

## I Serve A Risen Savior

Let's turn in our Bibles this evening to the book of 1 Corinthians. If there is one message that is central to this book we call the Bible it is the message of the Gospel. If there is part of the message of the Gospel that is so vital that it simply cannot be ignored, it is the Good News of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are going to look together today at the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. He is risen indeed!

We who are brothers and sisters in Christ celebrate the resurrection every Sunday. It is not something we celebrate only once a year. That is why we partake of the emblems of the Lord's body and blood when we observe His Last Supper by eating of the loaf and drinking of the fruit of the vine each and every first day of the week, for it is to commemorate Jesus' death and resurrection. That is the reason why Christians from the earliest times switched to meet on Sundays rather than Saturdays as the Jews had done for centuries because Jesus rose from the grave in triumph on the first day of the week.

Let's take a look this evening at a few verses of Scripture from 1 Corinthians 15, beginning with verses 1-8: ***“Now I make known unto you brethren, the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also you received, wherein also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except you believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He has been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that He appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then He appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to the child untimely born, He appeared to me also.”***

Now drop down in your Bibles and let's read together verses 12-22: ***“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised: and if Christ has not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain. Yes, we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that He raised up Christ: Whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised: and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”***

There are two groups of people under discussion here. Those who are standing firm in the word of their salvation and those who Paul warns might have **“...believed in vain.”** If I was a “politically correct” preacher, I would begin my message by being inclusive, and perhaps speaking about the brotherhood of man. The trouble is, Paul doesn’t do this. Instead, he distinguishes between people, and claims only **some** of them as his brothers. Paul is clear that there are certain things that are true of those whom he can truly call his brothers.

Paul would have one thing to ask us all this evening, “Are you holding fast to the word preached to you?” For many, sadly, they have not really had the Bible explained or preached to them. Perhaps you are one of them.

I want to draw a clear line this evening – not so much between the Christian and the non-Christian, but rather between the Christian who is standing firm in his faith, who is walking with God, who is confident of his salvation – who knows God is pleased with him and he is on his way to Heaven. On the other hand, there is everyone else. Paul issues that warning right at the beginning of our passage – **“...unless you have believed in vain.”** Look, as James says, even the devils believe in God. **“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!”** It is not just enough to believe. God wants us to be doers as well as hearers of His word: **“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves.”** (James 1:22)

I want to give you a chance this evening to cross that divide and make your faith sure. There is one place to do that more assuredly than anywhere else in the world, and it is the place we are going to be gathering this evening. You might expect me to say we will come to the cross – and we will, of course, speak about the cross – but, in fact, we are coming to the empty tomb. For it is at the empty tomb where we meet Jesus, and He is not dead, He is risen!

The Good News is the story of Jesus and how the events of His life some 2000 years ago still have a major impact on us today. What does Paul say is the most important thing? **What is the “Good News” or “Gospel” according to Paul?**

There are three aspects:

- Christ died
- He was buried
- He was raised from death.

Historians are very clear about two things about Jesus – He existed, and He was crucified. There are no serious thinkers who doubt those two facts. Indeed, the whole edifice of history comes tumbling down if you claim that they are not true for there are no events of history that are better attested to than those. If we

cannot be sure Jesus lived and died, then we cannot be sure of any event in history.

But the fact that there was a man who lived some 2000 years ago, then died, is not a “hold the presses” news story. The fact that He was a great teacher is not even a major news story. The fact that He was reported to work miracles is not even as totally unusual as you might think. The fact that He founded a religion does not even make Him unique – although, admittedly, fewer people manage that one! Actually, the fact that He hung on a cross and was crucified through no fault of His own is not even unique to Jesus – thousands upon thousands of people were crucified.

He really died – a professional executioner saw and confirmed it – the spear demonstrated it.

**There is, however, one fact about Jesus that makes Him unique.** There is only one thing that marks Him out as totally different from every great figure in history. ***That is the fact of the empty tomb!*** Again, even secular historians admit that there was an empty tomb. So we have seen, there is no doubt Jesus lived, there is no doubt He died, and we can be sure He was buried. We can also be sure that there was an empty tomb and a movement was born in the months and years after His death that claimed He had been raised from the dead and was now worthy of worship.

Something dramatic happened to transform a timid group of good Jewish boys who knew very well that there was only one God and they must worship Him or go to Hell. They became a bold set of preachers who would turn the world upside down and do so with a message that said “This man whom you crucified God raised Him from the dead, and we are now to worship Him.” Not exactly a message that is easy to believe, is it? It is not something that you would make up because it would have been so easy to prove you were lying about it.

One thing is for sure. If the Jewish or Roman authorities could have led us to the body of Jesus, they would have done so. So what other options do we have – that the disciples stole the body and knew all along they were lying? That simply doesn’t make sense psychologically – for people lie to gain some kind of benefit. If these guys lied, they got killed for it. And yet not one of them broke ranks and said, “Oops, we were only kidding!” The fact is, they no longer feared death. They could not be scared or intimidated by the threat of death, for they knew that Jesus had already conquered it! No, Paul could point to 500 people who were willing to say, “I saw Him **alive** after He was dead!”

Could it have been a hallucination? No, hallucinations don’t happen to a crowd all at once like that.

We also have to explain the amazing phenomenon that has been the church of Jesus Christ. No religion ever grew more quickly, and no religion today is as widespread. And the one thing the church agrees on is this – **Jesus rose from the dead**. Paul is very clear – if this did not happen, then every Christian who has ever lived is to be pitied more than anyone else. Everyone who has, at a funeral, believed his or her loved one had gone to be with Jesus is deluded if He is still buried somewhere in Israel. The apostles and every believer since have falsely testified that God has raised Jesus from the dead.

And if He is not risen, every great transforming work of Jesus is somehow a delusion.

- Without the resurrection, the Christian religion comes tumbling down – like taking the bottom piece out of Jenga.
- Christianity is the meanest, cruelest **HOAX** if Jesus is still dead – it is cruel and sadistic. Here we are singing to a dead man, praying to a dead man, preaching about a dead man, worshiping a dead man, trusting in a dead man! If Jesus is dead, everything is changed.
- The resurrection is **crucial**. If it was not for the resurrection, we would still be in our sins. How could Jesus work in us to forgive us and make us like Him if He is still dead?
- **“BUT,”** as Paul simply says here, **“IN FACT, CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED!”**
- Jesus is **NOT** dead – He is alive. Every other religious leader is dead – no one else conquered death – only Jesus.

The resurrection was Jesus’ justification – it was God’s stamp of approval that He still loved His Son, and that the work had been done. Jesus had died for our sins; now He was being raised up for our justification. It is not just that our sins are dealt with and that we are made morally neutral before God. It is not only “just as if I’d never sinned,” but also “just as if I’d lived a perfect life for eternity and was as pure and righteous as Jesus is!”

Jesus still had merit left after the cross – it is not as if sin swallowed His merit up – quite the opposite! His goodness and merit swallowed up sin so that God simply could not abandon His perfect Son to the grave!

**THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS!** “All the love and acceptance which perfect obedience could have obtained of God, belong to you because Christ was perfectly obedient on your behalf.” (C. H. Spurgeon)

The resurrection is also the one thing that gives us hope. For if Christ has been raised, then as Paul says here – we, too, shall be raised if we trust Him.

The Bible is not very complementary about us without Jesus – it says we are **“...having no hope and without God in this world.”** (Ephesians 2:12)

As we go through life, false hope simply makes us more desperate because every disappointment is like death to hope – “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” We go through life feeling something is missing. “There must be more to life than this.” We are so far from truly living life to the full as God intended it that we are effectively dead already – we are dead men walking. We spend our lives trying not to talk about death, but knowing full well it is coming.

When we come face-to-face with the Man Whom death could not hold, we have a hope. For the Christian, what Peter says in chapter 1 of his epistle, verse 3 and onwards, is true.

***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . .***

***“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*** (1 Peter 1:3; 8-9)

Is that true of you this evening? If not, it can be! You can meet Jesus. You can be born again because of the resurrection. Your spiritual death can be swallowed up!

- Sin does not win – Jesus does!
- Death does not win – Jesus does!
- He really did die for our sin and rise for our salvation, and we can sing to Him today, and can confess our sins to Him because He is alive.

He said I am God. I have come to take away sin. I will die, and three days later I will come back to life again to prove it. He did prove it!

Solidify your faith this evening – dwell on this resurrection of Jesus, and let it give you a firm foundation. Start with this issue when talking to the unbeliever about the message of the Bible. This is the big one!

### **What is the outcome for us of the resurrection?**

- Our sins are dealt with and we are declared righteous.
- We are born again – we have a new beginning with the old behind us, including our fears and our guilt.
- We have a hope for the future that goes beyond the grave.
- We have a hope for now that transforms our lives.
- We have a relationship with Jesus – we can know and love Him even though we don’t see Him with our eyes.

I have come to the end of what I want to say to you, but let me give Jesus an opportunity to speak. This is what He once said to His friend, Martha, and I believe He would say it to us again today: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*** (John 11:25-26)

### **Do YOU believe this?**

How do we become a Christian? It is a matter of becoming united with Christ – of putting our trust in Him. Of taking a public stand – ***“...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*** (Romans 10:9) Baptism is the way we publicly demonstrate our obedient, saving faith, and it is how we are clothed in the garments of Jesus. Paul said in Galatians 3:27, ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.”*** He also told the Romans in Romans 6:34 that what has happened when we are baptized is that we die with Christ, we are buried with Him, and we are raised back to life. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is reenacted by our being immersed in baptism. It is a demonstration of our obedient, saving faith in the Gospel, the really Good News of Jesus Christ! The Gospel really is Good News! Do you believe it?

There is a song that we have in our hymnals that I would like for us to sing right now. It is number 220 in your songbooks. Let us now sing this song in praise of the One Who lives, for we serve a living Savior!

***I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today.  
I know that He is living, Whatever men may say.  
I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer,  
And just the time I need Him, He's always near.  
He Lives! He Lives! Christ Jesus lives today!  
He Walks with me, And talks with me,  
Along life's narrow way.  
He Lives! He Lives! Salvation to impart.  
You ask me how I know He lives,  
He lives within my heart!***