



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V22 N13 April 12, 2020

EASTER WITH CENTRAL

“What If?”

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners, and rose from the dead.

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”

Hebrews 1:1-2



What if Jesus was not raised from the dead?

To the Corinthians, Paul writes: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve” (1Co 15:3-5). The doctrine of resurrection is central to the Christian faith—the resurrection of Jesus (v. 4) and “when he comes” the resurrection of those “who belong to him” (v. 23). Consequently, it’s important for all Christians to understand the meaning of the term *resurrection*.

Some wrongly believe that the term refers to what happens when we believe in Jesus and are born again. Before we believe, we’re dead in our transgressions and sins, but when we believe a merciful God makes us alive with Christ (Eph 2:1, 4-5). Resurrection, therefore, is thought to refer to this crossing over from death to life (Jn 5:24), which entails God raising us up with Christ and seating us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).

Others wrongly believe that the term simply refers to life after death. Upon the death of our bodies, our disembodied souls, that is, our immaterial parts go to be with the Lord. Paul puts it this way to the Corinthians: “As long as we are at home in the body [i.e., physically alive] we are away from the Lord . . . We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body [i.e., physically dead] and at home with the Lord” (2Co 5:6, 8). Both of these wrongheaded views are corrected by recognizing that resurrection is something that happens to our bodies and not to our souls. It was something that happened to Jesus’ body.

One theologian writes: the life that follows immediately after bodily death “is not what ‘resurrection’ meant in the first century. Here there is no difference between pagans, Jews and Christians. They all understood the Greek word *anastasis* [resurrection, cf., Mt 22:23, 28, 30-31] and its cognates, and the other related terms we shall

meet, to mean: new life after a period of being dead. Pagans denied this possibility; some Jews affirmed it as a long-term future hope; virtually all Christians claimed that it had happened to Jesus and would happen to them in the future. All of them were speaking of a new life *after* ‘life after death’ in the popular sense, a fresh living embodiment *following* a period of death-as-a-state (during which one might or might not be ‘alive’ in some other, non-bodily fashion) . . . The meaning of ‘resurrection’ as ‘life after “life after death”’ cannot be overemphasized, not least because much modern writing continues to use ‘resurrection’ as a virtual synonym for ‘life after death’ in the popular sense” (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 31). In the first century, people in general believed in life after death, albeit some of their views of what life after death was like were very bizarre. But only Pharisaic Jews and Christians believed in life *after* life after death, and only Christians believed that Jesus had actually experienced it.

When Paul writes about resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he means *bodily* resurrection. The same author rightly says: “Death must be, and in the Messiah has been and will be, defeated (15.26). Anything other than some kind of bodily resurrection, therefore, is simply unthinkable, not only at the level of the meaning of individual verses and phrases but at the level of the chapter’s argument as a whole. ‘Resurrection’ does not refer to some part or aspect of the human being *not* dying but instead going on into a continuing life in a new mode; it refers to something that *does* die and is then given a new life” (Wright, 314). Jesus’ body died on the cross; three days later, the same body that went into the tomb came out of the tomb made alive again. In other words, the body that came out of the tomb was the same body that went into the tomb—and yet different, being immortal. How do we know this? The tomb was empty Easter morning!



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

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. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Highlight “if” introducing a *condition* in vv. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19.
- Circle “resurrection” in vv. 12, 13.
- Circle “raised” in vv. 12, 13, 14, 15 2x, 16 2x, 17 2x, 20.
- Underline “useless” in v. 14.
- Underline “futile” in v. 17.
- Bracket “in your sins” in v. 17.
- Circle “only” in v. 19.
- Box “but” indicating strong *contrast* in v. 20.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, “This text is about _____.”



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Some Christians in the church in Corinth were saying “there is no resurrection of the dead.” Did they not believe that Jesus was resurrected? See vv. 1-5 and explain.

 2. Put exactly what they were denying in your own words.

 3. Would you agree that they believed in life after death but not in life *after* life after death? See p. 1 and explain.

 4. Identify the first *absurd* implication of the assertion that “there is no resurrection of the dead” (cf., vv. 13, 16).

 5. If true, that first *absurd* implication entails other *absurdities*. In what sense would it make “useless” gospel preaching and personal faith?

 6. If true, that first *absurd* implication would make gospel preachers liars. How so and how serious?

 7. Paul repeats the first *absurd* implication in verse 17. Explain the sense in which personal faith would then be made “futile.”

 8. Explain the condition of those who died believing in Christ if there is no resurrection.

 9. If our hope in Christ is limited to this life, explain why “we are of all people most to be pitied.”

 10. **Discussion:** If there is no resurrection of those who belong to Christ when he comes, eternal life is reduced to living as disembodied spirits in heaven eternally. Talk about how that strikes you.
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Commentary On The Text

Before reading 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 closely, consider one commentator's description of the situation Paul was addressing in these verses: "It is a point of very great importance to remember that the Corinthians were not denying the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; what they were denying is the resurrection of the body; and what Paul is insistent upon is that if a man denies the possibility of the resurrection of the body he has thereby denied the possibility of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and has therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality" (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, TDSB, 153). Paul's readers apparently affirmed belief in the resurrection of Jesus (vv. 1, 2). And yet, they ironically denied belief in the resurrection of the dead. Paul points out the logical absurdity of affirming the one while denying the other by showing them that they are, in the words of one writer, "cutting off the branch they are sitting on" (Wright, 332).

Interestingly Paul does not affirm the resurrection of the dead to confirm the resurrection of Jesus. Just the opposite. He affirms the resurrection of Jesus to confirm the resurrection of the dead – his point being that the resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of those who belong to him when he comes (see vv. 20, 23). To assume otherwise is ludicrous. Paul's concern, then, is to demonstrate the absurdity of saying there is no resurrection of the dead on the one hand, while saying Jesus was resurrected from the dead on the other. Paul's basic argument is a *reduction ad absurdum*, which negates their assertion, "there is no resurrection," by demonstrating that its logical implications are absurd. He makes the argument twice in quick succession. He says if there is no resurrection of the dead, it follows that Christ has not been raised twice (vv. 13, 16). And then he elaborates on the hypothetical consequences "if Christ has not been raised" twice (vv. 14-16, 17-19).

The assertion "there is no resurrection of the dead," and therefore, "Christ has not been raised" implies the following unacceptable absurdities. *First*, the preaching of the apostles and the faith of the Corinthians is *useless* because its object is a dead man (v. 14). The preaching of the apostles and faith of the Corinthians are to no avail because misplaced faith in empty nonsense changes nothing. One author writes: "Paul regards himself supremely as a preacher of the gospel. He is, therefore, stating that his whole life has been a complete waste of time if there is no such thing as resurrection . . . The obvious implication is that, not only has his life's ministry been founded on a fraud and a hoax, but so has very other apostle's – indeed every other believer's" (David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, TBST, 263).

Second, the gospel witness of the apostles and of the Corinthians is *false* because God did not do what they testify he did, namely, raise Jesus from the dead (v. 15). If the fact itself is untrue, then the testimony to the fact is equally untrue and amounts to accusing God of doing what he actually did not do. The same author writes: "If Jesus was another guru-figure and in fact an impostor, it is nothing short of blasphemy to link the name of God almighty with such a person. The only convincing

reason for linking God to the person and work of Jesus is the fact of his resurrection. Only God has power over death: if Jesus rose from the dead, God raised him" (Prior, 264).

Third, the faith of all who believe in Jesus is *futile* in the sense that it accomplishes nothing, leaving them in their sins (v. 18). Paul's main thrust in this verse is that the sin problem remains unsolved if Jesus was not raised from the dead. Again that author explains: "If Jesus stayed dead, there are only two possible conclusions: either he was not the sinless person everyone thought him to be and his death marked his final separation from God; or he might have been without personal sin, but his attempt to atone for the sin of the world by his death did not meet with divine approval. Either way, we are still in our sins, cut off from God and facing his judgment, like everyone else" (Prior, 264). Paul's rationale is straightforward, given the link between sin and death in scripture: if God has overcome death in the resurrection of Jesus, then the power of sin is broken; but if he hasn't, it isn't.

Fourth, believers who have died are *lost*. The misguided Christians in Corinth believed in life after death but not life *after* life after death. Apparently, they believed that those who fall asleep "in Christ," having left their bodies behind, go to heaven where their souls will spend eternity with the Lord. But heaven is not where Christians will spend eternity; the new earth is where they will spend eternity – not disembodied but embodied in resurrection bodies like the Lord's (see vv. 42-44, 51-56). What's more, "Paul simply does not rate a prospect of future disembodied bliss anywhere on the scale of worthwhile goals; he would not classify non-bodily survival of death as 'salvation', presumably since it would mean that one was *not* rescued, 'saved', from death itself, the irreversible corruption and destruction of the good, god-given [*sic*] human body. To remain dead, even 'asleep in the Messiah', without the prospect of resurrection, would therefore mean that one had 'perished.'" (Wright, 332-33).

Finally, believers whose hope is only for this life "are of all people most to be pitied" (v.19). One commentator clarifies the meaning of this somewhat obscure verse: "If the Christian's hope in Christ is just for what he or she can expect this side of the grave ('in this life only'), then that one deserves pity. Of course there are some benefits to trusting Christ as we live here and now (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8). However, we have to place these things in the balance with what we lose in this life for taking a stand for Him (cf. Phil. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; 9:25). If we have nothing to hope for on the other side of the grave, the Christian life would not be worth living ('we are of all men most to be pitied')" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 1 Corinthians," 284, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1corinthians.pdf).

Given the absurdity of the logical implications that follow from declaring "there is no resurrection of the dead," Paul concludes that not only "has Christ indeed been raised from the dead," but he has also become "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20), which guarantees the resurrection of all those who belong to him when he comes. To conclude otherwise empties the Christian faith of its efficacy.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 12, 13 **resurrection** See p. 1. "Some of the Corinthians Christians had been saying that there was no resurrection of the dead. This must mean that they were denying a future bodily resurrection and the strong probability is that they were doing so on the standard pagan grounds, as set out in chapter 2, that everybody knew dead people didn't and couldn't come back to bodily life . . . What is in mind here, clearly, is the future resurrection of God's people, not the past resurrection of Jesus . . . The is no reason to suppose that many in Corinth would have taken a hard line like the Sadducees, and a few pagan philosophers, and denied any form of future life at all. There is, however, plenty of reason to suppose that it would be quite natural for recently converted ex-pagans to doubt, and even to deny, a future bodily resurrection. Their entire culture was used to denying such a possibility" (Wright, 316, 30, 31). "Although they have denied that there is a resurrection of the dead, it is unlikely, in light of their baptizing for 'the dead' in v. 29, that they also thought there was no future for people who have died. Most likely in their view the believing dead have simply shed their bodies (cf. 6:13) so as to have entered into the final spiritual (heavenly) existence" (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 744). Some apparently believed in life after death but not life *after* life after death.

v. 12 raised According to this verse, "raised from the dead" clearly refers to "resurrection." "There can be no question, granted the normal meaning of the words Paul uses, that what he has in mind is bodily resurrection. If we were to take the paragraph [vv. 12-19] out of its context, it would be logically possible to understand it in terms of 'resurrection' meaning 'non-bodily survival of death'; but this is simply not possible historically or lexicographically. Egeiro [*raise up*] and anastasis [*resurrection*] were words in regular use to denote something specifically distinguished from non-bodily survival, namely, a return to bodily life. There is no evidence to suggest that these words were capable of denoting a non-bodily survival after death" (Wright, 330).

v. 14 **useless** Cf., "vain" (ESV); "empty" (NKJV); "futile" and "empty" (NET); "worthless" (ERV). "Verse 14 takes this at one level: if the resurrection does not happen, the apostles have been talking empty nonsense. And those who believed them have believed empty nonsense. Verse 17

takes this one degree further: their faith is not only 'empty', but 'futile', *matala*, a waste of time; and the crucial point is not just that they are believing rubbish about the resurrection, and about Jesus, but that *the new age in which sins are left behind has not after all been inaugurated*" (Wright, 332).

v. 17 **futile** Gk. *mataia*, "without results" (David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 543); "unable to secure forgiveness, or a future life" (C. K. Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 348). Cf., "worthless" (HCSB); "a delusion" (GNT); "useless" (NET, NLT); "pointless" (NTE).

v. 17 **still in your sins** "Condemnation can only be taken away by the expiatory death of Christ, and expiation would never have taken place if the victim who accomplished it had not been restored to life. As long as the security is not let out of prison, it must be concluded that the debt is not paid. If then Christ did not leave the prison of death, our justification was not obtained by His death; and we are still, we believers, as much as others, condemned" (F. Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2: 347).

v. 19 **only** C.f., "hope in this life only" (ESV); "hope . . . for this life only" (HCSB). The adverb means hope is in this life *only*, not hope only in Christ.

Other Texts to Consider

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words."



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Since Jesus was raised from the dead, those who believe in him will be resurrected when he returns, because to believe otherwise involves entertaining absurdities.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

We certainly have been in a season of “what ifs” lately. What if we run out of toilet paper? What if we stay quarantined for the rest of the school year? What if a friend or family member gets this virus? These are all sobering thoughts that can cause a roller coaster of emotions that make you go topsy-turvy. The one “what if” that really gets me to thinking, however, doesn’t have anything to do with COVID. Consider this, “What if Christ didn’t raise from the dead?” Christ’s resurrection is what gives us hope for our future. It reminds us this time on earth is limited and we’re just passing through on our way to heaven. Without the resurrection, without the hope of being raised ourselves, we have no eternal perspective to guide and direct our hearts and minds. The resurrection also burdens our heart for our lost friends and loved ones. Are you burdened for your child to know the Lord and trust in our Risen Savior? Now is the perfect time to share the Gospel with them! When the last of my four kids trusted Christ at camp several years ago, I let out a huge breath of relief I didn’t know was there. I will get to live forever with my family, worshipping a holy and eternal God! I may not know what will happen in the days to come, but I rest secure in the fact we will spend eternity with our Savior. We are praying for you and your family to know the hope the resurrection brings.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

1. What were some people saying?
2. If Christ had not risen, what does that say about our faith (v. 14, 17)?
3. If Christ had not risen, what would happen to our sin (v. 17)?

What Do You Think?

How would the world be different if Jesus did not come back to life?

What Do You Do?

With your parent’s help, make Empty Tomb cookies or Resurrection Rolls (recipe can be found online). Discuss what each ingredient represents and its importance.

CORE COMPETENCY: Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is fully God/fully man and died for my sins.

MEMORY VERSE: Matthew 28:6

He is not here; He has risen, just as He said.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week’s verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD’S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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