

Resurrection Hope

Bible Background • MARK 16; 1 CORINTHIANS 15 | Printed Text •

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–8, 12–14, 20–23, 42–45 | Devotional Reading • ISAIAH 53:4–12

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **CONTRAST** the first Adam and the last, **ANTICIPATE** a new resurrected life different from the present one, and **EMBRACE** the call to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ despite ridicule or resistance.

In Focus

Anthony stood and looked at the cell he had called home for the last 10 years. He was just a twenty-two-year-old kid when he came into this place, scared and angry. To make matters worse, he was innocent! His court-appointed lawyer had convinced him that it was better to plea bargain and serve some time than to risk a full sentence from a jury trial.

As he walked through the long corridors saying his goodbyes, Anthony tried to focus on the good in his unjust incarceration. He realized that prison had slowed him down, maybe even saved his life. Even though he didn't do the crime he was accused of, Anthony's lifestyle back then was leading him to certain destruction. Anthony thought about the college degree he earned while in prison. His parents had begged him to go after high school, but, no, he was too cool for college back then. The most important benefit from prison, Anthony knew for sure, was his salvation. He accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior nearly five years ago. It was difficult for Anthony to be bitter about his experience. God had yielded many positive things from something negative.

In our study we will observe how God turned Jesus' negative experience of death into the positive experience of the resurrection. What "resurrections" has God performed in your life?

Keep in Mind

"And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:19–20, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Born out of due time (v. 8) *ektroma* (Gk.)—Abnormally born through miscarriage or stillbirth

B. Preaching (v. 12) *kerusso* (Gk.)—To proclaim or herald, as one would herald the coming of a king

Say It Correctly

Eschatological. es-ka-toe-LAH-gih-kal

KJV

1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;
2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.
3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:
5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:
6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.
7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.
8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.
12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?
13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:
14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.
20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.
21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.
22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.
23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.
42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:
43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:
44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.
45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

NLT

1 Corinthians 15:1 Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it.
2 It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you— unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.
3 I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said.
4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.
5 He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve.
6 After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.
7 Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles.
8 Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.
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.
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.
42 It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever.

43 Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength.

44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

45 The Scriptures tell us, “The first man, Adam, became a living person.” But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit.

The People, Places, and Times

Gospel. The Gospel is literally “good news.” The equivalent Greek word, euangelion (ew-an-GHEL-ee-on), was used in relation to the announcement that Augustus Caesar was proclaimed ruler over the Roman Empire and would bring peace and joy. The biblical writers used this word to announce God’s grace and the coming of His kingdom in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This is the substance of the message the apostles preached. In the Gospel’s bare essentials, it is the telling of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and how we can be forgiven and welcomed into God’s kingdom.

How do you usually share the Gospel?

Background

Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul dealt with issue after issue. He addressed the divisions in the church (1:10–4:21), sexual immorality including incest (5:1–13) and fornication (6:12–20), marriage and divorce (7:1–40), idolatry (8:1–11:1), and different aspects of public worship (11:2–13:13). In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul addressed the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy. The apostle instructed the Corinthians to pursue love and the gift of prophecy because it builds up the whole church. Paul wrote that proper worship will result in even unbelievers admitting, “God is truly here among you” (from 1 Corinthians 14:25, NLT). The chapter ends with Paul describing the proper order of worship. With all of these other issues dealt with, Paul finally launched into explaining the significance of Christ’s resurrection.

At-A-Glance

1. Resurrection Clarified (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)
2. Resurrection Witnessed (vv. 5–8)
3. Resurrection Guaranteed (vv. 12–14, 20–23)
4. Resurrection Promises (vv. 42–45)

In Depth

1. Resurrection Clarified (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

There were some in the Corinthian church who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Paul reminds them that he had already preached the Good News to them and they had, or so it seemed, fully accepted it. Before explaining the foundation of the Gospel message, Paul asserts that the message he had given them and he had received himself was valid. He then explains the foundation of the Christian faith: (1) Christ died for our sins. If this had not occurred, eternal damnation would await us all, but God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin (Romans 3:23). (2) Christ was buried. To ensure Jesus was dead, a rock was sealed across the tomb and guards placed outside (Matthew 27:62–66). (3) Christ rose on the third day. Death needed to be conquered so that salvation could be secured (2 Timothy 1:10). Paul notes that the Scriptures support what he says, and

though Paul does not indicate specific verses, his references could include Psalm 69:9, Isaiah 53:4–12, Hosea 6:2–3, Jonah 1:17, and others.

How do you interact with people who profess to be Christians, but do not hold strictly to core doctrines?

2. Resurrection Witnessed (vv. 5–8)

Paul refers even more validity to the Resurrection by listing the witnesses. Peter and the Twelve saw the resurrected Jesus (John 20:19–29). They had been chosen to be witnesses (Acts 10:40–43). More than five hundred of His followers saw Jesus, including Jesus’ half-brother James and other apostles (v. 6; Luke 24:33, 36–53). Perhaps a criterion for being an apostle, from Paul’s perspective, was that one had to have been divinely chosen to see the resurrected Christ. They were sent out to preach the Gospel because they could personally testify to its truth. Paul was the last witness. Although he had not lived and journeyed with Jesus, he too had been chosen when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). The phrase “born out of due time” refers to a miscarried or stillborn baby. In essence, Paul was someone who was spiritually dead and therefore unfit to be an apostle because he had persecuted believers. However, God, in His grace, still chose Paul to be a witness. Paul mentions this in response to those in Corinth who were questioning his authority (1 Corinthians 9). Whether the other apostles or Paul preached the Gospel, it was the same message that the Corinthians had already believed.

3. Resurrection Guaranteed (vv. 12–14, 20–23)

Paul refutes the people’s belief that there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul’s line of reasoning, in essence, concludes that if there is no resurrection, Christ did not rise and their faith would be useless. They would all still be in their sin, condemned forever. However, Paul reassures his audience that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. He continues to explain the benefit of this fact. Jesus did not conquer death only for Himself. He is the first of all who have died. His resurrection ensures that all who believe in Him shall have eternal life. To illustrate this truth, Paul compares Jesus to Adam. Just as Adam brought death for all, Jesus has brought eternal life for those who believe in Him. This was Christ’s purpose all along; the Father sent Him so “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (from John 3:16). Jesus Christ was resurrected first so that all who belong to Him might be resurrected as well.

Many see Christ as being foreshadowed as far back as Adam’s Fall (Genesis 3:17). What does this reveal about God?

4. Resurrection Promises (vv. 15:42–45)

Bible scholars disagree on the exact nature of the Corinthian church’s doubts concerning the resurrection. Some argue that some Corinthians held that there was no such thing as Resurrection. Others think that the Corinthians held that Jesus Himself was not resurrected. Still others believe that the Corinthians were at odds about the status of the believers who had already died and the ability of these believers to be raised from the dead at the return of Christ.

Paul is emphasizing that the Resurrection is not simply a tenet but the cornerstone of Christian faith. If, he reasons, Christ died for their sins but He was not resurrected, then they have not been justified, and Jesus’ death was in vain. The heart of Paul’s argument is that although human lives are subject to death and the body will disintegrate, decay, and decompose—that is not the end of the story. They are also subject to the will of God, who through His Son, Jesus Christ, will bring forth resurrection of the dead.

Therefore, after death, there is continuity rather than a conclusion. Next, Paul launches into the “mystery” of death that he obviously believes plagues these believers. Because of the sin of the first man, Adam, the “natural” bodies of all humankind are subject to death. However, praise be to God, because of the redemptive act of the “last Adam,” Jesus Christ, believers now possess “spiritual” bodies. Paul asserts that these bodies are

“incorruptible”; they are no longer subject to the laws of nature and the penalty of sin (i.e., death). If believers were only subject to the inheritance of Adam, it would be fitting that we return to dust since it is through Adam’s sin that mankind dies. However, through faith, believers are joined to Jesus Christ. The bodies of the believers, through their faith in Him, now bear “the image of the heavenly.” (1 Corinthians 15:49) It is these glorified “heavenly bodies” that are subject to be resurrected. Part of this glorious inheritance in Christ is the resurrection!

How does Christ’s bodily resurrection give us hope in this life and the next?

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the Gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)?
2. How do Jesus and Adam differ (vv. 21–22)?

Discuss the Meaning

Many engage in frivolous activities attempting to understand who they are. As believers, the Resurrection has already determined our identity. How has the resurrection of Christ impacted your life? How can you begin to value your identity in Christ?

Liberating Lesson

Jesus was executed when found guilty of false charges during a trial that failed to follow due process. Resurrection on Easter morning, however, is God’s first fulfillment of true justice for all. Even if we fail in a fight against a system stacked against us, we know that God has the final word. Until that final word, we know we have the Resurrection power of Christ on our side. If He can conquer such an enemy as death, what can He not do? Meditate on ways the Resurrection motivates us to work for justice with hope.

Application for Activation

We love to celebrate life-changing events with others. We book banquet halls a year in advance and hire the best caterers so people can spend a few hours with us on our special day. The greatest event to ever happen to us is the Resurrection, and we should find ways to share it. Pray about at least three people with whom you can share the Good News and create a special occasion for the sharing. For example, meet for breakfast, schedule time at the gym, or invite them to a church function.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Corinthians 15:1–8, 12–14, 20–23, 42–45

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain.

The opening of this chapter introduces Paul's concerns and lays the foundation for the argument he develops in the verses that follow. Some in the Corinthian church exalted the spiritual in a way that devalued the physical. Consequently, this path led to the denial of bodily resurrection. Paul begins with what they have in common. Paul uses the euaggelion (Gk. ew-an- GHHEL-ee-on), which means good news message or Gospel, to describe what he preached and they, in turn, received as a means for salvation. They owe their existence as a community of faith to the Gospel he brought them. He warns if they cannot hold on to the same Gospel that saved them, their faith is in jeopardy of being ineffective and producing no fruit.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.

Paul presents the basics of the Gospel by highlighting three points of emphasis: Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day, all in accordance with the Scriptures. This essence of the Gospel was passed down to Paul. It is generally accepted that these verses reflect an early creed, which would have developed out of some ecumenical gathering of churches rather than simply Paul himself. Being of primary importance, the creed was, in turn, passed along by Paul to the church in Corinth. Although Paul covers a wide range of subjects in his letters, not everything he discusses is central to the Gospel. Nor does every instruction carry equal weight. In this passage, Paul highlights the elements of the Gospel message that are critical to the church and its health and vitality. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus are presented as an objective reality. There is a grave, and there were witnesses. It is not merely a spiritual phenomenon.

In addition to misconceptions about the Resurrection, it is likely that the church in Corinth had some misgivings about Paul's authority. Paul therefore grounds his argument not in himself but in tradition, Scripture, and apostolic authority. First, he appeals to tradition by referencing an early church creed. Then, he asserts that these things have happened according to Scripture. Last, he states that Cephas, or Peter, and the Twelve can attest to the validity of his claims. The twelve apostles had an especially close relationship with Jesus and a special role in the founding of the church.

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

Paul continues to build the credibility of his position by adding an additional source of authority—eyewitness testimony of believers, apostles, and him. Paul affirms that Jesus was seen by a number of people in a variety of settings after his resurrection, more than five hundred believers, according to Paul. Many of the witnesses were still alive at the time of the writing, and their accounts could be verified firsthand, although some had already “fallen asleep,” a common euphemism at the time for death. Next, Paul says that the resurrected Jesus was seen by James, Jesus' half brother. He was also a major leader in the Jerusalem church. This would have given Paul even more credibility, as James had major influence with the church at large due to his natural relation to Jesus. Paul also speaks of the resurrected Jesus being seen by the apostles. This is obviously not the Twelve because they were just mentioned in verse 5. Paul must have been referring to others outside of the Twelve who had been commissioned to represent Christ, perhaps those Jesus had sent out earlier in His ministry (Luke 10:1–20). Paul establishes a connection between the apostolic tradition and himself, even though there is no evidence he was regarded as one of the Twelve. He is likely referring to his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to

Damascus (Acts 9). Paul uses the Greek word *ektroma* (ECK-troh-ma), which is often translated abnormally born, to describe his apostolic calling. The Twelve had years of mentoring and close relationship with Jesus during His time on earth. Paul, however, did not become an apostle this way. He may have been expressing feelings of being born out of season since his apostolic calling was out of the ordinary.

12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

Here Paul makes a bold statement to the Corinthians about the resurrection that is demonstrated again and again in the New Testament. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the core of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul and the apostles are persecuted for preaching the resurrection (Acts 4:1–23, 17:18–32, 23:6–10). The Greek word for preaching is *kerusso* (kay-ROOS-so) and means to proclaim or herald, as one would herald the coming of a king. Proclaiming the presence of King Jesus is directly connected to announcing His resurrection from the dead. Paul argues that it is essential that Jesus Christ rose from the dead for our faith in Him to be valid.

Paul addresses the fact that there was a division among Jews about whether or not there is a resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees believed that there was a resurrection from the dead, but the Sadducees (which were another major faction of Jewish leaders) did not believe in a resurrection. Paul is asserting that the resurrection for all people will happen because the resurrection of Christ happened; the debate should be ended for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. Paul takes it a step further: if Christ's resurrection is not preached, then our faith in Him is in vain (v. 14). This should serve as a fundamental doctrine for all Christians, Paul proclaims. Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead, and because He was, we can place our faith in Him. Without the resurrection, there is no hope for our resurrection, and Jesus could be treated as just another prophet at best or a heretic at worst. But because Jesus was resurrected, we have a hope of life after death and our preaching has power.

20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. 21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Paul emphasizes the benefits of the resurrection for believers. Christ's resurrection made the resurrection of the dead necessary and inevitable. God raised Christ from the dead based on His own authority and sovereignty. Resurrection is required for the final victory over death so God can be "all in all" (v. 28). Paul uses the Greek word *aparche* (ah-par-KHAY), meaning a sacrifice of the harvest's "firstfruits" to sanctify the whole harvest, to describe the work of Christ. He is the first fruit of a larger harvest (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 16:15). This agricultural metaphor has eschatological significance. Christ's resurrection is not bound to one annual harvest, but it foreshadows the resurrection of all believers for eternity. For this to happen, Christ had to be human because death is a part of humanity, not divinity.

God's command, which resulted in the introduction of sin and its natural result, death, into the world. This was the beginning of all the death and dying that followed. Since it was through a human being that death came into the world, likewise the resurrection of the dead had to come through a human being.

New life and resurrection for believers are inevitable because we share in the new nature of the Resurrected Christ through the grace of God.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming

There is an order to this plan, which Paul now begins to explain. First, Christ the first fruits (the redeemer) must be resurrected; then when He arrives those who belong to Christ (the redeemed) shall be resurrected. The word order also carries the meaning of military ranking, like the ordering of troops for battle. The word "coming" (Gk. *parousia*, pah-roo-SEE-ah) was a term used to indicate the arrival, presence, or coming of someone,

especially someone like an emperor. It is used especially in Christian writing to indicate the appearance of God. Christ will become the King who sits at the right hand of God. His troops will be readied for battle against His foes. This imagery of the royal coronation is found in Psalm 110:1 and quoted from that Psalm in Acts 2:34–35.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.

The thrust of this section is to answer the question raised earlier in verse 35 with respect to how the dead are to be raised. Using various examples from agriculture, the animal world, and the heavenly bodies, Paul explains one central point: the resurrection body is going to be different from the present body in four significant respects. First, the present body is sown (an agricultural metaphor for death/ interment) as perishable, but it will be raised imperishable. Contrary to Greek thought that regards all bodies as subject to decay, Paul says while the present body is subject to decay, the resurrection body is not going to be subject to decay though it is a body all the same.

43 It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

Since the present body is subject to decay, it follows naturally that it would be treated with dishonor. There is nothing honorable in the whole process of the body decaying. It is partly to reduce the dishonor that death brings to the present body that it is buried or cremated. But even this is a form of dishonor as it is actually getting rid of the body. In the Old Testament, the corpse is regarded as something capable of defiling (Numbers 19:11). That is how we treat anything that is decaying, and the same is no less true of our present body in spite of the colossal amount we spend on cosmetics. At resurrection, the saints will assume a glorious body that is no longer subject to the dishonor of the present body because the resurrection body will not be capable of decay. All the dishonor that attends this present body will not affect the resurrection body because death will have no power over it. Instead, the resurrection body is going to be an honorable body. In this state, it is going to be comparable to the glorified body of Christ after He was raised from the dead (Ephesians 3:21). The resurrection is a divine act. As such it is characterized by the glory typical of such divine acts as Christ's resurrection (Romans 6:4).

The present body is subject to weaknesses of various kinds, such as fatigue, hunger, disease, pain, and death. In its present state this body is limited by time and space. It is not a body designed to endure for eternity or to transcend material barriers. The reality of our present body's weakness confronts us daily in our experience of pain, suffering, and death. This physical weakness will be a thing of the past as far as the resurrection body is concerned. When God raises the saints at the resurrection of the dead, He is going to bless them with a powerful body that is no longer subject to physical weaknesses and limitations. The resurrection body will not know weariness, hunger, disease, or death.

44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

The word translated as "natural" is *psuchikos* (Gk. *psoo-khee-KOCE*). Depending on the context, it describes the immaterial, natural, or physical part of humanity. Here it contrasts with that which is spiritual and seems to refer to the quality of the material body, which is taken from the physical world. The resurrection body is "spiritual" (Gk. *pneumatikos*, *puh-newmah- tee-KOCE*) and refers to that quality of the resurrection body, which is able to exist in the heavenly realm. There is a realm for physical (natural) existence, and there is another for spiritual existence. Each realm has a distinct body fashioned for it.

45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Here Paul quotes Genesis 2:7 to support his argument concerning the physical and spiritual distinctions between the present body and the resurrection body. The first Adam became a living soul and thereby represents the source of this present body that is subject to all kinds of suffering and pain. God created Adam's body directly,

while the rest of humanity inherited the same kind of body through its descent from Adam. Adam represents the natural body from the previous verse, as he comes a living “soul” (Gk. psuche, psou-KHAY). Jesus, on the other hand, is identified as the last Adam, who was made a lifegiving “spirit” (Gk. pneuma, puh-NEW-ma). Jesus is not just a living Spirit but a life-imparting Spirit. The word translated “quickening” is zoopoieo (Gk. dzoo-poy-EH-oh), which literally means “to make living.” In contrast to the first Adam, Jesus is the life-giving source of the spiritual body in which saints are raised at the resurrection. So, just as the two sources are different, so also are the qualities of both bodies different.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Women Find Jesus' Tomb Empty
(Mark 16:1–8)

TUESDAY

Saul Meets Jesus on Damascus Road
(Acts 9:1–9)

WEDNESDAY

Free Gift of Grace and Hope
(Romans 5:12–17)

THURSDAY

The Dead in Christ Will Rise
(1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

FRIDAY

All Things under God's Control
(1 Corinthians 15:24–28)

SATURDAY

Victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ
(1 Corinthians 15:50–58)

SUNDAY

All Are Made Alive in Christ
(1 Corinthians 15:1–8, 12–14, 20–23, 42–45)