

RESURRECTION: THE FUTURE HOPE

“I can’t believe they are taking so long to get here!” said Valencia to her mother. The family was gathering for their Easter dinner at her aunt’s home, and all the cousins had shown up before her brother and their father.

“Nathan and your dad left church at the same time we did,” said her mother. “Maybe they had to stop somewhere, but if they don’t hurry up and get here, I’ll have to set aside a plate of the baked ribs and scalloped potatoes.” She knew that the rest of the family was caught up in conversation, but they were ready to begin serving the annual family feast. Everyone loved to share their favorite dish, but of course, the important part was for the whole family to be together.

Just then, Nathan squeezed through the back screen door, and Valencia’s mother turned to see Jon coming through the front.

“That was quite an entrance. Took you long enough!” her mother teased, her voice at a level no one else would hear.

“So many places were closed. We had to drive around a bit,” Jon whispered.

“You just *had* to find a smoke shop on Easter? Don’t you see anything strange about that?”

1 How does the hope of resurrection shape the way we should look at our bodies?

2 When do you find yourself looking down upon the body, or treating your body poorly?

¹³ But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

¹⁴ And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. ¹⁵ Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. ¹⁶ For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: ¹⁷ And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. ¹⁸ Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. ¹⁹ If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

²⁰ But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

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.

Taste What Is Coming

Perhaps there is no text more appropriate for the joy of Easter Sunday than 1 Corinthians 15. Paul is writing to Gentile Christians in the wealthy city of Corinth, home to the temple of Aphrodite and many pagan religious practices. Paul begins by saying that he communicated the accurate and complete gospel story of Jesus' death and resurrection. This was confirmed by Christ's appearance to hundreds of witnesses, most still living (1 Cor. 15:3–8). Paul knows that there are some people who dispute whether resurrection is real, so he explains the greater significance.

People in Paul's day know how bodies work: a cold corpse doesn't start breathing again! Even leaving aside the obvious physical problem, there are people in Corinth who think that physical bodies *don't matter anyway*. But Paul claims moral significance for Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 6:12–20). He says, "God raised the Lord from the dead,

and he will raise us also” (1 Cor. 6:14). In 1 Corinthians 15:13–20, Paul invites readers to a little thought experiment (notice “if” repeated in vv. 13–17, 19).

What if hope of resurrection is a fantasy (v. 13)? It cuts to the core of Christian faith, for this would mean that Jesus never rose from the dead—never defeated the grave (v. 13, 16). It would mean that those hundreds of witnesses were deluded (or lying), and Paul’s missionary work is pointless. But the problem gets even worse. Death is the punishment for sin; as Paul says in another place, “Your body is subject to death because of sin” (Rom. 8:10). Without the defeat of death and hope of resurrection, it means that we have not received forgiveness from sins either (1 Cor. 15:17). Were that true, those already dead are gone forever, and Christians who follow Jesus deserve only pity (vv. 18–19). Without hope of resurrection, they have surrendered their lives to a lost cause; all that awaits them is the common despair of all people who are lost in sin, unable to restore a relationship with the Creator.

In other words, resurrection is pretty important! And the bodily resurrection of Jesus *is true* (v. 20). It is a fact. And the logic of the thought experiment works in reverse. His resurrection proves the power of God to raise us and to forgive our sins. What happened to Jesus is not a one-off but the pattern of what we shall experience too. Like the “firstfruits” of a harvest, one with a rich bumper crop about to ripen, Christ’s resurrection is only the beginning!

1 What difference does it make whether we hope for bodily resurrection or not?

2 Why does hope in resurrection relate at all to the forgiveness of sins?

3 What makes Jesus like the “firstfruits” of a harvest?

⁵¹ Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵ O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

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.

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.

God’s Victory, Revealed

Like many writers, Paul uses “sleep” as a metaphor for death and dying (v. 51). This doesn’t have to mean that death is a passive experience, but the metaphor is apt for Paul because sleep is *temporary*. Thanks to Jesus, death is temporary too.

Now that we know that the dead will rise, we might wonder: *What will it be like for people who are still living when Christ returns?* Paul describes a coming change for them (v. 51). Even though their bodies won’t have expired, they will stop being subject to decay.

The experience will come in an instant, in roughly the time it takes to shift one's gaze (v. 52). And what is “perishable” (NIV) or “corruptible” (KJV)—which means *human bodies as they are now*—will then “clothe itself” with something immortal and permanent (v. 53). Paul doesn't say, *The soul is eternal, and only it will last*. Instead, he describes what we can only call a new kind of resurrection body, or a new way of being embodied altogether, without the harmful effects of sin. Instead of allowing death to continue *swallowing* people (perhaps Paul is imagining the grave like a mouth), it is death itself that gets “swallowed up,” for Jesus has won the struggle (v. 54).

Everyone knows that mocking isn't kind, but Paul engages in what could be called “holy taunting” (v. 55). Paul adapts the language of Hosea 13:14, and the target of his taunt is death personified. Throughout all of human history, death has been the malignant enemy, robbing God's creation of glory. But in the struggle with the Son of God, death lost and had nothing to show. Paul rejoices over the defeat of death and victory over sin, for we get to experience and enjoy the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 57).

The application for Paul is, “Stand firm” (v. 58). With the victory already won, the price already paid, our invitation is to give ourselves over to any “labor” that God requires. We can spend our lives for God, because there is more where that came from.

1 What makes you eager to be “clothed” with immortality?

2 What makes death the most powerful enemy of all time?

3 How are you enjoying the victory that Jesus won for you?

Glory from the Last Adam

Easter is the center of the Christian calendar. Don't let stores and businesses fool you into thinking otherwise! (No surprise, but they would prefer your attention revolve around the season of gift-giving.)

Easter Sunday is the realization of thousands of years of God's promises. Just think of the way that *forgiving sins* gave offense to Jesus' contemporaries. They couldn't yet imagine a person with the authority to cover sin. Thus Jesus seems to have enjoyed flummoxing the same authorities by reversing sin's effects too—healing and raising people from the dead. How is that for a display of God's power?

Jesus' resurrection is a sign of the times, God's way of embarrassing and dethroning the forces of evil. Yet unless we witness Christ's return, we must all face the cold breath of life's end. Fear and apprehension are only natural.

Those in Christ are not without hope! God has flipped the curse of death. If sin and decay come from Adam, then resurrection and glory can be inherited from Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:49). We don't have to wallow in fear, worrying that our mortal lives are all we have. Those in Christ look forward to a glorious future with God—without pain, arthritis, or allergies. You probably have your own short list of everything going wrong with your physical body. But in the resurrection, everything that tends to go wrong will tend to do the opposite. It's not a fantasy or a cheap parlor trick; it is simply the power of the Creator, our Lord, renewing all things.

1 What is on your short list of things you long to see renewed in your body or in the body of a loved one?

2 Which would you prefer: living to see Jesus return or living a full life in hope of resurrection?

3 What promise of Jesus gives you strength?

A New Day Is Coming!

This week, use a quiet time to allow yourself to consider some of the discouraging aspects of mortality (the aches and pains of aging, sickness or disease, the loss of loved ones). Then write a prayer of gratitude, giving thanks to God that we can be raised from the dead, no longer to experience the pains of mortality.

Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, I welcome the day that my body will be clothed in glory and immortality. Give me courage to face . . .

Key Text

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. —1 Corinthians 15:20 KJV

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

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of April 6 through April 11

Mon. Proverbs 11:3–6, 8–11, 14—Wise and Righteous Counsel.

Tue. Acts 5:26–32—Our Ultimate Allegiance Is to God.

Wed. Hebrews 13:16–21—Godly Leaders Will Give an Account.

Thu. 2 Samuel 23:1–7—Just Rulers Fear God.

Fri. Deuteronomy 17:14–20—The Ways of a Godly King.

Sat. Mark 12:13–17—The Things That Belong to God.

Next Week: Mark 12:17; Romans 13:1, 6–8; 1 Peter 2:13–17

We will talk about the role of earthly leaders. Challenge yourself to list one admirable quality in a governmental leader this week, especially someone you don't support.