

Sermon Series - The Weak, Foolish, and Victorious Gospel
Sermon Text and Title - 1 Corinthians 15:12-20: If Christ is not raised...

Sermon Points:

Introduction: Let the Truth of Christ Determine Your Reality

1. If the Dead Are Not Raised Then Christ is Not Raised (vv.12-13, 16)

2. AND If Christ is not Raised...

-Preachers Have a False Message (vv.14-15)

-People Have a Futile Faith (vv.17-19)

Application: Let the Truth of Christ Determine Your Hope (v.20)

Corporate Prayer:

Lord, help us be people who want our understanding of all things to be shaped by the truth of Christ.

Help us believe that our preaching is indeed true, our message rightly representing God, our faith is indeed trustworthy, our sins are certainly forgiven, our perished blood-bought family certainly alive, and our future certainly secure.

And because of those truths, help us be people that rejoice in the hope of Christ and pity those who do not yet have that hope.

Introduction: Let the Truth of Christ Determine Your Reality

Paul has spent the last 11 verses reminding the Corinthians the gospel is everything to them, they received it, have stood in it, and are being saved by it. Paul has reminded them that Christ died, was buried, and was raised to fulfill thousands of years of Scripture. Paul reminds them of all those who have seen Jesus alive after the resurrection. And Paul reminds them of his radically changed life; a life that changed from persecution of Jesus to all in for Jesus and his gospel.

So, why spend all this time reminding them of and defending this gospel and especially the resurrection? Because they had left the truth. Because Paul constantly wants believers standing on rock solid truth and therefore to have rock solid hope. It is so easy to begin to drift away from the gospel in our belief and our practice because of the culture we live in. The culture we live in is almost always screaming a different message than the gospel we trust in. And we can become disoriented from what the Bible says is true.

And the Corinthians definitely struggled with the influence of their culture. In fact, this whole book is really Paul responding to issues where the Corinthians had begun to have their church more defined by the social, political, economic, and sexual trends of the day than by the gospel. And this issue is no different.

In other words, like the Corinthians, we often establish our reality and then make the Bible fit around our reality instead of coming to the Bible and letting the Bible show us reality so that we can have our past experiences, what the world has told us, our fears, and that pain we haven't dealt with go through the filter of the Bible and the gospel.

You see, the Corinthians were always getting distracted with ideas and ways of doing things that were subtle diversions from the Bible and thus had drifted from the gospel Paul had first delivered. And thus drifted from true hope and true joy. And so, my prayer is that we will be Bible and gospel-people here who let the Bible

define our reality and then listen to the Spirit of God as he leads us to shape our lives and actions around truth so that we can have true joy and true hope that is unshakable.

If the Dead Are Not Raised Then Christ is Not Raised (vv.12-13, 16)

In the city of Corinth, philosophy was a big part of the culture. And there was a philosophical view that was very popular at that time that believed that physical bodies were corrupted and therefore, when they died, they could not be raised.

In other words, the physical body was seen as separated from anything moral or spiritual, it was just a shell with which to enjoy all of the pleasures of this life, but was left behind eternally and separated from spiritual matters.

Now, there are multiple levels of problems with this idea for Christians Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 15; this week we'll deal with the problem of the consequences that come if the dead are not raised. Look at verses 12-13 with me quickly to see Paul jump right into this:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Paul basically shows the Corinthians how incompatible their new philosophy is with the gospel that they believed and has saved them. They are saying there is no resurrection of the dead (the word for dead here refers to the actual body), but their very salvation depends on it.

Paul wants them to be clear that there is no physical/spiritual divide here. Jesus went to great lengths when he appeared after the resurrection to prove his body was raised from the dead. He ate fish. He let people touch his wounds. Jesus had not just conquered the curse and punishment of sin spiritually but had conquered it completely. Indeed, heaven will not simply be a spiritual place where we float around without bodies playing harps on the clouds with angel wings on. Not only is that weird and corny but it is unbiblical. Our bodies, these bodies will be redeemed and made new. There will be a new heavens and new earth, where the whole creation, the physical creation will be redeemed, and made new. A perfect, glorious creation where we will worship God with perfect, glorious bodies like Christ's perfect, glorious body. In fact, Romans 8:23 says that one of the hopes of the gospel is that we eagerly await our full adoption with the "the redemption of our bodies."

What a great hope! These bodies that are so prone to sin, so prone to breaking down and suffering, so prone to letting us down, so prone to keeping us from worship or making it a lot harder, our minds that are so broken and beat up with sin, all of us will be redeemed and raised to take in the perfect glory of God with all of our senses.

Paul repeats their foolish idea again in verse 16:

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

Paul wants to show them that they've been influenced by a philosophical idea that might be fun to debate but actually destroys all hope of eternity for them. These ideas are not compatible. The gospel is not up for debate and if this idea that "some of them" have started to believe spreads, within a generation they will not only have shifted philosophical positions, but they will have lost the gospel completely.

Simply put, in their new philosophy the dead are not raised. And if that is true, then Jesus had not been raised. Paul wanted to show them the danger of what they were starting to believe.

AND If Christ is not Raised...

So, after Paul has shown them how the gospel that saved them and their new philosophy are not compatible, he will go on to show them the consequences of their line of thinking.

You've heard the story of the frog in the kettle where the water is slowly warmed up and the frog slowly dies, not even knowing it's being boiled because of the slow death. That is what happens with sinful ideas and actions as well, it starts slow, but it will not stay small if we don't see it.

So, perhaps the Corinthians think this little deviation from the original gospel is just a small matter of philosophy, but Paul wants to show them the seriousness of the path they are heading down in the hope that they will quickly turn away.

So, if their philosophy is right and the dead are not raised, then that means that Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, what does that mean for them?

Preachers Have a False Message (vv.14-15)

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 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.

First, Paul simply says, if Christ is not raised then this gospel that never changes, this gospel that every Christian has preached and been changed so radically by, is vain. It's not true. If Christ is not raised then the message is a lie. Our death to sin and our resurrection to eternal life is totally dependent on the death and resurrection of Christ. We die with him to sin and we are raised with him to new life. If Christ has not been raised then the whole message is vain. And if the message is vain, then their faith is vain.

If you believe a faulty message then your belief really doesn't matter. Right?

It doesn't matter if you believe me when I tell you that the sun is green and that I'm the new president of the green sun society that will take care of all your problems and lead to a green, blissful eternity. It doesn't matter because it's not true. And if you began to act on those facts and began to count those facts as your hope, and it wasn't true, your belief would be vain.

This is why Paul went to such great lengths to show the proof of the gospel and especially the resurrection in verses 3-11 last week, because it's true! It can be counted on! It is the very core of the gospel. Without it, there is nothing. Everything depends on Jesus being alive, having conquered sin and death, proving he was God, and showing us that those who believe in him will never die, but be with God forever! If that is not true, then the message is lost. The gospel is lost. Their hope is lost.

One seemingly small compromise in their thinking will lead to the gospel being completely lost in their church in a very short time.

And Paul says one more thing about the preachers having a false message. He says not only is the preaching in vain, but if dead are not raised and therefore Christ is not raised like they say, then all who preach this gospel would be misrepresenting God! Now, Paul is not just saying, "Shucks, we got it wrong!" No, he's giving imagery going back to the Old Testament here, just like he gave proof from the Old Testament last week.

Paul is saying they would be false prophets of God. They would actually be leading people to believe in an idol when they call them to worship Jesus, because if Jesus is not raised, then he is not the Son of God like he said he was, and he would be a false god. These people who preach the gospel would be like the false prophets in the Old Testament who lead the people away from God and to something else. They would be leading people to false hope that death was conquered because sin had been conquered by someone who couldn't even conquer death and sin himself, but who was still laying in some grave, defeated by death.

So, if Christ has not been raised, the preaching has all been for nothing and the preaching has really been preaching of false prophets, not servants of God.

People Have a Futile Faith (vv.17-19)

So, the first thing they lose with their faulty idea is the validity of the preaching, which means their faith is also in vain. Paul zeroes in on the consequences of a vain faith in verses 17-18:

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

Paul says if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised, and if that is true then their faith is futile, unproductive, not accomplishing what they hope, and that means they are still in their sins.

The reality of this line of thinking is tragic. They would still be in their sins. Still guilty. Still hopeless. Still without any ability to save themselves. Still waiting for God's wrath. Still with only this life to live and then eternal death.

And not only for them currently, but also for all those have died believing in Christ. Paul says if what they say is true, then all who have died in Christ have perished. Because the message wouldn't have been true and because their faith would have been in vain, when they died they just perished.

It is hard to fathom the hopelessness of our condition without the resurrection. Sins are not forgiven. Death is not defeated. And there's nothing we can do about it. There is much to be lost. But it gets even more profound in verse 19, look at what Paul says:

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

Now, Paul has elevated the cost even higher. Not only is the message vain without the resurrection, not only do we misrepresent God, not only is our faith then vain so that we are still in our sins and without hope for an eternity with God, but we are **of all people MOST to be pitied**. Why? If Christians have gotten the resurrection message wrong and our only hope in Christ is this life only and we have no hope of resurrection to the next, aren't we just like everyone else whose body dies and is destroyed?

No, we're not. Or, at least we shouldn't be. So, what would make us most to be pitied? Let's just peek ahead at verse 32 to start our answer this week and we'll get there fully next week:

If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

In other words, for those who hope in Christ, but it's in this life only, we miss out on many of the pleasures of this life the world tells us are better than Jesus.

Remember how Paul said his life was turned upside down by this gospel? Paul went from rich, acclaimed, powerful, and praised in the eyes of the world to poor, slandered, weak, and persecuted in the eyes of the world. Paul gave up everything. He says in Philippians 3 that he has suffered the loss of all things and counts them as dung compared to knowing Jesus. That's what should happen as the gospel does its work in us.

Because Jesus has died for our sins and then rose again, his resurrection power lives in us. When we see what Jesus has done, we begin to see that he is the only place we can find true, lasting joy now and for all of eternity. We wake up and realize that the sex and drinking, the money and power, the lust and leisure, the comfort and vacations, the prestige and popularity, the religious achievement and theological superiority, indeed all the things the world says will make us happy are nothing. They are NOTHING. But, we think they are nothing because we see them as sinful and therefore unappealing because Jesus has paid for our sins. And because we see them as nothing and Jesus as everything, and because we see an eternity with Jesus forever, because Jesus rose again and is alive, we do our best to leave all those things and try to live our lives sold out to know Jesus and to make him known.

We leave unholy pleasures and move toward holiness. We leave sin and move toward our Savior. And we do it all because we believe these earthly, sinful pleasures are a trap. We believe Satan wants to fool us into thinking we need to squeeze as much pleasure out of this life because it is all we have and death is coming soon. The world fears suffering and death and so it runs for momentary pleasure to numb the pain and feel good for at least a little while.

But, not Christians, we run from sinful pleasures and find joy in Jesus alone. But, the deeper we go into the gospel, the more we want to share the gospel, the more the things of this earth will grow strangely dim and we should find ourselves asking the question, "How can I live my life in a way that brings ultimate glory to God since it is so short" instead of asking, "How far can I go with the world and still be a Christian?"

But, if we give up the sinful pleasures of this world and take up our own crosses and follow Jesus, and then the resurrection isn't true, we are most to be pitied above all other people, because we gave up pleasures in this world for nothing. Our hope was vain. Our purpose was vain. Our gospel was vain. And our Savior is dead and we have been living a lie that has caused us to miss out on pleasures now with no better pleasures in Christ now or forever.

If the dead are not raised, Christ is not raised. And if Christ is not raised, we lose everything and should be pitied.

Application: Let the Truth of Christ Determine Your Hope (v.20)

Verse 20 is a transition verse, but let's just read the first half together now:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.

So, let's turn all of these sad realities into hopeful realities because Jesus has been raised and he is alive and we will be alive with him! Let's let the truth of Christ determine our hope. So, what does his resurrection mean for us today:

It means the preaching of the gospel is not in vain. And even though it seems foolish to the world, to those who are being saved, it is the power of God. So hear the gospel over and over and believe it deeper and deeper.

It means we are not representing God falsely, but we are ambassadors for Christ, bringing the only message with hope for eternity free of sin and enjoying the glory of God. So, say the message over and over again and pray that God would set people free with resurrection power!

It means our faith is not in vain, but that our faith unites us to the death and resurrection of Christ. So, keep believing and trust that God will continue to help you hold fast, and let your heart rest in the gospel.

It means we are not still in our sins, but that Jesus is who he said he was, and he has died as the once-for-all sacrifice. So, when Satan tempts you to despair and tells you of the guilt within, upward look and see Jesus there, who made an end to all your sin! And then get up again, reminded of your forgiveness, and fight your sin with resurrection power that lives inside of you by the Spirit.

It means that just as Jesus conquered death because he conquered sin, so all who die in Christ will conquer death with him because they have conquered sin with him. So, when suffering comes and whispers the reminder of the brokenness of this life and the nearness of death to you, shout back that you will rise with Jesus. When hard circumstances come and threaten you with the fear that your life is short and you're missing out, shout back that there's an eternity of joy coming for you. When disease and sickness comes and threatens all you hold dear in this life, shout back that you don't only have this life, you have eternity, and you will rise again with Jesus.

And it means we are not a people to be pitied. Oh no, we are not to be pitied.

You see, if we were giving up all the pleasures of this life with nothing else coming we could be pitied. But, we are not that brand of Christians. We are the brand of Christians may look crazy to the world, because we will go and sell all we have, but we sell it all because we know there is a treasure hidden in a field that has value beyond comparison. We know the gospel is real. We know Jesus has died for our sins and risen again, and we know that have died to sin and will live with him. We know that we will be with him forever because he lives and we will be with forever where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. He has paid the price. He is alive. And he has won our hearts to cause us to leave all else and follow him. And it's not crazy to give up false, momentary pleasures now for full, forever pleasures now and forever.

Because Jesus is alive and we will live with him forever, we no longer live to squeeze as much sinful pleasure out of this life as possible.

Let me read you a quote from Jim Elliot, the missionary who died at the hand of a tribe he had gone to share the gospel with in Ecuador in 1956:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

In other words, if we give up everything in this life for the sake of Christ, all of the sinful pleasures, all of the money, all of the comforts, all of the fame, all of the prestige, and all of the popularity, and instead we are poor, afflicted, unpopular, and persecuted because we follow Jesus, WE ARE NOT TO BE PITIED.

We will rise again because Jesus has been raised. We will live again because Jesus is alive. We will be with him. Forever. We cannot lose that promised joy. And we cannot keep anything on this earth.

Therefore, because Jesus is alive Christians are not a people to be pitied. There is eternal joy waiting for them with their risen King that makes the things we must give up on the way like a drop in the bucket compared to tidal waves of glory.