
“Promise Fulfilled”

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-20

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BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, this is all pointless. But in fact, He was!

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, our faith is in vain and we are still in our sins. We are of all people most to be pitied! But in fact, Jesus was raised from the dead! He not only disappeared from the tomb, He appeared to hundreds of people. Those people then gave their lives defending what they saw with their own eyes – Jesus lives!

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Wildwood! He is risen! (He is risen, indeed!) I'm Pastor Brian Smith, one of the elders here. So good to have you here with us today! Please open your bibles to 1 Corinthians 15:1-20. If you don't have a bible, there's one in the chair in front of you. It's page 961 in that bible. Before we get there, let me give you the back story.

THE BACK STORY

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 capture the creation of everything there is, including man and woman. God created everything and it was good, even “very good.” When God created, it was perfect! But by Genesis 3, man and woman figured out how to break it all! In what we call the “fall of man” Adam and Eve disobeyed God's one command – *“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* Genesis 2:17

Deceived by the enemy, Satan, they determined it was better to decide for themselves how they should live than to trust in the goodness and provision of the Lord their God. So, they took some of the fruit of the tree and ate it. Both Adam and Eve ate it. Instantly ashamed of what they had done, they sewed fig leaves to hide their nakedness from one another and then hid themselves in the garden from the Lord. Sin broke the relationship they enjoyed with one another and with God.

The Lord determined they could not remain in the Garden of Eden with access to the tree of life and He removed them from it where they would be on their own, reaping the brokenness of the world they had sown with their disobedience. But that separation, that broken relationship with God would not be permanent. God loves people so much He would make a way for us to be reconciled to Him.

IT WON'T ALWAYS BE THIS WAY

We would not have to remain cut off from God forever. But it was God, not man, who would deal with the problem of sin and the separation it caused. In what we call the protoevangelium, the first gospel, God said to Satan, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* Genesis 3:15

That promise to deal with sin and separation was fulfilled in Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection. The offspring of Eve was “bruised in His heel” when He was hung on the cross but He “bruised the head” of Satan when He rose from the dead and conquered death and the grave and won the final victory.

THREE PROMISES

Jesus not only fulfilled the promise of Genesis 3:15, but He also made two more promises that correlate to His death, burial, and resurrection. Over the next three weeks we’re going to see how Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection followed by His ascension to Heaven not only fulfilled God’s promise, but it also paved the way for the *Promised Helper*, the Holy Spirit, and the *Promised Home*, our place in Heaven. I hope you’re able to come all three weeks and hear more of how Jesus has already fulfilled two of those promises and because of that we trust Him to fulfill the third.

Let’s pray and then we’ll jump into our biblical text.

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Let’s read 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. **Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,**

Pause here, this brings Isaiah 53 to mind, *“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace...the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him...”* Isaiah 53:4-7

Let’s continue in **verse 4, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.** Let’s pause there, too, and explore some scriptures that Paul may have had in mind. We don’t have to look far, just the next few verses in Isaiah 53. Notice how even after being put to death, the servant would be honored, restored, and blessed.

“...and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:10-12 Isaiah tells us the servant of God would be put to death, then after death He would live again and be honored by the Lord.

Jesus referred to what was written in Jonah when He said in Matthew 12:40 *“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* Not only was Jesus’ death and resurrection in accordance with what was predicted in scripture, it was also witnessed by a whole lot of people.

JESUS NOT ONLY DISAPPEARED, HE APPEARED TO HUNDREDS

Let’s continue in verse 5-8. **⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 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, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.**

Credible eye-witness testimony is the most powerful form of testimony there is. If you can demonstrate that someone saw something take place, and is willing to testify to it, that is rock-solid

testimony and should be received as such. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was predicted long before it happened and it was verifiable by eye-witnesses, even to the Corinthians decades after the event. Jesus not only *disappeared* from the grave, but He also *appeared* to many people.

PETER, THE TWELVE, & 500 BROTHERS

Jesus appeared in bodily form to **Cephas (v. 5)** who we call Peter, then **the twelve** disciples. Jesus could have stopped there, having appeared to the leaders of the church, but He didn't. He appeared to **more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom [were] still alive (v. 6)** when Paul wrote this letter. Anyone who doubted the truth of the resurrection could have easily gone to the eye-witnesses and asked for themselves.

Jesus also **appeared to James**, His half-brother who would become the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Then he appeared to Paul, who was on his way to Damascus to persecute & imprison those who worshipped the Lord and who believed and spread the Gospel. Let me read the story of Saul's conversion in Acts chapter 9.

SAUL'S CONVERSION

"Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'" Acts 9:3-5

"...For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' And all who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ." Acts 9:19-22

This is a real story written by a physician named Luke who carefully chronicled an accurate history of the Church. This really happened. I want you to ask yourself what you believe about this because what you believe is what makes the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death. Jesus appeared to hundreds of people, including a man named Saul who was actively persecuting those who were claiming to have seen Jesus alive, threatening them with death.

WHO DEFENDS A LIE THEY MADE UP?

Then that same man joined with the very people he had once been persecuting. I want you to consider why anyone, let alone hundreds of people, would defend a lie if they knew it wasn't true when telling the truth would spare their lives? Why would so many people go to their deaths telling others they saw Jesus alive with their own eyes if they hadn't?

These weren't just wackos either. They were men and women who confounded leadership councils and Greek philosophers and Roman Governors. (cf. Acts 23-26) Ultimately, many of them took their testimony all the way to the death. For the doubters and the uncertain, the I-want-to-believe-but-it-just-doesn't-seem-real in the crowd, what do you do with eyewitnesses who endured torture and anguish and death? Why would they defend something with their lives if they had made it all up?

WHY IS THE RESURRECTION SO IMPORTANT?

Seems like a lot to give your life defending the resurrection of Jesus. Why was it so important to them? Why do Christians still die defending it today? Paul answers that question in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20.

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

SOLID LOGIC

Here, Paul lays out a strong logical argument. **If Christ is proclaimed as raised, how can you say there is no resurrection?** If Jesus has been raised from the dead, how can you say there's nothing after this life? How can you claim this is all there is?

If we're just annihilated, if we just go away, the resurrection couldn't happen. We're claiming Jesus rose from the dead, thus there is life after death. This life is not all there is. You are more than a material body. You have a spirit, a soul, and a body. This life is short, your body will die, but your soul will exist for eternity! That's point one.

Point two is found in verse 13, **if there's no resurrection, then not even Christ has been raised.** Paul circles around and takes the opposing position. If we close our eyes, breathe our last breath and that's it, then Jesus could not have been raised from the dead. If there is no life after death, then Jesus stayed dead. That's point two.

Point three comes in verse 14, where Paul says that all of this is nonsense if Christ has not been raised from the dead. If he was just a man and if there is no life after death, then this is **vain and your faith is in vain.** He's absolutely right. This is either true or it's empty and vain. Notice that Paul did not feel the need to argue the point that Jesus really died. That was never in question. The question is whether He came back to life and, if so, what does that mean for you and me?

In **verse 15** Paul takes it a step further, saying our preaching is actually worse than empty if Jesus hasn't been raised because it **misrepresents God.** It attributes to God something He didn't do. If this is not true, it's the worst lie ever told.

LOGICAL CONCLUSION

If Jesus has come out of the grave, you have to acknowledge there is something beyond this life. If Jesus has not been resurrected, this is all for nothing and even worse, it's a misrepresentation of God. Now Paul is going to get personal and draw the logical conclusion...

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. If our Gospel is not the Truth, then we are totally deceived and totally hopeless. Our loved ones who have died, died in their sin. Those who live, live dead in their sin. You either believe it is true or you believe it is a lie; there is no middle-ground.

Paul, who went from persecuting Christians for their faith in Jesus and their eye-witness testimony that God raised Him from the dead, would later come to follow Jesus & would himself be persecuted, beheaded defending the Gospel he once vehemently denied; that man made this definitive, unequivocal assertion in **verse 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

THREE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FACT

But in fact! Paul had been on track to live a very successful and prestigious life as a zealous Jewish leader and instead suffered incredible abuse and death proclaiming that this Gospel is the Truth. And this truth is laden with implications.

First, it implies Christ is alive today, which is the greatest hope as well as the greatest threat of humanity. He is the hope of those who believe the Gospel and He is a threat to those who don't. Jesus is enthroned in Heaven and it will be before Him that every knee in Heaven and on earth will bow down and confess "Jesus is Lord." (Phil 2:10-11) According to Romans 10, if you confess with your tongue that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved. But those who do not believe the Gospel, who, like Adam and Eve, believe they have the right to speak like God, to determine what is right and what is wrong, will face Jesus as judge and they will pay for their sins forever.

Secondly, that Jesus, God's own Son **was raised from the dead** implies He had to die, had to be buried, and had to be raised. This was the Father's will for Him because God so loved the world, it was neither a tragic accident nor an unfortunate turn of events. This takes us all the way back to Genesis 3:15. God made a promise that sin and death would not always be so. But to fulfill that promise, something, or more specifically someone, had to die. That's what we see over and over again in the Old Testament, something had to die to atone for sin because sin *requires* death. When Adam and Eve sinned, death was the penalty. Romans 3:23 says, "*For the wages of sin is death...*"

Thus, for sin to be atoned for, for the problem of sin to be resolved, someone had to die. And you and I cannot atone for our own sin because none of us is righteous. We face death *because* we're sinners. The fact that we need an atonement for our sin disqualifies us from providing it for ourselves. Only Jesus' death could resolve our sin problem. Fully God and fully man, perfect in thought, word, and deed, only Jesus could satisfy the full wrath of God on our behalf. Peter said in Acts 4:12, "*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection were necessary to save sinners.

Finally, that **Jesus was raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep** implies that like Jesus, we too will be raised from the dead! Like Jesus was given life after death, so too, will all who believe in His name. Jesus did not come primarily to make our lives here on earth better. He didn't come primarily to deal with our mental & physical health, marital conflict, feelings of purposelessness, financial crisis, or any other issue that relates to life here.

While relationship with Jesus does transform people in many ways and many people experience drastic change in those areas of concern, and while God genuinely cares about our concerns as a loving Father, they are not the primary reason for Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus didn't die to give you a *better* life on earth. He died to give you *eternal* life in Heaven.

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'" John 11:25-26

The message of Easter and every Sunday is that Jesus is alive today because God raised Him from the dead. He died because sin requires death and God loves you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you. Your sin, no matter what it is, no matter how grievous or how socially acceptable, separates you from God and reconciliation with Him necessitates Jesus' death on the cross. But praise the Lord, Jesus didn't stay dead! He came out of the grave and He's alive and He rules and reigns over all creation. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Those who believe this good news and confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord will inherit eternal life. Echoing Jesus' question to Martha, "Do you believe this?"

If you do, and you've never done anything with that, today's the day! Romans 10:13, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Humble yourself before the Lord Jesus Christ and ask for forgiveness and receive His grace. Do it today! And if you have already acted on faith, let the celebration of the resurrection today inspire you to greater faith, bolder faith, deep faith...if you believe it, will you stake your life on it? It was worth laying down your life for countless believers throughout history and it's still worth it today!

He is risen! He is Risen indeed!