

Wise Up – Triumphant Wisdom
1 Corinthians 15:1-23
April 16, 2017
Easter Sunday

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 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 Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. 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? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 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. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Unbelievers deny it, the intellectual elite and liberal thinkers call it foolishness, but the doctrine of the resurrection is the single most important fact in the world. The doctrine of the resurrection is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions and belief systems. The bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. Everything we believe, teach, and confess stands or falls on the validity of the resurrection.

If Jesus didn't rise, then we are no better off than anyone else in the world. If Jesus didn't rise, then the Bible is a lie and we have no real hope. If Jesus didn't rise, then we have no Gospel and we have no Savior to preach about. If Jesus didn't rise, then we Christians are the most foolish of all people.

If Jesus didn't rise, then Jesus himself is a liar. Five times Jesus foretold his resurrection. Destroy the resurrection and Jesus is reduced to an ordinary con man trying to fool the people. Destroy the resurrection and Jesus is not God. Destroy the resurrection and we are not justified before God.

Is it any wonder why the devil hates the doctrine of the resurrection? If he can convince people Jesus didn't rise from the dead, there's nothing of value to believe. Maybe that's why the devil put it into the minds of some people to doubt the resurrection even before it happened. *Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to [Jesus] with a question* (Mk 12:18 NIV).

This Easter Sunday, we are going to take a close look at the doctrine of the resurrection. We will examine the prophecies about the resurrection, the proofs of the resurrection, and the purpose of the resurrection.

Jesus' resurrection didn't happen in a vacuum. David foretold it in Psalm 16: *You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay* (Ps 16:10 NIV). Jesus also spoke about it. Matthew writes: *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days"* (Jn 2:19 NIV). Mark tells us: *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again* (Mk 8:31 NIV).

There are also figurative prophecies about the resurrection. Chapter 22 of Genesis tells the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. Just before Abraham completed the sacrifice of Isaac, God intervened and saved Isaac's life. God also provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac, thereby pointing to the punishment of Jesus as the substitution of for our sins.

Jesus also spoke figuratively about his rising from the dead. *"A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Mt 12:39-40 NIV).

At this point, a perfectly logical question might be asked. How do we know that Jesus actually rose from the dead? Is there any proof of such a resurrection? The answer is yes. There are several proofs of the resurrection.

The proof of human reasoning. After Jesus was placed in the tomb, Pilate had the tomb sealed and posted a guard to be sure no one would come and steal Jesus' body and claim the resurrection had taken place. When Jesus' body came up missing, who took it? The Romans didn't. The Pharisees and Sadducees didn't. The disciples were scared to death and hiding for their lives, so they didn't do it. The author of the book of Hebrews gives the only possible answer. *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus...* (Heb 13:20 NIV).

The proof of human testimony. There are more eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus than to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. There are more eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus than to evolution. In fact, there are no eyewitnesses to evolution. Yet, in today's text we hear: *After that, [Jesus] appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep* (1 Co 15:6 NIV).

The proof of human nature. It is unthinkable that people would willingly die, sometimes horrible and cruel deaths, over something they don't believe to be true. However, according to Scripture and tradition, all of the disciples, except John, were martyred because of their relentless faith. They died because they had complete faith that Jesus lives.

The proof of common experience. The disciples were grief-stricken after Jesus' crucifixion. They were crushed. Their hopes and dreams were shattered. But those disheartened disciples of Good Friday were joyful and filled with power on Easter Sunday. The only thing to explain such unusual behavior is the fact that they saw Jesus alive and well.

The proof of changed lives. The disciples, who were hiding in fear, on Friday were transformed into fearless evangelists on Sunday. These common men preached and witnessed in the boldest of manners. The sight of their risen Lord changed them forever. There are people in this room, who can tell you about the life-saving power of meeting a risen Savior.

The proof of time. Time has a way of erasing memories. Things that stand the test of time are things of more than ordinary importance. Dr. Harry Rimmer was a renowned creationist and evangelist. Once during a post-lecture question and answer time, a young Jewish man asked, "What did Jesus Christ do that no one else ever did?"

Dr. Rimmer answered, "Sir, you are a Jew. Would you agree with me that the Romans crucified nearly 30,000 young Jewish men?" The young man agreed and Dr. Rimmer continued, "I will name one of those who were crucified and you name another. I name Jesus Christ." The young man replied, "I cannot name another."

Only one of the over 30,000 Jewish men, who were crucified by the Romans, is remembered today. That one is Jesus Christ. The name of Jesus is known the world over some two thousand years later, not because he died, but because he lives.

Furthermore, it's not natural to hate a dead man. When someone dies, hatred is soon forgotten. So why does Satan hate Jesus? Why does the unbelieving world hate Jesus? Why are there groups like the ACLU that work feverishly to erase the name of Jesus? Jesus is hated because Jesus lives.

The proof of the human senses. *Luke 24:39-43: "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

This passage speaks for itself. Ghosts don't have physical bodies that can be seen and touched. In fact, ghosts don't exist. Dead people don't talk. And dead people sure don't eat and drink. The very human senses of sight, hearing, and touch say Jesus rose.

We've looked at some prophecies and proofs of the resurrection, so what is the purpose of the resurrection? The doctrine of the resurrection performs four valuable functions.

It activates the Gospel. *1 Corinthians 15:14: If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.* A dead Savior saves no one. If Jesus just lived and died, there would be no Good News for us to proclaim. But we have Good News. We not only preach Christ crucified, we also preach Christ risen. The whole Gospel isn't preached until we tell the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord.

It authenticates our faith. *1 Corinthians 15:17: If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.* But Christ has been raised. We have all of the proof we need to know for certain that the resurrection of Jesus is fact not just urban legend. The fact of the resurrection fuels our faith and allows us to live with hope, peace, power, and confidence.

It enables our justification. *Romans 4:25: [Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* Because Jesus lives, we know that God has accepted his death as payment for our sins. Therefore, God now sees us, not as the sinners we truly are, but as the spotless saints that make up his eternal kingdom.

It anticipates our future. *1 Corinthians 15:22-23: For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.* Jesus is our guarantee. Because Jesus lives we shall live. Because death was not the end for Jesus, death will not be the end for us. Because death is not the end, there will someday be a joyous reunion of all the faithful. *1 Thessalonians 4:14: 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.*

The message of Easter is beautifully summed up in the chorus of the song *Because He Lives*:

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow
Because he lives, all fear is gone
Because I know he holds the future
Life is worth the living, just because he lives.