

1 Corinthians 15:12-34 The Guaranteed Resurrection Falls Ch. AM 3/31/2024

A Christian musician named Nicole Nordeman wrote a song called *What If*.

The song is written as if she is having a conversation with a friend about whether the resurrection is true or false. Her friend is skeptical, so Nicole is laying out the consequences on both sides. The consequences if the resurrection is false, and the consequences if the resurrection is true.

Here are some lines from the song.

What if you're right? What if [Jesus] takes his place in history With all the prophets and the kings

Who taught us love and came in peace But then the story ends.

What then?

Let me pause there. If you listen to the song, you get the sense of doom and hollowness. That would be truly horrifying if the skeptic is right and Jesus did not rise. Now back to the lyrics of the Christian responding to the skeptic...

But what if you're wrong?

What if there's more?

What if there's hope you never dreamed of hoping for?

What if the arms that catch you, catch you by surprise?

What if He's more than enough?

What if it's love?

The song brings up a very important question - How do we know that Christianity is true? We know that Christianity is true because of the publicly verified historical facts. Why does it matter? It matters because if it were not true, everything would be different for us.

The fact of the resurrection of Christ, guarantees our resurrection.

First, Paul wrote verses 12-19 to show that Christianity is publicly verified fact, and that if the body of Jesus had been found, it would mean that there had not been a resurrection. Second, Paul wrote verses 20-28 to show what it meant for the believers that Jesus DID rise again. Third, Paul wrote verses 29-34 to show how it impacts our lives whether we believe or deny the resurrection.

Paul wrote to believers who had adopted some of the errors of the world. The apostles were consistent in living for the Kingdom of God. The unbelievers are consistent – they just live for this world. The believers in Corinth were trying to have it both ways. Paul was writing to them.

1. The aftereffect IF Christ HAD NOT risen. (v.12-19)

The bottom line in the first section is that if Christ had not risen, then we believers have placed our trust in a dead man, who cannot save us because He remains dead. That would be a real problem. Is that possible?

Theoretically, Christianity could be falsified. If the body of Jesus was found on earth, it would show the claims of Christianity to be false. Now we don't need

to be concerned about this. No one will ever uncover the dead body of Jesus on this earth somewhere, because Jesus has His own body with Him in heaven where He is. After He ascended to heaven, His body was glorified. At the end of the world, Jesus will come a second time from heaven to earth in that same body. When He takes us all back to heaven, He will continue to live forever in that same resurrected body. Alternatively, if the body of Jesus were discovered, would you want to know about it. You should. Why? Because of this one simple truth - that if Jesus did not rise again from the dead, then Christianity cannot be true. If Christianity is not true, we should all abandon it immediately.

Are you starting to get the sense that the resurrection is an issue of top importance?

If we deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, we deny Christianity.

Here is the key thing for us – Jesus is not merely the crucified Savior, he is also THE RISEN LORD. Why is that so crucial? Because we don't gather each Sunday to pray to and worship a dead person. Instead, we gather each Sunday to pray to and worship a living person. So, for Paul to write about what would it be like if Jesus did not rise again, was awkward. Yet Paul found it necessary to do so, because of the false teaching that was circulating in the church in Corinth.

We find this in verse 12, when Paul asked how some believers in the church in Corinth could say that “*there is no resurrection of the dead?*” For supposed believers to say that was as dangerous and as foolish as to take a wood saw, climb a high tree, and then saw off the branch on which you are sitting. If we could freeze frame the tree-trimmer like some television commercials freeze frame people, and then Paul could appear in mid-air to talk with the tree trimmer, Paul would say – have a look - you are sitting on that branch, and let me help you to see the importance of that fact - that after you cut off the branch, you yourself will fall to the ground, together with the branch. You do realize that, right? When we hear supposedly Christian people pontificate that people don't rise from the dead and miracles don't happen, we find the same sort of silly thinking is present.

Back in verse 1, Paul was reminding them of the gospel, helping them to recall to their minds, as though the basic knowledge of the facts had escaped them. Listen to verse 1, “*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you...*” Paul found it necessary to begin again and remind the believers in Corinth of elementary facts, which they had already previously accepted.

So, we learn from verse 1 and verse 12 that if people in the church in Corinth are going to doubt basic concepts, then Paul would have to address it. In verse 13, Paul addressed it by pointing out the most obvious of consequences to their wrong belief, which it seems the believers in Corinth had not realized. If they

were going to deny that any dead person could ever rise again, then they would have to deny the most important event in all of Christianity. Here was how Paul reasoned with them in verse 13, “*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*” You do realize that, right?

In verse 14, Paul continued to the next logical impact of their false theory – if Christ had not been raised, what impact would that have on preaching? Answer: it would make preaching empty and meaningless. Pushing further, what would a non-resurrection reality do to their faith? It would make their faith empty, for they would be trusting in a dead man, as if He were alive. This one truth claim and the historical event of the resurrection of Christ is so central to Christianity, that if this linchpin were removed, a cacophony of other dependent logical derivatives would also collapse.

In other words, if Christ did not rise, then the people in the church in Corinth receiving this letter from Paul, would not be Christians at all, and neither would Paul! There would be no Christianity!

In verse 15, Paul pushed forward to show that the situation would be even worse. Any preachers of such a religion would be misrepresenting God, and therefore all Christian apostles would be telling falsehoods. If God had not raised Christ from the dead, while Paul preached that God did raise Christ from the dead, then the most charitable way to state it would be that Paul misrepresented God.

In verse 16, Paul repeated what he had written in verse 13, in order to intensify the chain of repercussions.

In verse 17, Paul repeated his previous point about faith being empty, and now Paul added yet another level of consequence - that they would still be in their sins. In other words, the death of Christ by itself alone, without the resurrection of Christ, would have no atoning, redemptive, or liberating effect for their human guilt before God.

In verse 18, another consequence would be that those church members who had died and were expecting to awaken to a new dawn and a new day, instead would have utterly perished and would never awaken at all.

In verse 19, the summary statement for all believers in Corinth was if they only had this earthly life, they were more to be pitied than all other human beings. Why? Because of all the points Paul had just made – the gospel would have no grounding in facts, our faith would be ineffective, the witnesses would be incorrect, our sin would retain its destructive and damaging control, and our fellow believers who have previously died would be irretrievably lost. The story ends. What then? How depressing with eternal meaninglessness and emptiness.

2. The aftereffect that Christ did rise. (v.20-28)

The bedrock truth here is that since Christ did rise, believers in Corinth had placed their trust in a living Savior who had saved them because He rose again and

He lives.

In verse 20, when Paul wrote “firstfruits” it meant that Christ represented His people with a promise that they will rise from the dead also. SI – first tomatoes of Spring promise tomatoes all summer!

In verses 21-22, Paul wrote about the entrance of death and the entrance of resurrection. To do this, Paul contrasted Adam with Christ. Death entered world history for the first time through the first human being, the man named Adam. Adam sinned and introduced death. But Christ came to abolish death. How? By His resurrection from the dead. It was the only way to end death. Because Jesus was truly dead and then was raised, so all believers who die, will also be raised from the dead on the last day of world history.

Bible scholars call verses 21-22 the high point of the whole letter of 1 Corinthians. These verses announce a radically new action of God, with retroactive consequences all the way back in time to Adam, and all the way forward in time to every future believer. The resurrection of Christ necessarily announced the dawn of the future general resurrection of all believers. because our being trapped in sin ever since Adam sinned, guarantees our being released from sin ever since Christ rose again from the dead. Our unity with Adam by our birth as humans leads to our death, while our unity with Christ by our faith as believers leads to our resurrection.

The biggest problem in the church in Corinth was their failure to grasp this central place of Christ’s resurrection for all of world history. That was why this was the basis of Paul’s argument. Notice this – that verse 21 did NOT say by a man came death, and by a man came life. No. Instead, verse 21 says, “*by a man came death, [and] by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.*” This is the end of one world, and the start of another. This is the end of the world signified by Adam, and the start of another world, signified by Christ. The end of the realm of life and the beginning of the realm of resurrection life!

In verse 23, Paul gave the sequence of events that will bring an end to death. First Christ arose, then later all who belong to Christ will arise. Note that this realm of resurrection life is only for believers to enter. Verses 24-25 describe the end of the world, when Christ delivers the Kingdom of God over to His Father, after destroying every enemy.

Verse 26, in the sequence of Christ’s activities, the last enemy to be destroyed is death itself. Verse 27 shows God the Father’s participation with Christ – that it is the Father who has put all things under the feet of Christ or under the rule and authority of Christ.

In verse 28, even Christ the Son Himself is subjected to the authority of God the Father, so that God the Father may be all in all. What this means is that God the Father is Ruler over all, and everything is placed wherever God the Father places

everything. For example, God the Father put death under subjection to Christ, who is Himself the Resurrection and the Life. Because of that, every believer who ever dies, will be raised again to life by the authority of Jesus, who received that authority from God the Father. God the Father is the supreme ruler over all things.

3. The aftereffect of denying the resurrection. (v.29-34)

In these verses Paul exposed the bad impact of inconsistencies in the teaching and practices of Christians who claimed that there was no resurrection from the dead, but wanted to keep and enjoy some of the other parts of Christianity.

For example, in verse 29, Paul addressed a bad local practice in the church in Corinth. If someone had died without having been baptized, the church would offer to baptize a different living person as a substitute, in place of the dead person. Paul's point was that the believers in Corinth were wrong about this because they were inconsistent. If they believed there was no resurrection, (so that dead people were dead, end of story) then what benefit was it to try to give a dead person any benefit from a substitute baptism? Paul was simply pushing them to think through the aftereffects of their denial of the resurrection.

In verse 30, was Paul himself consistent? Did Paul think through the aftereffects of his own acceptance of the resurrection? Yes, in verse 30, Paul asked why would Paul risk danger and persecution because of the gospel?

In verse 31, Paul wrote that he dies every day. Courageously, Paul risked his life because Paul was more interested in Kingdom expansion than in self-preservation. What he was referring to was the fact that Paul was putting himself in danger every time Paul entered a new city as a missionary to preach there. Paul had to face potential death from angry Jews or from the authorities in each place. But Paul boasted with a holy pride in what Christ had done in the believers as a result of Paul's courage. The apostle was willing to lay down his life if it would cause the gospel message to spread. Why? Because of the truth of the resurrection. So, yes, Paul was living consistently with what Paul believed.

In verse 32, Paul referred to an example, namely, the danger he faced in the city of Ephesus, where he was doing missionary work, while writing this letter. Over in Acts 19, we read that Paul narrowly escaped death from a riot in the city of Ephesus. It seems likely that Paul was referring to both the spiritual beasts and also the actual wild beasts, because often the city of Ephesus would take Christians and put them in the arena with such animals. Again, let's not get distracted. The main question here was what Paul would gain by subjecting himself to danger? The gain would be the ability to spread the gospel, because the resurrection is true. But if the resurrection was not true, then Paul would not gain anything. In that case, Paul should not endanger himself, but rather should relax, eat, and drink, and enjoy himself, because this life is all that there is for anyone. While Paul was showing

the logical inconsistency of the Corinthians, Paul was contrasting it with the logical consistency of his own actions. Paul consistently lived out what Paul believed. Listen to how Paul summarized in 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, *“For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again.”*

In verses 33-34, Paul admonished the believers in Corinth not to be led astray by those in their church who would doubt the resurrection. Verse 33, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”* Those who deny the resurrection are a bad group of people with whom to spend our time, because the deniers threaten to lead believers astray. In verse 34, Paul mentioned another group – those who had no knowledge of God. Think of today – there are pastors of churches who dispute the indisputable and dispense with the indispensable, by teaching that there is no resurrection. And some followers are falling for it. Why does anyone attend those churches? Because those attenders come under the intoxicating influence of false pastors, while they should have known better. Since there is so much at stake, Paul’s advice was clear and forceful as he concluded this paragraph in verse 34, *“Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”*

This is how the Orthodox Presbyterian Church got founded in 1936, after years of open and public demonstration that many ministers in the old Presbyterian denomination denied the resurrection. Our founding fathers could not abide, and it would have been shameful to stay in that denomination. The only right thing to do was to openly declare that Jesus the head of the church is alive, and that we are following Him to form a new denomination.

Five hundred years ago, Pastor Martin Luther, who was influential for the Reformation, said, that if a person does not believe in the resurrection, “...he must deny in a lump the gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God. For all of this is linked together like a chain...Whoever denies this...must simultaneously deny far more...in brief, [he must deny] that God is God.”

Conclusion:

Admit that we base everything on the resurrection.

We do not live with the montra of eat and drink.

But our culture does. We live in an entertainment age of self-indulgence. Seeking pleasure and escaping the difficulties of reality. Our culture craves distraction from the truth! Distraction from problems. They don’t want to face things. If this life is all there is, then eat and drink and enjoy!

That is not the Christian life for the person who knows for sure that Christ has risen and that therefore we will rise.

We have more to live for than the pursuit of personal pleasure.

The center of our lives is not self-gratification or escaping.

What is fascinating about Paul's statement in verse 33, is to see who impacts whom? Which direction does it go? Is it those with good morals who have a greater impact on those with bad morals? Or is it instead that those with bad morals have a greater impact on those with good morals?

Paul says don't be deceived. You are being influenced by the world to waste your life with seeking pleasure, unplugging, endless entertainment, sports, gaming, eating, drinking, smoking, and chasing a hundred other frivolous things.

Let me be clear. If Jesus did not rise again, then enjoy yourself and do it all, because this world is all there is.

However, since Jesus did rise again, we are called to live in the realm of the resurrection life, which is to use our time to serve Him and testify.

Admit that we base everything on the resurrection, and we can state the same truth in its opposite form... Don't act like there is no resurrection.

If Christians get confused, then Christians make a habit of escaping into many various entertaining distractions, which are intoxicating. In verse 34, Paul says sober up. Not just from alcohol, but also from all forms of escaping. Everything we do in this life matters for eternity. Because Jesus is alive from the dead, that fact changes everything for this life, and everything for eternity future.

Why do we chase distractions? Because we are narrowly focused on how we feel at that moment. We feel overwhelmed or drained or discouraged. But instead, we are to live our lives narrowly focused on the truths of Christianity. We should focus on what Paul and the apostles said actually happened to Jesus. We have no need to be overwhelmed by the storms of life or even by times of doubt. Our relationship with God was secured not by the strength of our own faith, but rather by the power of the cross and the resurrection. Our standing with God and our place in this world is not dependent on our current emotional status, not based on our feelings. This truth is truly good news. We find our only comfort, our one consolation, our single source of strength during the trials and burdens of life, in the living, dying, and rising again of Jesus Christ for us, in our place.

The fact of the resurrection provides structure for our lives and for our clear and logical thinking about our lives. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, every moment of our lives has the Spirit's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness. We are equipped to die to self and live to Christ who is our wisdom and peace.

We can live looking ahead to that one glorious day coming soon when the sky will be rolled back like a curtain, and all the promises of God will be fulfilled

in the resurrection of our bodies. This is our hope and confidence on stressful days. The resurrection is the reason we go on living with thankfulness and obedience to our Gracious Savior.

Christianity is true whether masses of people in our generation believe it or not. Don't let the descending popularity of Christianity turn your religion into a subjective religious experience for you. Don't let them convince you that their beliefs are for them and your beliefs are for you. No. Jesus rose, whether they believe it or not, and whether you believe it or not. It is externally guaranteed. They will face Him one day. You will face Him one day.

As Christians, our motto is not – eat drink and be merry. Our motto is not sex, drugs, and rock and roll, escape, fun, and pleasure.

Our motto is He is risen, he is risen indeed, He is building His kingdom, and He is coming again soon.

Only a person who believes that Jesus is alive is on a mission to present this truth to a dying world.

How can we be different from the world? We rely on the resurrection to give us resurrection life. If this is not true, we are still in our sins, Christianity is patently false, and we have no hope.

But since this is true, we have every reason for hope, our sins are washed away, and our living Savior fills us with resurrection life.

Admit that we base everything on the resurrection.