

Because of Easter – 1 Cor 15:3-8

Welcome to our Easter service at Coram Deo Bible Church. I'm glad you're with us.

If you're new to our church, we consider you our guest and would love to know.

Just text "Guest" to the number on your screen, and someone will get back to you this week to welcome you and answer any questions you might have.

On this day of all days, I praise God, that though separated by city blocks and country miles, we're still connected by the Spirit; the Holy Spirit.

Though our *building* is empty this Easter, the church is full. 1 Cor 15:3-8. (Title)

➤ Easter is special, because it's the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

That's why it's often called *Resurrection* Sunday.

It's the celebration of life from death. Good over evil. Light over darkness.

In fact, Easter is the guarantee that God will triumph over *all* darkness one day.

That he will make *all* things right; all things new. Including our lives.

And that, is a precious, precious truth. Especially these days.

Because we're not immune to the ill-effects of sin. We're not impervious to the brokenness of this world. We're not *exempt* from suffering and death.

If the past few months have shown us anything, it's that we're not untouchable. Our lives our tenuous; fragile; fleeting.

Which makes Easter and the triumph of Jesus over death, all the more precious.

➤ So follow along with me, and let's see why. 1 Cor 15:3.

[3] *For I delivered to you* [the Apostle Paul says] *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* [Peter], *then to the twelve* [the 12 Disciples of his inner circle].

[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* [the brother of Jesus], *then to all the apostles. [8] Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me* [Paul says].

This passage is one of main reasons we can *believe* the resurrection of Jesus, instead of doubt it. Because it's well-attested and well-documented.

And not just here, but in the Gospels. And not just in the Bible, but in *other* writings of the time.

We can believe instead of doubt. (1 Cor 15:3-8)

Because of Easter, we can *believe* in Jesus. We can believe in who he is and what he's

done. We can believe the Good News that he preached and embodied. The Gospel.

That we are sinners in need of a Savior. Doomed to an eternity of hell, in utter darkness.

Apart from God and apart from others.

But by believing in Jesus to save us, believing that he died for our sins and rose again for our life; and repenting of those sins, confessing and forsaking them to live for *him* . . .

We can have life to the full and life forever.

All because he rose again, and lives.

We can believe.

Because of Easter, we can fully embrace him and fully trust him – put our faith in him.

We don't have to *convince* ourselves the Gospel is true, it *is* true.

We don't have to *wish* it so. It is so.

We can dismiss our doubts, we can set aside our skepticism, and we can believe.

➤ Especially so, because he appeared to a whole bunch of people. Witnesses.

Like Peter, v5. *He appeared to Cephas*. Someone who was highly respected and highly trusted. And went on to do miracles . . .

To *authenticate* his eyewitness account of the resurrection.

Then Jesus appeared to the 12 *together*. Peter and the *other* Disciples of his inner circle.

Most of whom went on to *die* for the truth of Easter. And as you've heard me say

before, *nobody* dies for what they know to be *false*.

Plenty of people die for what they think is true – Islamic martyrs, Hindu martyrs, etc.

But nobody gives their life for something they know to be false.

And since the 12 were in a position to know, to know whether the resurrection was real or not, and since they gave their lives for it, we can believe it's true.

Jesus appeared to Peter, he appeared to the 12, and then he appeared to more than 500

others; *at one time* it says (6). Most of whom were still *alive* when Paul wrote this . . .

And could have *refuted* it if it was wrong.

The point being, we need not doubt. The evidence is overwhelming.

➤ Nor should we be like Thomas. Who refused to believe unless he saw Jesus for himself.

Didn't matter what the others said. He had to see him. Which isn't just innocent doubt or naïve skepticism, but bull-headed pride and foolishness.

Like those who don't believe that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. "It's a fabrication" they say. Why? Because they didn't see it for themselves.

Or how about those who think the earth is flat because they've never *circled* it themselves; in a spaceship.

That's not doubt; that's irrational cynicism. That's foolish conceit. That's blatant inconsistency. Because if they applied that standard to *everything* in life . . .

They wouldn't believe anything at all.

➤ I love the **quote** from the late Chuck Colson about all this.

Imprisoned for his role in the Watergate scandal back in the early 70's, he said this:

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world, and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years. Absolutely impossible."

Because of Easter, we can believe. And should.*****

Second, because of Easter . . .

We can live instead of die. (Jn 11:25-26)

That's what Jesus said; in his conversation with Martha right after her brother Lazarus died. He said, "Your brother will rise again."

And she was like, “[I know, I know.] *I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*” (John 11:25–26)

[And] *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. [In other words, I embody it, I grant it, and I’m going to accomplish it.] Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, [26] and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”*

Because *Jesus* rose again to new life, he *is* the resurrection and life.

So that if we believe in him, we too will live again, even though we die.

That’s what he said. *Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.* (25)

In fact, we’ll *never* die. Not spiritually.

Everyone who lives and believes in me [Jesus said] *shall never die* (26). As in never suffer in the torment of hell. *That* kind of death.

Their souls will continue on in heaven. The epitome of *life*. Awaiting the return of Christ and a new glorified body.*****

Because of the *resurrection* of Jesus, the *promise* of Jesus, and our *belief* in Jesus – we can live instead of die. And will.

- That’s why martyrs in centuries past, went to the stake with such resolute calm. Many of them singing and testifying to God’s grace. Why? Because they knew they’d live. That’s why believers like us can face tomorrow; with no fear. Because he lives. And that’s why loved ones can sing around the deathbeds of godly *family* members. Because this isn’t the *end* for them, and life awaits. All because of Easter.

We can believe instead of doubt, we can live instead of die; and third . . .

We can pray instead of panic. (1 Jn 5:14)

Why? Because someone hears us. Someone cares. Someone loves us.

If Jesus weren’t alive, he *couldn’t* hear us. And if he didn’t care or couldn’t do anything about it, it wouldn’t matter. In which case we *should* panic.

But in fact he *does* live, and he *does* care, and he *does* answer.

So we should *pray*. We can and should.

- About a week and half ago, Becky and I had some decisions to make regarding our family, and didn’t have peace about it. They weren’t massive things, but things we wanted to get right. Judgment calls, and issues of wisdom.

And having gone to *bed* unsettled about it, Becky had more and more trouble sleeping. Until finally, she sat up in a near panic. With an anxiety attack.

So I sat up as well, concealing my frustration, and began asking her what was wrong. And after about 30 seconds it became crystal clear that this was beyond us. Talking it through wasn’t going to cut it.

So at 2 in the morning, we got on our knees beside the bed, and started praying.

Of course we had to shove the dog aside because she couldn’t be bothered in her beauty sleep. But it didn’t stop us from holding hands and praying.

It didn’t stop us from crying *out in the night* like it says in Lam 2, and pouring out our heart like water before the presence of the Lord . . .

Lifting our *hands to him for the lives of* our children. (v19)

And God answered. Giving us peace in the *moment* that allowed us to sleep, and clarity in the morning that helped us decide.

All because Jesus rose from the dead, sits at the right hand of the Father, hears our prayers, and acts on our behalf. (Is 64:4)

- When panic strikes, pour out your heart to him. (Ps 62:8)
When cares weigh you down, get on your knees. (1 Pet 5:7)
When the situation seems hopeless, lift up your voice.
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding (1 John 5:14), will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:7)
Because *this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*
And casting your cares on him, is definitely part of his will.

Because of Easter, we can pray instead of panic. And should.*****

Fourth . . .

We can respond instead of retreat. (2 Cor 9:8)

This is one of the *hallmarks* of Christians and Christianity.

Going all the way back to the 1st century, Christians have run *into* danger, while others have run away from it. They’ve *risked* their lives, instead of saving their lives.

- Rodney Stark is an acclaimed historian and professor at Baylor University, and wrote of such things in his book, *The Triumph of Christianity*. It’s on my “Best Of” list. And in it, he lays out 3 factors that contributed to widespread death over the centuries.

First, was the suffocating mass of people in most ancient cities. Like Rome. (p103-112)
It had a population density *3 times* that of modern day Manhattan. And 2 ½ times that of Calcutta. So disease spread like wildfire.*****

Second, was the disgusting filth in which people lived.

Water was often contaminated. Raw sewage was thrown into the streets. Animals added *their* mess. And the Tiber River, in the *middle* of Rome . . .
Was so rancid it could be smelled for miles.

And third, was a constant influx of newcomers to the cities. You see where this is going.

- And sure enough, a plague struck in 165AD, that killed 1/4 to 1/3 of the population of the entire Roman Empire. Over the course of *15 years*. (Stark, 114-15)
Worse yet, most people didn’t even *try* to treat the stricken. Including the preeminent doctor at the time – Galen. He fled to his country *estate* when the plague started.

And during a second plague, this time in Alexandria ca. 251AD (**Quote**), the Bishop Dionysius described things this way (Stark, 115):

“At the first onset of the disease, they [pagans, unbelievers] pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead.”

- But not Christians. Not there, and not in Rome.
Believing that death was not the end, and that life was meant to serve others, they *cared* for the sick instead of deserting them. They responded instead of retreating.

Listen to how **(Quote)** that same Dionysius described *them* (Stark, 117):

“Most of our brothers showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.”

In so doing, Dr. Stark estimates that Christians reduced the mortality rate by as much as 2/3 in those days. (Stark, 117)

And not just in plagues. According to Paul Johnson **(Quote)**, another historian:
“The Christians [in Rome] . . . ran a miniature welfare state in an empire which for the most part lacked social services.” (Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, 75)

- The point is this: Christians of every age, have responded instead of retreated in the face of difficulty.*****
They’ve run *into* the battle, instead of away from it.

Why? Because the same grace that empowered Jesus, empowers us. **(2 Cor 9:8)**

God is able to make all grace abound to you [just like he did Jesus]. So that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

We can respond instead of retreat because we have the same grace of God at *our* disposal, as Jesus did at his.

Not only that, but Easter assures us that dying is gain. We can respond instead of retreat in the face of danger, because *to live is Christ*, [and] *to die is gain*. (Ph 1:21)
To live is glory for *him* as we serve others, to die is better.

We can respond instead of retreat because *though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day*. (2 Cor 4:16)

And this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. (2 Cor 4:17)*****

Because of Easter, we can and should respond. Whatever the situation.

And last, because of Easter . . .

We can hope instead of despair. (1 Cor 15:19-22)

Hope, as in expect; anticipate; look forward to.

As opposed to *lose* hope; *lose* heart; despair.

Because of Easter we can hope instead of despair.

Hope for what? Heaven. Our own resurrection. Like it says in **1 Cor 15:19**.

[19] If in Christ we have hope in this life only [as if he didn’t rise again], 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 [the guarantee that those who have died in Christ, will rise as well]. [21] For as by a man came death [referring to Adam], by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Because of Easter, we can look forward to our *own* Easter someday.

Our own resurrection.

- And because of Easter **(Ps 27:13)**, we can hope for the best *now*. Like King David said.
I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!
We can hope instead of despair, not just later, but *now*.
We can hope to see the *goodness* of God in the land of the *living*, and the *greatness* of God in the life to come. We can.

You may not be immune from disease, but you can hope for protection. **(Summary)**

You may not be exempt from suffering, but you can hope for perseverance.

You may not be impervious to loss, but you can hope for provision.

And you may not live long, but you can hope for eternity.

All because of Easter.

We can live instead of die, pray instead of panic, respond instead of retreat, and hope instead of despair. But only if you believe.

- **Prayer** – If you want the hope and life that Jesus offers because of Easter, pray with me right now. Something to this effect:
God, I admit that I’m a sinner facing death. Eternal death.
And I believe in Jesus to save me. That when he died, he died for me; and because he rose, I will too. I believe.
So I repent of my sins. Please forgive me and help me to turn from them.
I receive you now, into my life, as Lord and Savior.

Father, for those who just prayed, will you help them rest in the certainty of your life and resurrection? Will you protect them and give them a hunger for your Word?

Give them great joy in believing. And connect us via your Spirit, even in this time of separation. We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.