

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been 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. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Christ's Resurrection Is Important!

1. Without the resurrection we face a hopeless end
2. With the resurrection we have an endless hope

She was impossible to beat! John clutched the little wealth he had left knowing it was only a matter of time before the most ruthless opponent he had ever faced would defeat him once again. You see John had never beaten his grandmother at Monopoly before and as he parked his racecar outside her hotel at Park Place he knew tonight was no exception. The only thing worse than losing to his grandmother was knowing exactly what would come next. "One day", she'd always say, "you'll learn how to play the game". For John that day couldn't come soon enough. After an entire summer of playing monopoly almost every day, all day long. He learned how to play the game.

The next time they faced off for battle John took everything she had. He destroyed her financially. And as he reached over to claim her last dollar it may have been the single greatest moment of his life. He wanted to leave the board out, bronze it as a memorial to his ability to play the game. But John's grandmother had one more lesson to teach him. "Now", she said, "it all goes back in the box. All those houses and hotels, all the railroads and utility companies, all that property and all that wonderful money... it all goes back in the box. None of it is really yours to keep. It was around a long time before you sat down to play, and it will be here after you're gone. Players come and players go. But in the end it all goes back in the box."

That night John learned that the game ends for every player, win or lose. We are reminded of this lesson everyday when watching the news or reading the paper. In the paper, you can turn to a page that is dedicated to people for whom this week the game ended.

Whether it is a middle-aged man whose heart couldn't keep up with his busy schedule, a beloved grandparent, or teenage kids who think they have the whole world in front of them till someone runs a stoplight. When that day comes everything they possess – the houses and cars, titles and clothes, bulging portfolios and bank accounts goes back in the box.

What about us? We don't know when our name will make the paper but we do know that sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin. And in this way death has come to all men, because all sinned (Rom 5:12).

Knowing this, the question of this morning is, "What is important?" While the world wants us to believe, like John, that winning is important. God's Word tells us something very different. This morning we are reminded that Christ's resurrection is important. It is important because without Christ's resurrection we would face a hopeless end. But with Christ's resurrection we have an endless hope.

Background

The message of the endless hope you possess through Christ is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The overall theme in Corinth was one of moral laxness. Sexual sins were present, there was disregard for the Lord's Supper, and factions were destroying the unity they shared as a body of believers. For these reasons, Paul wrote to instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness while correcting the erroneous practices and beliefs that had crept in.

Paul dedicates an entire chapter to one of those beliefs. In Chapter 15 we are told some of those living in Corinth were raising questions concerning the resurrection. Some were even denying the resurrection. Even in Paul's day they reasoned that dead people just don't come back to life again. When you're dead, you're dead. It all goes back in the box and that's it! This is what many in Corinth recognized to be true of everyone they had ever known. But this false belief was leading some to conclude it must also be true of Jesus.

It must have been difficult for the Corinthian Christians. They weren't there to place their fingers in Jesus' side. They didn't walk with Jesus down the road to Emmaus. They didn't cling to him outside the tomb. They had not seen. And for them seeing was believing. Sounds familiar doesn't it? (Heb 11:1) Like the Corinthians we believe by faith and not because we have seen. But their faith was being tested and some were being led astray. So Paul directs their eyes of faith back to Scripture as he begins his great resurrection chapter by saying, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, and that he appeared to Peter and to the Twelve."

Paul doesn't simply say, "Trust me on this one. Take my word for it." Instead he lists a number of resurrection appearances, instances in which people saw the risen Savior with their own eyes: Cephas (or Peter), the Twelve, over 500 believers, James, all the apostles, and finally Paul himself. This isn't a list only of those who wanted to believe Jesus was alive or who could be persuaded into believing. But there were those, like Thomas, who at one time, refused to believe but then had to believe after seeing their resurrected Lord. What is more, many of those "over 500 believers" were still alive at the time Paul wrote this. The skeptics could go and question them.

But some were preaching there was no resurrection; others were listening. What an example Paul sets for us. To the believers who were being lead to question the very foundation of their faith he speaks patiently but directly? Paul wants them to realize the hopeless end they face if there is no resurrection.

1. Without the resurrection we face a hopeless end

If there is no resurrection, Paul says, then Christ isn't raised either. But if Christ isn't raised, then all our preaching is useless. Think about that for a moment. Our entire liturgy revolves around the gospel. The gospel we preach is the same gospel message Paul preached. If Christ has not been raised then what are we doing here this morning? If Christ has not been raised then what is the purpose of Christian schools, of home devotions, of gathering here for worship. The Bible would nothing more than a book of lies. It would be no different than any other religious book. Its message would be worth nothing.

And Paul adds that our faith wouldn't be worth anything either. What good does it do to believe in a "dead and still buried" Jesus? According to the Bible Jesus' death on the cross was intended to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. But if Jesus didn't rise from the dead then we can only conclude that his sacrifice wasn't good enough and God is still angry with us.

If Christ has not been raised then our loved ones who have already died are right now suffering the consequences of their sins. If Christ has not been raised then everyone from Adam till present has perished, that is, they are in the eternal torment of hell. If Christ has not been raised then we would face the same hopeless end. Life would be nothing more than a cruel waiting game, a time to wait and wonder when we will die and fall into the hands of our angry God. If Christ has not been raised then we would fear anything and everything that would bring us face to face with death and God's certain judgment for our sins. If Christ has not been raised then when the game ends for us and it's our time to put everything back in the box only a hopeless end would await us.

2. With the resurrection we have an endless hope

But praise be to God this is not the case! Because Jesus is risen! Paul writes, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead." What a simple yet incredibly powerful statement this is. The Corinthians of today and our sinful human reason may tell us one thing—people just don't rise from the dead; but the reality is something far, far different. Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed!

Jesus lives and his empty tomb is God the Father's way of saying to the entire world, "I have accepted my Son's payment for sin. My justice has been satisfied, my anger set aside and your sins are forgiven." Jesus' resurrection is God's guarantee that our sin is forgiven. Because Jesus lives the gospel message we preach is true, our faith is not futile but rests securely on our resurrected Lord, our foundation. Because Jesus lives the promise he made rings true for all those who believe... "Because I live you also will live".

Paul confirms this truth with a unique picture. The apostle tells us that our risen Savior "has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." This picture is from the harvest and refers to the first sheaf of grain the farmer gathered. Having harvested that first sheaf, he brought it to the Lord and presented it as a wave offering before the Lord. He gladly gave this offering to God, because he knew how generous God is. He had absolute confidence that there would be many other sheaves to follow. That's the confidence we have because Jesus has risen. Our risen Lord is the firstfruit; the first of countless millions who will follow him in his resurrection. Jesus will raise us to life, and we will enjoy eternal life with him forever.

How differently we can look at life, including the end of life, because Christ has risen. We know, for one thing, that death – whenever it may come - will not be the end of everything. Though death may claim our bodies it will not claim our souls which will immediately go to be with our Lord for all eternity. Even our body will not be lost forever but will be raised again when Christ returns. And when we stand before the coffin of a loved one... while we certainly will grieve... for our Lord himself wept when his dear friend Lazarus passed away. But we will not grieve as those who have no hope.

Jesus lives! And because he lives we have the guarantee that there will be a sequel to his resurrection. It will be our own. Christ's empty grave is a preview of what will happen to our graves and to the graves of all of his believers. I never met my grandmother but I know I will see her one day in heaven. You will see your believing husband or wife again. You will hold in your arms again that baptized child who was taken from you at an early age. As Christians the resurrection is important for this life and for the one to come.

So here again is the question of the day. What is important to you? Is it collecting the most property, building the most houses and hotels? Is it winning? Or is it the victory that Christ won for you when he conquered sin, death and the devil when he rose from the dead?

The resurrection matters. It is important because it changes everything. It's the difference between forever far away from God or forever near. It's the difference between a hopeless end and an endless hope. It is the reason we can say the words of Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh (my resurrected flesh!) I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" Amen.