

Dear Church
1 Corinthians 15:12-58

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Good morning. I have a simple point for today's message: **what God did for Jesus, he'll do for you, and he'll do for all creation.**

That is the Christian hope. **What God did for Jesus, he'll do for you, and he'll do for all creation.** But we live in a culture increasingly pregnant with a sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness.

A couple of examples for you (view the online sermon to see the referenced slides and hear additional information):

- Recently the CDC released a Youth-Risk Behavior Study which showcased trends from 2011-2021. As always, there are a multitude of reasons for this kind of thing, but note how dire things are. Now look at the CDC's reports on teen suicides.
- For the rest of us, The General Social Survey found that "happiness" as broadly as it can be defined was at an all-time low.
- Anti-natalists argue that it is immoral to have children because it is wrong to bring them into a world that is so corrupt and full of hopelessness.
- People are attacking art in national museums because they feel there is no tomorrow.
- Many of our songs are haunted by hopelessness. Listen to some of these lyrics: "You can't make me stop (stop) / You can't make me stay (stay) / I don't know how many more I've got / But I'll be waitin' for forever if I'm waitin' for a better day / You can't make me go (go) / You can't make me change (change) / I don't know what the future holds / But it happens how it happens, everybody dies anyway."

How else are all these things to be interpreted except as expressions of hopelessness?

We are obsessed with dystopian stories, end-of-the-world disasters, zombie apocalypses. We fear global collapse from pandemics, economic breakdown, climate-change disaster, cyber warfare, terrorism, and gross ideology. Things are not as they should be. Schools feel broken. Government feels broken. Entertainment feels broken. Politics? Broken. Economics? Broken. Globalism? Broken. Media? Broken. Communities? Broken. "The Science?" Broken. OFFICIATING IN THE NFL?? BROKEN.

We also have our personal hopelessness: my kids will never come back to the Lord, I'll never find someone to partner through life with, I'll never be fully known *and* fully accepted, this job is endless torment, death is approaching sooner or later. What's the point?

We wrestle. But the eternal proclamation of the scriptures, of the Apostles, of witnesses before our time is this: there is a future.

Because **what God did for Jesus, he'll do for you, and he'll do for all creation.**

FIRST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF RESURRECTION

It all begins with *resurrection*. Look at how Paul starts this passage: "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? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised" (1 Corinthians 15:12-13).

When it comes to resurrection, the Christian position is wholly unique compared to that of the ancient world. The Corinthians didn't really believe in resurrection. Paul says, "Some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead." In fact, most Greco-Roman people didn't believe in resurrection. They believed

in an afterlife, sure. But to them life *after* all this was nonphysical, purely spiritual. You live, die, and then ascend/descend into the spiritual realm.

Adjacently, but differently, the Jewish perspective on resurrection was not that you live, die, and ascend/descend into some spiritual realm, but that *on the last day, all at once*, God would raise the righteous from the dead with new/transformed bodies, redeeming/restoring all of creation. The Jews thought it *was* physical, that this earth, our bodies that God created *good* but that were subject to sin, decay, and death, would be redeemed and transformed, carrying aspects of the old, but being made new.

Neither of these two groups—the Corinthians or the Jews—ever thought that someone might rise from the dead in the middle of history. The Corinthians didn't believe that. It was gross. Why bodies? Yuck. And the Jews didn't believe that. To say someone rose from the dead ahead of everyone else like the Apostles were saying about Jesus would be like saying to a Chiefs fan that Patrick Mahomes won the Superbowl but not the rest of the team. It wouldn't make sense.

And yet, this is what Paul & Co. preached. They preached that Jesus broke the rules. They preached that despite traditional expectations, either Greco-Roman or Jewish, God raised Jesus by the Holy Spirit, bodily, physically, in history. And from that point, they preached that, as a flower blossoms from the stem outward, **what God did for Jesus, he'll do for you, and he'll do for all creation.**

METHOD + MEANS OF RESURRECTION

As I was growing up, I didn't really believe in the resurrection. I would have answered the question, "Do you believe that Jesus rose from the grave?" with a "yes," but essentially, I was like the Corinthians. I believed Jesus rose, but that quickly after he rose, he ascended into "heaven" and that when we die we would go be with Jesus in some spiritual realm called "heaven."

I thought the Christian story was something like this: earth → Jesus comes → heaven/hell). I thought the heaven part of that was nonphysical, disembodied, purely spiritual. Something like harps, golden roads, winged babies, fluffy clouds, soundtracked by Jeff Buckley singing *Hallelujah*. Anyone else?

The Bible talks about a place we go when we die like our conception of heaven. But very little, to be honest. Jesus says to the thief on the cross, "Today, you'll be with me in paradise." Paul says in 2 Corinthians to be "away from the body" is to be "at home with the Lord," and he says in Philippians that if he were to die, he'd "depart and be with Christ."

But the Bible is not so much concerned about life after death. It's more concerned about what N.T. Wright calls "life after life after death." Something more like this: heaven+earth/creation → heaven/Jesus/earth → heaven+earth/new creation. Creation and then NEW creation is what the Bible's story points us to. Life after life after death. The story isn't about us going to heaven when we die, but about heaven coming to earth—first in Jesus, then in Jesus' people, and finally when Christ returns for all of creation. It's physical, embodied, real, more real even than the life we have before us. Heaven is important, sure, but it's not the end of the world.

Because **what God did for Jesus, he'll do for you, and he'll do for all creation.**

Several years ago, I came across this resurrection art (view the online sermon to see the artwork) from a Ukrainian artist named Ivanka Demchuk. Look at what's happening here. Jesus has been raised. He's overcome the grave and he's pulling us up with him. Just as he's been made alive, you'll be made alive. All of creation will be renewed and redeemed. This is our future hope, our sure reality.

"But," you may be wondering, "how is this resurrection going to happen?"

Paul says,

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

“Well, what is our resurrection going to look like?”

Paul says, “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Later in verse 53 he says, “The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

“Well, how’s this going to happen?”

Paul says, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

“But what is the point of resurrection?”

Paul says, “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

Jesus comes first and his resurrection is a *sign* of what going to happen to you and me and all creation at the end of time. Your body, my body, this creation, which is subject to sin, death, decay, corruption, sickness, disease, weakness, frailty, and entropy, will be made into new bodies. This world will be remade. You’ve heard the phrase “*new and improved!*” and that’s the idea. This will happen to you in a flash, in an instant. When Christ returns to put the world back together, to complete the renewal of all things, to bring heaven to earth, to judge the living and the dead, we who are in Christ will be changed. Still physical, just like Jesus’ body was physical. But different. Transformed. In the resurrection of Jesus, the POWER and REACH of death has been overcome!

There’s a lady named Joni Erickson Tada who I think exemplifies this well (view the online sermon to see the photo).

What God did for Jesus, he’ll do for you, and he’ll do for all creation.

IMPLICATIONS IF JESUS HAS BEEN RAISED

Now, why does all of this matter?

Several weeks ago, I was driving in my car listening to a lecture on Christian eschatology (as I do). The theologian, who is also a bishop, told a story of being in a taxi in London on his way from A to B. They got stuck in a traffic jam. The driver turned to the theologian/bishop in the back seat with frustration on his face, but also a smile. He saw the bishop was wearing his bishop clothes: purple shirt, collar, cross necklace, and all the rest of it. And he said, “Oh, bishop are you?” The bishop replied, “Yes.” He said, “Church of England, is it?” The bishop replied, “Yes, Church of England.” The driver replied, “I heard you’re having some difficulty about such and such a thing in your church.” The bishop replied, “Yes, we are having such and such a

difficulty in our church.” And then the driver said, “Well, what I always say is, IF GOD RAISED JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD, everything else is basically rock ‘n roll, innit?”

And I sat there in my car thought “That’s it!” Of course, if God didn’t raise Jesus Christ from the dead, then we’re all wasting our time. BUT IF HE DID, then everything about everything is different. Everything is rock ‘n roll, baby! Then I turned on Joan Jett and the Blackhearts’ “I Love Rock ‘N Roll” and rode off into the sun contemplating our future glory.

This matters because the way you live now is completely controlled by what you believe about your future. Isn’t this true? Think about it.

- If you are about to go on vacation, many times you’ll clean your house beforehand because you know that when you get back from vacation, you’ll be tired and want a clean house. What you believe about your future reality determines what you do in the present.
- Some of you run companies and you know that you have to be future-oriented. You know you need to plan and strategize. You know that planning and strategy impacts how you run your business TODAY.
- I was talking with a school therapist social worker friend this past week and he is BURNT OUT. He has a newborn at home. He’s the only school therapist in a large inner city school. Lots of hardship. But he knows that spring break and summer are right around the corner and rest is coming. That belief about the future is impacting his decisions/endurance in the present.

What you believe about your future reality determines what you do in the present.

For the Corinthians, Paul says to them that that future reality—that what God did for Jesus, he’d do for them, and he’d do for all creation—should direct them to three things:

1. Holiness

The Corinthians were living like there was no resurrection. They thought that their bodies didn’t matter, that they could treat their bodies however they wanted since the afterlife just consisted in their spirits going into the spiritual realm. This gave them license for sexual immorality, drunkenness, argument, and more.

But Paul says to them, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.” (1 Corinthians 15:33-34). Paul’s like, “Come on! Don’t hang around those people who are messing up your thinking. Come back to the truth! Jesus rose! What God did for Jesus, He’ll do for you. You’re just ignoring this resurrection talk and ignoring your future reality because you want to keep sleeping around, getting drunk, and putting yourself on a pedestal.”

Doesn’t this happen to us? We forget our future and because of this we live now, not in light of eternity, but in light of momentary afflictions. We shrug off holiness because what we do now doesn’t *really* matter. But it does. Doesn’t mean it won’t/can’t be redeemed. But it matters.

So, Paul says, “Stop hanging out with bad characters who are changing your view on where all of this is headed. Come back to your senses. Stop sinning.”

2. Perseverance

Later Paul says, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

It's Black History Month. I was thinking this past week about how black Christians withstood the absolute horror of slavery. And I came across an African American scholar named Howard Thurman. In 1947, he gave a lecture on the meaning of the Negro Spiritual. He was responding to the critique that their spirituals were so “otherworldly,” that because the spirituals are filled with references to heaven and judgment day and crowns and the thrones and the robes they’ll have one day, it made them docile and submissive.

But Howard Thurman says it was their faith in God’s future, started in Jesus, that he would one day come for them that gave them hope in the present. He says it gave them a “hope that the environment...could not crush” and argues that it “enabled them to reject annihilation and to affirm a terrible right to live.”

3. Kingdom work

“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Here’s a question: are you living NOW in light of resurrection, in light of your future hope?

Honestly, I can say this because I know: **what God did for Jesus, he’ll do for me, and he’ll do for all creation.**

Of course, if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, all this is a wash. Paul even says so in this chapter. Actually, he says if Jesus hasn’t been raised, we are in deep trouble. He says if Christ hasn’t been raised:

- Preaching is useless (v. 14)—that would stink for me
- Your faith is useless (v. 14)—that would stink for you
- We would be liars about God (v. 15)
- We’re still in our sins (v. 17)
- Those who have died are “lost” (v. 18)
- We are to be pitied (v. 19)
- We are getting baptized for no reason (v. 29)
- We are endangering ourselves for no reason (v. 30)
- We have no purpose (v. 32)—“let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”

But the witness of the Apostles is this: Jesus rose. Because he rose, they preached that **what God did for Jesus, he’ll do for you, and he’ll do for all creation.**