

## All Things New *I Corinthians 15*

A grandfather wanted to see how much his four-year-old granddaughter knew about the Easter story. He put her on his lap and asked, “Julie, why do we celebrate Easter?” Without hesitating, she said, “Jesus was crucified. After he died, his body was put into a grave. They rolled a big stone in front of the opening. A bunch of soldiers guarded the tomb. On the third day, there was a big earthquake and the stone rolled away.”

Well, Grandpa was pleased with how much his granddaughter knew about the Easter story ... but then she continued, “When the earthquake happened, the entire town came out by the grave. And if Jesus came out and saw his shadow, they knew there would be six more weeks of winter!” At least she had part of the story right.

For a lot of people today, Easter has come to mean just new spring clothes, cute little Easter bunnies, a fun egg hunt, Peeps, and another reason for a family or friends get-together. Is it possible we have lost the full meaning of Easter as time has gone by?

If we don’t get the full story, the complete picture of what the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah really accomplished, we run the risk of missing its significance or misinterpreting its meaning.

The human story begins gloriously with God creating man – male and female, placing them in a garden of Paradise, instructing them to be fruitful and multiply, and to enjoy all that he had created. He gave them just one prohibition: they were not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God was testing their allegiance to the One who had created them. Would they submit to his Lordship?

Adam and Eve chose to disobey their Creator and suffered the consequence which God had outlined ahead of time. He had told them that if they were to disobey him, they would surely die. They rebelled against God, and death entered into the human story. And every human being born since then has possessed this natural tendency to rebellion, self-assertion – a bent to what the Bible calls sin.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in his letter to the Romans: “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God... For the wages of sin is death.” – *Romans 3:23; 6:23*

Men and women all stand before God under his judgment because of sin. But this holy God, this absolutely perfect God, chose to intervene in the human tragedy. He sent his Son – the second person of the Godhead who existed from all eternity past – to this earth to be the sin-bearer. That’s what Good Friday is all about.

In some way that is almost inconceivable and non-understandable, God placed all the sins of the world upon his Son and poured out his wrath for sin onto Christ. In and through Jesus, God did for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. He took our hell, our judgment.

For the human observer, Christ's death on the cross was a great tragedy. This teacher of goodness, this worker of miracles, this embodiment of love, was dead. But, you see, that wasn't the whole story.

A little while ago, you heard the Easter story read from the Gospel of Matthew. What seemed at the time a great loss became an amazing gain – Jesus was raised from the dead. The Church was founded on the fact of the resurrection.

The Apostle Paul, whose preaching laid the foundation for a thriving church in the city of Corinth, wrote a letter to them addressing a concern they had raised about the resurrection. Some questioned how a resurrection was possible and what it would look like? How could the body, which many viewed as only physical, have any relevance in the afterlife.

In chapter fifteen of First Corinthians, Paul shares three things that result from the fact of the resurrection. The first is a new identity.

### **1) A New Identity – From guilt to innocence**

#### **I Corinthians 15:12-19**

In the *Religion* section of yesterday's Washington Post, the headline read: "Must a Christian believe literally in the Resurrection?" In the article, New York University professor Scott Korb says:

The miracle of a bodily resurrection is something I rejected without moving away from its basic idea. What I mean is that we can reach the lowest points of our lives, of going deep into a place that feels like death, and then find our way out again – that's the story the Resurrection now tells me.

There was a second article, this one by Sally Quinn titled: "A season of gratitude, no matter what you believe." At one point she confesses she doesn't know if Jesus was raised from the dead. Then she says, "(It) does not matter what the Christians at Easter believe. What matters is the overwhelming sense of community that all of these rituals inspire."

Here's the critical point. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then the sin problem remains. There is no forgiveness; there is no hope; there is no future.

But, if Christ indeed was raised from the dead, it is evidence that he truly took the punishment required for sin. It is the stamp of certification that his death was sufficient to satisfy the justice of God. That is the only reason why God can forgive sin.

Today, in our misguided concept of tolerance, people think that in the end, a loving God will be tolerant of everyone and therefore welcome everyone into heaven – or at least those who tried to live a good life. It's sort of like giving everyone on the team a participation trophy so they can feel good about themselves.

But that's not the God of the Bible. God cannot just excuse sin; its penalty must be paid. That's why Jesus went to the cross. But, having his justice satisfied, God can forgive the person who believes in Jesus and places their trust in what he did on their behalf.

When we do that, we have a new identity. We no longer stand before God as guilty, but innocent. The penalty has been paid, and we are free!

Not only is there a new identity; there is a new reality – **I Cor. 15:42-49**

## **2) A New Reality – From broken to whole**

One consequence of sin is that we are broken. There is something wrong. We are no longer what we were originally created to be. The result is the old just won't do. Look at the words used to describe this brokenness: perishable, dishonor, weakness, natural, dust.

All of these things describe the body of flesh as we know it, a body that has been corrupted by sin. That body is not fit for eternity. What happens then when life on earth is over? Will God just toss our bodies aside like the plastic bottles that litter the landscape? Paul writes that God is not quite done with our bodies.

When Jesus came back from the dead, he was in a physical body – recognizable, yet different from before. One account says he ate food; another says he walked through locked doors. His was a different kind of a body.

Some of you probably got new clothes for Easter. New clothes make you feel like new, a different person. They do something for you. When Paul explains what our new bodies will be like, he says it will be kind of like the seeds we plant in our garden. Those seeds have to die before they produce a new plant. Paul says earlier in this passage – beginning at verse 35: **I Corinthians 15:35-38.**

We can't predict what the plant will look like just by looking at the seed. But, "God gives it a body as he has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body." I don't know how that will work, but it is as though God will redeem our bodies in a unique way. Verse 53 says, "This perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality."

The resurrection is not a reconstruction, but rather a transformation. It is the continuation our bodily existence, but it is not the same body we sow in the earth that has turned to dust. Jesus' resurrection body was far different from the one which died. It was not longer limited by time, space, and material substance. During his appearances, Jesus went from one place to another without traveling in any physical way. He appeared and disappeared at will, and entered rooms without opening a door.

Resurrection changed Jesus' body in marvelous ways, and at his return all resurrection bodies will be changed likewise. The reality is that we will go from broken to whole. Adam and Eve were created to live forever.

That was God's desire for them if they would submit to his rule over them. But in the Fall of Sin, that was lost and mankind was broken. Our bodies show the result, the effect of that fateful decision to rebel.

In the resurrection our bodies will be changed into a form suitable for eternity. This is all because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without his resurrection, there would be no resurrection for us. Brokenness would remain – no hope, no future.

There is a third change – not only a new identity and a new reality. There is a new certainty.

### **3) A New Certainty – From death to life**

#### **I Corinthians 15:50-57**

Most people are curious about the afterlife. A boss asked one of his employees: "Do you believe in life after death?" "Yes, sir," the new recruit replied. "Well, then, that makes everything just fine," the boss went on. "After you left early yesterday to go to your grandmother's funeral, she stopped in to see you.

Four friends were talking about death. One of them asked the other three, "When you are in your casket and people are mourning you, what would you like to hear them say about you?" The first man said, "I'd like to hear them say that I was a fine physician in my time and a great family man." The second fellow said, "I'd like to hear that I was a wonderful husband and a school teacher who made a huge difference in our children of tomorrow." The third man replied, "I'd like to hear them say, 'Look, he's moving!'"

For most people, death is the great unknown. Yet for the Christian, it is no longer a mystery. It is no longer to be feared.

Death, which entered into the human story in the Garden of Eden and has reigned ever since, will itself one day die – the death of death. "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Though we will all die physically, there is a greater truth. That is, death is only temporary; it is only physical. Jesus' resurrection conquered the power of death. In Christ's death, we die to sin and are brought to life.

Jesus talked about this when he said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." – *John 5:24*

"Has eternal life" – present tense. Then he shifts to a different verb tense at the end of that verse. He uses the perfect verb tense – "has passed from death to life." The perfect tense was used to convey permanence. He speaks of a completed act in the past with results that continue through the present.

If you have believed in God and in his Son who died for you, you have – presently – eternal life. You have already passed out of death into life and continue so through the present. John writes later in his first New Testament letter:

And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. – *1 John 5:11-13*

To not believe in Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation is to still be dead spiritually and under God's judgment. Let me finish out a verse I quoted from earlier: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." – *Romans 6:23*

When we believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, there is a new certainty we have about the future. And when we have that certainty, it affects our perspective of this life and what it holds.

Professional golfer Paul Azinger was diagnosed with cancer at age 33. He had just won the PGA championship and had ten tournament victories to his credit. He wrote, "A genuine feeling of fear came over me. I could die from cancer. Then another reality hit me even harder. I'm going to die eventually anyway, whether from cancer or something else. It's just a question of when. Everything I had accomplished in golf became meaningless to me. All I wanted to do was live."

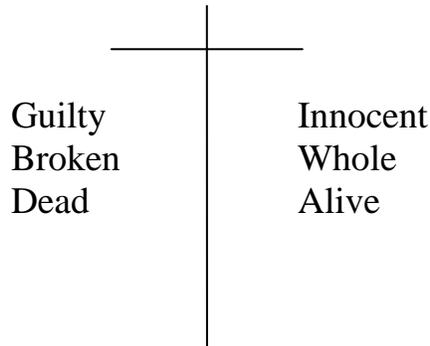
Then he remembered something that Larry Moody, who taught a Bible study on the tour, had said to him. "Zinger, we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living."

Azinger recovered with chemotherapy and returned to the PGA tour, winning another seven events. He's done pretty well. He's earned more than \$14.5 million in his career. But that bout with cancer deepened his perspective.

He wrote, "I've made a lot of money since I've been on the tour, and I've won a lot of tournaments, but that happiness is always temporary. The only way you will ever have true contentment is in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that nothing ever bothers me and I don't have problems, but I feel like I've found the answer to the six-foot hole."

The resurrection provides the only answer to that six-foot hole. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, that is our certainty that we also will be raised from the dead. This resurrection will be a resurrection not to judgment for those who follow Christ, but to life.

So, let's summarize these three things that Paul says results from the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.



The consequences to you this morning of the resurrection if you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior are a new identity, a new reality, and a new certainty. The Apostle Peter links these truths to the resurrection. He writes:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. – *I Peter 1:3*

For those who know Christ – because of the resurrection, nothing will ever be the same again. Paul describes these changes in Second Corinthians, chapter 5. The King James Version puts it this way:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. – *II Corinthians 5:17*

This is the whole story of the resurrection. And the implications for you and me? All things new! Watchman Nee was a 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese Christian leader and teacher. He wrote: “Our old history ends with the cross; our new history begins with the resurrection.”

May I ask you this morning if you have believed in Jesus Christ and are trusting in him alone for salvation? If so, you have a new identity; you have a new reality; you have a new certainty. All things have become new.

If not, what is keeping you from trusting in Christ? God offers you this free gift of eternal life if you would believe in his Son.