

Resurrection: The Game Changing Reality
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Introduction: GAME CHANGERS. We hear about them and have experienced their work throughout history. A game-changer helped bring about fundamental change in the areas of science, innovation, or vision that transformed the way we functioned or perceived a certain area. This kind of disruption could be in the area of sports/entertainment, like **Stephen Curry** who allowed short (er) players to become great in the game of basketball, prompting the way that the game is played to change (and encouraging elementary basketball players to chuck shots up from 30 feet away!) We have all felt the effects of **Bill Gates** and the progress of our phones, which have created new opportunities and stumbling blocks for every generation within a short window of time. Or **Jeff Bezos** who changed the way that most of us shop now, or even think about shopping, as apparently every day can be Christmas with brown boxes that can show up at our front door any day (or *everyday*) of the year! And there are the obvious medical breakthroughs like penicillin that saved countless lives and little things like electricity that mark our lives each day.

But today, you are here at least in part because of the greatest game-changer ever experienced in this world. We gather today, and every Sunday, because of **Jesus’ resurrection from the dead**, a day in history that shook the very foundations of the universe. There is a nagging reality that ties us all together today, regardless of age, ethnicity, economic status, political alignment, or even spiritual belief, and that is the fact that **death stares us each in the face**. We can run from it, ignore it, hate it, or become indifferent toward it, but the reality is we must all experience it. And there was a time that it seemed like death had the upper hand, that it had secured some sort of victory over us, that fight as we may against it, it would ALWAYS come out on top. Our only solution seemed to be **“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”** (1 Cor. 15:32) But death’s victory was short lived, and its time of mastery ended at the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and **that reality changed the game permanently for all those who believe it, trust it, and turn to it.**

This morning we will look at one of the most *straight-forward* passages the Bible gives about the nature and reality of life and death through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal is not to rile up your emotions, though coming to grips with these truths will certainly engage them. No, the goal is to bring clarity and hope to all who live now but face death. The **Corinthian church** seemed to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but they questioned if they themselves would experience it, meaning they understood the concept but refused to apply it to their own lives. Jesus is a **living Savior, and though He experienced death on Good Friday, God raised Him up on Sunday**, and that not only meant His sacrifice was complete and accepted, but has real world, game-changing, hope filled, joy infused implications to each of us today.

A Gentle Reminder: How the gospel comes

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 *“Now I would **remind you**, brothers, of the **gospel I preached to you**, which you **received**, in which you **stand**, 2 and by which you are **being saved**, if you **hold fast** to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain*

The apostle Paul was writing to a group of people who had their thinking confused, and had some Biblical truth mixed in with worldly lies, which made for a whole lot of confusion and **wrong conclusions**,

which absolutely happens still today. So he wanted to *clarify by way of reminder* the reality of this thing called “**gospel**” that they had already known and received. Now we will unpack this in the next section, but for now, let’s remind ourselves of a few things:

- 1) **The gospel means “good news”** – Just like any news today, the information must be presented to be understood. The words “preached to you” are the same word for gospel – “The gospel I gospelled to you”, since preaching here does not simply mean what I am doing here right now, but means **proclaiming!** If you were the recipient of a game-changing cancer treatment, wouldn’t you want to shout out the cure! This is the same with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news for sinners and hope for the hopeless, rest for the weary.
- 2) **It is received by faith** – The gospel is not something we conjure up in our own head, but must be received by **faith**, which is a gift of God’s grace alone:

Ephesians 2:8-9 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast”*

- 3) **It comes with conviction** – The gospel is foundational, meaning it actually changes our life, purpose, outlook, hope, and future. We stand in the gospel because it **transforms, not just adds to our life.**
- 4) **It transforms completely** – In the gospel we are both *saved and being saved*. The gospel changes us from the inside out, not just in moral action but in heart transformation. God gives us a new heart, new affections, and new desires when we come to Him. This is a life-long process the culminates in us living with Him into eternity.
- 5) **It lasts** – He **secures us** in salvation, meaning we cannot be taken out of His hand nor can our inheritance of heaven be taken away, which means we will hold fast to Christ our whole lives, because He holds us fast (Jude 1:1).

This was framed as “reminder” but I believe you are here today because you have heard this or believe this at some level, whether you remain **skeptical, unsure, in a nominal way, or even antagonistically**. IF you are here, it is because you have some understanding of the gospel, as the church of Corinth did. But Paul was a master of **logic, and continued to build a case to clarify why they needed to change the way they thought and lived.**

A Profound Simplicity: What the gospel does

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed

One of the realities about both the gospel and resurrection is we must take these **by faith**, which means there is a substance of things hoped for and evidence of things that are not seen (Heb. 11:1). In other

words, faith believes even when we cannot see it or were there to observe it. But our faith is NOT based on some illogical leap in the dark or part of some mythological universe, but rather ground in reality. And this was Paul's point:

Foundation of the gospel: ground in reality

The great lie perpetuated on humanity is that God is made in our image and somehow we are competing with Him. We were created for **God's glory**, not the other way around, so the saving and life giving message reflects the fact that all of life is **about Christ, not us, and something needs to change IN US to bring us back to that way of thinking**. One of the things that stands out here is the **simple** message that the gospel is, that even a child can understand, yet complex enough that we will be considering it into eternity. Paul also noted that the greatest **source of truth to understand is the Scripture itself**, since God laid out exactly what happened. It is also a clear, **historic** event that happened in a real place and time.

1. **He died** - This is the most tragic, wonderful, foundational truth of the universe: that God became a man, became a servant, and was willing to face humiliating death (Phil. 2:8). He did this to save us from our sins, since there had to be payment for sin, and only blood would suffice (Heb. 9:22-28). His death took the place of ours.
2. **He was buried** - This is a simple statement of fact: where do dead humans go? They go to the grave. We know Jesus was buried in a new tomb (Matt. 9:57-61), was wrapped and laid in the tomb for three days. This served to confirm He was truly dead.
3. **He rose on the third day** - The gospels lay out that on the third day, there was a violent earthquake, the stone was rolled away, and Jesus walked out of the tomb (Do you like conspiracies? How about the cover-up by the soldiers and the elders to keep everyone quiet about everything that happened at the resurrection (Matt. 28:11-15)? This was testified in the OT by the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:39-40), the picture of Isaac (Gen. 22:8-14), the words of David (Psalm 16:9-11), and the message of Isaiah (Isaiah 53).
4. **He appeared to many** - It is clear in the Biblical record that Jesus was recognized after His resurrection only by those He chose to reveal Himself to. People who had been so close to Him before His death didn't truly see Him as he was until it was revealed to them: Mary Magdalene (John 20:14-16), two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:15, 31), and even the disciples gathered together on Easter evening (John 20:19-20). Notice the **quality & quantity** of Jesus' appearance: **Peter, the 12, and 500 at a single time, James** (Jesus' half-brother and skeptic) all the apostles, and finally Paul.

*"The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I will die. And the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I too, will be raised on the day of judgment. Our salvation is 'from outside ourselves'. I find salvation not in my life story, but only in the story of Jesus Christ. Only those who allow themselves to be found in Jesus Christ --- in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection ---- are with God and God with them."*¹

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 62.

Transformation of the gospel: *changes personally*

The gospel is both intensely powerful and profoundly simple, and both given to all and received personally. Paul shared his own story: that He was **the least** of anyone, the **most unlikely candidate, the most unworthy** to be saved as a follower of Jesus. He was a zealous and committed **persecutor of the church, seeking to kill Christians and imprison more**. He wanted nothing to do with Jesus except to see Him and His followers wiped out. And he was on his way to do that when Jesus knocked him to the ground and gave him eyes to see (Acts 9). Paul not only saw his own sin and became a follower of Jesus, but by God's grace, became a **radically new man**, willing to die for the cause of Christ instead of killing it, suffering for the name of Jesus instead of causing it. This is because the **gospel transforms us**. This simple message that we entrust our lives to radically re-aligns and renews:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 *"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God"*

There are several areas here that we are told that since we are born this way, we will always be that way, even if we change behavior. But the gospel wipes us clean, makes us holy, and changes our identity. We no longer are bound by our **past or the guilt of our actions, but are now WASHED, SANCTIFIED, and JUSTIFIED in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. That is game changing. No matter what you've done or where you've been in life, Jesus can make you new, **declared righteous, and prepared to worship for eternity**.

But here is the thing: *why, oh why, would people not believe this?* We must not only believe in our minds and understanding, we must believe by entrusting ourselves to Christ, turning from the course of our current life, and there is no middle ground. **Our pride and desire for self-rule hinders us from truly believing to the point of repentance**. The Corinthian church believed in the resurrection in theory, but by not applying it to their own lives, stripped it of its power. The power of the gospel and resurrection is not received generally but personally, and that is the only way that we can have true victory over death.

A Logical Argument: *The resurrection denied*

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 *"Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."*

Paul gave a logical argument for believing the full gospel, including the resurrection from the dead. Perhaps you have never outright denied this in your mind, but you simply live like there is none. Often people will say they **believe in Jesus** but it makes no impact on their lives. What Paul is saying is that **true belief has implications, just as unbelief**. He posed the question: *if there was no resurrection from the dead* – meaning there is no full gospel, no hope in death, and death gets the victory, then the following would be true:

1. **This is all a Vanity project** – If this was all just a mere belief and something just said, then all of life would be **vain, empty, and without purpose**. All of this would simply be a club of like-minded crazy people
2. **We would have to claim God is a liar** – If there is no resurrection, then God has lied to us, which means the whole Scripture is up for grabs. This morning we must all face the reality that this whole gospel, Jesus dying and raising from the dead is either the **truth, or the product of lunacy, or that God is a big fat liar**.
3. **This is all some FUTILE attempt at finding hope** – If Jesus did not raise from the dead, we would still be in our sins and without hope. The resurrection of Jesus NOT ONLY assured and affirmed that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted, but it **signaled that we would rise again as well**. When we only half-commit to the truth, life truly becomes a futile venture – *living for the weekend, hoping to scratch out an existence of stuff, always complaining, never having enough, and by comparison, feeling like we are missing out – an exercise in futility*.
4. **There is no hope for anyone who has already died** – One of the most hopeful things in life is the fact that those who we love who believe in Christ will live, and that we will live with them into eternity, worshipping Christ together forever. If there is no resurrection, then AT BEST, we can hope to return to the dust and out of existence, but that is a fool's hope, since we know that when anyone died, they must face judgment for their sins (Heb. 9:27)
5. **We should be pitied** – If there is no resurrection, if Jesus has not conquered sin and death, and we are merely playing a part and acting like there is hope, we should be the most pitied of anyone in the world – ignorant, deceived, and living for something that can never come true, like some cult waiting for a comet or some utopia to come.

The pivot in all of this is: ***But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead!*** And when we believe this, it means we will not only be saved from our sin, but we will rise with Him one day, and life now is no longer defined by **death, but by life!** We will one day received NEW BODIES fit for eternity, where we will no longer face decay, pain, sorrow, or tears. We will break free from the bondage of sin and decay and be raised up to life:

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

⁵⁴ *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ ***“O death, where is your victory?***

O death, where 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 beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your **labor is not in vain**.*

By believing, entrusting, and following Jesus, we can experience Christ's victory over death. Death had rule and reign for a short lived time, and though we must face death physically, we know we no longer have to face death eternally.

No resurrection means a hopeless end...but believing the resurrection means endless hope.

The REAL question today for every single person: ***what do you believe?*** Do you have a belief that in this that does not touch the rest of your life, or a belief that entrusts your whole life to Jesus, recognizing your own sin that is deserving of judgment, and ***asking for forgiveness?*** Today is a day that you can call out to Jesus to save you, believing that He lived, died, was buried and rose again, believing all of this by the grace He gives. This is the glory of Easter and the hope of life.

Each time we have an opportunity to walk with someone at the end of their life on the earth like we did this weekend, I'm reminded of the same thing: ***death stinks, it strips dignity and brings pain and sorrow, and it is totally unavoidable.*** But each time we look at the dying, we say, "***death does not WIN, because Christ has secured the victory over it***" Death for a believer simply is the step into eternal life, because it ushers us into the presence of Jesus, and in "His presence is the fullness of joy and pleasure forever" (Psalm 16:11). This is the biggest game changing reality in all of life.