

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:12-34 by Jonathan Shradar, Easter 2017

There is just something about plastic eggs filled with candy that sings of Christ's resurrection! If we made the effort we could certainly make the tie-in... from the "hard reality of Good Friday (the plastic shell) bursts forth the sweet surprise of the resurrection on Easter morning!

Somehow eggs have become nearly essential on Easter as we celebrate... its not just savvy consumerism, we don't really know for sure where the tradition began but there are stories of early Christians using eggs (painted red) as a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus. And other accounts through history using them to highlight new life.

In our reading of Scripture today though we arrive at a situation far more serious than whether there are eggs on Easter. In Corinth there is a potential denial of what is truly essential in believing in Jesus and understanding his good news, the gospel. The apostle Paul calls them out and calls them to the life they are meant to have.

Resurrection life is yours in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:12-34 "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? [13] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. [14] And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. [15] 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. [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. [27] For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. [28] When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

[29] Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? [30] Why are we in danger every hour? [31] I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die

every day! [32] What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” [33] Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” [34] Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.” (ESV)

What we had in the first 11 verses of chapter 15 was a reminder of the thing of “First Importance,” the gospel, the news of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. From that center, all of life is to flow, and oh what a life it is! But there is a warning here for some of the members of the church in Corinth. While there was not, it seems, an outright denial of Christ’s resurrection, there was an increasing denial of our resurrection - that there is an eternal reality to be ours, in our bodies, with Christ.

This is typical for a first century environment that was hyper-spiritual in nature, an emphasis on the “spirit” of people and a diminishing importance placed on the physical body as if it was to be discarded or thrown away. The danger is where this leads... slipping into unbelief, disregarding the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Paul wants the church to cling to this belief and live the life they are meant to have because of it... he doesn’t want them, or us, to miss out.

So these verses tackle the question ‘is resurrection real?’ and give us a glimpse of life that follows when the answer to the question is yes!

1) Is Resurrection Real?

This is a question that makes perfect sense. In the first century coming back to life after being dead was just as rare as it is today! But this is one of the defining questions for those that believe in Jesus - is this life all there is? And more importantly, did Christ rise, did Easter truly happen?

If the answer is no, then our gathering today is worthless, the preaching, your faith, all useless. If the answer is no, then this life is all there is, and if this is all there is, what incentive or motivation would one have to try to work for a greater or better world.

Worse than lacking a reason for living, is that if Christ is not raised we are still in our sins, captive to them, deserving still of punishment for them.

“Without resurrection Christian ministry is pointless, personal faith is ineffective, God’s character is called into question, Christians are still in need of salvation, any sense of future hope is removed, and our present experience is meaningless...”

And as Paul says to the church in Corinth, if there is not resurrection why are you doing weird spiritual things like being baptized for the dead... without resurrection those that are dead have perished.

We live in a time when all sorts of people want to downplay the resurrection (and any number of miracles). But if we don’t believe, if resurrection is bunk and doesn’t happen, then Christ was

not raised and if Christ was not raised we are wasting our time - as followers of Jesus, if our only hope is in this life and not in eternal life, resurrected life with him, we are to be pitied most of all.

But if the answer to the question, is resurrection real, is yes... then everything changes.

“Resurrection is the hinge upon which the story of the world pivots.” Tim Keller

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died. For as by a man came death, by a man has come the resurrection of the dead.”

Here Paul is saying that a whole new age has dawned with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: he is the first fruits of an immense harvest, consisting of all those who are in Christ and who belong to Christ.

And this new age, means there is something to live for. To see worth in other people, to hope for a better world, to follow Jesus and surrender our lives to him. Because the resurrection is true, we know God has put all things in subjection under Christ’s rule and is headed toward a final unleashing of power that will make death a faded memory in history...

So the resurrection we celebrate on Easter is essential to the unfolding of redemption and remaking of this world. For the return to the garden where we belong - for the physical experience of eternity. And it has present implications for us and this is what we miss, this is what the Corinthians miss if they deny resurrection - if the dead can’t be raised by the Creator of the universe.

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” verse 22.

Being made alive is the resurrection life, living from the resurrection of Christ, and toward our future resurrection with him.

2) Resurrection Life

I came across the story of two brothers this week. They were homeless and lived in a cave outside of Budapest, Hungary. They would make trinkets out of trash they found and sell them for pennies on the streets. Their existence was filthy, cold and without food. And they lived this way for years... until a lawyer tracked them down to distribute the inheritance they received from their grandmother - some 100 million euros. Spiritually we can live like these brothers, as misers, always starving and exhausting ourselves to make a couple of pennies. But the resurrection is the inheritance we have been given in Christ and it is meant to change our situation.

It changes the way both death and life are understood and experienced.

Living resurrection life, we have **hope**. We have hope in the renewal of all things, the environment, relationships, humanity, and us. We have hope because death no longer has the last word. Christians can look death in the eye without ultimate fear; we can rest in knowing that because of Christ's resurrection we are secure in him and will forever have a place with him.

When loved ones pass away, we are not filled with final grief but with expectant joy.

“We have inherited this resurrection life as a gift - a power that is already inherited by faith in Jesus, that helps us look suffering and death in the eye and see hope. Death will not ultimately have the victory because of what Jesus Christ has done...”

Living resurrection life we have **motivation**. “The resurrection is profoundly applicable to all human life. God has a way of entering into people's lives, breaking through with the shattering, disrupting, powerful event of the resurrection. He has a way of throwing things off balance, but it is in these moments that he builds the believer up with the powerful implications of the resurrection.”

Since Christ is raised he is the authority in our life - everyone will one day answer to him and because he gave his life for us, we can give ours to him. This is where the adventure happens because we live defined by what Jesus says of us not what social category determine.

Success is achieved, approval experienced and we are free to live that “God may be all in all,” as the most important thing. Like Paul, “I die everyday,” he goes on speaking because he has good news to declare - we too live to share and we are cool risking it all for Christ's glory - because our relationship with him is that good.

It shifts how we approach work, being a neighbor, a good citizen, a husband or wife, parent, brother, sister or child. We care for others, we can sacrifice for them, we can honor them because we have been given life in Jesus.

Christians do not need to engage in self-preservation and self-protection because they cannot ultimately lose... This is the ability to live and enjoy life to the full without fear. Sign me up! And we are motivated to invest ourselves, our treasure, and time in what is truly important as we gain a renewed perspective on what really lasts.

Living resurrection life we have **victory**. Because of the cross of Christ and his resurrection, what has been proclaimed is true, what has been won has been won - all of the work is finished, both his and ours. We are given victory over sin, over fear, the anxiety that attempts to wreck us.

We can hear Paul's call to come awake and not go on sinning because we share in Christ's victory. By his cross and resurrection, every level of human need is met. He removes our sin and

guilt before God; he gives us power to obey God's law; and he will one day fully free us from the physical effects of sin such as death, disease and disability.

The resurrection narrative tells a story with a beautiful, happy ending... God wins, and those who are in union with Christ will win along with him. He will renew the entire world to make it the way it is supposed to be and will undo all of the corruption.

This hope, motivation, and victory is yours in Christ. It is all yours when you believe that Jesus is the God-man who lived an obedient life on your behalf, was your substitute on the cross, innocent taking on our guilt and burden. That he was raised on the third day and that he is coming again to unleash your resurrection in him.

Who will live like this? Who will let this resurrection transform your life?

“Many who have an intellectual knowledge of the resurrection lack a transformative knowledge. Paul compares this to a drunken stupor - functionally living without resurrection hope. But note that Paul doesn't offer them anything more than what they already have in Christ. It is not as though there is something more profound than the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul's approach is to call their attention to the foolishness of ignoring the incredible significance of the resurrection life that they have. In other words, there is no need for something more - we need to drill down deeper into what we already have. We have a profound hope that gives us the ability to live riskily with moral composure because death has been defeated!”
May we be transformed as we continue to drill down deeper to the water of life found in the good news of Jesus.

The resurrection is stunning. It serves as the exclamation point to the work of the cross and it vindicates all that Jesus taught. And this promise of our resurrection is stunning as well, that the God of the universe would so care for us to give this gift.

Resurrection life is yours in Christ Jesus.

Luke 24:1-6 “on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. [2] And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, [3] but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. [4] While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. [5] And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? [6] He is not here, but has risen...” (ESV)

John 11:25-26 “Jesus [says to you], “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, [26] and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (ESV)

Response:

Believe - This is the good news, Christ delivers people from the bondage of sin and guarantees their future with him in a life where neither sin nor death shall have their way. In repentance turn to Christ, to his forgiveness, his life, and the promise of resurrection.

Live - Let it give you hope, motivation and experiential victory. Let it make you a risk taker, adventurer for Christ's glory. "We should be living in this world as those whose confidence in the final vindication of Christ through our own resurrection determines the present.

This last week we witnessed in the news terrorism and violence toward those that believe in the resurrection, Christians in Egypt. We can only imagine the chaos of that morning worship where suicide bombers took the lives of innocent people... but later that day in the street as caught on video, a group of believers, whom had been in the churches that day, who had cried and cared for loved ones; were declaring their place of hope, and living in response to what they believe. Reciting the Nicene Creed:

"We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father."

"Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end."

"And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen."

May this same Spirit, this same truth of the resurrection make us so bold, that we would live the resurrection life undeterred, for the glory of God.