

Resurrection Doubts – 1 Cor 15:12-20

1 Cor 15:12-20 (p.961); While you're turning there, let me just say a few things about the past few weeks, and the next few weeks
First of all – best Christmas ever; From the 17-18th with so many people professing Christ, to really special times of worship and reflection on Christmas Eve/Day . . .
It was one of the best Christmas seasons I've ever had
Especially with the *numbers* on Christmas Eve; We had about 2600 people between the two services, and it was a very sweet time

- Second, I want to commend you for your faithfulness/generosity in giving
We weren't sure what to expect at year-end, b/c our weekly giving had dropped off a bit from earlier in the year; But you gave
And whether it was a part of your ongoing tithe, or an offering over and above your tithe, I love the fact that you'll experience the blessing/provision of God in your life
Just like we're experiencing his blessing and provision in our church

And then third, we're going to kick off a 40-day focus on giving and stewardship and generosity next week – and I can't wait
I went back through the devotional booklet that we'll pass out next weekend, and I can't wait to see how God uses it *my* life, and in our home, and in our church
And not just for the capital campaign, but long term
So we have much for which to be thankful, and much to look forward to

- But I don't want to lose sight of our study in 1 Corinthians (**Intro**)
A letter from Paul to the church in Corinth, where he's addressing various issues they were having – issues like infighting, and divorce, and disorder, and a lack of love
None of which we're exempt from

So my desire has been to learn from the issues of *their* day, so as to avoid them in ours
That's the purpose of this entire series; And the reason I think, that this letter was included in the Bible in the first place
The present issue being *resurrection doubts* – that's the issue, starting in v12

• 12 *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. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Evidently there were people who just didn't believe it could be true; And said so
Not unlike many people today; Maybe even you
Especially with the "New Atheism" going around from the likes of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens
New, only in the sense that those who *believe* in it, are increasingly vocal and adversarial about it

And make no mistake, atheism is a belief based on faith, just as much as Christianity or any other religion

With so much of that on the increase, this passage is about as relevant as it gets

And the first point of Paul's rebuttal, is that when it comes to life, life now and life eternal – if you throw the resurrection out, you throw it all out

No resurrection, no nothing (v12-19)

That's the big idea Paul's trying to get across in v12-19

Saying in v12 – *Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

Proclaimed, as in, declared with the proof to back it up

That has to be the sense of the word, otherwise, the force of his argument is lost

IOW if you're just shootin' from the hip to say that Christ arose, without any proof, somebody could *totally* say that's not true

But if you give evidence to back it up, like Paul did in v3-8, that's another story

So he must be using *proclaimed* here, in the sense of proclaimed with proof

That being the case then, *how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?*

With such clear, verifiable, and overwhelming evidence, how can you say it's a fallacy?

That no one can be raised to life again?

It's a rhetorical question, with the implied answer, that you can't – you can't legitimately say such a thing

- And then he starts the next sentence in v13, with the word *but* – which seems a bit out of place at first glance; Why not just start the sentence with *if*?
So the flow, starting in v12, would read like this – *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 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*
Why not just leave out the *but*? It seems like you could; But he didn't; So we can't
Which forces us to figure what in the world he's saying with it in

Which I think, is this: I think he's implying an intervening thought of something like –
“that's easy to say”

IOW *if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?* [That's easy to say,] *but if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.* (13)

I think that's the implication of the word *but*; Otherwise, it doesn't make much sense

In any case, his point here in v13, is that you can't have it both ways

You can't say there's no resurrection of the dead, and still say that *Jesus* rose from the dead; It's one or the other

So given the premise of no resurrection, one of the implications is that . . .

• Jesus is dead (v13,16)

He didn't rise again; That's what Paul's saying for the sake of argument

If there's no resurrection, there's no Jesus; Period

And if Christ has not been raised [v14], then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. IOW it's all for naught; None of it makes one bit of difference

• **Preaching is moot and faith is useless (v14)**

If Jesus didn't rise again, proclaiming the gospel is done in vain, and trusting in it, is too
Which makes church a club at best, and a waste of time, money, and effort at worst
Yet another implication

What's more, v15 – *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.*
He reiterates there in v16, what he said in v13 – that if there's no such thing as life after death, then not even Jesus rose again

In addition, from v15, is that . . .

• **God is misrepresented (v15)**

If the resurrection is a hoax, then the apostles and those after them, including us – have grossly misrepresented God; Saying he *did* something, he didn't
In a sense, creating our own god out of the figments of our imagination
Which not only makes our preaching *useless*, but our message, false

And then he says in v17 – *If Christ has not been raised* [he repeats the premise], *your faith is futile* [which is another way of saying it's held in vain] *and you are still in your sins*
If there's no resurrection . . .

• **We're still sinful (v17)**

Meaning we haven't been forgiven; We still bear our guilt; We're still facing punishment
We're still God's enemy; We're still separated from his presence
No resurrection, no forgiveness
Which is not only another disturbing implication of the *premise*, but it's a commentary on the gospel itself – the good news of salvation
Cluing us in to the fact, that the death and resurrection of Christ are inseparable

If Jesus just *died* for your sins, but didn't rise again – then death won, and his sacrifice was no better than the animal sacrifices of old
Temporary in their coverage, and inadequate in their extent
That's the implication of Paul's statement
The death of Christ, without the resurrection of Christ, is incomplete and ineffective . . .
In redeeming us, reconciling us, restoring us, justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying us
No resurrection, no nothing

Not only that, but *those also* [v18] *who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished*
If the premise is true, that there's no such thing as life after death . . .
Then those who have died professing Christ as their Savior and Lord – have not only died under false pretenses, with a false hope for heaven and life thereafter . . .
But they've perished – they've gone to hell

Which means if there's no such thing as a resurrection . . .

• **Hell is our destiny (v18)**

That's the connotation of the word *perish*; It doesn't mean annihilation
Perish and destruction in the NT, when used to describe death, refer to hell
Like when Jesus said in Jn 3:16 – *whoever believes in me will not perish, but have* . . .
Not to mention his explicit references to hell in Matthew, the Apostle John's comments in Revelation, and some of the other NT writers in between

If there's no such thing as a resurrection, our destiny is hell

- So it's no wonder he ends this paragraph in v19 saying . . .
If in Christ [another reminder that he's talking to the church, he's talking to believers] . . .
If in Christ we have hope in this life only . . .
If this is where it ends; If there's no life beyond the grave; If things like love, joy, peace, goodness, and blessing are only for now . . .
If we just die and decay and go to hell – *we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Pitied b/c we're deluded; Thinking something is true, when it's really false
Thinking it's going to be *happily* ever after, when it's not
Thinking it's going to be heaven, when it's hell
Thinking it's going to be life, when it's death
Thinking there's reason for hope, when there isn't

If there's no such thing as a resurrection . . .

• **Hope is fleeting, and Christians are delusional (v19)**

Delusional b/c we base our whole lives on something false, thinking it's true . . .
And fleeting, b/c hope doesn't last; It's only for the here and now, if at all
We're like people in a raft who think the water ahead is smooth sailing, when in reality Niagara Falls is just around the bend*****
No resurrection, no nothing

But in fact [Paul says in v20] **Christ has been raised (v20a)**

Enough of the implications based on a false premise, he gets back to the facts; The truth
Which means the doubts are unnecessary, and the objections unfounded; They're wrong
The evidence supports it, the Bible says it, and our spirits feel it

Evidence like a quantity and quality of people who witnessed the resurrection
Including 500 at one time, trusted leaders, and cagy skeptics who eventually believed
Most of whom were still living when Paul wrote this, and available to confirm it
And did so even though they had little to gain and much to lose

• **The evidence supports it**

It supports the fact that Christ *has* been raised; That's why Paul can speak so definitively

Not only that, but . . .

• **The Bible says it**

It says that he rose again; In no less than 4 different gospels
Gospels that were *written by eyewitnesses*; Men who were either apostles themselves, directly commissioned by Jesus . . .
Or those close to apostles – like Mark was to Peter, or Luke was to Paul
We can trust the resurrection accounts in the Bible, b/c they were written by eyewitnesses

Not only that, but they were *accurately recorded*; Shown by the fact that . . .
Despite their different perspectives, their agreement is uncanny
And they didn't just get together and conform their accounts to a party line
Rather, they included different details, recording what *they* heard and saw; All of which reveals a concern for accuracy/truth, more than anything else

Otherwise, why would they include embarrassing details of their leaders, like Thomas doubting? Or report that a *woman* first saw Jesus after his resurrection, instead of a man? Considered a more *credible* witness in that day? Why would they do that, unless they were more concerned with accuracy and truth than anything else? They wouldn't

- Which means we can trust what the Bible says, b/c it was written by eyewitnesses, it was accurately recorded, and third, it was *faithfully preserved*; Which is vitally important If the resurrection was accurately recorded but not faithfully preserved, we can't be sure of its truth; Especially so, b/c we don't have the original manuscripts Nor some of the first copies; We only have some fragments from the 2nd/3rd centuries

But the manuscripts we *do* have from then on, show an amazing measure of agreement – to the tune of 99.whatever% And the differences in the small fractional part have to do with incidentals, not major doctrines

Which would be nearly impossible if the scribes in the first few centuries, had made significant errors or intentional changes If that were the case as some skeptics speculate, it's likely that we'd have a wide *divergence* in the manuscript evidence, instead of wide *agreement*

Not only that, but through the writings of some of the early *church* leaders in those first few centuries, we can reconstruct almost the entire NT . . . Even though we don't have the manuscripts; And lo and behold, the reconstruction agrees with the manuscripts we *do* have, later on All of which means, that it's *most* likely, that the copies we have, are faithfully preserved from the originals themselves

And it leads us, once again, to the conclusion that Christ *has* in fact been raised, b/c the evidence supports it, the Bible says it, and third . . .

• **Our spirits feel it**

Which, by itself, doesn't mean much; People feel all kinds of crazy things in the name of religion; But when you combine it with the evidence and record . . .

It adds something *very* significant

In fact, without it, without the *feeling* that it's true, without the resonance in our soul – something would be missing, and terribly wrong

It would be like living in a marriage where your spouse *says* they love you, and even wrote you a letter *telling* you so 20 years ago – but you don't feel it You hear what they say and see what they've done – but if you don't feel it, if you don't resonate with it, something's wrong; Either with you, or with them And the same goes for the resurrection If you don't feel it in your spirit, something's wrong

- But the problem doesn't lie with the facts The problem, is that far too many people don't *feel* the truth, b/c they don't want to *face* the truth; The truth, that if Jesus lives – he's Lord He's Lord, and deserves your worship, your allegiance, and your lives – the focus of your entire existence

But that means you'd have to admit your *sin* – your wrong ways of thinking/living . . .

Drop your skepticism – that all things supernatural are fake . . .

And abandon your hedonism – your self-centered, self-absorbed pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification

In order to *feel* the truth, you have to *face* the truth; And people don't want to do that

Instead, they say things like, “Oh, Jesus was just an historical figure; Just a man; He didn't really rise again”

Really? Then how could Paul cite so many people who saw it, *and* were available to confirm it?

If Jesus didn't rise again, Paul's story wouldn't have checked out, his legitimacy would have been compromised, and his ministry would have ended before it began

After all, who's going to trust a liar when his story can be checked with facts? Nobody

So objecting to the resurrection on the grounds that Jesus was “just an historical figure,” doesn't add up; Which is why the *real* reason they do so . . . Has more to do with their heart than it does their head

- Is that you? Do you not *feel* the truth of the resurrection, or *believe* the truth of the resurrection, b/c you don't want to *face* the truth for your life? 9 times out of 10 that's the problem; At least for those who *know* the truth

The worst part of which, is that you're not only going to face the *consequences* for all eternity, but miss out on the *blessing* for all eternity

The blessing that Christ not only rose again to take away your sin, but that he rose again so *you could too*

That's what Paul means when he says in v20b that Christ is *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*

That is, he's the indicator and promise and guarantee, that those who have died in him, will rise like him; That's what *firstfruits* means

It's like earnest money on a home purchase

You pay it forward as a promise and indicator that more will follow – just like Christ paid it *all*, and overcame it all, so *you* can follow*****

Just like *Christ* has been raised . . .

(And) you will be too (v20b)

IOW if you're in Christ, if you're a believer, if he's your Savior and Lord by virtue of his grace and your faith – b/c he lives, you will too; b/c he rose again, you will too

What an amazing promise; What blessed assurance

And if you don't have it, you can; If you'll admit your sin, drop your skepticism, abandon your hedonism, and believe the truth

Pray – Lord, hear the prayers of those who are turning to you; Those who are confessing their sin, and expressing their belief – their belief in you and your resurrection

And as we give our tithes and offerings to your work of ministry, will you solidify our assurance that b/c you live, we will too? Thank you Jesus