

Unit II: God Promises a Just Kingdom Hope for a Better Life

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 53:4-12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 16; 1 Corinthians 15

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-14, 20-23, 42-45

Key Verses—If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. (1 Corinthians 15:19-20, KJV)

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If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:19-20, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Contrast the love of the women with the disciples' response to their actions (Mark 16:1-9 [Background Scripture]).
- Appreciate the women's preparation of Jesus for His coming death and burial (Mark 16:1-9 [Background Scripture]).
- Embrace the call to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ despite ridicule or resistance.

*Key Terms

Crucified (Mark 16:6 [Background Scripture])—Greek: *stauroo* (stow-ro'-o): fixed to the cross; drove down stakes; destroyed; mortified.

Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12)—Greek: *anastasis* (an-as'-tas-is): a raising to life again.

Vain (1 Corinthians 15:2)—Greek: *eiké* (i-kay'): without just cause, reason, purpose; empty.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

There have been multiple discoveries and inventions that have improved the quality of life for humankind. For example, the medical field has seen the genesis of anesthesia, the development of infant formula, the polio virus culture, improved techniques of blood banks, and the discovery of antibiotics—to name a few. Advances in modes of transportation and recent technological inventions have enabled



The Biblical Context

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the Gospel. John Locke, the eighteenth-century British philosopher, said, "Our Savior's resurrection is truly of great importance in Christianity, so great that His being or not being the Messiah stands or falls with it." Paul devoted the entire fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians to this single pivotal doctrine. His teaching concerning Christ's resurrection was necessitated by the confusion some of the Corinthian believers were experiencing about their own resurrection. The fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead had been taught, and they had believed it. Paul's focus was to convince them that they too would be raised with Christ to life eternal. He had to face the challenge of conflicting Grecian views to which the Corinthians would have been exposed about life after death. The Greeks readily accepted the immortality of the soul but were skeptical about the notion of the body's being raised. Paul set forth specific evidence to convince the Corinthians that their objections and doubts about the truth of their own resurrection were baseless if they accepted the truth of Christ's resurrection.

travel to distances in a matter of hours and communication with others across the globe from offices or homes almost instantly. These and other discoveries and inventions have made it possible to experience better living conditions and offer hope for a better quality of life for many today and in the future. As extraordinary as these discoveries have been, nothing offers a surer and more secure hope for a better life and justice for humankind than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The reality of Christ's resurrection and the security of the believer's hope provide the motivation to continue to work for justice despite current circumstances and challenges. The hymnologist's lyrics capture the essence of the hope for this better life made possible by Christ's resurrection: "Because He lives, all fear is gone, because I know He holds the future! And life is worth the living just because He lives" (William Gaither, 1971).

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

It's a Fact! (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

KJV

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.

NIV

NOW, BROTHERS and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in *vain*.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

**4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.
6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.
7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,
8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.**

Paul lays the foundation of his argument about the Resurrection by reviewing the knowledge of the Gospel that the Corinthians already possessed or should have known. They had heard, believed, and received the Gospel and had been transformed by it (**verse 1**). It was through this Gospel that the ongoing process of sanctification was taking place (**verse 2a**). Paul explained that their holding fast to the message of the Gospel they had heard and believed was the evidence that their salvation was genuine, unless they had not truly accepted it (**verse 2b**). He wanted the Corinthians to understand that they were living proof that the doctrine of the Resurrection was true. In **verses 3-8**, Paul provided further undeniable evidence of the reality of Christ's resurrection for the Corinthians: the Gospel message itself that he had preached to them (**verses 3-4**); and the testimony of eyewitnesses (**verses 5-8**). Paul had authoritatively delivered to the Corinthians what the Scriptures taught about Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. By focusing on what had already been predicted about this event, Paul substantiated that this was not a new doctrine. Even the Jews could not deny that the Scriptures taught it. God's Word is always the reliable source to use as proof of doctrine (see 1 Timothy 3:16). Genuine eyewitness accounts are always admissible forms of evidence in all the courts. Under the Law, a matter had to be substantiated by the witness of two or three. Paul continued to build his proof by identifying those that had actually seen Christ after His resurrection in sequential order: Peter (Cephas), His disciples, five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, James (believed to be Christ's half-brother), all the apostles, and finally, Paul himself. His logical and court attorney-like argument established that the reality of Christ's resurrection was proven by their salvation experience, its prediction and promise in the Scriptures (Old Testament), and His appearance to reliable eyewitnesses after His body was raised from the dead. The salvation we enjoy now makes the Resurrection a fact. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then there is no salvation—because believing that He did is what makes it possible.

? **What Do You Think?** How can the first two verses of 1 Corinthians 15 be effectively used in evangelism?

The Necessity of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20-23)

KJV

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.

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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.

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

NIV

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.

.....

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.

23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

The Resurrection is the basis for our hope for life and justice now and in the future. After having established the fact of Christ's resurrection, Paul demonstrated that it is both possible and essential. First, he presents a logical response to those unidentified among them who were denying the reality of the resurrection of the dead (**verse 12**). The Corinthians had believed in Christ's resurrection and that He was obviously alive because their salvation was based on it. Since this was so, then the possibility of their resurrection was obviously true. Paul then gave them a total of seven negative consequences to prove the absolute necessity of the Resurrection (verses 13-19), two of which are in **verses 13 and 14**. Theologically, he argued in these verses that if there is no Resurrection, then Christ, in whom they had believed, was not resurrected. If He was not resurrected, then the preaching of the Gospel and their faith in it were useless. The two are inseparable: no Resurrection, no living Christ; no living Christ, no transforming salvation. Either they are both true, or they are both false. Paul continued by focusing on its positive consequences (**verses 20-23**). Emphatically, he states (based on the previous proofs) that Christ has been raised from the dead, becoming the firstfruits of those who are asleep or dead (**verse 20**). Israel was required to bring a sample of their crops before they were harvested. Firstfruits, in reference to the Resurrection, implies that there will be other fruits to follow. At His resurrection, Christ became the first fruit or the representative sample of all others who would be raised into a life that knows no death. The humanity of Christ was fully involved in His resurrection and validates the resurrection of others. It was through the man Adam that the penalty of death came. Jesus's dying and being buried and resurrected as a man qualified Him to be the firstfruits of all others related to Him by spiritual birth (**verses 21-22**). Christ's resurrection is the surety or earnestness that others will be raised at His coming (**verse 23**). The consequences of Christ's resurrection are also a guarantee that there is hope for a better life and for justice now as believers. We do not need to fear what time, circumstances, and people can do to the physical body, because one day we will be raised like Him. While we rejoice and praise God for this gift, we should also boldly stand against injustice and live godly lives, despite ridicule, opposition, sorrow, or suffering.

? What Do You Think? How should the surety of the Resurrection affect how we live in this present age?

The Character of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42-45)

KJV

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.

NIV

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;

43 it is sown in dishonor, 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

45 So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

The fact of the Resurrection is the undeniable spiritual and tangible proofs found in the Scriptures and verified by eyewitnesses. Its necessity was the earnest that believers will be raised like Christ. Those who denied the Resurrection among the Corinthians had probably been influenced by the Gnostic philosophy that considered the physical body evil and the spirit good. Some who questioned that the possibility of a resurrected body was true wondered what kind of body it would be. Paul described the character or nature of the resurrection body in verses 35-49. The apostle explains that just as the flesh of living things and the form of heavenly bodies differ, the resurrection body will be different from the physical body in specific ways. First, the resurrection body will be imperishable and will not be subject to decay (**verse 42**). Second, it will be one of glory—that is, free of the stain of sin (**verse 43a**). Third, the resurrection body will not be characterized by human frailty but by power (**verse 43b**). Paul adds that the resurrection body will be suited for the human spirit and the world to come, just as the natural body is suited for the present earthly life (**verse 44**). Paul concluded by explaining that the first man, Adam, gave his nature to all humankind that followed, and Christ, the last Adam, will be the source of the spiritual body in the resurrection for all who have accepted the Gospel by faith (**verse 45**). The present and future condition of our natural bodies should not be the source of gloom and doom; rather, it should be a reminder that although they will perish and deteriorate, we have the promise that they will be re-created as imperishable, honorable, and powerful spiritual ones just like Christ’s. God’s people must submit their present bodies as living sacrifices to be used by God to promote justice and point lost humankind to Him for salvation and hope for a better life.

? **What Do You Think?** How can we maintain an appropriate focus on the joy of having a better life beyond this one and not become “heavenly focused” and “earthly useless”?

A Closing Thought


The pivotal doctrine of Christianity is the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If there was no Resurrection, then all we teach, preach, and believe is in vain. It is impossible to be a Christian and not believe that Jesus was raised from death to life on the third day. Today, we celebrate Easter Sunday (“Resurrection Sunday”). As we worship and praise God for all the benefits of the resurrection of His Son, let us also commit to make the best use of our present life’s opportunities to evangelize the lost and be active advocates of social justice in our communities beyond today.

Your Life

Belief in and acceptance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ can be considered a personal challenge and call to action. He left the work of building a just kingdom for all in this present world in the hands of His people today. He has also empowered and equipped us to do even greater or more extensive works on earth than He had done. Consider making a personal commitment to use your unique spiritual gift(s) in some way this week that will give someone hope for a better life.

Your World!

The chaotic and decaying condition of our present world can make hope for a better life and social justice seem unattainable. Yet, the reality of Christ’s resurrection is the foundation and motivation believers need to courageously strive to redeem the times by living godly lives, providing encouragement to the oppressed and suffering, and intentionally proclaiming the Good News to the lost.

 **Closing Prayer** Dear God, today, as we commemorate the resurrection of Your Son, keep us mindful of our responsibility to move from adoration to the ministry of evangelism and the promotion of justice in a world filled with people desperately in need of hope for a better life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

Sometimes God places His people in strategic positions to advocate for those for whom justice has been denied or threatened. Next week’s lesson is an example of this truth. Prepare for this study by reading Esther chapters 3, 5, and 7.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , April 13	“Mordecai Refuses to Bow to Haman”	(Esther 3:1-6)
TUESDAY , April 14	“Haman Sets a Decree to Destroy the Jews”	(Esther 3:7-11)
WEDNESDAY , April 15	“Haman Builds Gallows to Hang Mordecai”	(Esther 5:9-14)
THURSDAY , April 16	“The Decree against the Jews Is Struck Down”	(Esther 8:3-8, 16-17)
FRIDAY , April 17	“Festival of Purim Established”	(Esther 9:18-23, 29-32)
SATURDAY , April 18	“Mordecai Advances Welfare of the Jews”	(Esther 10:1-3)
SUNDAY , April 19	“Esther’s Plea and Haman’s Punishment”	(Esther 7:1-10)