

Rev. Seth D. Bode ‡ Sermon 133, 04-11-2021 ‡ Easter 2

"Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

1 CORINTHIANS 15

¹²But 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? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵More 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. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.



Let me tell you about a religion that stinks.

It was a broken appliance—the kind that flushes. I fixed it right away. I was pretty proud of myself, because if you know my level of handiwork, you know this isn't typical. I bought a new handle, bent the new metal rod just right, connected the chain, and it worked. I could have said I fixed it. We could have used the other two appliances in the house just like it & said it was fixed. But in the end, we would have forgotten that appliance was broken, and that would stink.

Imagine saying something was true, pretending it was true, but in the end it was the opposite of the truth. Imagine saying Easter happened, preaching that now those who believe in the Easter message will live again like Jesus, but actually just pretending.

That's a religion that just made Jesus into a broken appliance. That's a religion that stinks.

Read our text carefully & know that there's noooo way around the Easter link between the resurrection and truth. Here Paul acts as if the entire gospel is nothing other than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He insists on it. Jesus' Easter becomes our Easter, because **as alive as we believe He is, that's how alive we will be. As raised as we believe He is, that's how raised we will be**; in other words,

His Easter Has Become Our Easter

These Corinthian people were Paul's dear students, who heard the gospel and believed in it. But then they fell into a catalogue of errors. Some of them were saying that there is no resurrection from the dead. Whether they realized it or not, that means they were saying that Jesus is dead. Why would they say so?

First, this would be the typical pagan Greek attitude toward the doctrine of the resurrection. **Second, the empirical data for the resurrection isn't obvious ... right now.** If you want to measure death right now, you look at what happens to human bodies: One is burned, another is worm food. One leaves an arm behind, another leaves a bone. One is covered with dirt, another is scattered at sea. Then ideas come along like there is no resurrection. There's nothing to it; it's empty, since it doesn't fit what we perceive with our senses.

So Paul launched into this argument that we wouldn't expect. He seems to make a case against the resurrection. He toys with the idea that maybe Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead.

As it turns out, **to deny that doctrine would mean to deny other doctrines**, for Scripture is a web of truth. So Paul comes up with some conclusions if it were true that Jesus Christ didn't rise from the dead:

1. No one else would get a resurrection from the dead
2. Our preaching is empty and useless
3. Your faith is empty/ futile
4. We would be false witnesses (liars and deceivers)
5. You are still in your sins
6. Those who fell asleep already are lost

7. We Christians are the most pitiful people on the face of the earth

Why so pitiful? To have been Christian and not believe in the resurrection is to have come so close. You lived for others, you made commitments, you took up your cross daily, you faced the worst suffering, but ... any real hope ended with death.

Notice the word “useless” in our text. It is literally the Greek word for “empty.” Usually when we say “empty” this time of year, we are talking about the tomb. Either the tomb was really empty, or our preaching is empty. Both cannot be empty. So there is some reason going for us here; there is a connection between Christ’s Easter and our future Easters. Our eternal life is plugged into the tomb. Either it is really empty, or our faith is empty. This Easter can be incredibly bad if we pretend to say Jesus is risen, as if it’s a nice story.

That's what makes this link so dangerous; if the resurrection of Jesus is a figurative concept, there is no guarantee for those who trust in Him. One of my funerals (not anyone here) once included a committal at the graveside. I had offered promise after promise, “*I know that my Redeemer lives*”; “*I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies*”; “*now I know in part, then I shall know fully*.” Then the funeral director walked up to the coffin, where I had shared these promises, and said, “This concludes our service. I want you all to remember that the deceased will live on in your hearts as long as you cherish your memories.” Okay, I guess that’s true. Okay, I guess that’s a nice, polite thing to say. But it is so limited. And it is so empty compared to what Jesus had already said that day. It dulled my message. It opened the door for figurative language and metaphors. That should not have been the last word.

After laying out this whole case against the resurrection, Paul evaluated it and batted it down. “²⁰*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life, the source and cause of the believer’s resurrection.

Notice that it’s not a new suggestion that the resurrection didn’t really happen. (No error really is new.) You notice that the earliest of Christian preachers wouldn’t be caught off guard and surprised by disbelief and doubt in the resurrection. They understood it was a big claim. They knew what it meant if they were wrong. They weren’t unsophisticated or easily duped.

But from the very beginning, Paul and all the apostles proclaimed a literal, bodily resurrection from the dead. Your Easter should not be different than Jesus' Easter. I guarantee you—He guarantees you—they're linked. ***As raised as you believe He is, that's how raised you will be.*** This is incredibly good when we believe that Jesus is risen—He is risen indeed—and we mean really, really alive after being dead.

That's what makes this link so blessed, so meaningful, so wonderful! If Christ has been raised, then *of course* we have been justified, we worship a living Savior, and he is able to keep his promise to redeem us from sin and raised us up. His resurrection even proves our sins are forgiven. When He came back to life, He proved that what he did was successful. He paid for the sins of the world. And if He paid for the sins of the world, He paid for your sins. His coming back to life proved that you are reconciled to God, that God is once more at peace with you, and that you are at peace with God. Jesus has proved to us that what He did was enough for us. He has proved it to the Father. People can believe left and right with this kind of proof.

Are you feeling weak in faith in the real resurrection? **God wants you to have the faith that everything has been done.** Your faith is in an accomplished fact, not just a leap or a guess. Go to his Word, "*It is finished*"; "*He is risen*"; "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ*." The Old Testament holds resurrection promises that Jesus guaranteed, "*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death*" (Hosea 13:14). Through death from the power of death, God ransomed people—and not the pious only, but the rebellious also, the sinners. His ransom and resurrection are not for the strong of faith, or the people who never seem to fail at anything; but for the weak of heart, the incompetent, and the hurting.

Maybe none of what I told you is new to you. If it is not, I am thrilled. That means you were a Christian this whole time. But **I never want anyone to be able to say you never heard the simple greatest and most essential truth.** And I never want anyone to be able to empty its meaning from you.

May you forever hold this and keep this. **His Easter Has Become Our Easter;** in Jesus' name, Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.