

Theme: “The Actions of Christ’s Passion” – “Raised!”

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:13-20

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

“God is dead!” That statement is famously attributed to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was a man who based many of his works on the premise that man must find a new way of “being” given the fact that God is dead in the hearts of modern man – killed by rationalism and science. He proposed that human kind should accept the fact that God is dead and start creating their own set of morals and find a new purpose for their lives.

Do you want to know what our lives would be like if God were, in fact, dead? Just consider the attitudes, words, and actions of Jesus’ followers on Easter Sunday before they knew He had risen from the dead. These people had been living the past few days with the belief that God was in fact, dead—that Jesus was still dead.

- ✠ The women came on Easter morning, not looking for the living, resurrected Christ, but with spices to anoint His dead body.
- ✠ Mary Magdalene wept even at the sight of the empty tomb, not for joy, but as she told the angels, **“Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:13).**
- ✠ When Mary and the rest of the women who had finally seen the risen Christ went and told the apostles, **“who mourned and wept” (Mark 16:10)**, even their testimony did not convince them, **“And their words seemed to them [the apostles] like idle tales, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11).**
- ✠ When Jesus talked with the men on the road to Emmaus He did not allow them to recognize Him, and asked them, **“What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?” (Luke 24:17).** Their reply showed their disappointment. They said, **“But we were hoping that it was He [Jesus] who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened” (Luke 24:21).**
- ✠ After Jesus revealed Himself to these two, the other disciples did not even believe their testimony and kept themselves locked in a room for fear of the Jews.

These are not the words and actions of confident people ready to find a “new purpose” for their lives. These people were depressed and overwhelmed by the sense that their lives were purposeless because they believed that God was dead.

This is exactly the situation the apostle Paul is describing in our text when he writes, **“And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty... And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (v. 14, 17).** Isn’t this going a bit far? Don’t we have many other great teachings and messages in the Bible that we could still hold onto even if we didn’t have the resurrection of Christ? Yes, there are many other great teachings and comforting passages in the Bible besides the message of Christ’s resurrection, but they all mean absolutely nothing without it! Without the resurrection there is no true Christianity. As Paul says in v. 14 of our text, **“our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (v. 14).**

Without the resurrection, Christ is still dead. He would have taken His sinless life and innocent sacrifice with Him to the grave and stayed there. His perfect life would do us no good. His innocent sacrifice wouldn't do us any good either. Without the resurrection Jesus is reduced to a perfect man who earned heaven for Himself by His righteous life, but for no one else. God's Words and Christ's teachings, then, are nothing more than good words to live by for this life. If that is the case Paul also tells us, **"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable"** (v. 19). If there is no resurrection, no hope of heaven then what did Paul endure all the dangers, persecutions, beatings, and imprisonments for? Why would we waste our time studying and listening to God's Words, or waste our efforts trying to live according to His commandments? Why would we even bother praying to God if there is no hope of a resurrection and eternal life in heaven?

This is how one Lutheran Bible scholar put it:

"Ask yourself what makes the church valuable, indispensable to you, what is the highest blessing it offers you, and you will ever find, it is the Lord Himself. What is the baptism of your child, if there is no living Christ to make your child His own? What is your confirmation, if you cannot enter into a covenant with the living Redeemer and be His own forever? What is every service in His house, if His name is only a name and He is not present to give you His blessings and receive your devotion? There is not a single feature of in our religion which in one way or another does not rest on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Take this away and the entire Church and all Christianity sinks into ruin" (R. C. H. Lenski, *Eisenach Epistle Selections Vol. I*, p. 516)

That is the importance of Easter; the necessity of the resurrection. This final **"Action of Christ's Passion,"** that Jesus was **"raised,"** is the joy-filled ending to a string of very depressing and sorrowful events in His life. It is the assurance of a joy-filled ending to our lives as well. Paul gives us this good news in the last verse of our text, **"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"** (v. 20).

Why is the resurrection so important?

First of all, it means that our Savior Jesus is living. God is not dead. He is arisen and alive, just like He said He would be. The resurrection is the number one irrefutable proof that Jesus was in fact, true God, just as He said He was.

Secondly, the resurrection was a necessary step for our salvation. We understand that Christ had to live a perfect, sinless life in order to keep the law perfectly for us. We realize that Christ's innocent sacrifice on the cross paid the punishment for our sins, but do we always realize what His resurrection means? Think of it this way: If Jesus' death was the full payment for our sins, His resurrection from the dead was like the "receipt"—God had accepted the payment of His beloved Son PAID IN FULL! This is why Paul says in **Romans, "He [Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"** (Romans 4:25 NIV).

Finally, Christ's resurrection is personally important to each one of us because, as Paul says, by His resurrection Christ **"has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"** (v. 20). In Old Testament times the **"firstfruits"** were the first and best sheaf of grain given as an offering to the Lord. It was the first of many sheaves of grain that would be harvested. In the same way Jesus is the first one resurrected to God the Father, and those who have **"fallen asleep"** in Him, that is those who died with faith in Christ, will follow and also be resurrected to God the Father. Jesus' resurrection means our resurrection on the Last Day! Let's put it another way: Because of Jesus victory over death at His resurrection, YOU AND I ARE GOING TO LIVE FOREVER!

Do we live like it? Imagine how our attitudes and our whole lives would change if we lived with this thought in our hearts and minds everyday: **WE ARE GOING TO LIVE FOREVER!**

Now, this illustration might seem a bit strange, but hear me out, it does have a point. Those of you who play video games are probably familiar with “cheat codes.” “Cheat codes” allow you to manipulate and change parts of the game to your favor. (If you’re old enough to remember *The Game Genie* on the original Nintendo was the first time I remember using something like that). If you know the “cheat codes” to a game you can do things like give your character special weapons or super powers, or maybe even skip over different levels in the game. The “cheat codes” that we used the most used, however, were the ones that made you invincible or gave you unlimited lives. This changed how we played the game dramatically. No more dodging bullets or trying to avoid enemies on the screen. Our character was now invincible! We’d plow through our enemies, bullets would bounce off us, and we could walk through the lava pits without getting hurt. That’s naturally how you’d play the game if the fear of losing your life was taken out of it!

We have been reminded once again this morning that we are already victorious because of Christ’s innocent death and resurrection. The “game” has already been won and we have been guaranteed eternal life! Once again, do we live like it? Now, I’m certainly not saying that we should live our lives with reckless abandon and constantly throw ourselves in harms way because, “Hey, Jesus promised me I’m going to live forever!” Obviously, we are all going to physically die someday if Jesus doesn’t come back first. But because of Jesus resurrection that physical death that we all fear so much by nature is actually going to be the best thing that’s ever happened to us! What then do we need to be afraid of if Christ has taken away the very fear of death itself by His resurrection? It should not even be natural for us to now live timid fearful lives holed up in our own little corner like the disciples were on that Easter Sunday in fear of Jesus’ enemies. Jesus lives! He has defeated all our enemies—sin, Satan, and death. He is our living and powerful Savior who is right now ruling all things and using His almighty power for the good of His believers. He has promised us, **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:26).**

We can now live joyful, confident lives in the power of Christ’s resurrection. Not lives of fear and doubt, but lives that live courageously and victoriously. Lives that reflect an absolute trust that **“If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?”** and that **“we are more than conquerors through Him [Christ] who loved us” (Romans 8:31, 37).**

The early Christians would remind themselves of this victory by greeting each other with the words, “He is risen!” to which the other would reply “He is risen indeed!” That is our victory cry on this Easter Resurrection Day, and throughout our lives. Let’s try it out, right now: He is Risen!

Congregation: HE IS RISEN INDEED! Amen.