

# 1 Corinthians 15:1-28

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back to 1 Corinthians 15, page 961.! Motivation for life, the thing that drives you to do what you do, can be fickle.

But there are a few things that I think are consistently true. Ambition is one of those. Ambition, you want to achieve things, you want to succeed. The thought of getting ahead is what gets you out of bed each day.

Then there's duty. Duty, you've got to pay the bills, or you've got to meet your family's expectations, or you've got to just do your bit. Duty.

Duty. Then lots of us, if we're asked the question, what is it that motivates you, we would say, well, I don't know really. Just follow the crowd. One of those, or a mixture, or even something else, that's what most of us think will make our life count.

Ambition, it's about success, it's about being an impressive person. Duty, it's about reputation, it's about being seen as a good person. And following the crowd is actually about belonging, it's being an acceptable person.

[ 1 : 14 ] The question is, what if none of this matters? Plenty of people have started down one or more of those paths, and have got along the way, and have asked themselves the question, why am I doing this?

What is the point of all of this? Why, in the end, does it matter what I do or don't do?

And punk bands and indie singers have been singing about this realization for years. We could even go back as far as Johnny Cash. I shot a man in Reno. Why'd you do that, Johnny?

Just to watch him die. Why would you do that? Well, because it doesn't matter what you do, actually, in this hard and painful and meaningless world that we live in.

And who can disagree with that when we face the facts about the world that we live in? We are surrounded by struggle and difficulty and pain, and it all ends in death.

[ 2 : 20 ] Well, that's a cheery way to start on Easter Sunday evening, isn't it? But as the man said, them's the facts. Even if life is broadly good, death casts its long shadow, and none of us can avoid it.

We know it's coming. And because we know it's coming, it motivates us in itself. We've got to get better in order to get on with things. Our ambition is then in a hurry. We've only got so long to make it.

Our duty, our virtue, it needs to be noticed. So we get on social media and tell everybody about it before we pass and miss the chance to be recognized. But even then, what does all of this matter?

If death is the end, why not shoot a man just to watch him die? Why not do life on your terms regardless of what others think or the effect that it has on other people?

Because if death is the end, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. If we care to be honest about reality, that's the bottom line.

[ 3 : 23 ] And that is why what Paul says this evening is such a relief. He reminds us that there is something that changes all of this. Something that reframes our ambition, imbues our duty with lasting meaning, and screams hope in the face of nihilism.

And it is the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter changes everything. Today, all those years ago, changes absolutely everything. By everything, I mean everything.

The resurrection is more than just a bona fide that we can take off on our theological orthodoxy checklist. It has far-reaching consequences, and we need to be clear about that.

And I think it's important that as Christians we face up to this because I think while many of us believe the fact of the resurrection, we confess it in our creeds week by week, we don't appreciate just how significant it is.

The Corinthians have got this wrong. The problem is there in verse 12, 1 Corinthians 15 verse 12. Can you see? Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

[ 4 : 32 ] The Corinthians have no expectation of a future bodily resurrection because they believe that they are spiritually there already. They think Christianity is spiritual, so the presence of gifts and experiences in their church mean that they think that they have arrived.

They have reached the pinnacle. This is as good as it gets. And this mistake actually is the thing that leads to all of the errors that they have fallen into that Paul addresses in this letter.

If you know anything of the letter, he has challenged all kinds of sinful behavior. And he ties it here at this point. This is getting right towards the end of the letter. He ties all that's been going on in their church down to this one theological misstep.

They don't understand the significance of the resurrection. And he makes clear that this is no side small issue. Look at verse 2. It is possible that getting this issue wrong takes you off course completely.

It is possible that you can have believed in vain, Paul says. So it is possible that you're a Christian, that you say that you're a Christian, that you attend a Christian church, even to be really sincere about that, but to have believed in vain because you missed the importance of the resurrection.

[ 5 : 46 ] Paul is saying this is no small matter for us this evening. And I don't want that for any of us, so let's go through what Paul says here to help us grasp the magnitude of this event that we remember today, Easter Sunday.

The resurrection of Jesus, first of all, it's central to the gospel. Paul says it's central to the gospel.

The message upon which the whole Christian faith rests, this verse 3, matter of first importance, matter right at the top of Paul's theological list, necessarily involves resurrection.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

The testimony of the Bible is consistent. When the Messiah, the Christ, comes, he will suffer at the hands of a corrupt religious regime. He will be crucified under the judgment of God for the sin of the world.

He will be buried in a tomb on Good Friday. And three days later, he will walk from that tomb alive. This is the gospel that Paul preached wherever he went.

[ 7 : 00 ] This was the gospel that he preached when he went to Corinth. It is the gospel upon which the Corinthian church and every other church is built. It was the message that the Corinthians received and believed.

It is the same message that faithful preachers declare today and will continue to proclaim until the end of history. And it is a message that unfaithful preachers avoid or edit in order to please their hearers.

This is the good news at the beating heart of the Christian faith. It is why we get up in the morning and why this life has meaning. If there is no resurrection, death wins and everything upon everything is pointless.

There is no good news for everyone, for anyone. But if Christ has been raised, then we can be raised too.

If he gets through death, he can get us through death too. But that can't just be wishful thinking. That can't just be true in a person's heart.

[ 8 : 05 ] It has to be true, true. It has to be true objectively. And because dead people don't rise, Paul is at pains to assert the fact that it really happened. Did you see that in his account here?

Six different sources saw Christ in the flesh after he had been raised from the dead. Look at verse 5. Peter. Peter. Verse 5 again. The twelve disciples.

Verse 6. Five hundred people, Paul says, some of whom are still around if you need to ask them. Don't take it from me. Go down the street. Ask them. Number 52. Down there.

Knock the door. Ask them. They were there. They saw it. They'll tell you. Verse 7. He appeared to James. Verse 7 again.

And then to all the apostles. Then verse 8. Paul himself. If you don't ask some of the five hundred, ask me. I'm the most unlikely convert of them all.

[ 9 : 02 ] And I'm telling you, I saw him. I was on the road to Damascus and the glorified Christ appeared to me. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no good news.

If Jesus Christ is in the grave this evening, Macbeth is right. Life is a poor player that struts and frets its hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. But all these people saw him. Raised.

Eating. Talking. He wasn't a hologram. There is a gospel. There is good news for the world. There is a message about Jesus Christ that you can trust and you can trust your life to.

And the resurrection is central to that message. But it's also central to how that message is worked out. So secondly, we see the resurrection is also central to the church.

[ 10 : 05 ] That's where Paul goes next. It's central to the church. Paul explains this by highlighting the negative verse 13. If there's no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

The Corinthians were saying that there's no general resurrection for believers at the end of history. And Paul seems to be pushing their logic to its necessary conclusion. If there's no resurrection of the dead at the end of history, then there's no resurrection of Jesus in the middle of history, he's saying.

And this means that if Jesus was not raised, the elements of what make a church a church are all in vain. So he starts verse 14.

He says, preaching is pointless. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. The word for vain here is literally empty.

Nothing. There's nothing to hold on to. There's nothing there. Look in there. Empty. If there's no resurrection, he's saying, then Paul's preaching, there's nothing there. It's empty.

[ 11 : 09 ] There's a complete waste of everyone's time. And it's the same today. If Jesus' bones are rotting in the ground somewhere, what I'm doing now is about the most pointless thing in the world. It's empty. It's nothing.

It's nothing. Then he goes on. Secondly, the New Testament is false. Christ is not raised. The New Testament is false. Look at verse 15.

Christ has not been raised. We are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified about God that he raised Christ. And we did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

If there's no resurrection, then Paul and all the apostles, the we here, they've told us all a big lie. Our New Testament is made up of their writing.

The church is founded on their teaching. So if Jesus wasn't raised, it's all a big hoax. When I say turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15, it is no more significant than saying turn to page 7 of your favorite work of literature.

[ 12 : 12 ] Or your favorite comic, for that matter. Without the resurrection, the New Testament is false. The claims that it makes about itself, the claims that it makes about Christ are false.

Paul continues. Preaching is pointless. The New Testament is false. Doctrine is meaningless. 16 to 18. Verse 17.

If there's no resurrection, we are still in our sins.

And that means there's no forgiveness. If Jesus is still in the grave, those who have gone ahead of us are lost. That means there's no salvation. The doctrines of forgiveness and salvation that are right at the heart of the church's teaching, They are meaningless if there's no resurrection.

That doctrine is useless. We have simply nothing to offer a sin-sick world. This is how central the resurrection is to the ministry of the church.

[ 13 : 20 ] Without it, her teaching, her scriptures, and her theology are all empty. There's nothing there. And that is why to believe otherwise is utterly futile.

It is so important that we grasp this. You know, if there is no resurrection, the church is a joke. And all our faith and devotion and service are just laughable.

Verse 19. We are to be pitied. Of all people. Of all the poor souls that you come across. People, you see them with profound needs.

Begging in the street or begging at the lights on the main road. And your heart goes out to them. You feel pity for them. You are more to be pitied than them. Because you've been duped. You've been tricked.

You've fallen for a big old ruse. The joke is on you. Don't fall for the idea that if Christianity isn't true, well, it's basically okay.

[14:20] Because it gives you good things like morality and values and peace of mind. And you know, there's a nice social group down at the church there. Nonsense. If it's not true, if the resurrection of Jesus didn't happen, you've spent your life for a lie.

None of us want to do that. You've made a foolish investment. None of us want to make foolish investments. Paul says we're fools. The resurrection didn't happen.

We're fools. Let me just say, can I say this? If you're not a Christian, can you see how what Paul says here raises the stakes on the decision that Christians have made to follow Jesus?

Your friend or family member who is a Christian knows that if the tomb isn't empty, they've wasted their lives. And they're still prepared to follow Jesus.

Because they're convinced that it's all true. It's not just an emotional crutch, this Christian thing. It's not just a fuzzy feeling that they enjoy. So I wonder, would you ask them? Or would you ask us?

Ask me why they think that is.

[15:25] I'd love to talk to you about that. And would you consider their answer? I would bet that there are more reasons to believe the empty tomb than any of the alternatives that are proposed.

Maybe look again at the evidence for yourself. I can help you with that. There are Christians around you here this evening who can help you with that. Point you to what it says and work your way through.

Consider what it says. Weigh the alternatives. We've been giving this little book here away over this Easter week. It's a book about a man who got a terminal diagnosis with cancer.

And it explains how the resurrection of Jesus gave him hope in that context. There is real hope here. There is something to offer. Those books are available outside.

Help yourself. The resurrection is central to the gospel. It is central to the church's ministry. And then Paul presses it out further. Thirdly, it is central to the Christian life.

[16:27] So Paul lays out the negative implications. There not being a resurrection. And then verse 20 comes as an incredible relief, doesn't it? But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

If there's no resurrection, you can't dig a deep enough hole to find hopelessness. There's nothing. But, verse 20, Christ has been raised from the dead. The firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. Here we see how the whole Christian life is lived in light of the resurrection of Jesus.

The principle of the firstfruits comes from the Old Testament. The first portion of the produce that was given to the Lord. We see that in Leviticus 23. It's a sign that the whole thing belongs to the Lord. The firstfruits go to Him as a sign that it all belongs to Him.

[17:27] And the rest of the harvest is going to come. And this is what it's like with Jesus. He is the firstfruits. He goes ahead of us. He is the first one who is raised as a sign that there is a harvest to come.

And Paul makes this point with reference to the two great covenant heads of history. Everyone is born with Adam as their representative head. We are all born in Adam.

And so he says we all die. But for those who have faith in Christ, those who are in Christ, and have Him as their head, there is life.

Just as Adam draws everyone to the grave, so Christ makes alive all who put their faith in Him. And He does this through His resurrection. Verse 21. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

It's as if Christ goes into the grave to get us. And as He rises again, He draws out all who are His with Him. This is the promise of future glory.

[18:32] And that future reaches back and changes our present. German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, in his book on the vanity of existence, said this, Yet, what a difference there is between our beginning and our end.

We begin in the madness of carnal desire and the transport of voluptuousness. We end in the dissolution of all our parts and the musty stench of corpses. And the road from the one to the other, too, goes, in regard to our well-being and enjoyment of life, steadily downhill.

Happily dreaming childhood, exultant youth, toil-filled years of manhood, infirm and often wretched old age, the torment of the last illness, and finally the throes of death.

Does it not look as if existence were an error, the consequences of which gradually grow more and more manifest? We shall do best to think of life as a process of disillusionment, since this is, clearly

enough, what everything that happens to us is calculated to produce.

End quote. Existence is an error. Life is a process of disillusionment. That is astonishingly depressing. But can you fault his logic?

[ 19 : 52 ] If our existence is entirely the in-Adam kind, and death really is the last word, and all we have is the decay that we see all around us, our lives are ultimately meaningless.

In the end, there is no one to answer to and nowhere to go. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. Christ has been raised from the dead, and so a window of hope is opened.

And Schopenhauer can rethink. Resurrection life is available. And this resurrection life is the reason why we baptize people, 29.

I take what Paul says here to mean, why mark people with the sign of belonging to Jesus if they're going to the grave for eternity, verse 29. The resurrection is why we identify with Jesus in baptism. It's because we're going to be with Him in glory. And it is the reason why Paul would choose, do you notice there, to suffer for the gospel. Look at verse 30. Why are we in danger every hour?

[ 20 : 55 ] I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ our Lord. I die every day.

Verse 32. What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus if the dead are not raised?

Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. The resurrection is the reason why Paul would choose to suffer for the gospel. It's why he would forego the pleasures of life in the here and now.

At its most basic, the Christian life is a life patterned after the example of Jesus. A life of self-giving. A life of personal relinquishment. Jesus says, if anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me.

Why on earth would anyone do that if it wasn't the path to glory? If after death there wasn't resurrection, why would you deny yourself for a moment if there wasn't resurrection life in the future?

No reason. Verse 32. Have a look. What does Paul say? Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Why? Cocaine and prostitutes for tomorrow or next year or 30 years or however long we've got.

[ 21 : 58 ] It's going to all be over. So make the most of it now. Paul says, no. Resurrection brings hope. He says if there's no resurrection, well then nihilism is all that there is.

Party on the lip of the abyss. But no. No. In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. So you can deny yourself.

You can suffer for the sake of truth. You can forego the promises of this life that say live for all you can get in the here and now.

You can forego promotion or recognition or praise for the sake of obedience to Christ. You can do it. You can deny yourself the pleasures of sin in order to honor Christ. In a culture that makes a virtue out of sinning, this is hard.

But you can do it. Why? Because the tomb is empty. Christ is real. He has given you His Spirit who lives in you and He is keeping you for glory.

[ 23 : 03 ] Suffering and self-denial for the sake of Christ only makes sense if Christ is raised. But He is. And that changes everything. Ambition, duty, acceptance.

Everything. Oh