

Salvation - Our Hope, Now and Forever

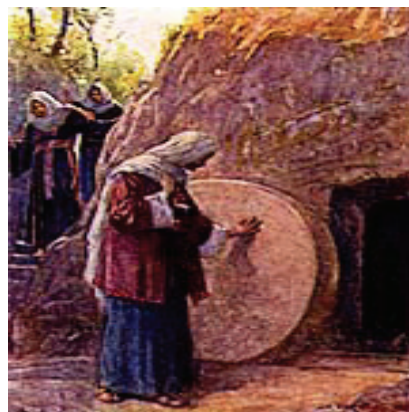
1 Corinthians 15:12-15:20

Pastor Eddie Idefonso

A little girl lived near a cemetery, and often had to walk through it after dark. When someone asked her, "Aren't you ever afraid?" she answered, "Oh, no! My home is just on the other side."

The best way to begin this sermon today I think, is to ask the question; 'where are you going'? Do you have hope for journey's end? As you pass through the dark shadows of this life, are you afraid? Or do you walk with a confidence that 'home' is just the other side? It all comes down to this, you know; either you know that when you leave this life you will enter into eternal life with the risen Christ, or you have no hope at all for anything beyond this life, and in your soberest moments you must face the fact that life is ultimately futile.

Any other attitude about some kind of floating, spiritual bliss, becoming one with the cosmos, or reincarnation, or even total obliteration and nothingness after death, is deception with no basis whatsoever. We know about the hereafter from the One who has been there and came to tell us about it and then returned, or we can only speculate; because all those of us who have passed over to the other side are still there, except for that One; Jesus Christ.



Paul is addressing the Christians in Corinth, when he says that some of them say there is no resurrection. These people were in error about the most important, the most fundamental truth of the Christian faith; a misconception that could only leave them hopeless. But Paul was to establish here that there IS hope ...that our faith is NOT in vain, ...that Christ is indeed, risen from the dead, ...and that because He lives, we too shall live.

(read I Corinthians 15:12-20)

WHAT IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION?

Paul was apparently addressing some Christians who were approaching their new faith, carrying a lot of baggage from the heathen philosophies they once adhered to. They must have subscribed to the teaching that Jesus of Nazareth had risen from the dead. That was the primary message of the apostles and others who had been in and around Jerusalem during that time, and had actually seen the risen Christ.

But for whatever reasons, they could not believe that His resurrection held any promise that they too would rise. Maybe they saw Christianity as a worthwhile religion, when compared to philosophies and religions all around them, but that is all. Well, it might have been enough in

their thinking. After all, it didn't call for sacrifice of small children. It seemed based on high moral standards and did not call for going in to the temple prostitutes; a practice still actively held in Corinth even at this time Paul was writing.

Maybe they saw Christianity merely as a reformation. A 'turning over a new leaf' and living a more wholesome life. I'm afraid that is how many people see Christianity today. Not only among the unsaved and unchurched, but even among many, who are active members of the church. Oh, there is no doubt that the message of Jesus rising from the dead is still out front and one of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. Even many in the secular world know that.

Folks in the church surely know it, and they go one step further than the unchurched community and believe that they too will one day be in Heaven with Jesus. Unfortunately, the truth of what Christ's resurrection really means for us often does not translate into significant change in the thinking or lifestyle of the believer.

Let's look at it this way. What if there is no resurrection from the dead? What would it be like to be a Christian then? What would we do; what would church be and mean for us, if there was no hope of a resurrection?

Well, first, I suppose our focus would all be on the here and now, wouldn't it? Since there would be no hope for anything after this life, then the point of Christianity would have to be whatever applies to 'now'.

So we'd have to start with a place to live. The church structure would have to be as pretty and as comfortable and as impressive as we could possibly make it. The larger the number of people in a congregation, of course, the more we could afford to put into the structure itself; therefore, the more impressive we could make it.

Then, since we would be in competition with all the other religions of the world, and in reality would have nothing more to offer than they, (since there is no resurrection from the dead), we would have to compete with them constantly with better music, better programs, better benefits, and a more attractive philosophy; one which does not offend or condemn or convict, but one which gives the listener a sense of peace and contentment and happiness and relief from the struggles of life. It would have to be a religion of comfort and personal satisfaction, so as not to drive potential paying members away.

After all, there is the upkeep of the structure to consider; and competitive salary and benefits for leadership and staff.

If there's no resurrection; if there is only the here and now, then it would be important, in order to be a 'good Christian', to obey the rules. But then, since there are so many different churches, and so many different types of congregations, in so many different places, then many of the rules could change from place to place, couldn't they? For some the rules would be very stringent, and for others not quite so tight. A person could go to one place where a woman wearing slacks is shunned, and feel quite comfortable there; but another person would see that as absurd, and go to a place where the rules are more relaxed.

You might look for a church where musical instruments are frowned upon, because you don't like the sound of pianos and organs and guitars and drums anyway. Or, you might be a real music lover, and you want to be someplace where someone is going to sing for you or play for you every Sunday.

You might even subscribe to going to church on some other day of the week because it would be more comfortable for you. But it wouldn't be based on any perceived religious truth. These decisions wouldn't be based on any real convictions, because, after all, this is all there is. So why shouldn't every man do what seems right in his own eyes?

Oh, there would be some rules common to all, for the sake of maintaining the Christian 'identity'. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" That would be a good rule to follow, wouldn't it? Or would it? If there was no resurrection, then the boundaries would be significantly smaller. For example; if I am dealing with someone old, and I know that soon they are going to die and I'll never see them, nor they me, again, then I don't have to be quite as careful about how I treat them, do I?

The rules are all open to some degree of interpretation, because they have no eternal value. How can rules have an eternal value, if there's no one in eternity to benefit or suffer from the degree the rules were adhered to in this life?

If there's no resurrection, then when it comes right down to it, the only consequences I'll pay for disobeying the rules are those natural consequences I bring upon myself here. Am I willing to lose a friendship, or pay a fine, or break a heart, or spend some time in jail, or ruin a life so that I can enjoy some temporary personal gratification? Then why not just throw the Golden Rule out the window? It means nothing to anyone, if it means nothing eternally.

In fact, if there is no resurrection, then who cares what the other guy thinks at all? If he wants to start a day care in the church, but I think that would be unreasonable or unprofitable, why not kill him to have my will done? Ok, I don't want to go to prison or anything, so maybe I'll just kill him with my tongue. Maybe I'll just talk to other people about how inadequate he is; maybe spread some vicious rumors about his character; until he goes away or other people reject him and ignore him...then I'll win.

Why not, if there is no resurrection?

In the '60's Peggy Lee sang a song that for some reason which escapes me still, became very popular.

"Is that all there is?

Is that all there is?

If that's all there is, my friend,

Then let's keep dancing.

Let's break out the booze and have a ball,

If that's all there is."

If I hadn't been a teenager with my whole life ahead of me I think I would have found a bridge to jump off of after hearing it.

But you know what? If there is no resurrection from the dead, if this is all there is, then that song makes all the sense in the world. For what is the point in even attempting to live the Christian life, if this is all there is? "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins."

Christians, you find a quiet place later, and you ask yourself these questions.

"Do I live as though this is all there is?"

"What are the most important things to me?"

"What are the essentials? What are the things I would not give up if a gun were put to my head? And are those the things I give priority; or do I focus my life on what is passing away?"

"Do I treat my fellow Christians as though I'm going to spend eternity with them?"

"Do I feel an urgency to call others to Christ, because I know that there is a resurrection, and that if they reject Christ they will spend eternity in torment?"

"What does my religion consist of? Relationship with the risen Christ; or in structures and programs and rituals and rules...as though this is all there is?"

**Well I'm here to assure you today that,
THERE IS A RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD**

How do I know? Because my Redeemer lives. So very much as been said and will be said about the resurrection and eternal life, but that is the simplest and most profound statement that could be made, as convincing proof of our future hope.

Because He is risen, we too shall rise. I want you to listen to these words of Paul, and while listening I want you to keep in mind that he was writing during a time where there were still many people alive who could easily have refuted his claims, had they not been true. In fact, he says in [verse 6](#) of this chapter that many of them who had seen the risen Jesus were still alive, so I'm sure that many who still wished Him dead were still around also. Fact is most of them kept their mouths shut because they knew the truth.

"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received; in which also you stand; by which also you are saved; if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now; but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."

There are so many convincing proofs of the resurrection of Jesus, that denial of the fact only exposes one's ignorance.

In just these opening lines of **chapter 15**, Paul sets forth that all these things that happened in Jerusalem were simply fulfillment of what the prophets said would happen. Jesus died for our sins, He was buried in the ground, and He rose again, bodily, from the dead. He appeared to more than 500 people at once, and most of them were still alive and available. When a writer wants to be credible, he quotes credible sources. Paul would have been an utter fool to assert that 500 people who are still around would be willing to attest to the resurrection of Christ, unless he knew for a certainty that they would do so.

Then he names names. James saw Him...go talk to James. The other apostles saw Him. Go talk to them. They were with Him constantly for over three years. They saw Him die. They have seen Him alive...and have even eaten with Him, touched Him, spoken with Him. Go ask them.

If that isn't enough; do you want personal testimony? He appeared to me also. What a wonderful, though undeserved honor that was! He appeared to me, not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted His church. But I've seen Him.

There are so many other convincing proofs. Those who hated Jesus never officially refuted the resurrection, except to say that His disciples had stolen the body. By saying that, they confirmed that the tomb was empty. If they didn't believe He had risen, they would have opened the tomb themselves, and brought out the decaying body to show everyone and quash all rumors for good.

If they really thought the disciples had stolen the body, they had the resources and the authority to arrest the disciples and torture them, one by one, until someone revealed where the body had been taken. Did they ever do this; even with one of the disciples? NO.

What about the gospel writers? If these people were lying, ...if this was a fabricated myth, told for gain and profit, the story would have had a lot more flair.

What fiction writer wouldn't include at least one witness to the fact, so they could talk about the loud 'bang', or the blinding flash of light, or the singing angels or the voice of God coming through the clouds when Jesus rose? What fiction writer wouldn't have had Him appearing first to Peter, or to John, or to Pilate or Caiaphas, instead of little reformed prostitute, Mary Magdalene in the quiet privacy of the garden?

Wouldn't at least one of these apostles have tried to skirt around the fact that they were still cowering like frightened dogs in a thunderstorm, when Mary and the others rushed in to announce that their Lord had risen from the dead? Wouldn't at least one of them have said something like, "...as I was sharpening my sword in preparation for assassinating Pilate..." or some other macho thing like that?

We don't have time for a great discourse on all the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus. I know that in your heart you know it is true.

But more; **THERE IS RESURRECTION FOR US.** His resurrection assures our resurrection.

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

The festival of “Firstfruits” is celebrated 2 days (or, on the third day) after Passover. The Passover lamb is slain, the blood sprinkled, the Passover dinner is eaten, and on the third day, the people take the first fruits of their crops before the Lord as a wave offering.

Now this was what they were thanking Him for, and I want you to pay close attention to the type of Christ here;

The first fruits were the early fruits of Spring, that came before the main crop. Seeing the early fruit was a promise of the fuller harvest to come. Therefore, when they took the first fruits into the temple and waved them before the Lord, they were thanking Him for this promise of a later harvest. They were not allowed to eat of the first fruits, or partake of any of the crops until after the feast of Firstfruits; after they had given thanks to God for them.

Two days (or on the third day) after our Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, was crucified, He rose; the first fruits...the pledge or promise from God, of a greater harvest, when all the saints will be ‘harvested’, when they raise from the dead in the last day.

This is our great hope, Believer in Christ. It is a hope, not just for now, but forever. You see, it is not a hope, as in waiting to see if a desired event will take place. It is a hope which is an assurance, a settled conviction, a confidence. And our confidence is in our risen Lord both now and forever.

“If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied” But don’t you pity us; because our hope is most certainly not in this life only; but in eternity in the presence of the Living God; as the latter harvest of our Lord and King; according to the promise presented by the first fruits of the resurrection; Jesus Christ our risen Savior!

Now as I close I want to point out something very important. All men everywhere will rise on the last day; not just the Christians.

Dan 12:2 says this: **“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake; these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”**

There is not escape. There is not rest. There is not even merciful oblivion for the one who rejects God and His promise of forgiveness through the shed blood of His Son.

There will be a resurrection for them also; but it will be a resurrection to judgment and then terrible, eternal separation from God, and consignment to the Lake of Fire.

If you're here today and you've never confessed your sin to God and received His free gift of eternal life through faith in that shed blood and death of Christ, then today is the day of salvation.

Today is the day you need to turn to Him, the first fruits of the resurrection to eternal life for all who believe. Don't miss this opportunity. You never know what opportunity will have been your last.

Believer, knowing that Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection and that therefore your great and undying hope for eternity is in Him; how should your faith be expressed? Has your focus been on the forms and rituals of religion? Do you often relate to your fellow believers and men in general as though this is all there is; and there is no resurrection to eternal life? Where is your focus? What are your priorities?

These are things for you to take before God and honestly ask Him to reveal in you, tendencies toward faithless living; and ask Him to make real to your mind and heart the precious truth that because He lives, you too shall live, and therefore everything, everything, everything, should be measured, categorized, implemented, disposed of, dealt with, in light of that eternal truth.

This is your hope, now and forever: **BECAUSE HE LIVES, YOU TOO SHALL LIVE!**

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”. [1 Cor 15:58](#)