

Resurrection: The Future Hope

Devotional Reading: Luke 24:1–12

Background Scripture: Luke 24:1–12; 1 Corinthians 15:3–20, 50–58;
Revelation 22:1–5

Today's Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58

I. The Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:13–20

¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

13. Some members of the church of Corinth disputed the reality of future *resurrection*. Paul reasons that, if their belief is true, then either Jesus' crucified body is still in Joseph's tomb, or there's credibility to the rumor that Jesus' disciples stole it. Thus, Paul begins to examine the faulty logic of the resurrection-deniers.

14. Paul sets forth what we might call a "chain reaction of consequences." These if-

then statements emphasize the importance of Christ's resurrection on the Christian faith. In this verse, Paul says if Jesus didn't rise, then Paul's preaching and that of others like him amounts to nothing at best. It is downright deceptive at worst.

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus "died for our sins" and "was raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Paul likely had in mind passages such as Psalm 16:8–11 that claim God's "faithful one" will not "see decay." Paul is saying that if there is no resurrection and Jesus is not alive, then the Old Testament Scriptures presenting the Messiah in these terms are also worthless.

A hypothetical deception such as *Christ has not been raised* says something negative against both the preachers and those who accept their message. They (and we) put faith in a lie if Jesus is not raised.

15. The chain-reaction argument continues. If Jesus is not risen, then those who boldly proclaim Jesus' resurrection are *false witnesses about God*. They violate the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16).

The collection of people who become false witnesses if Christ is not raised includes Peter, the rest of the 12 disciples, a group of 500 believers, James, all of the apostles, and Paul himself. Two of those witnesses, Peter and John, do not hesitate to voice their unshakable conviction.

tions before the Sanhedrin: “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

16–17. As if to underscore the seriousness of his argument, Paul repeats words from verses 13–14 above. Then he adds an independent clause: *you are still in your sins*. Paul’s argument personally affects his listeners. Presuming Christ did not rise, then they are holding to useless faith, and the hope of forgiveness and new life is gone.

Jesus’ death and resurrection are inseparable. Jesus “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Without the resurrection, Jesus’ crucifixion is nothing more than the death of a self-deceived, self-named Messiah. In this scenario, he too, is a false witness of God. The ultimate tragedy of such an alternative is that humans are, therefore, still dead in sins.

18. Paul moves from the tragic results of “no resurrection” for living Christians to addressing the dire consequences for Christians who have already died. The Greek word translated *asleep* is used in both biblical and non-biblical literature. It can mean literal, ordinary sleep or figuratively represent the idea of passing away. In the New Testament, the former usage appears four times and the latter thirteen times. We see one sense confused with the other in the case of Lazarus (John 11:11–15).

19. Earlier in the letter, Paul lists *hope* among the three qualities that “remain” (1 Corinthians 13:13). He writes that we are saved by hope in Romans 8:24. Hope for the future sets Christians apart from others “who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

20. The gloom of the previous verses is replaced with Paul’s declaration that *Christ has been raised*. Paul supplements his declaration with a noteworthy affir-

mation: Christ is the *firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. The term *firstfruits* is derived from the Law of Moses. After the harvest, the people of Israel were to bring the first portion of their crops to the priest as an offering to the Lord. There was even a specific “day of firstfruits” (Numbers 28:26–31).

This practice emphasized two realities. The first: harvests come from the Lord. The Israelites are just tenants or stewards of the land God gave them, and he blesses them with harvests. The second reality is that more harvests will follow; the first fruits are just that—the rest is yet to come.

II. The Mystery

1 Corinthians 15:51–57

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

51. The Greek word that is translated as *mystery* in this verse occurs 27 times in the New Testament, most often by Paul (20 times). When Paul uses the term “mystery,” he is not speaking of an unsolvable problem with no resolution. His definition

indicates a vital spiritual truth that was hidden for a time but is now revealed. In the text before us, the mystery he's talking about concerns what the future holds for Christians. *Sleep* is a euphemism for death. Paul says the collective experience will not be death but rather change. His teaching here is consistent with what he writes elsewhere on the subject, especially in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 regarding the connection between our resurrection and the return of Jesus.

52. The phrase *in the twinkling of an eye* indicates an event that will happen suddenly. A feature of the Lord's return will be the sounding of a *trumpet*.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul states that the trumpet's sound will be accompanied by a shout from Jesus and the voice of the archangel. At that time, *the dead will be raised imperishable*, no longer subject to the problems and limitations of a broken, sin-cursed world. When Jesus returns, the remainder of the "crop" following the "firstfruits" of his resurrection will be "harvested." *And we will be changed!*

53. Our physical bodies are *perishable*. Since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50), a radical transformation is required. That transformation will happen at the resurrection.

We must take care to understand what it means to *clothe the mortal with immortality*. When we put on *immortality* we will not become gods ourselves. To believe otherwise is to confuse the word *immortality* with the word *eternality*. The former means "without end"; the latter means "without beginning or end"—an incommunicable attribute belonging only to God.

54. The word *mortal* reminds us of words like *mortuary* and *mortician*, which have close associations with death. But such vocabulary has no place in our promised transformation.

The saying *Death has been swallowed up in victory* is likely drawn from Isaiah 25:8. The second half of that verse features God's promise to wipe away all tears. We see the promise's ultimate fulfillment in the glimpses of heaven given in Revelation 7:17 and 21:4. The absence of tears in heaven is a by-product of Jesus' *victory* over death.

55. Paul personifies *death* and addresses it to highlight Jesus' triumph. He adapts the words from Hosea 13:14. Death cannot respond to Paul's challenge, for death is a defeated enemy.

56. God warned Adam that *death* was the consequence of disobedience. "The wages of sin is death," writes Paul in Romans 6:23. Additionally, God's *law* gives *power to sin* by making sins undeniable. Sin ensures we can never measure up to the standards set by God's law.

57. The death and resurrection of *our Lord Jesus Christ* gives us *victory*. The threats mentioned in the previous verse are all dismantled. The cross and empty tomb of Jesus are victorious. Gratitude rises for all God has accomplished. We say with Paul, *thanks be to God!*

III. The Work

1 Corinthians 15:58

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

58. The word *therefore* links the crucial truths of Jesus' resurrection to the mechanics of how the Corinthians (and all Christians) are to live. Stated differently, it links doctrine with practical counsel. The doctrine of our future resurrection is the foundation for present-moment kingdom service. Thus, Christians are called to *stand firm* and be unmovable in commitment to *the work of the Lord*.

Involvement Learning

Resurrection: The Future Hope

Into the Lesson

Do an internet search to find an example of a great victory. Examples may come from history, current news, a sports or personal achievement story, an industry advancement, etc. Write down details of the example.

Today we will examine the greatest victory of all time. We will consider the wonderful comfort this victory provides to all who believe in Jesus.

Into the Word

Read 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58. List all the promises in this text.

What is the “mystery”?

What is the “victory”?

What does the resurrection provide believers?

How does Paul ask believers to respond to the truths in this passage, and why?

What word or phrase from today’s text stands out in a new way?

How does Christ’s resurrection bring you comfort?

Key Text

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
—1 Corinthians 15:20

Into Life

List trials in life (such as a loss, death, health diagnoses, or financial stress). Then write encouraging words, phrases, or verses from today’s text that help us face those trials.

Trials: _____

Encouragement: _____

Thought to Remember

Christ is risen!