

The Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

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Today is Easter, the day Christians give special recognition to the resurrection of Jesus. So, this evening we're going to consider what the resurrection of Jesus teaches us along with what it reveals about our own future resurrection. We'll be looking at 1 Corinthians 15, the first 8 verses after I address a few preliminaries.

Back when I worked at Texas Instruments, I shared an Easter message in a workplace worship service there. We had a lot of engineers from foreign places at TI and I learned afterwards that the term "resurrection" was new to at least one of them so I could have done a better job of explaining it. The term "resurrection" is one of those church terms we assume everyone knows what we're talking about. This week I saw an article commenting on the representative of a seeker-sensitive megachurch not planning to use the term "resurrection" when they promote their Easter services. They said they were not going to use the term because it would make people feel like outsiders. Well, it seems to me that feeling like an outsider would be a good thing if it convicted people of their need to turn to Jesus. I know everyone here will be familiar with this term but there is still value in restating its definition...

The term "resurrection" simply means rising from the dead. It refers to life after this mortal existence is over. It is a continuation of life in a significantly better state. It occurred to me that Teresa and I had something like a resurrection when we moved to Alpine from the Houston area. My job in Houston ended as the digital processor business at Texas Instruments went through its death-throes. So Teresa and I moved to Alpine where we wanted to spend our retirement years and I found a new job here. We moved from a house in a heavily wooded swamp-thicket to one on the top of a mountain where we could see for miles. Don't get me wrong, we love trees but after spending 20 some-odd years living in the woods you get a bit claustrophobic not being able to see the sky. Every place has its redeeming qualities but we are definitely in a better state having relocated to Alpine. However, as good as it is in Alpine, this pales in comparison to what we can look forward to in our resurrected bodies.

Our faith is based on the resurrection of Christ. Of all the miracles revealing that Jesus was the Messiah, His being raised to life after he was crucified was the most important. When the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove that He was the Messiah, He responded in Matthew 12:39-40:

"A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

There is a couple of things of significance here. First of all, Jesus refers to the story of Jonah as if it really happened, it is not some fantastical myth. Also, details matter and the three days Jonah was in the belly of the fish points to the three days Jesus would be in the grave. And of course, He said His resurrection would be the greatest sign of the Messiah. Alright, with that introduction let's look at our text...

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also.

In this passage, Paul wraps up his letter to the church in Corinth with a reminder of the gospel... the good news about Jesus Christ. Paul preached this good news to them when he visited them, they came to believe it and, in general, the Corinthian Church was standing firm on it. The most succinct statement of the good news about Jesus is John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (NKJV)

God the Father demonstrated His love for humanity by sending God the Son into our world to live among us as one of us and then paying the sin-penalty for all who trust in Him. As Romans 5:8 says, *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Sin is another one of those "church terms" which describes that which separates us from God. You can consider the term sin to be essentially synonymous with selfishness. All of us have a natural tendency to put ourselves ahead of others, especially our Creator-God. As Romans 3:23 says, *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

There are consequences for living our lives just for ourselves never accepting the provision God made for us. All who persist in putting themselves ahead of their Creator-God will be separated from Him when this mortal life is over. Or, as Romans 6:23 says, *"the wages of sin is death."*

The consequences for holding on to our natural human selfishness is permanent separation from God which is spiritual death. Part of the human condition is to suffer physical death, but that is not the worst thing that can happen to a person. The worst thing is this spiritual death which is eternal separation from God called the second death in Revelation 20:14. We don't much like talking about the prospect of eternal, spiritual death but Jesus warned us more about this than what He told us about Heaven.

The reality of the second death is what makes the good news of God's provision for us so good. Jesus was the only one who could pay the penalty of sin for us. Since He was God who took on the flesh of a man, He lived a sinless life and thus did not have to die. But He chose to go to the cross for our benefit, paying the sin-penalty of all who trust in Him.

Notice that verse 2 says you will be saved, *"if you hold firmly to the word"* of the gospel. This is rhetorical, if you truly trust in the work of Christ on the cross for your salvation, you will never stop believing it. That is because our capacity to believe this truth is not just some decision we make; it is from God breathing life into our human spirits. Jesus called this being *"born again"* in John 3.

1 John 5:1 says, *"whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."* People don't get un-born and God doesn't un-do what He has done. If you truly trust in Jesus for salvation, you will not stop believing. All who appear to have believed and then later fall away from the faith never truly believed to begin with. Just saying you believe doesn't make it so, as Jesus said in John 3:7, *"you must be born again."*

While truly believing in your heart of hearts is something God must do for us, He will breathe life into the spirits of all who **sincerely** seek Him. Romans 10:12-13 says, *"[the Lord] richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

In this context, Romans 10:9 says, *"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

And that is what our 1 Corinthians 15 text tells us in verses 3 & 4. Believing Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead is of first importance. His dying to pay the penalty for our sins and rising from the dead is the core of the good news about Jesus.

Paul next reminds us that Jesus rising from the dead confirmed that He was the Messiah... Notice it says here in verse 4 that the death and resurrection of the Messiah happened *"according to the scriptures."* The death and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah. Psalm 22 describes in detail the crucifixion of the Messiah and it was written by King David 500 years before this method of execution was even invented by the Persians.

Psalm 16:10 refers to the resurrection of the Messiah saying, *"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."*

Isaiah 53 also describes the Messiah's death on the cross and verse 11 says, *"after he has suffered, He will see the light of life and be satisfied."*

As Jesus said, His resurrection was the most important sign the world would have that He was the Messiah.

Back to 1 Corinthians 15; in verses 5-8 Paul describes all the witnesses to the resurrected Jesus. Our Lord made sure His followers knew He had risen from the dead spending 40 days appearing to them on numerous occasions (Acts 1:3). He was seen by all of His disciples and even 500 people at one time. He was seen by His half-brother James and all the apostles He commissioned to start churches including Paul, who He specifically commissioned to go to the Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 15:20 calls the resurrection of Christ the first-fruits of all who have died. This term brings to mind the first-fruits offering introduced back in Leviticus 23:9-14. No grain was to be harvested until the first-fruits offering was made because this offering consecrated the whole harvest. The first-fruits offering was to be observed the third day after Passover. Not only did Jesus die on the cross the very day the Jews slaughtered their Passover Lambs, He rose from the dead on the very same day they made the first-fruits offering. With God, even the small details have significance.

Since Jesus' rising from the dead was the first-fruits of the resurrection, the testimony of those who saw Him reveals what we can look forward to when we are resurrected.

One such insight comes from Peter at the Lord's empty tomb:

John 20:6-7 - *He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.*

Another Bible version says that the head covering was folded together. So, the picture here is of the grave clothes lying undisturbed as if the body of Jesus just dematerialized from inside them. Contrast that with the time Jesus revived Lazarus who was also good and dead having been in the tomb 4 days...

John 11:43-44 - *Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

Do you see the difference here? Lazarus had to be helped out of his grave clothes while Jesus did not. We could dismiss this difference thinking since Jesus was God, He didn't need any help. But I think there is something more significant here because everything Jesus did was for our benefit. This is what Jesus promised us in John 14:12 - *"He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do."*

Since the resurrection of Jesus was the first-fruits of the resurrection, the resurrection of Lazarus had to be different. I take it that Lazarus was made alive in his mortal body. Jesus was resurrected into a permanent, glorified body; one like we can expect to have when we are resurrected. As 1 John 3:2 says, *"we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."*

Revelation 21:4 promises us we will not suffer *"death or mourning or crying or pain"* in our permanent, glorified bodies. But the difference between the resurrections of Lazarus and Jesus makes it clear that our glorified bodies will have some capabilities that our mortal bodies do not, such as the capacity to pass through physical barriers.

Among my favorite descriptions of the resurrected Jesus appearing to His disciples is in Luke 24 when He just materialized to His disciples who were assembled in a locked room. He could have knocked on the door, but instead He beamed Himself into the midst of them for a reason. This demonstrated that we will have the capability in our glorified bodies to teleport ourselves around at will. Perhaps we will make use of the spiritual realm to get around the physical universe. Certainly, Jesus promised us in John 14:3 - *"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* And since Jesus is God in human form, He may be anywhere.

Another thing the resurrected Jesus did when He appeared to His disciples was show them He wasn't just a non-corporeal spirit-being but had a physical body with flesh and bones even eating food with them.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 says that all people are a tri-unity of body, soul, and spirit; we will always be body, soul, and spirit, even in eternity after our resurrection. Eternal life will not be some alien ethereal existence, it will be physical one like we are already familiar with; only much, much better. People often use the terms soul and spirit interchangeably but it is clear from Hebrews 4:12 that there is a distinction... our souls are that inner part of us that is our intellect, personality, and the seat of our emotions. Our spirits are that part of us that has the capacity to commune with God when we are born-again:

Romans 8:16 – *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

Our human spirits were already resurrected as a guarantee of our ultimate body and soul resurrection when we were born again. And we look forward to the resurrection of our bodies, especially as we get older. But our souls will also be resurrected, losing our sin nature. Can you imagine living in a world where no one acts selfishly? It boggles the mind. I don't expect there to be any doors in the New Jerusalem not so much because we'll be able to pass through walls, but can you imagine the confusion there'd be with everyone scrambling to open the door for everyone else?

Some other things Scripture teaches us about our eternal existence is that we will maintain our identity in our resurrected bodies. While Jesus' disciples didn't always recognize Him after His resurrection right away, they did recognize Him and they knew He was a man. John 20:10-18 tells about Mary Magdalene's encounter with the resurrected Jesus... she initially mistook Him for the cemetery gardener calling Him "Sir" but recognized Him when He spoke her name. So, men will still be men and women will still be women in eternity. What a blessing that will be.

However, according to Jesus in Matthew 22:30, there will be no marriage in heaven. It will not be necessary because we will not be procreating and **all** our relationships will be enhanced. There will be no need for the exclusive institution of marriage to protect us from loneliness and despair as is the case in this fallen world.

I've heard people say they think an eternal existence without sin would be boring. This is as if there can be no fun without sin. That is a lie from the devil. So, what will we be doing? Revelation 5:10 says we will "*reign on the earth.*" We will have opportunities to express our unique creativity in eternity. It has always been God's plan for us to work with Him in managing His creation. God gave Adam work to do in the garden even before the fall. Work will be significantly more rewarding with the curse removed. We will be engaged in activities that will help us get to know God better, glorify Him, and bless our fellow immortal souls. I expect one of the things that will keep us busy in eternity is learning more about our Creator by exploring this vast universe He created for us. God has some amazing things to show us after this life is over and no one should want to miss out on it.

One more quick insight about the resurrection then I'll close. I'd encourage you to read all of 1 Corinthians 15. As a matter of fact, you may want to make it a tradition to read this chapter every Easter.

There is of course verses 51-52 of 1 Cor 15 which is a classic passage describing the Rapture of the Church. The Bible tells us the Church Age will end spectacularly in an instant with no warning when Jesus comes for His bride resurrecting all His Church-Age followers both living and dead at one time. That is the Rapture of the church.

It is amazing how we may discover new things in Scripture even after reading a familiar passage. As I read through 1 Corinthians 15 in preparing for this message, I discovered verses 22-25 to reinforce the pre-Trib Rapture of the church...

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

Verse 23 tells us there is an order to the resurrection; Christ of course was the firstfruits of the resurrection which foreshadows our resurrection. And after the resurrection of the church, *comes the end*. I take it *the end* is the Tribulation given the context of putting an end *to all rule and all authority and power...* The Tribulation will be *the end* of the *times of the Gentiles* that has oppressed Israel since Babylon.

As we've been looking at in our studies, there are many signs we are getting very close to the end of the Church Age. And we all know it will be much better to become a follower of Christ now during the Church Age than to think you can put that off.

So, in summary, the resurrection of Jesus reveals that He really was the Messiah and shows us that death is not the end; we can indeed look forward to life after our current mortal existence is over. And we can also eagerly anticipate eternity in a glorified physical body with some amazing enhancements... all immortal people will be like super-heroes being able to move about this vast universe at will. You certainly don't want to miss out on that... if you have any doubts about your salvation, I'd urge you to pray that God would open your heart to Jesus.

And I hope this passage has given you something that brings you closer to Jesus...

- God wants us to be secure in our relationship
- The more we get to know Jesus and apply His Word in our lives, the more abundant our lives will be

Next, we will observe the Lord's Supper. **But before we do, what insights have come to mind for you from this passage we looked at this evening?**

Prayer: As we observe the Lord's Supper this evening, we thank you Father for sending Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins... Please reveal to each of us anything we need to do to be closer to You. And thank you Lord for the promise of resurrection... we look forward to seeing Jesus as He is and spending eternity with You.

Now we'll observe the Lord's Supper... and pass out the bread wafers.

The Lord's Supper is for all followers of Christ. It is an act of worship remembering the price Jesus paid by dying for us thus fulfilling the requirements of the Law so that our sins may be forgiven.

Jesus Christ initiated the Lord's Supper as part of observing the annual Passover Feast with His disciples. About this, the Apostle Paul said in...

1 Cor 11:23-24 – For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

This bread wafer represents the body of Christ broken for us... Let us eat together.

Now we'll pass out the cups...

1 Cor 11:25-26 – In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

This cup represents the blood of Christ shed for us... Let us drink together.

When we take the drink at the Lord's Supper, I am always reminded of the promise Jesus made when He instituted it...

Matthew 26:29 – I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.

Jesus is looking forward to the day when we will join Him in Heaven to remember His sacrifice at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It is good to be part of the Bride of Christ, Amen?

After Jesus made the promise of not drinking of the fruit of the vine until He drinks it with us in the Father's Kingdom, the very next verse says...

Matthew 26:30 – And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We're going to substitute going out to the Mount of Olives with getting some refreshments in the back, but we are going to sing a closing hymn first.

Nancy, please lead us in singing Amazing Grace...

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

As you go, go in the peace, joy and love of our Lord Jesus Christ! And never forget... He is Risen!