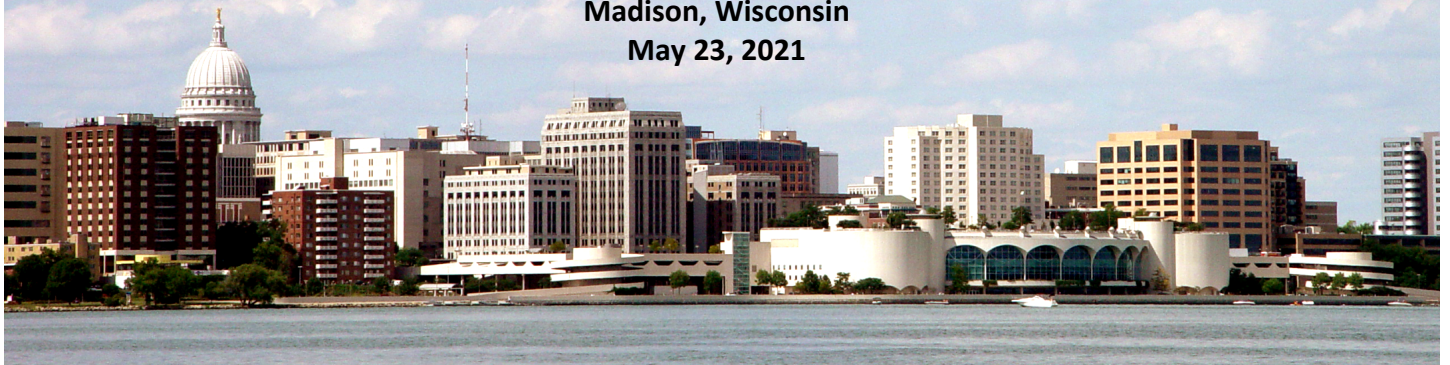


If Christ Has Not Been Raised

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-19 • RESURRECTION (PART 2)

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
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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 (one of our shepherds) 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 we begin, I need to make a confession. When I got here this morning, I did something that was a bit risky, and perhaps even reckless – I hope you will forgive me, but I took the snow shovels from beside the front door and put them away. So, if we get a blizzard this week, you can probably blame me. This is a strange time of year. When I got here today, the A/C was bringing the temp in here down to 70, and when I went downstairs, the furnace was bringing the temp up to 70. We are right on the edge this morning.

Since we don't know whether this might be the first, last, or only time somebody might be with us (either in person, online, or on the phone), we want to make sure we at least briefly explain God's plan of salvation. Knowing that we would sin, God planned ahead and sent his Son as a perfect sacrifice. He died, he was buried, but he was raised up from the dead on the third day. In response, when we hear this good news, we believe it and we 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.

As our tradition has been, we are passing along some good news today, in our ongoing series pictures of those who have recently obeyed the gospel. This has been a highlight for me over the past year. At first, when I started preaching from our garage, I wondered whether we could keep this up, finding at least one image of somebody who was baptized somewhere in the world each week. But thankfully, I don't think we've missed a Sunday, and thankfully, we've been able to include some pictures from right here in Madison. As you can see, today's is a bit unusual: A barrel baptism in the Philippines! I don't have the woman's name, I don't know exactly when this happened, but it's obviously at the Twinville Church of Christ (written right there on the barrel). These are actually screenshots from a video. Due to the language barrier, I could not understand what was said, but it's obvious what was happening throughout the 4-minute video, something that has happened thousands upon

thousands of times over the past 2000 years: A man reads from an open Bible, they exchange a few words, and then this young woman is buried with Christ in baptism. And we share this by way of encouragement: What she has done, 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.

Before we get to our study today, I'd like to give another brief update on the tech-outreach side of things. We've given a few updates on the website, and YouTube, and the captions, and Google Maps over the past several weeks, and today I thought we should give just a brief update concerning the livestream that goes out over the phone line. When the pandemic first began, we got that first class out over Facebook, and that quickly moved to YouTube. However, one of our young men was especially concerned that some of our seniors and a few others without internet at home were really cut off there for a bit. Very early on, he found a way to set up a phone server at home, using some open source software that allowed him to treat the audio from our livestream like hold music. You know how you call a company and end up listening to music while you're on hold? Our sermons and Bible classes were the hold music! Each lesson would repeat itself over and over until a fresh lesson was added either Wednesday or the following Sunday. And that worked fairly well, we shared the concept with several other congregations, but it was highly dependent on reliable internet. And the other issue was: If somebody called in the middle of the week, they might end up joining in on the middle of a service and would have to continue listening from the middle to the end, and then continue on into the next loop. It would just play over and over again. Another downside is that we were paying on a per-minute basis for those who called in. It was also a bit complicated to set up, so that he and one other person were pretty much the only ones who could do it. A few months ago, then, he found a better option. We now pay a flat fee every month, it's easier on our end, and when people call in, they start at the beginning now! Also, the new system can call YOU if you choose that option. It has been more reliable, and it is extremely important for our members without internet.

We took a screenshot of the stats from the past month, and what I noticed on the chart, first of all, is how the numbers are slowly decreasing, and that is good! Even those who join us on the phone, are slowly starting to return to in-person worship. But what I also noticed is how the numbers are higher on Wednesday than on Sunday. Since we are still on-line only on Wednesday, the phone is still the only way some of our people are staying connected. We had 12 unique callers over the past month. These people listened for a grand total of 2,093 minutes, and eleven have signed up to get called automatically when each service starts. We summarize these figures on a weekly basis on the backside of the church bulletin. But I just wanted to make sure all of us are aware of this. When many of us live and work on the internet, we might forget that some of our members are not online, and this has given them a way to stay connected. We are thankful for those of you who make this possible.

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, but as we make our way to that passage, we are spending several weeks in 1 Corinthians 15, which includes what is perhaps one of the first written records of the Lord's resurrection. And I say this, because (as we learned last week) 1 Corinthians was perhaps written before the four gospel accounts.

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 (as a young congregation in a difficult place); so, Paul writes a series of letters back to this congregation, answering their questions. And in 1 Corinthians 15, he seems to be answering some kind of concern about the resurrection. It seems, in fact, that some of the members are perhaps questioning the possibility of a future resurrection. I didn't think about this

last week, but you might remember a warning Paul gives in 2 Timothy 2, about false teaching spreading like gangrene within the church. And specifically, Paul warns about **“...Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.”** So, this teaching was spreading in the early church, the idea that there is no future resurrection. This is a doctrine that continues to spread, even today.

Last week, 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, with three reminders or appeals. He appeals to the existence of the Christian faith, he appeals to the scriptures, and he appeals 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. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul himself went from being a persecutor of the church to being a gospel preacher. And what changed Paul also has the power to change us.

This morning, we move into the next paragraph, and we come to a new line of reasoning, as Paul tries to get these people to imagine what life would be like if Christ had never been raised. Some in Corinth were suggesting that there is no resurrection, that people simply do not come back from the dead. He takes that, and he spins it around, and he argues that, **“...if there is no resurrection of the dead, [then] not even Christ has been raised.”** And he tries to get them to picture what this really means. If there is no resurrection at all, then that includes Jesus, and here are some consequences. This is the logical result of not believing the resurrection.

This morning, then, let’s look at verses 12-19, and as we look at this passage, let’s be looking for this list of consequences. If there is no resurrection, these are the results of this way of thinking. Let’s look together at 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, the words of Paul,

12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact 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 worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

As we look at what Paul says here, let’s think about the consequences of not believing in the resurrection. And all of these fall under Paul’s main argument in verses 12-13, **“If there is no resurrection of the dead, [then] not even Christ has not been raised.”** And if this is the case, these are the consequences.

- I. **And we start in verse 14, as Paul explains that if Christ has not been raised, then OUR PREACHING IS VAIN.**

And the word Paul uses for **“vain”** is a word sometimes translated as “empty.” Without the resurrection, our preaching is missing something. We know what “empty” means. In a time with shortages and rising prices, we think of a car without gas or a firearm without ammunition. Both are useless when they are empty. Last week, we learned that the gospel is the good news about Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Without the

resurrection, our preaching is also “empty.” Without the resurrection, our preaching is missing something; our preaching is hollow. Without the resurrection, we are preaching only the death and the burial, and that’s not good news, that is bad news! Without the resurrection, Jesus is just dead and buried, and our preaching is just wasting people’s time. Without the resurrection, we might as well go home. There’s no point to preaching without the resurrection.

Without the resurrection, some might be tempted to say, “Well, Jesus is at least just a good, moral man with some wise sayings,” and yet, even that’s not true, because in reality, without the resurrection, Jesus himself would be a liar. And I say this, because Jesus predicted his own resurrection several times, didn’t he? Sometimes, a bit cryptically, but other times, very directly. In John 2:19, in response to the Jews asking for a sign, Jesus, referring to his body, said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** “Oh, he wasn’t really talking about his resurrection!” Really? That’s the statement the Jewish leaders actually quote to encourage Pilate to seal the tomb! They understood it as a reference to his resurrection. And in Matthew 16:21, Matthew indicates that this was something of a regular theme for Jesus, **“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.”** Jesus preached his own resurrection. And his people understood this. After the resurrection, in fact, the angels at the empty tomb said (in Matthew 28:5-6), **“Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.”** Everybody knew that Jesus had predicted his own resurrection. In fact, we might even say that everything Jesus said hinged on the resurrection. He claimed to be the Son of God, with the ability to forgive sins, a king, the Messiah. Those are some bold claims, but then he was put to death. And if he had not come back from the dead, everything he said would have been meaningless.

So, if we try to remove the resurrection, our preaching is empty; our preaching is missing something, our preaching is vain.

II. Not only that, but Paul also says that our FAITH IS VAIN as well.

If we listen to empty preaching, then our faith is also empty. Empty preaching leads to empty faith. Without the resurrection, our faith has no foundation. There’s nothing to it. It’s belief in a whole lot of nothing. We might even compare it to the worship of idols. Without the resurrection, our faith is vain; our faith is hollow and empty. Without the resurrection, we would be putting our faith in a dead man. And really, without the resurrection, we’d be putting our faith in a dead liar, a deceiver, somebody who said he would come back, but didn’t.

And if this is true of us, it would also be true of all of God’s people. We think of those great heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Like Abraham, they were **“...looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** They **“...died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”** They were looking for **“...a better country, that is, a heavenly one.”** Without the resurrection, their faith (like ours) is also vain (or empty). Without the resurrection, death is the end. Death wins. Jesus doesn’t win, but death does. When this life is over, it’s over. Faith in Jesus without the resurrection is vain. Life itself is meaningless. We get up in the morning, eat, go to work, come home, eat, go to bed, wake up, and repeat, over and over until we die, and that’s it. That is a meaningless, empty existence, **“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,”** as King Solomon says.

So, first of all, without the resurrection, our preaching is vain. And secondly, without the resurrection, our faith is also vain.

III. This leads us to the third idea: Without the resurrection of Jesus, PAUL AND THE OTHER APOSTLES ARE FALSE WITNESSES.

As Paul says (in verse 15), *“Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.”* So, not only is our preaching vain, and not only is our faith vain, but we are all liars! And if we are testifying that God did something he did not do, then we are testifying against God. And this goes for all of the apostles. If Jesus has not been raised, all of them are a bunch of liars. Tradition tells us that all of the apostles except John died for their testimony. They all died as martyrs. They died as witnesses to the resurrection. They staked their lives on this. And not just the apostles themselves, but everybody we learned about last week in verses 6-7, the 500 and James, the Lord’s own brother. All liars! All were testifying to something that never happened. And they not only lied personally, but they conspired together. They coordinated their lies. The four gospel accounts and the letters are almost supernaturally consistent, agreeing with each other in every possible way. If it’s a lie, then they all conspired together. And they do this in spite of persecution. There’s nothing in it for them if they lie. We’re studying the book of Acts in our Wednesday class. The apostles are harassed, and thrown in jail, and beaten, almost from the very beginning. All for a lie. And they do this not only in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, but they take this lie to the uttermost parts of the earth, being harassed and tortured all along the way, as they tell the story of Jesus dying on the cross, being buried, and coming back from the dead on the third day. If it’s all a lie, it doesn’t make sense, does it?

And again, think about those who deny the resurrection but try to claim that Christianity has some good teaching. No! Without the resurrection, the entire Christian faith is based on a lie. And a faith based on false testimony is worse than useless; it’s a fraud, it’s a great deception. If they all lied about the resurrection, then how can we trust them on anything? Everything in the New Testament hinges on the resurrection. Either the apostles and other New Testament writers are lying about the resurrection (and who knows what else), or they are telling the truth. And that’s Paul’s point here in verse 15.

And really, this applies to us, doesn’t it? If Christ has not been raised, whenever we mention Jesus to somebody, we are sharing in the conspiracy. We are participating in the deception. We also are false witnesses, testifying against God, claiming that God did something that he never did. If Christ has not been raised, we are lying to the world and also to each other. As bad as it is to believe a lie, it is even worse to promote a lie. And if Christ has not been raised, this is exactly what we are doing: All Christians are lying.

IV. As bad as this is, it does get worse, because as Paul continues to explain, if there is no resurrection, YOUR FAITH IS WORTHLESS; [AND] YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS.

If there is no resurrection, our faith is useless, our faith has no purpose, our faith is unproductive. The goal of having faith is salvation. But if Christ is still in the grave, there’s no point to any of this, because all of us are still lost! Without the resurrection, we are not justified, we are not sanctified, we are not forgiven, we still have the curse of sin hanging over us. I say this mainly because of what Paul writes in Romans 4:24-25, where he mentions our belief in God, *“...who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”* Without being raised up, there is no justification. Jesus was *“raised for our justification,”* Paul says. A little later, I think we might be singing the chorus of a song most of us know, “Living, He loved me; dying, He saved me; Buried, He carried my sins far away; Rising, he justified, freely forever; One

day He's coming, O glorious day!" Rising, he justified. Without the resurrection, there is no justification; we are still in our sins.

Paul uses a similar picture in Ephesians 2:5-6, a passage familiar to most of us. He refers to God's mercy and love and says that, **"...even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."** Do we see how important the resurrection is? When we died to sin, God **"raised us up with Him."** If there is no resurrection, there's no being **"raised up."**

We see it in the act of baptism. In that passage we read last week (in Romans 6), Paul describes baptism as a death, burial, and resurrection. In baptism, in obedience to God's command, we reenact what Jesus did. We die to sin, we are buried under water, and then we are raised up to live the new life. Without the resurrection, we only die and are buried. Without the resurrection, I hold you under until you stop moving, and then it's over. As it is, though, the resurrection is critical to our forgiveness, **"...so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection."**

Or, as Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 15, without the resurrection **"...your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."**

- V. **In verse 18, we come to the next consequence, and that is: If Christ has not been raised, then THOSE WHO HAVE DIED ARE REALLY DEAD, and will not be coming back, ever.**

As Paul says, **"Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."** They are lost, destroyed, they are gone, and we will never see them again. **"Fallen asleep,"** of course, is a common euphemism for death. It's a picture. But Paul says here that if there is no resurrection, it's not an accurate picture at all. With sleep, we wake up, but not without the resurrection! If Christ has not been raised, death is truly the end. Those people who have gone on before us have truly gone on before us.

We think of the comfort Paul gives in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 when he says, **"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."** On the other hand, if we do NOT believe that Jesus died and rose again, that's it. There is no comfort. Without the resurrection, we would truly grieve **"as do the rest who have no hope."** Without the resurrection, aging and death would be absolutely horrific.

As it is, though, one of the great benefits of being a Christian is that we have comfort in knowing that we will see our loved ones again. Years ago, when my grandmother passed away, I remember my dad saying, "If the Christian faith isn't for times like this, then what is it for?" That's exactly right! As God's people, we know we will see each other again. But without the resurrection, those who have fallen asleep are gone, eternally separated.

- VI. **In verse 19, Paul closes this section with another consequence, without the resurrection, he says that **"...if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, WE ARE OF ALL MEN MOST TO BE PITIED."****

The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope beyond this life; but, if this life is really all there is, ***“we are of all people most to be pitied.”*** If there is no resurrection, we are some of the most miserable people anywhere. Why? Because as God’s people we have given up certain things for the hope of being with God in eternity. We have deprived ourselves. Not only that, but we have perhaps put ourselves in danger. We’ve sacrificed. We’ve given up time and earthly treasures to advance the kingdom of God. Like Moses, we have chosen to endure ill-treatment with the people of God rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. We’ve signed up for persecution. We’ve perhaps left father, and mother, and sisters, and brothers for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. We’ve taken up the cross to follow the One who conquered death. But if he hasn’t really conquered death, all of this is for nothing. In fact, it’s worse than nothing. We’ve made ourselves miserable for no reason. We are of all people, most to be pitied.

Conclusion:

But, these are the consequences. If Christ has not been raised, some terrible things are true. Thankfully, though, Christ has been raised! We will move into the next paragraph next week, but in the next verse, in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul says, ***“But now Christ has been raised from the dead,”*** and he goes on from there. But because he has been raised, the opposite of all of these things is true.

- Our preaching is NOT in vain – our preaching has significance.
- Our faith is NOT in vain – our faith has a foundation.
- The apostles have testified TRUTHFULLY about the resurrection. What they say happened really happened, and because of this...
- ...we are NOT still in our sins; our sins have been forgiven.
- And because Jesus was raised from the dead, the dead in Christ have NOT perished, but they are alive and waiting for us.
- And because of the resurrection, we, of all people are NOT to be pitied – far from it, we are blessed beyond all others!

I’m looking forward to coming back together next week to study what comes next. For now, we end knowing the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. Because he was raised, we can also be raised. But for that to be true personally, we must obey the gospel by reenacting the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in our own lives in the act of baptism. We die to sin, we are briefly buried under the water, our sins are forgiven, and we are brought up out of the water to live the Christian life. As I said earlier, if you have any questions about this, if you would like to study further, please get in touch, and we would be glad to study the word of God together.

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

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, creator of all life, the only true God, who raised your Son from the dead. We are thankful for your grace and your mercy toward us. We are thankful today for the good news. Thank you for giving us a reason to live. Thank you for giving us the message of life. Thank you for saving us and for washing our sins away. Bless us with courage as we share the good news with the people we know and love. Forgive us when we fall short.

We are thankful for our guests today. We pray for safe travels. We pray for open doors for telling the world what you have done and continue to do.

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

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com