

April 24, 2022
Why Easter Matters ...
1 Corinthians 15:12-34

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

"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? For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. 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. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world."

In 15:12-19, Paul argues *if* the Corinthians who contend we will not rise from the dead are correct, *then*, logically, Jesus could not have risen from the dead either. And if Jesus is not risen ... well, Paul considers some of the logical consequences of taking this position:

- Paul and his buddies are wasting their time. In fact, they are spreading lies and promoting a horrendous deception.
- "Faith in Jesus" is pointless. Indeed, those of us who have sacrificed anything (time, money, morality, safety) for God are pitiful. It's all been a waste.
- Sins are not forgiven. We are guilty forever. We can never put the past behind.
- Death is the end, for you and anyone who has died before you. There is no hope.

What Paul is describing is atheism at its most stark. No hope. No purpose. No point. No values. Anyone teaching hope, of any kind, is a charlatan. Self-giving love or altruism is contrary to your survival. Your responsibility is what is best for you, yourself, first and foremost. Life is empty and meaningless ending in oblivion. Ouch.

The good news is that this is **NOT** true. This is **NOT** the world in which we actually live. We **DO** live in a world in which Jesus has risen from the dead. That is the truth (speak to me about evidence for the resurrection). That means, God is real. God's love is real. God's salvation and defeat of sin and death are real. We have hope, meaning, and purpose for our lives now, and confidence in a life hereafter as well. Jesus is with you, this moment and for all eternity. You matter. What you do matters. How does that change how you live?

Alister McGrath, professor of theology at Oxford University, was an atheist when he went to university: *"Growing up as a (nominal) Protestant in Northern Ireland, I had come to believe religion was the cause of the Province's problems. While I loved studying the sciences at school, they were important for another reason: science disproved God. Believing in God was only for sad, mad, and bad people who had yet to be enlightened by science."*

"I went up to Oxford to study the sciences, expecting my atheism to be consolidated. In the event, my world was turned upside down. I gave up one belief, atheism, and embraced another, Christianity. Why? There were many factors. For a start, I was alarmed by some atheist writings, which seemed more preoccupied with rubbishing religion than seeking truth.

"Above all, I encountered something at Oxford that I had failed to meet in Northern Ireland – articulate Christians who were able to challenge my atheism. I soon discovered two life-changing things. First, Christianity made a lot of sense. It gave me a new way of seeing and understanding the world, above all, the natural sciences. Second, I discovered Christianity actually worked: it brought purpose and dignity to life."¹

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

In 20-28, Paul states that since Jesus is risen, everything changes. The world and cosmic order of things is radically different as a result:

- all who are "in Christ" will be resurrected, and
- death itself will be destroyed.

"In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

"After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. For the Scriptures say, 'God has put all things under his authority ...'"

What does it mean to be "**in Christ**"? Paul contrasts this with being "**in Adam**." Simply by being born into this fallen world, our nature is fundamentally marred by sin. We are "in Adam." In very practical terms, try as we like we just don't behave perfectly all the time. We've all messed up at least once.

Being "**in Christ**" means we are "re-born" into a redeemed humanity, and a whole new nature. Jesus uses this idea of being "born again" spiritually (John 3:1-19). Paul (2 Corinthians 5:17, Titus 3:5), Peter (1 Peter 1:22-23), and John (1 John 5:1) all use the metaphor of new birth, too. When we put our faith "**in Christ**" we are born anew as

¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-433628/Do-stop-behaving-God-Professor-Dawkins.html>

spiritually-alive beings. The old **"in Adam"-life** is replaced by a brand new **"in Christ"-life**. Our sins are forgiven; we are saved; we look forward to a resurrected life with Jesus.

This is not JUST a future reality: we are "born again" – now. We are "in Christ" – now. We are called to live as we were created to live – now. We are invited to live as Jesus would live if He were living our life – now. Yes, one day, someday, we will be with Jesus. But we are also living in the reality of His resurrection power and presence, right now. You don't have to wait till you die to enjoy that relationship.

"The point of the resurrection," says Tom Wright, "is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die ... What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it ... What you do in the present – by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself – will last into God's future. These activities are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom."
The point of the resurrection is we live differently now, knowing what we do now matters.

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

In 15:29-34 Paul tackles some more, *"If Jesus were not raised ..."* issues.

"If the dead will not be raised, what point is there in people being baptized for those who are dead? Why do it unless the dead will someday rise again?" (15:29).

This is intriguing: baptism for the dead? Apparently some Corinthians were doing this. But, **if** they didn't believe in the resurrection **then** this would be pointless. Paul is not condoning the practice. He is pointing out the inconsistency between their words and actions.

Is baptism for the dead right or is it wrong? After all, if we obey what the Bible says...? Consistently the Bible emphasizes that **we are saved by faith in Jesus** not by works or spiritual practices, be it circumcision, baptism, speaking in tongues, or ___ (fill in the blank). Paul would say any baptism for any other person is foolish – that person's faith in Jesus saves them, whether they are baptized or not. Scholars are unanimous in agreeing Paul is not condoning this practice since it is at odds with every other teaching on baptism and salvation in Scripture. Salvation is always based on a person's decision of faith. Baptism is a public affirmation of that faith but carries no "magical" or "salvation-effectiveness" in itself. Baptism for other people, especially those who are dead is simply pointless: those who died with faith in Jesus are saved (15:22). Those who died apparently without faith? Their fate is in God's hands. He's the judge. This is a motivation to share our faith, isn't it?

Back to Paul's point. Paul is emphasizing how illogical it is for people to be doing this at all if they do not even believe in resurrection. If they don't believe in resurrection, then why do this crazy thing? His point is that resurrection is real. We have hope for life with Jesus.

"And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour?" Paul continues. "For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you. And what value was there in fighting wild beasts – those people of Ephesus – if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, 'Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!' Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for 'bad company corrupts good character.' Think carefully about what is right and stop sinning. For to your shame I say some of you don't know God at all" (15:30-34).

Paul is calling us to appreciate the wonder, mystery, and power of the resurrection. Through His cross AND His resurrection, Christ broke the power of death once and for all time.

"What you do in the Lord is not in vain," affirms Tom Wright. "You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that's about to be dug up for a building site. You are – strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself – accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God's new world."

Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter one's fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world – all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.

- What difference does **Jesus'** resurrection make in your life? How would your life be different if **Jesus** had NOT been raised from the dead?
- What difference does knowing **you** will be raised and made alive in Christ make in your life? How does that change how you live - TODAY?
- We know people who have not experienced the life transformation that comes through knowing the power of Jesus' resurrection in their lives. Pray for them. Pray that you can share your faith with them.

We are part of changing the world today. What we do, in the name of Jesus, matters.

How then shall I live, today?

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