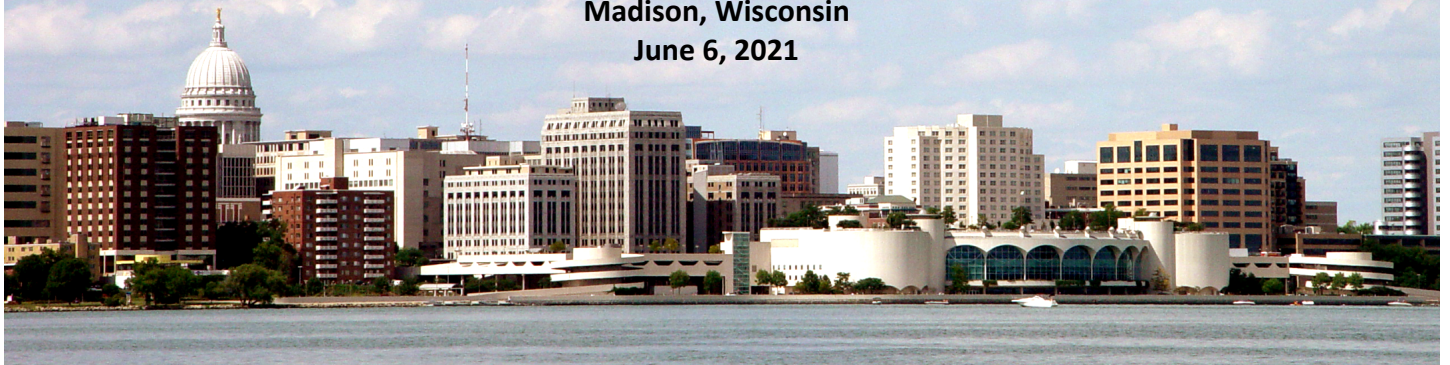


Motivation

1 CORINTHIANS 15:29-34 • RESURRECTION (PART 4)

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****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is good to be together this morning! I hope all of us have the elements for the Lord's Supper (either from home or from the table in the entryway), as John/Aaron will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after our study today. And then, Clayton/John will be leading us in three songs before we head outside to do our visiting outdoors.

As our tradition has been, we are explaining God's plan of salvation here at the beginning. The gospel is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This is what God has done, and in response, we must believe this good news and obey it. We turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Christ, the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. At this point, God adds us to his kingdom, the church, and the Christian life begins. If you have any questions about this, if you would like to study together, we would invite you to get in touch.

Also, as our tradition has been, we are passing along some good news today! This first pictures are of three women baptized in Kenya last Sunday – Irene, Betty, and Nancy. We rejoice with our new Christian sisters this week.

We then have an update from The Gospel of Christ, an online teaching ministry based out of Manchester, Tennessee. Recently, Glen Burkard started watching down in the Huntsville, Alabama, area. He then went online and found a nearby congregation in Hazel Green, Alabama, made the call, studied with their preacher (Ben Bailey), and Glen was baptized just a few days ago. We are thankful for opportunities to learn online, and we are thankful for Glen's persistence.

And then we also have a picture of Jamir, who was baptized last Sunday at the Roeser Road congregation in Phoenix, Arizona. This is all I know, but we do know that we have a new Christian brother, and so we rejoice with Jamir and his new Christian family down in Arizona. We share all of this by way of encouragement: What these men and women have done this week, you can do today. Pull me aside after worship, get in touch with either one of our other elders, and we would be more than happy to open the word of God and study together.

This morning, I would invite you to return with me to 1 Corinthians 15. Several months ago, one of members asked for a lesson on a rather difficult verse in this chapter, and we finally get to that verse today! Normally, before we could ever study 1 Corinthians 15:29, we would need to spend half of our time together giving some background information. But, we've already had three weeks of background material! Of all people, we now know what this chapter is all about. As we've been learning, this chapter is perhaps one of the first written accounts of the Lord's resurrection.

Like Madison, we learned that Corinth is built on an isthmus. And we learned that Paul visits Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey (in Acts 18). The church in Corinth has some issues, so Paul writes a series of letters, addressing those concerns. And in 1 Corinthians 15, he comes to the resurrection. It seems, in fact, that some of the members are perhaps questioning the possibility of a future resurrection.

Three weeks ago, then, in the first eleven verses, Paul starts to combat this by appealing to the resurrection of Jesus. He starts with what they already believe. If you are a Christian, you believe in the resurrection of Jesus, so he starts here, appealing to the existence of the Christian faith, appealing to the scriptures, and appealing to a good number of eyewitnesses. And then, he applies all of this by writing about the change that the resurrection makes in our own lives.

Two weeks ago, we moved into the next paragraph, and we came to a new line of reasoning, as Paul encourages these people to imagine what life would be like if Christ had never been raised. If the dead simply do not come back, that applies to Jesus, and there are some consequences: Our preaching is vain, your faith is vain, all of the apostles are false witnesses, your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins, those who have died are truly dead in every possible way and are not coming back, and we of all people are most to be pitied (we have sacrificed for nothing, we have wasted our lives).

Last week, we came to verses 20-28, as Paul gives the reminder that **"...Christ HAS been raised from the dead."** And because of this, we learned that we will rise, death will die, and God will reign.

Today, we move into verses 29-34, and we find that the resurrection is something of a MOTIVATION. And without the resurrection, the greatest incentive for Christian living is taken away. Without the resurrection, what is the point? The resurrection, then, motivates. And if we are weak or struggling with our faith, there's a good chance we need to think a bit more carefully about the resurrection. Today, then, we're looking at our response to the resurrection. Some of these are worded in a negative way, "Without the resurrection, we wouldn't be motivated to do this or that," but for the purpose of our study, let's look at these things in a positive way: Because of the resurrection, this is what we are motivated to do, this is how we respond. Because Christ was raised, and because we also will be raised at some point, we are motivated to respond in some way.

This morning, then, we are looking at 1 Corinthians 15:29-34, and we're looking out for how we might be motivated to respond to the resurrection. Let's look at verses 29-34, the words of Paul. He's in the middle of claiming that Christ really has been raised, and we pick up in verse 29 as he says,

29 Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? 30 Why are we also in danger every hour? 31 I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. 32 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE. 33 Do not be deceived: "Bad

company corrupts good morals.”³⁴ Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

As we look at what Paul says here, let’s go back and notice what the resurrection motivates us to do.

I. And we start in verse 29, as Paul mentions BAPTISM.

And this is where we get to this strange reference to those who are ***“baptized for the dead.”*** One of our members wants to know: What in the world does that mean? As I have tried to process this passage over the past 30 years, here’s my conclusion: I am not exactly sure! And if you figure it out, I hope you will let me know. This is what we do know: Paul knew exactly what he meant when he first wrote it, and the Christians in Corinth knew what he meant when he wrote it. For us, though, it seems as if something is missing. We’re missing some context. Unfortunately, some have taken this rather obscure passage, and they have done some pretty bizarre things with it. Most of us know that the Mormons literally baptize for the dead. They will research genealogies, and somebody in the present will be baptized on behalf of somebody who has died in the past, with the idea that one person can be baptized on behalf of another. This is why the Mormon church has such an interest in genealogies. Ancestry.com, for example, is Mormon-owned. If I have some question about my dead ancestors, they will know, and it goes back to this passage. They have a religious motivation to find the names and dates of everybody who has ever lived, so they can be baptized on their behalf. They’ve had some controversy in the fairly recent past, as Mormons have supposedly been baptized by proxy on behalf of people like Adolf Hitler, Genghis Kahn, Joseph Stalin, and others.

So, as we try to figure this out (without losing our minds or spending the next six months on this), here’s what’s been helpful to me: 1.) We know what this passage does NOT teach, 2.) We have several possibilities as to what this passage MIGHT teach, and finally, 3.) Even without nailing down every possibility, we can be very confident in what WE need to learn from this passage.

So, first of all, what does this passage NOT teach? When we compare everything else the New Testament teaches on baptism, we know that Paul is not suggesting that the living can be baptized on behalf of (or in the place of) those who are already dead. Baptism is not some kind of magic ritual that one person can do for another. This isn’t voodoo, where we push a pin in a doll, and somebody gets hurt. We don’t immerse one person and another person gets saved. That’s not what baptism is. Baptism is our personal obedience to the gospel. We hear the good news, we believe it, we turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the son of God, we allow ourselves to be immersed, and we are born into God’s family. There’s no way to do this for somebody else, any more than we can repent for somebody else, or believe for somebody else. Plus, once this life is over, that’s it. There are no second chances. According to Jesus in Luke 16, there is a ***“great chasm”*** between the lost and the saved. After death comes ***“judgment”*** (according to Hebrews 9:27). So, this verse does NOT teach that somebody can be baptized in order to save somebody who has already died.

What MIGHT this passage teach? We have several possibilities. First of all, there’s a chance that Paul is referring to some form of what I just referred to, but he’s not endorsing it. There’s a chance that he’s taking what others are doing and using it against them. And in that sense, what he says is true. If the living are being baptized on behalf of the dead, it’s wrong, but makes even less sense without the resurrection. The main thing going for this view is Paul’s shift in pronouns. Up to this point in the chapter, he’s been referring to ***“I,”*** and ***“you,”*** and, ***“we.”*** But suddenly, in verse 29, he says, ***“Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?”*** So we notice that this isn’t something Paul is

necessarily endorsing, but it's a practice he's using in his argument. It might be similar to the argument Jesus makes in Matthew 12:27, when he speaks to the Pharisees and says, ***"If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges."*** Jesus wasn't saying that he was casting out demons by Beelzebul, but he was using their argument against them. So, this is at least a possibility.

Another possibility is that some were being baptized in order to be with their dead relatives. In other words, my grandfather died, he was a faithful Christian, I want to be with him; therefore, I will be baptized. In a sense, I have been ***"baptized for the dead."***

A slightly related possibility is that some were being baptized as a result of the influence of someone who has died. In other words, my grandmother was a faithful Christian, she has now died, but when I think of her example, she motivates me to obey the gospel. In a sense, I might be baptized ***"for the dead."*** As I studied for this lesson, I realized in doing many hours of reading that some of those authors have already died. In Hebrews 11:4, the author refers to the faith of Abel and says that, ***"...through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."*** When we die, our influence lives on, even to the point that we might motivate someone to obey the gospel, to be ***"baptized for the dead."*** Most of the authors of the songs in our songbook are probably dead, but we continue to be influenced by them. The article in today's bulletin is written by a friend of mine who died a couple of years ago – Stan Mitchell, a professor at Freed-Hardeman University. If you read that article and were encouraged, you were influenced by the dead. So again, in that sense, we might be influenced by those who are now dead to obey the gospel.

Another possibility is that some might be baptized in order to fill the vacancies left by those who have died. It's almost the picture of an army in a battle. As some are killed, others step in to fill the gaps.

Another possibility is that some were baptized due to the influence of Paul and the other apostles. And this one is interesting, because in verse 31 Paul refers to himself and says, ***"I die daily."*** He was referring to his suffering as an apostle. In 1 Corinthians 4:9, he refers to himself as one ***"condemned to death."*** In 2 Corinthians 4:11, he refers to ***"constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake."*** So, because Paul and the other apostles are so willing to die for what they believe, others see this, and they are motivated to obey the gospel themselves.

So, we know what this verse NOT teach, we've looked at what it MIGHT teach, but what do we know for sure? In the big picture, we need to realize that Paul is writing these words, not to prove a point about baptism, but to prove a point about the resurrection. So, instead of introducing some strange new teaching about baptism that's never referred to anywhere else in scripture, Paul is actually making a point about the resurrection. Without the resurrection, baptism makes no sense at all. And the positive side of that is: The resurrection motivates us to be baptized. We might not understand every possibility here, but we know that 1 Corinthians 15:29 teaches that the resurrection in some way motivates us to be baptized, and without the resurrection, baptism makes no sense at all. So, we might not understand everything about this verse, but we know what it does NOT teach, what it MIGHT teach, and what it DOES teach.

II. **This leads us to a second motivation provided by the resurrection: The motivation to risk it all, to LIVE IN DANGER FOR JESUS.**

I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage in The Message. He summarizes what Paul is saying here in this way. In verses 30-32, he says,

30 And why do you think I keep risking my neck in this dangerous work? 31 I look death in the face practically every day I live. Do you think I'd do this if I wasn't convinced of your resurrection and mine as guaranteed by the resurrected Messiah Jesus? 32 Do you think I was just trying to act heroic when I fought the wild beasts at Ephesus, hoping it wouldn't be the end of me? Not on your life! It's resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live.

So, it's the hope of resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus, that motivates us to risk everything for Jesus. We live in a world that hates the Christian faith. We live in a world that crucified the Lord Jesus. It would be easy for us to just be quiet and go off to hide somewhere. But the resurrection motivates us to live dangerously, we might say – not in terms of skydiving or something like that, but in stepping out and doing bold things in the name of Christ.

Several days ago, a headline from the Babylon Bee caught my eye. They are a site for satire. They're like The Onion for Christianity. But in light of it being Pride Month, the headline said, "Major Corporations Bravely Come Out In Support Of Incredibly Popular, Socially Acceptable Movement." So, it is now brave to boldly agree with what everybody else already agrees with. The article closes with this, "Meanwhile, companies that openly support incredibly unpopular religious causes were booed for their cowardice." Very interesting. As God's people, we mourn all of the terrible things happening in the world around us. We think we are unique, and yet the world continues to be the world. It has always been risky to live for Jesus, but the resurrection is our motivation. Because of the resurrection, anything we suffer in this life is worth it.

In verse 30, Paul wants to know: Without the resurrection, "***Why are we also in danger every hour?***" Paul was in constant danger. At the end of verse 31, Paul says, "***I die daily.***" As I see it, Paul would wake up each morning, fully expecting to give his life for preaching the gospel: Today might be the day! "***I die daily,***" he says. In verse 32, he refers to fighting with "***wild beasts***" in Ephesus. We don't have a record of this. We do know that not too long after Paul left Corinth, he was caught up in a riot in Ephesus when the silversmiths' guild (or trade union) riles up the crowd over Paul preaching against the goddess Diana. He barely escapes with his life. There might have been literal beasts involved, but it might have been figurative. Today, we talk about "throwing somebody under the bus." Usually, that isn't literal. But either way, Paul faces each day with courage, despite living in constant danger.

Over in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul is defending his apostleship, and he says,

23 Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

Paul, then, faces what he faces on a daily basis, with courage, motivated by the resurrection. Otherwise, "***What does it profit me?***" he says (back in 1 Corinthians 15:32). If there's no resurrection, why do I put myself through

this? Without the resurrection, why bother. Without the resurrection, there's no motive for sacrifice, there's no reason to risk everything. The positive side of this, of course, is: The resurrection motivates us to live for Jesus, no matter what, to risk everything for Jesus, to live dangerously for the Lord. In light of the resurrection, we as God's people need to look for ways to put ourselves out there – speak up when it's unpopular, serve when it is not convenient, love when it is easier to do nothing, and so on.

The resurrection, then, motivates us to be baptized, and it motivates us to live in danger for Jesus.

III. This leads us to the third motivation in this passage: Because of the resurrection, we have a reason to LIVE WITH SOBRIETY.

We see this starting near the end of verse 32, through the end of verse 34. There are a number of ways we might summarize this, but the idea is: The resurrection motivates us to live like Christians need to be living. He starts with something of a negative argument, and he seems to quote a pagan playwright, ***"If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE."*** And if the dead are not raised, that is a valid conclusion! If the dead are not raised, who cares how we live! I'm thinking of a situation a number of years ago when a man in England was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. His doctor told him he would be dead within a year. So, this man went home and quit his job. He started selling or giving away all of his earthly possessions. He stopped paying his mortgage. And then he started spending his savings. He ate out with friends, he took expensive vacations, he did everything he had always wanted to do. And at the end of that year he had nothing left except the suit he planned to be buried in. However, as that year came to a close, his doctor made a shocking discovery. This man didn't have pancreatic cancer at all. His pancreas was inflamed. It was painful and serious, but treatable. The last I heard, he was suing the doctor. How strange, to sue your doctor because you are not dying. But we at least understand. Thinking he was on his way out at any moment, he enjoyed himself right into poverty. And that's what Paul is saying here: If there is no resurrection, ***"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*** As it is, though, there is a resurrection, so the opposite is true: Let us NOT be eating and drinking! Let us not be partying. Let us not be partying like there is no tomorrow, because there is a tomorrow, there is a life after this one.

And this is where we come to a verse that is often ripped out of context, ***"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"*** This is true in many ways. Most of us have done some things with friends that we would never have considered doing on our own. I'm thinking of an area-wide fellowship at the church down in Crystal Lake on a Monday night many years ago. The church sign at that time, was a bit like ours here – two signs mounted at an angle, only theirs was made of two 4x8 pieces of plywood. My friend and I went out there at night (while everybody else was eating inside), we hid between the boards of that sign, and we threw a few jelly doughnuts at some passing cars...until we hit a car, and the guy got out and chased us. Today, I'm embarrassed by that. I have matured through the years. Today, I would never waste a jelly doughnut like that. But my point in sharing this is: Neither one of us would have ever done that on our own, but as it is, we influenced each other (in a bad way). And that's the point Paul is making here, but specifically, with reference to the resurrection. Some in the church in Corinth are denying the resurrection, and this teaching is starting to spread. Back in 1 Corinthians 15:12, Paul was asking, ***"...how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"*** Some in the church were actually teaching this, and this teaching is starting to impact the way these people are living. What we believe influences what we do, and the people we associate with influence what we believe. So, be careful who you associate with! If the people I hang out with think it's okay to waste doughnuts, get some new friends! In the same way, what we believe about the resurrection controls how we live, it controls how we spend our time and resources, it changes our behavior.

No wonder, then, that the church in Corinth had so many problems. Up to this point in the book, Paul has dealt with division (everybody in the church had their favorite preacher, and they were dividing up over that), he's dealt with a man living in sexual sin with his own stepmother, he's dealt with the wealthy members chowing down on the Lord's Supper and not leaving any for the poor members, and so on. When we leave behind the basics of the Christian faith, we drift and we sin in any number of other areas. If we don't believe right, we won't behave right. If we don't believe the resurrection, everything else is out the window.

Paul's conclusion, then, comes in the command (in verse 34), to ***"Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God."*** ***"Wake up from your drunken stupor,"*** as the ESV puts it. When you're drunk, you can't judge your behavior properly. It would be like asking a drunk guy how he thought his driving has been lately. So, ***"Become sober-minded as you ought."*** This doesn't mean we can't enjoy life, but we do need to go through life ***"sober-minded,"*** knowing that we will be held accountable someday, knowing that there is a life after this one.

Conclusion:

Is there a resurrection? Absolutely! Jesus really did come back from the dead, and because he was raised, we will also be raised. This motivates us, first of all, to obey the gospel, to be baptized, to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. The resurrection also motivates us to live for Jesus, risking everything, risking embarrassment, risking financial ruin, even risking our lives, because we know that in the end, anything we sacrifice will be worth it. And finally, the resurrection also motivates us to live righteously and godly in this present age. Because Jesus has been raised, and because we will be raised, we are to stop sinning, we are to live in sobriety.

I'm looking forward to coming back together next week to look at the next paragraph as we continue to learn more about the resurrection.

Before we partake of the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the one and only great and awesome God, creator of heaven and earth, the creator of life itself, and the God of both the living and the dead. As we think about the resurrection, we ask that our thoughts would be shaped by your word and that our hearts would be encouraged to always do what is right. We pray that your Son's resurrection would encourage us to be more like him every day – loving our neighbors, caring for the poor, and speaking the truth. We pray that we would wake up, that we would always be sober-minded, and ready for your Son's return at any moment.

Thank you for forgiving our sins. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. In Jesus we pray, AMEN.