphasizes the unity and reliability of the truth by associating with the apostles. (Like hey we're on the same team.) Thanks for that sick long intro, Paul! What's your point?! He wants to talk about RESURRECTION! :D So I'm going to read straight through these verses and then we'll talk about it.

The Resurrection of the Dead

¹² But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. ¹⁵ And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶ And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸ In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹ And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. ²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

What just happened? He's talking to a group of people who believe that Jesus died and rose again, but they're denying the part about EVERYBODY rising again. It's like they don't really believe the WHOLE GOSPEL. It's a pretty intense thing to believe though. When we look at what other faiths around that time believed, we can understand why.

Greeks mostly believed in immortality, that when we leave this earth we go to Hades and the rare few important people like Hercules and roman emperors would join the

gods. We've all see Hercules and Hades' Pit of Souls or even Scooby Doo, so you get the idea. The physical body was just a casing, it's dead and your floaty soul thing goes on.

Jews accepted resurrections just barely, in that there's pretty much 2 verses that ever acknowledge it and they're in Daniel, which is the latest book of the Hebrew Bible, so...

Sadducees would've been notorious for denying a future life all together and if any disembodied immortality idea come up, they pretty much brushed it off yea, yea whatever.

Philosopher Josephus, who was a Roman scholar at the time, thought his soul would be immortal when his physical body died, like in the movie Ghost or Casper or Ghostbusters.

SO we can see that there was a big focus on the afterlife but not really a big focus on how we live now and what matters to us now.

Resurrection is different though. It's not a floaty soul thingy or growing a set of angel wings. It's not rising up to heaven or the light. It's not getting taken up in Glory like Elijah and Enoch in the OT. It's not reincarnation. It's the cancellation of death and the destruction of its power. We see this echoed through the New Testament, specifically in Romans 6:4 which says, "We therefore were buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life."

And if we don't believe this, then what are we even doing here? Especially here in the Baptist Collegiate Ministries, where we place priority on baptism being an outward an expression of an inward decision AND symbolic of dying with Christ, and being born again into a new life in Him.

This is huge to the way we practice our faith, the way we share our faith. Like...

What are the repercussions of this part of the Gospel, a mass resurrection, not being true. Well let's look at the verses. Paul says it like this:

1- If we don't believe in resurrection, then Christ never rose from the dead. - That wipes out everything! We can all go home and get some sacrifices ready if that never happened.

2- If we don't believe in resurrection, then we've played you. We're all a bunch of liars. And you believe in nothing. Your faith is based on nothing.

3- If we don't believe in resurrection, this not only debunked who Jesus is, it makes the character of God untrue. That's a big no no! Because even if you're on the fence about the Jesus part, I know you believe in God.

4- If we don't believe in resurrection, then nothing has saved us from our sins.

5- If we don't believe in resurrection, all of the people before you, who accepted Christ and stopped doing animal sacrifices - stopped living with a works based faith- were never actually made right before God, and they are now lost forever.

6- If we don't believe in resurrection, we only accept Jesus for the ministry he had on this earth being an example, then that's barely a faith or religion. It's really just a moral code. It tells us rules for how to live with no promise of the afterlife, which many cultures would say is the whole point of having a religion or faith system. So if we don't believe this, what happens when we die? Do we come back as animals, do we become angels, or do we just no longer exist?

BUT IN FACT, CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

Paul and the apostles aren't liars, your faith is based on truth, Jesus is who he says he is, God's character is still infallible, and we have been offered reliable salvation from sin and death. Praise God!! And as a quick side note- the first of the harvest just means Jesus' resurrection is the example of what will happen to all of us. Like when you buy a box of pens or you bake cookies and you check to see if one is good and then you know the whole batch is good.

So cool- you want me to be confident in my faith. Thanks for clearing that up Paul, catch you on the next letter... Wait hold up. Resurrection?? What does that even mean? Jesus came back to life cool. But what exactly will that look like for us? How the heck am I supposed to explain that to someone??

Paul's so glad you asked!

He gives beautiful explanations of that in verses 35 through 44.

³⁵ But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" ³⁶ What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. ³⁷ And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. ³⁸ Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed. ³⁹ Similarly there are different kinds of flesh—one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

Which, if I could say this more simply, remember when I explained the Gospel earlier and how we're impure? Paul's saying we won't have these scarred and broken and buried bodies. We'll be pure. This life is like being asleep compared to being awake with God! These are all examples of how bodies change, like He's trying to explain that ours will be kind of like these. Pick up verse 40.

⁴⁰ There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. ⁴¹ The sun has one kind

of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory.

Have you heard it said that being on earth and experience life here is only a shadow of what it'll be like after resurrection? The sun itself produces light, but the moon is only seen with the sun's light. This is like us. We have our shining moments when Christ shines on us, but after resurrection we will be as pure and shiny as Christ.

⁴² It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. ⁴³ Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. ⁴⁴ They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

So we're all gunna be swole, Paul? Sweet! I dunno. He doesn't really know exactly- that's why he gives all this pictures and analogies.

But I want you guys to really get this- Paul goes into such depth articulating his faith, explaining what resurrection is, not only for himself to know, but so he and all the Corinthians and all of us are confident in believing and articulating our faith.

And resurrection is the key! Honestly, what is our faith without this? It's so easy for us to drop this part when we share the Gospel though, right? We live in a culture of philosophical, cosmopolitan people who rev up against our faith, like what the Corinthians are dealing with. They can easily hear the substitution aspect of the Gospel- we'll never be good enough and so Christ is our "good enough". We could never be pure enough to be in the presence of God, so Jesus coats us in his purity. That are sounds great! That sounds like the best setup for a YOLO lifestyle. But what about when you include the resurrection? Which- it's really not this weird picture we've had of floating up into the white light and growing a set of wings. When Christ returns, -which is explained more so in this chapter, but we just don't have the time- believers will be resurrected and we'll all be transformed, as the last chapter of this great epic story! This chapter ends saying

⁵⁴ Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, [i] this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. ⁵⁷ But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

Guys, we know that death is only a result of sin and that the law helps show us just how sinful we are. But when we believe in the whole Gospel, we're on Christ's team in defeating death! We can have unwavering hope in this impenetrable faith we have for what happens when we die. And we have purpose! Paul gets this- that if God can give me new life, I can give him everything I am. And when I whole heartedly believe this, the faith that I believe in and that I confidently share with us can never go to waste. Or I'd reword it to say, I can be confident that the way I live, pursuing Christ and pointing others in his direction, can never ever go to waste!

Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg said, "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

When we accept the resurrection as truth and a key part of the gospel, it's about more than just the afterlife. It's more than just having a religion so we "know" what happens when we die. It changes how we live now. It changes how we evangelize.

Do you know what you believe in? Do you know how to share your faith? If you don't know how, ask us.

That's all Paul wanted and that's all I want for you guys- is to know confidently what you believe in and how to articulate it.

BOTTOM LINE: Believing in the WHOLE Gospel - the substitution part AND the resurrection part - changes everything!