



Several years ago, I came across an animated short that sought to beautifully describe how people can still enjoy life to the fullest even though there’s death. However, this video clearly rejected any idea of existence beyond death. Essentially, the creators used a meteor as it’s main and only character. This meteor was enjoying life in space, and then it entered into the earth’s atmosphere. It was scary and excruciating, but once it entered the atmosphere, things cooled down and the meteor was enjoying the speed at which it could travel. But then the meteor noticed ocean below and became fearful. What would happen if it fell into the water. It knew it would die. So, for a long period of time, it feared the water. It tried to move away from the water, but despite its best efforts, it only got closer. But then a realization came to it. Just embrace what life you have right now. So, the meteor began to enjoy the sky – moving around at top speed but enjoying the wind and air. Finally, the time came when it hit the water, completely cooled and then died.

That’s how this animated video ended. And, if I could succinctly state the philosophy of the video, it was: Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die. Or, “You Only Live Once.” So, just seek to be as happy as possible in the moment because nothing’s coming after death. There is a large segment of the American population that would seek to embrace this mentality. And yet, I would imagine many people here today would find that message to be very lacking. To you (and definitely to me), you might be thinking, “If there’s nothing after death, then what’s the point?”

Throughout the ages, people have either believed in something after death or nothing after death. And these two positions have then sought to describe how their view can still lead to satisfaction in the present. Of course, the Christian position is that there *is* something after death. Today, this Easter morning, we focus our celebration on the reality of Jesus’ resurrection and all that means for us in the life to come and in our current life! But, are we right? Did Jesus really raise from the dead? Is there really life after death?

I recall a former pastor saying, “If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn’t rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead” (Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*). If Jesus rose from the dead, that changes everything!

Now, I don’t want to assume that everyone here believes the resurrection of Jesus and has turned to him as your Savior and Lord. If that’s you today, I hope that you will hear at least *why* so many of us are excited about Jesus and his resurrection. Even if you don’t believe, maybe you can sense longings in you for its truthfulness because the resurrection means there’s justice. The resurrection means that God cares for this world and life isn’t pointless. The resurrection means that there is eternal love and acceptance. The resurrection means there’s a miracle-working God who actually engages with rebels and promises to give eternal hope.

So, let me ask you this: What position do you hold? Do you not really care about what's to come after death and just try to seek your ultimate happiness now? Or, do you realize there is a life after death? Either way, please consider that there is life after death. And, the Bible tells us how you respond to Jesus matters as it relates to your existence after death.

As we continue on in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul makes his case for why the doctrine of the resurrection is essential to the Christian faith. Paul is also explicit that the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus is essential. You can't redefine resurrection. Jesus either literally rose from the dead and we have hope *or* Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead, and then there's no hope. How does Paul come to this conclusion? We will discover more today and also in the weeks to come. But today, the main idea is that **If there's no resurrection, there's no hope in Christ.** In these verses, Paul states the negatives if Christ isn't raised. In the next section, he states the positives of what we receive since Christ is raised.

As we begin in this section, I want to highlight verses 12, 13 and 16 first: 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. . . . ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.¹ In these verses, we have the reason why Paul has brought up this discussion on the resurrection, and then in verses 13 and 16, we have the hinges on which Paul hangs his statements in these verses.

Verse 12 gives us the reason for the discussion: some say there's no resurrection of the dead. This wouldn't be uncommon for people to believe, especially in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. In studying Greek philosophers, writings and mythology, they either believed there was complete annihilation after death *or* that there was no physical resurrection, while experiencing some sort of freedom of the soul. In the Corinthian situation, it's probable that the point being made by *some* in the church was that there was no physical resurrection. In these verses Paul brings up the error of non-physical resurrection by calling the people to consider what has happened to those who have already died if there's no physical resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, it seems that there's some in the church who are embracing their culture's view of resurrection more than the Scripture's teaching – which is an important lesson to us today, too. Are we shaped by God's Word or do we shape God's Word to the culture? Paul stated in verse 11 that they originally believed the message of Jesus' resurrection, and if Christ was proclaimed as raised from the dead, then how could they ever come to the conclusion that we then *won't* be raised from the dead?

Now, look at verses 13 and 16. I bring up these verses because there's a similar phrasing of Paul in both. Again, these serve as hinges on which Paul hangs his arguments. "If there's no resurrection of the dead/ if the dead are not raised then not even Christ has been raised." I don't know about you, but I've been confused by this argument in the past. Why does Paul say that if we humans don't raise from the dead physically, then Jesus never rose physically? Can't we believe Jesus physically rose from the dead and then just say that humans are only spiritually risen from the dead? No, we can't! In verse 19, Paul uses a very important phrase that is used throughout the New Testament: in Christ. This phrase speaks many wonderful realities, but the main reality is that if you have turned from your sins and turned to Jesus for forgiveness and reconciliation with God, then you are united with Jesus. Your life is woven with his. And, therefore, everything Jesus receives, we receive as blessings. Jesus conquered death. We conquer death. Jesus rose from the dead. We rise from the dead. Jesus reigns. We will someday reign under his

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:12–13, 16.

reign. Jesus is God's Son. We are adopted into God's family. Therefore, Paul shows us that if we don't rise physically, then Jesus didn't rise physically. That's how connected we are to Christ!

But some may say, "Why does it practically matter whether or not we physically rise from the dead? Why does it matter if Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead?" Now, we get several answers from Paul. Every answer emphasizes that without Jesus' literal, physical resurrection from the dead, there is no hope. I love how one person put it: **Resurrection means endless hope, but no resurrection means hopeless end** (Garland, p. 721). So, let's look at the hopelessness we receive **if Jesus didn't rise from the dead**.

1. Gospel preaching is in vain (v. 14).

¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain. . . .² What does "vain" mean? Well, it doesn't mean what many mean by the word today. I remember hearing the old song, "You're so vain. I bet you think this song is about you." Vain often means "self-centered." That's not what it means here. Vain means empty. It's pointless. Purposeless. It's empty.

Years ago, I remember hearing of someone who said that if Jesus' body wasn't found, that wouldn't change their faith at all. I'm so shocked and disturbed by that statement because if there was a circumstance where Jesus' bones were found and it was proved these were his bones, then that would change my faith completely. I would stop being a pastor – and you should stop being a Christ-follower. But that person's statement really emphasizes that there faith isn't really in a *real* Savior who *really* conquers death and sin.

This is why Paul says the preaching is in vain. How can you be nourished by an empty message – a message that doesn't bring forgiveness and a message that doesn't proclaim a Conqueror who conquers the brokenness of this world? Seriously, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then don't gather here to listen to preaching. You might as well fill your mind with TED talks and Podcasts. And, go find the correct religion because Christianity isn't it. Why can I say this so adamantly?

2. Faith is in vain (v. 14).

Verse 14 ends with, ". . . and your faith is in vain."³ Your faith is empty. What does that even mean? Take the idea of faith – which means dependence and reliance on something. If Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead. If his body stayed in the tomb, who are you relying on? Someone who is still dead. Sure, maybe his spirit has risen, but because he didn't rise physically, he cannot conquer this physical world. This physical world, in all of its fractured frailties and sin, still wins!

Your broken bodies, your aging, your future death, storms and destruction of all sorts, beat Jesus, if Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead. Therefore, your dependence is empty because you've depended on a dead man who has given empty promises of a future hope where there will be no more sin, sadness, and pain. Do you see the hopelessness if Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead?

You also don't have to believe in Jesus to recognize the hopelessness. For millennia, people have sought to make this world better, but sociologists and scientists and rulers throughout the ages continue to

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:14.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:14.

discover that this world and the cosmos is dying. We can fight against it, and it's good to try to do things to steward the creation as God commanded Adam and Eve. But, death reigns unless there's Someone who conquers death. If there's no conquering over death, and if Jesus didn't conquer it, faith in Jesus is empty.

3. The apostles are liars (v. 15).

Verse 15 says, "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."⁴ The "we" here is referencing Paul and the apostles he mentions in the earlier verses of this chapter. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then the very people the Corinthians trusted and believed are actually untrustworthy liars.

I imagine you've found yourself in positions before where you found out someone was lying to you. When you discovered that, you were probably hurt and confused. Paul is saying, "Save yourself the time and hurt. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, reject us!" We shouldn't believe liars. Paul also reveals here that if someone says they're a Christian, yet they deny Jesus' physical resurrection, then the message is completely different.

A close friend of mine told me a story of a friend of his who pastors a church in NYC. That pastor had been a part of a church that denied Jesus' physical resurrection, and the first Sunday when this pastor preached, he said that he believed in the resurrection of Jesus. He went on to say, "That means, I believe Jesus literally rose from the dead." He had at least one person come up to him afterwards and say, "You don't really believe that, do you?" The previous leader didn't embrace the resurrection. This pastor does. They believe different messages. But which one gives hope? Which one actually delivers through on eternal grace? And, for this point, "Which messenger is lying?"

But this is the question. Are the apostles telling the truth? I'm not going to get into all the arguments for why it's utterly reasonable to believe the resurrection of Jesus, but let me simply say that earlier in this chapter, Paul states the sheer volume of people who saw the resurrected Jesus – many of whom, at the time of this writing, could still be questioned by the Corinthians. In addition to this, I've found it particularly intriguing the individuals I've read of who testify to the weight of evidence behind the resurrection of Jesus. For example, the atheist philosopher, Anthony Flew, wrote, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events." While he later became a theist, there is no evidence that he ended up trusting in Christ.

All this said, if the apostles were liars, the gospel proclamation is empty and faith in that gospel is empty, too.

4. Jesus did not accomplish anything on the cross (v. 17).

Verse 17: And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.⁵

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:15.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:17.

Paul again emphasizes a vain faith. It's empty. The word "futile" emphasizes its uselessness. If Jesus isn't risen from the dead, faith in him is useless. And, Paul adds something more here, you are still in your sins. What's the primary purpose of Jesus' death on the cross. Some want to say Jesus was just being a great example of love, but he still died at the hands of injustice. If that's the case, that's no reason to worship him. That means he was a sinner and we're still sinners, too. I don't think I need to argue the point with any of you that you and I know our own brokenness. We know we've made a mess of things and that we have done things our ways. There are actions we've done that we wish we could forget. If those actions are judged someday, we know the verdict would be guilty. So, some people simply choose to believe there's no God. But that's pretending, just like that meteor. When you die, your existence goes on. And someday, there is a judgment before the God who is Just and Perfect. He will judge righteously and you will receive the justice for your sin. And, sin is rebellion against him. The Bible states that those who refuse Jesus' rescue will be punished away from the presence of God in a place called Hell. But the Bible also states that Jesus took God's punishment on himself on the cross. He became sin, who knew no sin, so that all who turn from their sinfulness and turn to God for forgiveness will be forgiven! What glory, right?

But if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then the cross isn't vindicated. Death kept Jesus down and so he was not victorious over sin. Why worship someone who couldn't rescue you from your sinfulness? Look for another Savior if Jesus didn't rise from the dead! This leads to the final points:

5. There is no future hope (v. 18)

Verse 18 says, "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."⁶ The two main positions of people in the Greco-Roman world seemed to have been either annihilation at death or the spirit continuing. The people in Corinth don't seem to have been talking about annihilation, but simply a spiritual resurrection. But Paul says that if you believe in only a spiritual resurrection, then you might as well believe in annihilation because, again, if Jesus didn't physically rise from the dead, then he is not victorious. He didn't fulfill what the Scriptures said must be fulfilled of the Savior, and the fallen world wins.

But, the opposite is true. If Jesus physically rose from the dead, those who have "fallen asleep" await a physical resurrection someday. The Bible says that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. So, if you were to die today, your spirit would rise. But that's not the end of it. Someday, like Jesus, when he returns, all who trust in him will receive resurrected bodies and we will live on a "resurrected" New Heaven and New Earth, physically. There we will worship and praise and rejoice for all eternity without even the scent of sin! The physical resurrection of Jesus grants eternal hope. Without it, we're hopeless. And finally,

6. There is no present hope (v. 19).

Verse 19: If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.⁷

There is actually irony in Paul's statement here. This is exactly how many people live their lives. They live as though they *just* have hope in this life. Again, it's kind of like the meteor animation. Just enjoy your existence until you die. Ponder that. And, if you haven't thought about the reality of your mortality in a

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:18.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:19.

while, I want to encourage you to think about that. What hope do you really have if there is *nothing* after death? You really can't have any hope to grasp a hold of.

But Paul is also going further than simply being ironic. He is literally saying that if our union with Jesus only gives us hope in this life, that's a miserable hope! Not only does Jesus not give anything lasting if he didn't rise from the dead, but he gives us greater problems. That's why we are most to be pitied.

Why? Because Christ teaches us that we're blessed if we're persecuted for his name. Paul said earlier to the Corinthians that Christians can be treated like the refuse of the world. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, and people follow him in this life, what stupidity! You've given yourself more problems on the pathway to death and hopelessness!

But what if Jesus did rise from the dead? He gives the exact opposite! And, while we'll look more into this next week, I have to read verse 20: ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.⁸ Jesus is the firstfruits. Meaning, he receives first what's to come for us! **Jesus did rise from the dead. Therefore, the gospel message is full of meaning and life. Our faith is in the living Savior and Lord. The apostles are telling the truth. Jesus did die in the place of sinners, for our sin. We also have present and future hope!**

Do you believe on this Savior? I pray you do. If you don't, will you talk to someone today with your questions? Or, if you want to trust Jesus, the Bible simply says, "Call on him now!" He hears you and will reconcile you to God. Christians, do you know the immeasurable hope you have because Jesus rose from the dead? Have you been living more like Jesus isn't risen? You're living for right-now happiness until you die? Have you forgotten there's a glorious life to come and that there is glorious hope for you today so that you'd follow and obey Jesus now? I pray none of us would live like that meteor. Instead, I hope and pray we'd know the Victorious Savior and live in his victory every day until we see him face-to-face.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Fee, Gordon. *TNICNT: The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.
2. Garland, David E. *ECNT: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.
3. Um, Stephen. *Preaching the Word: 1 Corinthians*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 15:20.