

The Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12-34, 58

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the apex of the gospel. Toward the end of his long letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds them of the gospel, the thing he calls “most important”: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (15:1-6). He then spends the rest of the chapter explaining the importance of Jesus’ resurrection and ours, and how these two events relate to everything that takes place in the time between them. Some Corinthians were denying bodily resurrection (v12); in our day much of the church is forgetting or muddling it. Paul’s word in verse 34 is good for us all—wake up! When we do, we see what it means.

A Car Without an Engine

Jesus was crucified, died, laid in a tomb, and rose after three days (v4). Paul says if you deny the resurrection of all people, you deny Jesus’ (v13). And if you do that, the gospel is empty and hollow; there’s nothing under the hood (v14). This would make the apostles false witnesses (vv15-16). It would mean faith in Christ is pointless because no sin would be atoned for if Jesus didn’t rise (v17). The dead would have perished and Christians with false hope are most to be pitied (vv18-19). It’s *not* the thought of resurrection that counts. With refreshing clarity Paul says that thought or “faith” which doesn’t correspond to what is true is worthless. If Jesus didn’t rise from death, your time is better spent partying in despair (v32).

Geography of the Dead

If Paul isn’t talking about “going to heaven” when we die, then what about it, and how does it relate to the resurrection? Before Jesus’ death, all the dead went to Sheol or Hades, gathered to their people (Eccl. 3:20; Gen. 25:8, 35:29; Jdg. 2:10). Those who loved God were blessed there next to Abraham, and those who didn’t suffered (Lk. 16:19-31). After Jesus died, he descended into Hades where he announced his victory and took the faithful with him into paradise, including the thief on the cross (1 Pet. 3:18-20; Lk. 23:43). To die today is to be absent from the body but present with the Lord (Phil. 1:21). There the saints await their new bodies and the ultimate destruction of death (Jn. 14:2; Phil. 3:20-21; vv23-26).

Jesus the Firstfruits

Old covenant believers knew about the resurrection at the end of time (e.g. Dan. 12:2). This is what Martha tells Jesus about Lazarus: “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (Jn. 11:24). Though they discussed it, they couldn’t fathom Jesus rising in their day (Mk. 9:10). At first Mary Magdalene supposed the gardener stole the body, and none of the apostles believed (Jn. 20:15; Lk. 20:11). They thought Jesus failed to redeem Israel because he died (Lk. 24:21). In a move that astonished everyone and exploded the scope of “redemption”, God raised Jesus from the dead in the middle of history, the firstfruits of all everyone (v20). At Passover, commemorating their redemption from slavery in Egypt, the Jews offered the first of their barley harvest to the Lord, a token of a greater harvest. So God received Jesus, the first of many, the beginning of the harvest (v24). God is growing his field, advancing his kingdom, overcoming his enemies, and final enemy to fall will be death (vv25-26). He is doing this; we announce it.

Resurrection Life

The harvest has begun because God has reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). How does life on earth now relate to life in the resurrection? Like a pregnant mother to her baby (Rom. 8:22-23). The whole creation looks forward to the resurrection. It’s mysterious and it hurts, but it’s important. Your earthly labor done for God is *not in vain* (v58). It’s part of the resurrection life we enjoy now and helps prepare you and the world for resurrection to come. To miss this like being drunk and passed out at an otherwise great party (v34). God invites us to sober up and join the party. This party is the celebration of the defeat of death (vv54-56).

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: 1 Corinthians 15:16-26

16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1. The apostle Paul writes this letter to the church in the city of Corinth. Some people there didn't think Jesus rose from death. If he didn't, what would that mean for their faith (verse 17)?
2. Is Paul sure that Jesus rose from the dead (verse 20)? He says "Jesus is the _____ of those who have fallen asleep" (verse 20).
3. The firstfruits refer to crops taken at the beginning of a harvest. If Jesus rose from the dead, the harvest has begun. When will the rest of the harvest take place (verse 23)?
4. Draw a picture of Jesus rising from the dead.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. -1 Corinthians 15:20*