

SESSION 2

Why the Resurrection Matters



QUESTION 1:

What invention or innovation has been a “game changer” for you?

THE POINT

The resurrection of Christ changes everything.

THE PASSAGES

1 Corinthians 15:20-28,54-58

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We live daily with all kinds of inventions that have dramatically changed the way we live and work:

- ▶ The Gutenberg printing press, invented in the 15th century, enabled the mass production of words and ideas.
- ▶ The battery, introduced in 1800, gave us a way to store energy.
- ▶ Edison's electric light (1879) illuminated what we do day and night.

Inventions like these have truly transformed the ways we live and work, but they've been around so long and are so commonplace today, we no longer give them much thought. Just think how difficult it would be to live in 2020 without lights and batteries.

Not all life-changing events should be so taken for granted or overlooked. Consider the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection has been a central truth of Christianity for two thousand years, and sadly, many Christians can repeat the facts of the resurrection while never contemplating the implications of that truth for their daily lives.

Jesus' defeat of the power of sin and death is truly a game changer for our lives—now and forever.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

20 But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man.

22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

KEY WORD: Firstfruits (v. 20)—A metaphor based on the Mosaic law which required farmers to bring their “first” or best crops to the house of the Lord to be dedicated to God.

In leading up to this passage, Paul stressed the importance of an actual and historical resurrection. He asserted in verse 14, “If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith.” Paul made this statement to respond to some of the Corinthian Christians who did not believe in the resurrection. He argued that if there is no resurrection, then not even Christ rose from the dead. Paul offered the further conviction that if there were no resurrection, then to proclaim the risen Jesus was to give false testimony about God (v. 15). It was equivalent to breaking the ninth commandment (Ex. 20:16). To summarize Paul’s teaching, if Christ has not been resurrected, ...

1. ... you give false testimony about God (1 Cor. 15:15).
2. ... your faith in Christ is worthless (v. 17).
3. ... you are still in your sins (v. 17).

Beginning in verse 20, Paul used an analogy to further explain what Christ’s death means for all humanity. The resurrected Christ is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” In the Old Testament ceremony of the firstfruits, the people brought their first (and best) portions of the harvest to give them as offerings to God (Lev. 23:9-14). “The firstfruits indicated that the entire harvest was soon to follow.”¹ The significance of this analogy is that Christ’s

resurrection precedes the harvest of others, when His followers will be raised from death. While physical death is inevitable, Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that our death is not the end of the story.

In an atheistic view, death *is the end* of the story. It is the finality of every individual. No matter what you thought, said, or did in this life, you end up the same as everyone else, and the same as all matter: dead or destroyed. Nothing you have done in life has ultimate significance since you will face no judgment and have no afterlife. This is a sad, horrifying, and utterly hopeless view when taken to its logical conclusion. No matter what good or evil you did, in the end, you simply die and go back to dirt.

In striking contrast to this view are Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 that through one man came death but through another came life. Christ's resurrection presents a great shift. Adam's sin brought death into the world, but what Christ has done means that death isn't *how things have to be*. Through Christ we have a way out of the mess humanity made of life and of God's creation. A singular historical event in the cosmos has overturned the effects of our sin and its destructive consequence: Jesus' resurrection has secured new life. Because Christ conquered death and rose again, we have the assurance of this new life, a sure hope in the things yet to come.

QUESTION 2:

How does the resurrection influence your understanding of life after death?

1 Corinthians 15:23-28

23 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

24 Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he abolishes all rule and all authority and power.

25 For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet.

26 The last enemy to be abolished is death.

27 For God has put everything under his feet. Now when it says “everything” is put under him, it is obvious that he who puts everything under him is the exception.

28 When everything is subject to Christ, then the Son himself will also be subject to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

KEY WORDS: Under his feet (vv. 25,27)—This phrase refers to the complete victory Jesus will ultimately have over all God’s enemies.

The resurrection of Christ holds two significant truths:

1. It wasn’t just anyone who was raised from the dead; it was God incarnate.
2. Jesus’ power over death means He is the Lord of all.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus made claims to divinity. He forgave people’s sins (Matt. 9:4-6), identified Himself as Lord of the Sabbath (12:8), knew people’s innermost thoughts (v. 25), and said He was one with the Father (John 10:30). All of Jesus’ claims would have been meaningless had He stayed in the grave. However, Jesus’ resurrection was the ultimate evidence that He is who He claimed to be: God, the promised Messiah, and the Savior of mankind. Only God has power over death and Jesus demonstrated that power through His resurrection. With everything that comes at us in life—diseases, injuries, heartbreak, financial instability, disasters, and war—what is the worst thing that can happen? Death. Of all our “enemies,” death is the worst because it claims finality on our lives and on the lives of those we love. Death is a tyrannical foe because it makes no bargains with us; we cannot go back. It reigns over us, for we are all subject to death through our fallen nature.

But Jesus changed that. “The last enemy to be abolished is death.” By defeating death as an enemy, Jesus demonstrated with

DIGGING DEEPER

JESUS' POST RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

Why were the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ central to the gospel? The importance of these appearances lie in the promise and fulfillment of Jesus' foretelling of His death and resurrection. One of the most striking traditions of the Gospels is Jesus' threefold passion declaration (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34 and parallels). In these statements, Jesus explained He would suffer rejection, be killed, and rise from the dead. Jesus' death would be vindicated by His resurrection; but in order for that promise to reach its intended fulfillment, people would have to witness the resurrected Christ. Certainly the people closest to Jesus, though they had heard His statements of His death and resurrection, did not expect Him to rise from the dead on Sunday morning. This was evidenced by the women wondering who would roll away the stone for them so they could finish anointing Jesus' body (Mark 16:3). Clearly they were

not expecting to encounter the resurrected Christ.

Neither did the disciples dare believe that Jesus had fulfilled His passion statements. They thought the women's report of an empty tomb to be "nonsense" (Luke 24:11). Thomas refused to believe that Jesus' passion statements could be fulfilled—until he saw the resurrected Christ with his own eyes (John 20:25b). The disciples and the others who were closest to Jesus certainly were not in a heightened sense of expectation that Jesus' words would be fulfilled—but something changed their minds.

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances changed the disciples from defeated skeptics to encouraged believers. Though reconstructing an exact timetable and chronology of Jesus' appearances is difficult, the fact that He appeared to those who knew Him best is certain. Something changed the disciples from their skepticism to belief, and that something was seeing the resurrected Christ.

Gregory T. Pouncey, "Jesus' Post Resurrection Appearances," *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 2015, 29-32.

finality that He is the Lord of all things. Over the course of Jesus' earthly life, the disciples and others saw Him command many forces. He commanded the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 8:23-27). Demons submitted to Him when He exorcised them

(vv. 28-34). He healed multitudes of their diseases and infirmities (9:35). He even brought people back from the dead (vv. 23-25). We see both natural forces and spiritual forces are under the authority of Christ.² However, when Jesus physically rose from the dead, with a new and incorruptible body no longer subject to death, He demonstrated that even death had finally submitted to His authority.

What would it mean, though, if no subsequent resurrection awaited us? We would have no more than another mythological tale of a *somewhat* powerful god or demi-god: a tale of one who displayed his greatness in some miraculous works, but whose power was limited. In ancient myths, we see similar thinking about mythological gods. But Jesus Christ is neither demi-god nor mythological figure. He is the One through whom all creation came to be and is held together (Col. 1:16-17). His resurrection is a sign that all things are subject to Him, including the authorities and principalities of the world. Jesus Christ is alive and reigns as Lord over all.

QUESTION 3:

What kinds of things characterize a life that is submitted to Christ's reign as Lord over all?

1 Corinthians 15:54-58

54 When this corruptible body is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal body is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place:

Death has been swallowed up in victory.

55 Where, death, is your victory?

Where, 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, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Paul's defense of the resurrection throughout 1 Corinthians 15 clearly shows that Christ indeed rose from the dead; therefore, in turn, we will experience resurrection. Since death is defeated, what we do with our lives actually matters. Death currently holds power over us, but only for a time. Paul illustrated the end result of Jesus' resurrection by quoting from two Old Testament passages.

- ▶ "He will destroy death forever" (Isa. 25:8).
- ▶ "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol. I will redeem them from death. Death, where are your barbs? Sheol, where is your sting?" (Hos. 13:14).

The power of death has been removed by the victory gained through the death and resurrection of Christ. Where once existed only the end result of death and destruction, Jesus replaced these things with life. The unique Christian witness in the resurrection of Jesus is the only historically evidenced reversal of death. Everything—both our present daily lives and our future in eternity—hinges on this historical defeat of death,

Jesus' defeat of death carries several implications for us.

1. Since death is the consequence of sin (Romans 6:23), then Jesus' defeat of death also demands a defeat of the power of sin. Jesus didn't just change our "end game"; He changed the way we live our earthly lives here and now. Sin does not have power over those who have trusted in Jesus for new life. This means we no longer have to succumb to the power of sin.
2. Christ's resurrection means we do not live our lives in vain. Everything we do matters in this life. "Your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

QUESTION 4:

What are some ways we share in Christ's victory?

Unfortunately, a host of negative influences still seek to pull us away from the goodness of the One who gives life. The first-century Corinthian believers also faced this struggle. Therefore, Paul encouraged the Corinthians—as well as all believers—to live for the things that lead to life! Since we are free from the bondage of sin, we should share that freedom with the rest of the world. Because Christ rose from the dead, spreading that truth provides freedom to others. This is the work to which the resurrection calls us, and it will never be a work done in vain.

QUESTION 5:

What specific actions can believers take to ensure that we stand firm?

ENGAGE

Can you recall times when it has felt like death or sin was winning the victory in your life?

Write out a couple answers below.

Based on 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, cross out each one.

Praise God that death and sin have been swallowed up by Christ's victory.

LIVE IT OUT

The resurrection of Jesus is a foundational doctrine and truth that transforms all of life. How will you live out that truth?

- ▶ **Confess.** If you have allowed sin to have power over a particular area of your life, confess that to God. Acknowledge that sin has no power over you because of Christ. Choose to live under His lordship.
- ▶ **Serve.** Find an area of ministry where you can get involved. Do not let hesitancy or fears make you feel inadequate to serve. Live under the lordship of Christ, knowing that you never serve Him in vain.
- ▶ **Share.** Tell someone how the resurrection of Christ has made a difference in your life. Lead the person to trust the resurrected Christ for new life.



END NOTES

1 Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—1 & 2 Corinthians* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 250, Wordsearch ed.

2 Adapted from Simon J. Kistemaker, *Baker New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1992), 523, Wordsearch ed.