

The Imperfect Church – 29
The Resurrected Church
1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Introduction

I want to introduce you to two groups of people. Both of these groups are adequately represented here in this room today. You will fit into one of these two groups.

The first group of people are not perfect people, but they are all Christians, meaning they are convinced that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and they have made a personal commitment to follow him. They don't always live up to this commitment fully, but they are serious about growing in their faith. These people find themselves in a daily battle with what the Bible calls 'sin.' It is a struggle but they are finding that God is helping them through this life. They are deeply convinced that at the point of their death, their souls will go to Heaven into the presence of Jesus. Plus, they are convinced that at some future point in history, Jesus will return to judge the world and take those people who have faith in him back to Heaven. These people are all different from each other, but they have all made a similar life commitment to know, serve, and follow Jesus Christ.

The other group of people are those who represent another point of view. These are not perfect people either, but they represent people who have had a bad experience with religion. Many of them have seen hypocrisy in the church and that has made it difficult for them to put their faith in Jesus Christ. Some have spent a lot of time in church. They've been in youth groups, they've heard sermons. They've been brought along to church by parents and grandparents. Yet, they have not come to the point of making a personal commitment of faith to Jesus.

TS - Last week we began walking through the penultimate chapter of 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. The first few verses of that chapter establish for us the gospel, the good news of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. That truth is the "most important thing" in life. The One Thing to devote our lives to. To live our lives for. To center our lives around. Why? Because this Good News is what saves us. We are sinners, but Jesus, by his death, burial, and resurrection, has enabled us to be forgiven and granted eternal life.

At this point in 1 Corinthians, Paul, who has planted this church in Corinth, and now writes this to them 5 years later, after now establishing the Good News of Jesus, drills a bit deeper into this and focuses in on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is the hinge pin of Christianity. Remove the resurrection and it all falls apart. If you can explain away the resurrection, you can dismiss Jesus. The faith of Christianity stands upon, our hope is built upon, this truth that Jesus has risen from the dead. We believe in that. We hope in that. These truths from 1 Corinthians 15 speak to both categories.

The first thing I want to do today is speak to the first category, those who believe Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and who have made a commitment to follow him. I want to ask you this question: what if you are wrong? What if Jesus Christ really is not risen from the dead? When it comes to this central claim of Christianity - Jesus' resurrection from the dead - either he did or he did not. So I want us to look honestly at this first scenario - the theoretical possibility that Jesus did not rise from the dead.

Some people are so addicted to religion and doing religious things that they will tell you that even if Christianity is not true, the Christian faith is still the best way to live. Maybe you've heard someone say something like this or maybe even said it yourself: "Even if it turned out that Jesus did not rise from the dead and there was no such place as heaven, I would not regret living the Christian life." I understand why people say that. But please understand this: The Bible absolutely disagrees with that position.

1 Corinthians 15:19 - "And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world."

1 Corinthians 15:32b - "And if there is no resurrection, 'Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!'"

TS - If Christ is not risen from the dead, you who believe that he has are to be pitied more than anyone. Paul will give us four reasons for this rather startling conclusion:

If Christ is not risen...

1. OUR FAITH IS USELESS

1 Corinthians 15:12-17a - ¹² But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then

all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. ¹⁵ And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. ¹⁶ And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless...

Useless. That's a harsh and blunt word. But it's a true word. You think your faith will deliver something to you, but if Christ is not risen, it does not. It cannot. Christians build their lives around the conviction that, if you have faith in Jesus, God does something in your life and makes you a new person and will eventually welcome you into eternal life. But the Bible is quite clear on this point - if Christ is not risen, that is all just an illusion. You have trusted a lie and staked everything on something that is nothing. You talk about trusting Jesus, but if Jesus is not risen, there is no Jesus to trust.

When drug companies test out a new drug, they run tests on two groups of people. They give one group the real drug, the other group gets an identical looking pill, but it's a placebo. Sugar. Nothing, no substance. Never revealing which group has which pill. They do this for a very specific reason. They know the mind is powerful, and some people feel better just because they have swallowed a pill. They believe they are better even if the pill has no substance that can actually change them. It's all in their minds.

If Christ is not risen, Christians are those who took the fake pill. This whole church/faith thing is just one big placebo effect. You are confessing some change in your life that is not really there. Right before this section, Paul writes that the Gospel was "not without results" in his life. Jesus transforms. But if Jesus is not risen, that simply is not true. Such faith does nothing for you except within your own mind.

Christians claim that faith saves them. But if Christ is not risen, faith is nothing but an elaborate self-deception. You are merely playing a mind game. All that has happened to you this this: church music has made you more cheerful, Christian friends have made you more hopeful, and a brighter outlook on life has made you more thankful. If Christ is not risen, all you think God has done is nothing more than a figment of their own imagination, and that is sad.

2. WE ARE STILL GUILTY OF OUR SINS

1 Corinthians 15:17 - "And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith in useless and you are still guilty of your sins."

Our culture is overwhelmed with new spiritualities and religious ideas. In our world, you don't even have to subscribe to one of the major, or even minor, religions in the world. You can fabricate your own. Or you can piecemeal one together of all the parts you like from all the different religions. But here is the most important question to ask of any religion or spiritual idea- how does it deal with your sins?

This is important because Christians are worried about their sins. It is why you've placed your faith in Jesus. For you, sin is an issue. You are acutely aware of all you've said, done, and thought, that didn't honor God. Your conscience bothers you and you'll do anything to alleviate some guilt. But if Christ is not risen, you have staked your eternal destiny on a man, it turns out, died 2000 years ago. And he can do no more for you than Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great.

And really, your problem is even worse because by your profession of faith in Jesus, you have actually added to your sins. If Christ is not risen, people like you have been praying to Almighty God in the name of a man who died 2000 years ago. You have established that Jesus is God in the flesh. That's blasphemy. You have put a man in place of God. Frankly, it would have been better for you, in regards to sin, to have lived a completely secular/pagan life, far removed from anything having to do with Jesus.

3. WE HOLD ON TO A FALSE HOPE

1 Corinthians 15:18 - "In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost!"

Many of you have stood at the graveside of a loved one. Those who claim faith in Jesus have drawn comfort in those horrific moments from the conviction that the person they love is now in the loving presence of Jesus.

The Bible is brutally honest here. If Christ is not risen, that is a false hope. Because if Jesus wasn't raised, there is no hope whatsoever that anyone else is going to make it to eternal life. They are, if Christ is not risen, simply lost. Gone. And you are living in denial.

Some people might think that false hope is better than having no hope at all. The truth is that false hope is the saddest thing in the world. That is the point C.S. Lewis makes in his book *A Grief Observed*. Every person who has been by the bedside of a loved one and has seen them rally only to then decline knows the devastating power of false hope.

The Bible is saying here that, if Christ is not risen, Christians are sad creatures because you've staked your lives on a hope that will ultimately prove to be false. There cannot be any worse way to live than that.

4. WE ARE WASTING OUR LIVES

1 Corinthians 15:19 - "And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world."

Paul must have written these words with much passion. He had personally paid a very high price for following Jesus.

2 Corinthians 11:23b-29 - I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. 24 Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26 I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. 27 I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. 28 Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?

This was his life. Why live like this? This man was a brilliant academic. He could have led a comfortable life as a lecturer in a rabbinic school with a great salary and the respect of the Jewish community. Why did he endure all this? For the sake of Christ. But if Christ is not risen...

1 Corinthians 15:30-32 - ³⁰ And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour? ³¹ For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you. ³² And what value was there in fighting wild beasts—those people of Ephesus—if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, "Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

So Paul is saying: Why bother? If Christ is not risen, I've endured all of this for the sake of a dead man and a lost cause. The Christian life is so hard that if Jesus is not risen, it simply isn't worth the effort.

You have fought battles with sin and you need never have bothered. You have prayed and it was like sending letters that never arrived. You have given money you could have saved and enjoyed. You have served countless hours for a cause that is worthless.

That is what Paul is saying here. He says it all with great honesty. There is no special pleading. No, "we must keep the church going at all costs. We must build the kingdom." Christianity stands or falls on its claim that it is true. If it is not true, integrity demands that we shut the whole thing down.

TS - and now having painstakingly, brutally, made his point clear that everything stands or falls on whether or not Jesus was raised from the dead, he declares this:

1 Corinthians 15:20 - "But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead."

Notice he does not paint this second scenario as a possibility. He declares it as fact. And I'm going to do the same today. Yes, if Christ is not raised, it all falls apart and we would certainly be the most to be pitied. But this is the declaration from God to us...Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and on the third day he rose from the dead. The tomb is empty.

So to you Christians, here is what this means for you:

1. YOUR FAITH HAS SUBSTANCE

You are not believing in nothing. You've placed your trust in one who lives. When you pray he hears you. When you worship him, it brings joy to his heart. You have placed your trust in the living Lord Jesus Christ, and those who trust in him, the Bible says will never be put to shame.

2. YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

Jesus died for our sins. What Jesus did on the cross was big enough, great enough, to cover all our sins and the sins of everyone who will place their trust in him.

3. YOU HAVE REAL HOPE

It means that when you talk about heaven, you are talking about something that is going to happen, for you are going to be with Jesus forever.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 - ²⁰ But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. ²³ But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

²⁴ After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. ²⁵ For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. ²⁶ And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For the Scriptures say, "God has put all things under his authority." (Of course, when it says "all things are under his authority," that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) ²⁸ Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under God's authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.

Because Jesus is risen, He wins. He will be utterly supreme over all things. Death will be defeated. Cancer, AIDS, Alzheimer's, disability, autism, pain, death...none of these get the final word. God does. This is why Romans 8 says that our current "light and momentary" troubles do not compare to the glory that will be revealed at the return of the risen Jesus. He wins. You win. Just as he was raised from the dead, so you will be raised. This is our hope. This hope defines us. This hope drives us.

4. COSTLY SACRIFICE IS THE GREATEST INVESTMENT OF YOUR LIFE

1 Corinthians 15:58 - "So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless."

Every price you pay, every battle to defeat sin in your life, every prayer you pray, every clinging to hope in every dark moment, every penny given, every second invested in the expansion of God's Kingdom...it's all worth it.

TS - so now let's talk to those of you who identify with the position of not yet having placed your trust in Jesus. To you who are still tossing around questions in your mind. To those standing at a distance from Jesus. To you, I say this - Christ has indeed been raised from the dead! That means...

1. UNBELIEF IS USELESS

If faith was just a mind game, then to take a position of unbelief would be reasonable. But since Christ is risen, unbelief is unreasonable. It goes against the very fabric of reality.

2. YOU ARE STILL GUILTY OF YOUR SINS

Christ is risen. That means you are going to have to stand one day in front of the judgment seat of Christ. You are accountable to the Lord who made you. Your sins and guilt could be washed away, but they are not because you have refused to trust in Jesus.

3. YOU HOLD TO A FALSE HOPE

Those who take this position of unbelief are cherishing the hope that there are no consequences for their unbelief. That is a false hope. He is risen.

4. YOU ARE WASTING YOUR LIFE

This is perhaps the greatest tragedy for those who live in unbelief. Their lives are wasting away. The risen Christ comes to every person and offers the greatest opportunity of their lives. You can invest in eternity. Instead, in unbelief, you waste your life on temporary things.

Conclusion

Those who stand at a distance from the risen Christ are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. You need to make the move today.

Believe/Repent/Confess/Baptize

If you do, your faith will not be useless, it will be the strongest thing in your life. Your sins will be forgiven as you repent of them and are baptized into Christ. You will have the hope and certainty of eternal life. And you will begin to grasp the greatest opportunity of your life - to follow and serve Jesus.