

INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. 1 Corinthians 15. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to 1 Corinthians 15.

INTRODUCTION: PAP-PAP

In the winter of 2003 my grandpa, or as I knew him: Pap-Pap, died.

- I had never visited Pittsburgh during the winter,
- though I had visited for a month every single summer of my life.
- But it seemed like the weather fit the occasion.
- It was cold...
- it was grey...
- and the night before the funeral, it snowed.
- There was a white blanket covering the ground.
- Clean. Pure. Pristine.
- No sign of the death that was to occupy our day.

I had never seen a dead body before.

- It was Pap-Pap...but it wasn't.
- In his early life he had been called away from the Steel Mills
- to fight in World War II...
- I hadn't known that about him.

And when the uniformed officer bugled taps...

- I saw my dad,
- an Army man himself,
- weep.
- I'd never seen that before.

Then they closed the lid of the casket...

- I put on white gloves,
- and joined my brother and uncles and cousins,
- and we carried Pap-Pap's casket
- to the long vehicle,
- to drive him to the cemetery...
- to bury him in the frozen Pennsylvania ground.

And on the way back from the funeral, questions began to come...

questions that I didn't have adequate answers to.

- You see, I had only been a Christian for a couple years...
- and the questions were:
- "So, where is Pap-Pap now?"
 - I mean, I know...I just saw his body.
 - I saw the casket.
 - I saw the hole in the ground,
 - and I saw them lower the box down.
- But where is he?
- Is he in that box?
- Is he gone?
- Or is he in a place that I think I believed in...called heaven?

And if he was there:

- What part of him was there?
- Where is heaven?
- What about that corpse we just buried?
- And if heaven is real, how do I know he made it there...
- and not to the other place?

I didn't have answers to many of those questions, and I'm guessing you may have some similar questions.

TRANSITION

Well, in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 we find the longest treatment in the New Testament on what happens after we die, and problem is...it doesn't mention heaven.

I actually talked to a theologian about 1 Corinthians 15, and he said it is one of the most important chapters in all of Paul's letters.

CONTEXT

So, what Amy read was from verses 1-11.

- Now, if you remember,
- which I don't expect you do,
- but I preached these 11 verses on Easter.

So, you can always go back and relive that gem of quarantine online...

But I wanted it read over us before jumping in because Paul reminds the Corinthian church what is "of first importance."

Now, remember where we've just come from.

- The first 14 chapters have covered divisions in the church,
- Sexual ethics of the church,
- the issue of rights and freedoms in the church,
- and then the last 8 weeks we looked at
- the gatherings of the church,
- and specifically how God has gifted people in the church.

But for the last movement of this letter from Paul to the Corinthians, he closes with things "of first importance" which he goes on to define as a thing called RESURRECTION. And he begins to give us a glimpse of what happens after we die.

So, here we go, 1 Corinthians 15:12

1 CORINTHIANS 15:12

[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?

EXPLAIN: DUALISM

So, here's what's happening in Corinth...some of the church members are denying that Jesus has been resurrected. Why? Because in their society the idea of a resurrection didn't fit with their worldview.

Now, we talked about this back in chapter six when talking about sexuality,

- but in first century Corinth,
- the dominant belief is known as dualism.

But dualism, very simply put,

- is from the philosopher Plato,
- where they believed in an afterlife,
 - what we might call “heaven”
- but according to this view,
- humans are composed of two parts: body and soul.
 - The soul is good...
 - the body is not...
- and at death,
- the mortal body is shed like a snake’s skin,
- and the immortal soul continues
- in a purely immaterial existence.

Now, you might be like, *“Hey, isn’t that what Christians believe?”*

It sounds like what I thought heaven was like when Pap-Pap died.

- His body is in the ground.
- And his soul or spirit is now in heaven.

But Paul doesn’t use that language here...he doesn’t speak of heaven...he speaks of resurrection. And those are two different things.

DIFFERENCE

You see, Biblically, when you die

- there is a temporary separation of the soul from the body.
- Our bodies go back into the earth,
- and our souls go into the presence of God with rejoicing...
- we call that *heaven*.

But, then the Bible talks about *resurrection*. And when you see the word *resurrection* in the Bible it means coming back from the dead in a physical body.

So, while *heaven* may be this temporary disembodied state...it is not to last,

- because *resurrection* means back from the dead...
- with an actual physical body.
- Jesus wasn't a spirit.
- He had a real body.

But this is why some in Corinth are saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. It's because they don't believe in that.

- They believe in Jesus' resurrection,
 - but that was a one-off thing.
- They believe in life after death...
- the dualistic framework...
- but what about after that?

Well, Paul proposes that there is a thing called *resurrection* that comes after. As one theologian put it, "*the life after, life after death.*"

TRANSITION

So, to say that Pap-Pap

- "*is in heaven,*"
- or, "*his spirit with God,*"
- or, "*he's in a better place now,*"

as I would have that day of his funeral, **is correct...it's just not complete.**

And as I said back in chapter 6...often we believe far more like Plato than like Paul. There is a disembodied reality after you die which we can call heaven. But it's not to last. There's something more. Resurrection.

Now, Paul is going to correct their errant train of thought. He's going to give us consequences if the resurrection is NOT true, followed by consequences since the resurrection IS true. So, look at verse 13.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:13-19

[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. [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.

6 CONSEQUENCES

Ok, Paul gives us six consequences, or ramification, if the resurrection is NOT true.

FIRST

First, verse 13, if the resurrection is not true, then not even Christ has been raised. That is, the very Gospel falls.

- The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are,
- hear me, NON-NEGOTIABLE doctrines!
- They are **of first importance!**
- They are not debatable.
- If you don't believe Jesus actually lived, died,
- and was raised from the dead...
- you are not a Christian.

To quote one commentator: *"Everything stands or falls on the truth of the assertion that God raised Christ from the dead."*

SECOND

Second consequence: verse 14, **our faith is in vain**. If the core belief of the resurrection falls...then everything we are building our faith on falls as well.

- Jesus clearly teaches that it is not the amount of faith
- that you have that matters,
- you could have faith as small as a mustard seed.
- It's not the amount of faith that matters,
- it's the thing that you put your faith in that matters.
- And if the Gospel is a hoax,
- then your faith is in a sham.
- It is in vain.

THIRD

Third: if the resurrection is false, then the trustworthiness of the Apostles all the way to us today, is shattered.

- Essentially, the Bible is wrong.
- The Apostles lied.
- They made false statements
- by announcing the God raised Jesus,
- if in fact he did not.

FOURTH

Fourth: verse 17: you are still in your sins.

- If Jesus was not raised,
- our sins are not paid for,
- and we are still damned.

Jesus' resurrection enables us to walk in the newness of life,

- but if Christ has not been raised...
- none of that is true.
- We are still dead,
- just as he is.

FIFTH

Fifth: those who have died are gone. Paul uses a euphemism that Jesus used by saying that they have **fallen asleep**.

In the Gospel of John chapter 11, Jesus resurrects his friend Lazarus, but before he calls him back from the tomb, he says this:

SLIDE JOHN 11:11b–15a

“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.” [12] The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” [13] Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. [14] Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus has died, [15] and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe.”

BLANK SLIDE

I think the reason why Jesus and Paul use this euphemism is the hope of resurrection.

- But if there is no resurrection,
- then they aren't sleeping...they're gone.

Another commentator said, *“No one wants to think that their relatives have kidded themselves in this life and are now rotting.”*

SIXTH

And then sixth, if there is no resurrection, all hope is gone.

- If Christ is not raised,
- then our hope is nothing more than a fairy tale.
- You'd do just as well to hope in the Easter Bunny.
- If there is no resurrection,
- the cross is utter folly.
- Hope is gone.
- Joy is gone.
- All that is left is despair.

Do you see the argument Paul is making? EVERYTHING HINGES ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD!

Now, Paul hits the argument from the other side. Look at verse 20.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20

[20] But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Praise the Lord! It is fact!

- A resurrection from the dead has already occurred.
- Christ has been raised from the dead!

And in the first ramification of that fact, Paul calls Jesus the **firstfruits**, which was a common illustration in the Old Testament and even into the Greco-Roman world.

ILLUSTRATION: APPLE TREES

So, at my last house I had two big apple trees in my back yard. And when we first moved in, I thought,

- *“This is going to be great!*
- *I love apples!*
- *We can eat them,*
- *and bake them into pies,*
- *and make apple-sauce...*
- *all that! I was pumped.”*

I was wrong.

And man, it was like torture waiting

- through the spring as the tree flowered,
- and then all summer as these dinky little green apples started to show up,
- and then into the early fall as they just started to get red,
- until finally in October or so,
- the first apples were ready for picking and eating.

And I remember picking the first apple from my tree, the firstfruits, as it were.

- I felt like a farmer.
- Like a suburban farmer!

But the firstfruits are always just that...the first. And what I didn't realize that very quickly hundreds and hundreds of apples would start falling into my yard.

- And if I didn't get them in time,
- they would start to rot and stink.
- And every single week I was filling half a trashcan with apples.
- And I'd let my dog out and she'd run away from me
- and just be munching on apples.
- Staring at me.
- And I'd mow my lawn,
- only to run over and apple
- and spray apple guts all over the place.
- It really got out of hand.

So, when we bought our new house last year, there was this huge apple tree in the front yard...

- and the first thing I did when we closed,
- was chop it down.
- I'm done with fruit trees.

Jesus as the firstfruits...means...there is more fruit to come!

- Resurrection is not something that only occurred once
 - with God raising Jesus from the dead.
- No! He is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
- There is more resurrection to come.
- There is more fruit to come!

He emphasizes this in verses 21-22

1 CORINTHIANS 15:21-22

[21] For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

If you are in Christ, resurrection awaits you! Christ's resurrection was not merely an isolated occurrence. You, too, will be made alive!

Now, his second consequence since the resurrection IS true is found in verses 23-24:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:23-24

[23] But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. [24] Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

EXPLAIN: SECOND COMING

The second consequence is that Christ's resurrection sets into motion a series of events that culminate with his second-coming.

- Jesus is the firstfruits,
- but he is coming back for those who belong to Christ.
- This has been called the *general resurrection*,
- when Christ returns
- and the souls of believers will be reunited with their bodies,
- their bodies will be raised from the dead,
- and they will live with Christ eternally.

Then comes the end.

- So, life...then death...then heaven...then resurrection...
- And after the resurrection that's when "the end" comes.

Christians often talk about living with God forever, but this reality is called many different things in the Bible...it's just not called heaven.

- Paul just called it the **Kingdom of God**.
- The Prophet Isaiah, the Apostle Peter, and the Apostle John
- all called it the **"new heavens and a new earth"**.
- Jesus called it the **"age to come"** or **"eternal life"**.

But what we find here is that at the end,

- after our resurrection,
- Jesus destroys every rule, authority, and power...
- these are enemies of God,
- and they will be overcome.

He goes on in verses 25-28:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:25-28

[25] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. [26] The last enemy to be destroyed is death. [27] For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. [28] When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

EXPLAIN: DEATH

My favorite verse in that section is verse 26: The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

- Death is not the end, my friends,
- but death does have an end.

You see,

- there is coming a day
- when your body has aged to the point
- where you don't want to be alive anymore.

For most of us, that isn't on our radar.

- And I know that I'm a young man...
- But I can already feel it.

You ever wake up from a night of sleep

- And you're like, "Woah...what happened to me?"
- I was just sleeping...
- unconscious...
- I hurt myself...sleeping!"

But the Bible is very clear in Ecclesiastes,

- there is coming a day
- if we live long enough
- that we don't want to be here anymore!

And if I had to guess, you've probably already had days like that regardless of your age,

- where you're sick
- or you have had such an awful experience,
- that you'd be fine just going home to glory.

And now hear me, you will get there...mortality rate, even before Coronavirus, is hovering right around 100%.

- BUT DEATH IS NOT THE END.
- Death is not the end.
- You will be raised.
- And even death will be destroyed.

EXPLAIN: 29-34

Now, in verses 29-34 Paul parallels verse 13-19 in bringing to light the negative consequences if there were no resurrection.

- He uses some rhetorical arguments
- showing that it is foolish to worry about those already dead
- if there is no resurrection.

And he ends by saying that if there is no resurrection then self-indulgence and overindulgence are legitimate. **Eat drink and be merry**...because dead is dead.

CONCLUSION

So, let's land the plane. Why is this important?

Well, it sure seems like death has been a central topic of 2020.

- And with death
- and disease
- and fear
- and anxiety
- on everyone's front burner...

we as Christ followers need a more robust theology than, *"Well, he's in a better place now."*

Christian, your hope isn't in heaven...it's in resurrection!

- And if the resurrection isn't true,
 - then my Pap-Pap is still in the frozen hole in Pittsburgh.
- If the resurrection isn't true,
 - then any faith or hope he had in Christ is foolish.
- And if the resurrection isn't true,
 - then funerals are really, indeed, the end.

But, I think 1 Corinthians 15 paints a different picture.

- Because Jesus was raised,
 - we can have faith in him.
- Because Jesus was raised,
 - the Bible can be trusted.
- Because Jesus was raised,
 - our sins can be forgiven.
- Because Jesus was raised,
 - those who died in Christ will be made alive.
- And because Jesus was raised,
 - we have hope.

WHAT HAPPENS?

So, then what happens when we die?

- Well, death is temporary.
- It is a temporary separation of the soul from the body.
- Our bodies go back into the earth,
- and our souls go into the presence of God with rejoicing.

But God will not leave our dead bodies in the earth forever.

- One day we will be reunited with our bodies,
- resurrected,
- and we will live eternally with Christ
- in the new heavens and the new earth.

What will that be like? Well, we'll get into that in some more detail next week.

But let me leave you with a question:

If you're a Christian here today: are you living as if death has the last word? Maybe you're living in such a fear of death, that practically, you're denying the resurrection?

- Brothers and sisters, our hope is not in this world...
- Our hope is not even in heaven...
- Our hope is that we will be raised with Christ...
- All things will be put right...
- And not even death will survive...

Christian, you have a hope beyond this world...beyond death...and I would say, beyond heaven.

Now, if you are NOT a Christian, hear me plead with you today:

- forgiveness of sin is available for you in Christ...
- this hope of eternal life is available for you in Christ...
- Death does not have to be the end of your story...
- You just have to submit
- and ask for forgiveness
- and repent.

It's available for you! Please, talk to us about this if you're worried or don't understand. We'd love to walk with you through these things.

Let me end with Paul's words. Maybe just close your eyes and hear these words. Let them fill you and be your hope in these trying times:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Pray with me. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- Anderson, David. *The Resurrection of Christ*.
- Comer, John Mark. *Resurrection: Life After Heaven*.
- Garland, David. 1 Corinthians.
- Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology.
- Wright, N.T. Surprised By Hope.