

O Glorious Day! (Part 1)

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

By Scott Huckaby

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Easter is often called Resurrection Sunday because it celebrates the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is the most essential doctrine in Christianity next to who He is, our Creator-God who took on a human body to pay our sin penalty. If the resurrection of Jesus didn't happen, we'd have no hope of eternal life. But it did, and that is why we are all here today remembering what His resurrection means for us.

Not only was the resurrection of Jesus an amazing event, it was the most important development in all of history. And it was pretty significant for God as well...

King David spoke to God saying in Psalm 8:3-4 –
When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?

Astronomers using the Hubble telescope estimate there are something on the order of 200 billion-trillion stars in the universe spread out over at least 26 billion light-years. And yet Scripture refers to that work of creation as the work of God's fingers. While the provision God made for His people being able to spend eternity with Him was a much bigger deal...

Isaiah 52:10 – *The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.*

God rolled up His sleeves and did an even greater work than creation to make possible our salvation.

This morning we're going to consider what the resurrection of Jesus means along with how it foreshadows our own resurrection. We'll be looking at 1 Corinthians 15, the first 8 verses so you may want to turn there while I address a few preliminaries.

Several years ago, I shared an Easter message in a workplace worship service at Texas Instruments. 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. So, in order to avoid any

potential confusion in my speaking of the resurrection, let me define it...

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 of a resurrection when we moved to Alpine from the Houston area. My job in Houston ended as the digital processor business at Texas Instruments died. So, Teresa and I moved to Alpine where we wanted to eventually retire 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 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 been resurrected 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 are a couple 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, Jesus said His resurrection would be the greatest sign that He was the Messiah, our Savior-God. Alright, with that introduction let's look at 1 Corinthians 15, the first eight verses....

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 Christ is where Jesus said in 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."*

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 paid 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."*

You can't appreciate the Good News of God's provision for eternal life without first recognizing the bad news for not having Christ in your life. The penalty for holding on to our natural human selfishness is permanent spiritual death. Part of the human condition is that we are all destined to suffer physical

death, but that is not the worst thing that can happen to a person. The worst thing is spiritual death which is eternal separation from our Creator-God called the second death in Revelation 20:14. We don't much like talking about the prospect of spiritual death but Jesus warned us more about this than what He told us about heaven.

- The worst part of being separated from our Creator-God is that He made us to have an eternal relationship with Him. People who don't have that relationship with Him try all kinds of things to fill the void... that is how people become addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and other excesses that will eventually destroy them.

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. That 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 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. 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 breath 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 Cor 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 for us 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 Cor 15; 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 called 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. And 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 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. (Sorry for using Star Trek terminology.) The resurrected Jesus just materializing in the midst of His disciples 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 as disembodied spirits, it will be physical one like we are already familiar with only much, much better. The Luke 16 passage about the rich man and Lazarus Bo shared with us last week shows that all people will have a physical body after death, even before we receive our glorified, resurrected bodies. All followers of Christ living and dead will be resurrected in mass at one time per 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. This future event is called our blessed hope in Titus 2:13 and is also known as the rapture of the church.

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 a 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. 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?

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. The more we learn about the creation, the more that reveals about our Creator. 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. You may even want to make it a tradition to read it during every Easter season. 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 doctrine that the rapture of the church occurs prior to the time of God's wrath which Jesus called the great tribulation. And then of course there are verses 51-52 of 1 Corinthians 15 which is a classic rapture passage revealing that our resurrection will be suddenly, *in the twinkling of an eye.*

As one who came to Christ because of the prophetic Scriptures, I can tell you there are many signs we are getting very close to the end of the Church Age. Scripture reveals it will be much better to become a follower of Christ now during the Church Age than to think you can put this off. We're going to have baptisms in a couple of weeks. If you haven't been baptized and would like to make the official public profession of faith that Jesus ordained, let us know and we'd be thrilled to include you.

So, in summary, the resurrection of Jesus 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 anticipate eternity in a glorified physical body with some amazing, super-hero-like enhancements. 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.

If you are intrigued by what our resurrected bodies will be like and would like to learn more, I'd invite you to join us at Moss Creek Chapel 6 PM this evening. We'll take a break from our Zechariah Bible study for an Easter Worship Service where I'll be sharing 14 observations about the resurrection of Christ that reveal what we can look forward to in our own resurrection. ...Let's pray.