

If Christ Did Not Rise

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is, that was a good one. Good work. My name is Eric. I'm one of the guys on staff here at Watermark Church, and it's great to be with you this morning. We, back in the fall, we're going through the book of 1 Corinthians, and we saw that the church Paul was writing to, the church in Corinth, was a messed up church. They had issues with divisions within the church.

They had issues with misunderstanding what wisdom is and misapplying wisdom because of that. They had a guy who was sleeping with his stepmom. They had issues with spiritual gifts. They had, basically, you name the issue that could exist in a church, and they had it. They were an absolute mess. And as we get further into the book, Paul comes closer and closer to the heart of the issue, and he builds on it. And what we see in chapter 15, which we're looking at today and over the next couple weeks, is that there is one issue that's sort of overarching all the other issues in this church at Corinth, and that's causing lots of other problems. And that problem is this. The church in Corinth had many people in it who were denying the fact that the dead are raised. And Paul writes to them, and he wants to remind them of a couple things. First, Christ has been raised. Second, we will one day be raised. And third, what we believe about our future shapes our present. Christ has been raised.

We will be raised. And what we believe about our future shapes our present. So he jumps in, and he starts to argue against this group within the church that's saying there is no resurrection of the dead. And I think this is an easy thing to believe. We live in a world where we see people die every day. And I don't know about you, but I don't really hear about people coming back from the dead that often. If I do hear about it, I'm sort of naturally skeptical of it and wonder what someone's trying to sell me. We live in a world where natural observation tells us people don't come back from the dead. And so it's understandable that the people within this church in Corinth would believe there is no resurrection of the dead. On top of that, Corinth was in Greece. I don't know how many of you studied philosophy in school. But the Greeks had this belief that the physical world is bad.

The physical world is polluted and gross, and the truly good is the spiritual world. And so we have basically good spirits living inside of bad bodies. And when we die, the Greeks believe the spirit lives on, and it's free from this corruption of the physical world.

And it's good that it's free of the body. And in the Greek context, living in that Greek philosophical mindset, it would be totally undesirable for there to be any type of resurrection where the body came back to life, because the body is dirty, the body is bad, the body is polluted. And you want the good spirit to be free of that bad, polluted, gross body. And so the belief within the church in Corinth that there is no resurrection of the dead is understandable, both from the human standpoint of observation of what we see every day, and from the philosophical standpoint of the world that they lived in. But Paul steps in to this conversation, and he says, you are wrong. He says, Christianity Christianity is a religion founded on the belief that Jesus himself rose from the dead, and that is a historical fact. As we saw earlier in the chapter, he talks about eyewitnesses who saw

[4 : 07] Jesus after he had risen from the dead. He believes that the resurrection of Jesus was a historical fact, and he says that if this historical fact of the resurrection never happened, then the entire Christian gospel falls apart. And he spells out one after another the implications of it if Jesus has not raised from the dead. He says, your faith is in vain if Christ is not raised from the dead. You believing in Jesus is a waste if Jesus hasn't risen from the dead. He says that when we share the gospel, if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, we are lying about God. If Jesus has not been raised, there is no forgiveness of sins. We are still guilty before God. And if Jesus has not been raised, then those Christians who have died have perished and have no hope. He says the resurrection of Jesus, him coming back to physical life after dying, is the number one primary central truth that has to be true for anything else in Christianity to be true or make sense. And he builds up his argument till he gets to verse 19 where he says, if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. Now this may seem like a weird thing for a Bible writer to say. You think like you're writing the Bible. Shouldn't you at least say, you know, like, even if it's not true, stay in church because it's good for you.

But no, he says, if this is not true and we spend our lives believing and following it, we deserve to be pitied. We deserve to have the world look at us and think, I am so sorry for them. They wasted it.

They wasted their life. And it may seem like a weird thing, like I said, for a Bible writer to say this, but picture this with me.

Have most of you seen the new Star Wars movie? Yes? I think I see lots of nods. A couple no's. It's okay. You don't have to have seen it to understand this. But there's one scene in the movie, don't worry, no major spoiler alerts coming up. There's one scene where this guy Finn crashes in the desert in a TIE fighter. It's a plane. And he crashes in the desert and he's in the desert and he's hot and he doesn't see any signs of life around him. And he starts looking for life, for civilization. And he walks through the desert and he's hot and he's thirsty and he's sweaty and he's gross. And finally he comes to the top of a hill and he looks down over the edge and he sees a city in front of him. And he goes down to the city and when he gets into the city, the first thing he does is he runs up to everyone. He's like, water! Do you have water for me? And everyone blows him off.

They're like, no, get away. And he's standing there in the city like, I don't know what to do. And he hears the noise of splashing water. He turns around and looks and there's this huge alien creature drinking water out of this filthy trough. But it's his only chance at water. And he runs over and he falls down on his knees and he starts, he takes one glance because the water is gross and filthy. He thinks for a second, do I want to do this? And then he decides, yeah, it's my only chance at water. And he scoops up the water and starts drinking it. Now imagine with me for a second, then as he gets down on his knees, he's thinking for just a second, do I really want to do this?

[7 : 57] And he looks up and out in the edge of the desert, he sees this beautiful, clean, cool stream with fresh flowing water in it. He thinks, yes, I don't want to drink this filthy animal water.

I want that. I want that. Clean stream water. And he pulls up whatever energy he has left and he forces himself to go through the effort of going out into the desert to this nice, clean oasis stream.

And he pulls up this effort and he goes out to the desert and he gets there and he realizes it was a mirage. Now, Finn has lost out twice and deserves to be pitied because not only did he miss the miss out on the greater hope of having clean, fresh, flowing water. But also his hope for that clean, fresh, flowing water led him to miss out on the only chance at water he had back in the trough.

And Paul is saying the Christian life is kind of like this. Christians have a hope, a hope of life after death, a hope of resurrection. And he says that Christians, if we are living properly, will miss out on certain worldly pleasures because of that hope for a life after death.

We'll pursue that greater hope at the expense of lesser pleasures. But if, when we get to the end of the road, it turns out that that greater hope was only a mirage, then we deserve to be pitied because we've missed out twice. Not only have we missed out on our greater hope, but we've also missed out on the only opportunity we had for any type of pleasure in this world. So if resurrection of Christ is not true, then Christians deserve to be pitied more than anyone else. Because Christianity, ultimately, it's not about just finding what works for me.

[9 : 58] If Christianity works for you, but it's not true, it doesn't work for you. He says if it's not true, it's not worth believing. There's a pastor in the States I love. He says, you know, if church is just a hobby for you and not something you believe is true, go buy a boat.

Because that's a better hobby. You'll have more fun. But Christianity is not about finding something that works for us. It's about finding something that is historically, objectively true and clinging onto that for our hope. And that's what Paul is getting at here. But he says, Christianity is true. And so Christians do not deserve the world's pity.

If you look at verse 20, he says, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. Not a myth, not a legend, a fact. And he, as I said earlier in the chapter, talks about eyewitnesses who saw the risen Jesus in their world, that were alive as he wrote this, that could be cross-referenced to see, is this true? Did he really come back? And Chris talked last week a little bit about the arguments for why we can believe the resurrection is true. And we don't have time to get into those today. But if you want to know more about them, I'd love to talk to you more after service. But there are many, many good historical reasons to believe the fact that Jesus physically rose from the dead.

Christ has been raised. And that means people who believe in the resurrection do not believe, do not deserve the world's pity. It means that if you believe in Jesus and the resurrection, your faith is not in vain. It means you have forgiveness of your sins. It means that those who have died in Christ have not perished because Christ has been raised in a historical, factual event.

And not only has Christ been raised, but we too will one day be raised. It says in verse 20, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Now, first fruits, not a word we use today, but it's an ancient agricultural term. And it referred to, when you went out to harvest your field, the first part that ripened, you'd pick that, and that was your first fruits. And the ancient Israelites had to offer their first fruits to God as a sacrifice. But even more than that, the first fruits was an indicator of how the rest of the harvest would be. If the first fruits of your apple tree were nice, fresh, big, juicy, green apples, then you could be pretty sure the rest of the apples to grow this year would be nice, big, green, fresh, juicy.

[13 : 05] If the first fruits of your apple tree were little, thin, dried out, rotten apples, then I hope you have some money in savings so you can get through till next year and hope for a better harvest then.

The first fruits were indicative of the entire harvest. They were a predictor of what the rest of the harvest would be like. And it says that Christ's resurrection is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

What that means is that Christ's resurrection is an indicator of our future resurrection. That our resurrection someday will be like his was. And so what was his resurrection like? First of all, it was a real historical event. It wasn't just a figment of people's imagination. It wasn't just something that people made up and turned into a myth. No. For Paul, he believed, and the eyewitnesses who saw it believed, that it was a real, literal, historical event. And what does that mean about our resurrection? That it will be a real historical event. But even more than that, it was a physical resurrection. You know, in some circles of Christianity out there over the past couple hundred years, there's been this idea that Jesus didn't actually come back from the dead. That the resurrection was more a figment of his followers' imagination. That a few days after he died, they started to have this feeling that Jesus' presence was with them. That even though he was still dead, they could feel his presence with them. And they called that the resurrection. There's a problem with this theory.

In the ancient world, they had a word for this type of experience. If someone had died and you felt like their presence was with you, you know what you said about the person who had died? You said they were still dead because they were still buried in the ground and they were not with you. You had this feeling like they were feeling like they were with you because they were dead. If Jesus' disciples and his followers had had this feeling that we think and we feel like Jesus is with us while his body was still buried in the ground, they would not have called that a resurrection. They knew as well as we do, people do not come back from the dead. It took something big, something physical for them to see and touch and question to believe that he had actually come back from the dead because that thing just doesn't happen. And yet they believed because something physical and literal and real had happened in the world. Jesus physically came back to life. Jesus physically rose from the dead. You know, in the words of one of,

I think, the most brilliant theologians alive today, he said, a resurrection without a body is no resurrection at all. And if Jesus' resurrection was anything less than a physical event, then Jesus is nothing more than a dead savior. And a dead savior is nothing more than a dead savior at all.

[16 : 43] If Jesus' resurrection was anything less than a physical event, a physical, historical, true event, then Jesus is nothing more than a dead savior. And a dead savior is no savior at all.

But if Jesus' resurrection was a real, literal, physical, historical event, and he is the first fruits of our resurrection, what that means is that one day we will be literally, physically raised in an actual historical event called the resurrection. And I'm going to pause here for a second because I'm guessing there are some people here who are like, whoa, what is this? Because we live in a Christian culture that for years has, I think, oversimplified and dumbed down the Christian hope. And we've said, we go to heaven when we die. And a lot of us have this picture, sort of like the Greek philosophy, that our body gets buried in the ground and our spirit goes to be with God, and that's that. And I think realistically what's happened is the powers that be in the church worldwide have been scared of the physical world.

And they've seen there's evil and there's corruption happening here, just like the ancient Greeks saw. And they know that the spiritual world is where we know God. And so people like pastors within the church have gotten scared of this idea of the physical resurrection and found more comfortable the idea that our spirit just goes to be with God.

And we've stopped teaching the fact that the Christian hope is not just some spiritual existence in the next world, but actually a physical new resurrected body where we will live lives as they were meant to be lived with God on the new earth forever. That is what the Bible shows us as the great Christian hope, that God will not abandon this world, but that he will come and he will make all things new.

You know, in verse 25, it says that he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

[19 : 19] And in verse 26, it says that the last enemy to be destroyed is death. The Bible tells us in this passage that God will defeat every single one of his enemies.

And it is very clear, death is one of his enemies. Death is an enemy that will be defeated by God.

If he just stepped back and said, I'm going to fix some stuff, but the physical world, it's too messed up. I'm going to leave that one to just go to pieces.

After he made it good in the beginning, then what he's doing in that process is admitting defeat. Because God made the physical world, God made the physical world good.

And God is going to renew the physical world, not abandon it. And in order to have victory over death and over every single one of his enemies, God needs to bring back everyone who has died throughout history.

[20 : 33] Because you haven't defeated death if everyone that it ever killed is still dead. But the Bible is clear. God will be victorious over everything.

And that is the great hope of the Christian faith. That the world as it was originally meant to be will be again.

That those who have hoped in Christ in this life and turned to him for forgiveness for our rebellion against God will be able to live with him forever.

forever, in new bodies, in the new earth. Living life, not as it is in this world, broken and falling apart. But as it was meant to be in the beginning, good and perfect and whole.

And yet it also says that he will reign until he has put every enemy under his feet. Which means that if we're here today, and we haven't trusted in him, and we have set ourselves up as his enemies, rather than turning to him for forgiveness, that we will be part of that group that is conquered.

[21 : 54] We will not be the ones who rejoice and live with him forever, but we will be the ones who are conquered and destroyed. But today God offers us forgiveness.

He offers us a chance to be part of his people. To receive this hope that he has offered to everyone through Jesus' death and resurrection.

And so Christ is risen. In a historical, physical action.

It has happened. And that ensures that we will rise again. Because God will be victorious. And Christ's resurrection shows us what our resurrection will be like.

But then thirdly, what we believe about our future shapes our present. Paul says in verse 32, there's really only two ways to live.

[22 : 55] One way, he describes as, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Basically, in our world today, we call that YOLO.

Last week's word, we had FOMO, fear of missing out. This week we have YOLO, you only live once. And the world pushes this message on us so much today. Disney says, follow your heart.

Let your dreams guide you. Ashley Madison says, life is short, have an affair. The world says, this life is your only chance. Make the most of it.

Have as much fun as you can. And YOLO has become this generation's cry of basically hedonism. People will go out and go to the restaurant and order these meals that are going to give them a heart attack halfway through.

And then grab their phone and post on Instagram, eating out with the bros, YOLO. Girls and sometimes even more disturbing guys will go online and post photos of themselves in super skimpy outfits.

[24 : 04] Because, got to let everyone see this body because you only live once and I'm not getting it back. Just got back from the gym, YOLO. Or they'll go out to the bar and they'll get a line of shots.

Long week at the office, YOLO. And YOLO, you only live once, has basically become this, the world today's cry of, I really know that I shouldn't be doing this right now.

But I think it'll be fun. And since I won't have another chance, let's do it anyway. And Paul is saying, if Christ did not raise from the dead and if we will not one day rise from the dead, that is exactly the right way to live.

If Christ has not been raised, YOLO. If we will not be raised, YOLO. But, if Christ has been raised, and if we will be raised like he has, there's a very different way that we are supposed to live.

The way of submitting to God and living life under his authority. Basically, Paul is saying, you know, if you think back to the Star Wars story, if there's no stream out in the desert and all you have to drink from is muddy animal filth water, drink as much of that filth as you can, because it's not going to last forever and may as well enjoy it while you can.

[25 : 38] But if there is a stream of clean water, then you are a fool to drink the filth instead. And he says, Christ has been raised.

The stream in the desert is not a mirage. It is reality. And this is weird to the world around us. This makes people around us who don't believe in the resurrection think maybe that we're wasting our lives.

I remember back when I first decided to go study the Bible at university. I had a well-meaning non-Christian family member come up to me and say, you know, Eric, I think that you're wasting your life by studying the Bible.

She said, I think that you would make such a great doctor. And you're just throwing all that talent away to go study the Bible. And you know, if the resurrection is not true, she's absolutely right.

I could be making so much more money as a doctor. It is not funny. And I could be living in a nicer place and taking better apartments and, you know, helping people in a way that actually matters.

[26 : 51] But if the resurrection is true, then I have not wasted my life by deciding not to become a doctor. And I'm not saying anything bad about doctors here. I think the world needs lots and lots of great Christian doctors.

But if the resurrection is true, we also need people who can teach about Jesus because we have a lost and dying world around us that needs to hear the truth that there is another life, that you don't only live once.

No, you only live twice. And so I want us to think about two ways that this can practically impact our lives this week.

Because I know that the idea of living for eternity is sort of abstract. But I want to talk about two, a little bit more tangible ways that we can do that this week in the time that we have left.

And the first is living with radical bravery. The world around us expects us to live for today just like they do.

[28 : 03] The world around us expects us to follow our heart, to go live that YOLO lifestyle. And if we are living for eternity, then we are going to have to take a stand against that mindset.

And for some of us, it will cost us. Maybe it will cost us friendships. Maybe it will cost us jobs because we won't pad the numbers on the spreadsheet to make it look like our company is doing better for the investors than we really are.

For Paul, who wrote this passage, it cost him his life. But if we are living with a knowledge that eternity is ours, that we are servants of King Jesus, who will raise us from the dead to live with him forever, then that should free us from the fear of what others think about us and enable us to live with radical bravery in our world today.

I don't know if we have any Chronicles of Narnia fans in here. Anyone? Like two? Okay. Three? Well, in the Chronicles of Narnia, there's this character.

I love him in the books. In the movies, he's super annoying. But his name is Reepicheep. And he's this two-foot-tall mouse, a talking mouse. He is incredibly brave.

[29 : 31] And in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, one of the Narnia stories, he goes on this voyage to the edge of the earth with Prince Caspian and his crew, seeking out Aslan's land.

Aslan is like the Jesus figure in the Chronicles of Narnia. Reepicheep is incredibly brave, despite his size. Because he has received a promise when he was young that he would one day see Aslan's country.

And he fights through intense battles that people three times his size would run away from because he holds fast to this promise that one day he will see Aslan's country.

Here's a summary of him that I found online this week. It says, Reepicheep was exceedingly brave, a trait apparently shared by all Narnian mice. He was loyal to the death, willing to fight and die for his king and lord.

Reepicheep was fierce in battle, always eager to fight for Narnia's cause. And listen to this, he did not fear death because he knew that when he died, he would go to Aslan's country, which was his one dream.

[30 : 39] He did not fear death because he knew that his eternity was secure. And if we are people who have believed in Jesus' resurrection and believe that he will one day raise us from the dead, we should be people who live with incredible bravery knowing that our eternity is secure and so we don't have to fear the people or powers around us on this earth who tell us to live otherwise.

And the second way this week that our lives can be different because of the resurrection is living with radical sacrifice. You know, if it's true that we only live once, then we should stockpile everything we have and hoard it so that we can maximize our pleasure in this life.

We should live in the place that's most fun and convenient for us and take advantage of every opportunity to live life to the fullest that we can. But if it's true that we're going to live again, if it's true that we are people created not just for this one life on earth, but for eternity, then we should be living as much as possible for eternity.

Sacrificing pleasures today for the sake of eternity. And so this means that we should be radically sacrificial with our money, giving it to causes that will further God's kingdom in eternity.

Showing the world around us that we have a hope that's greater than anything this world can offer. If you want to be radically sacrificial with your money and don't know where to start, I'd recommend Watermark, but you know.

[32 : 22] But seriously, I think that we're doing a lot of great things to try and reach the world around us with this good news of Jesus' love. And it's something that we can't do without generosity from the congregation.

But not just with our money, but also with our lives, we should be radically sacrificial, living a lifestyle that shows the world around us that we have a different hope than they do.

There was a man in the States in the early 1800s named Adoniram Judson. He was the first foreign missionary sent out from the USA. And he felt God calling him to go to India.

And there was a girl that he was in love with. And he knew that if he married this girl, her life would be difficult. So he wrote a letter to her father to ask his permission for her hand in marriage.

And this is what the letter said. I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring to see her no more in this world. If you're a parent, think about that.

[33 : 27] Sending your daughter away never to see her again. Whether you consent to her departure to a heathen land and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life, because they didn't have air conditioning back then when you were a missionary.

Or lots of other modern conveniences. Whether you consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India, to every kind of want and distress, to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death.

Just what every parent wants for their daughter, right? Can you consent to all of this for the sake of him who left his heavenly home and died for her and for you, for the sake of perishing immortal souls, for the sake of Zion and the glory of God?

And now listen to this. Can you consent to all this in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory?

A crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Savior from the heathen saved through her means from eternal woe and despair.

[34 : 45] Can you send your daughter away never to see her again because you know that eternity is secure? His father decided to let his daughter make the decision.

She said yes. And in early 1812, Adoniram and Anne sent out for India. Fourteen years later, Anne would die never having seen her family again after suffering through 21 months of sickness.

If the resurrection is not true, she wasted her life. Her father was a fool for sending her off and Adoniram was a cruel tyrant for bringing her into that situation.

But through the work of Adoniram and Anne, by the time Adoniram died, there were a hundred churches planted throughout the country of Burma.

They ended up moving on from India to Burma. There were a hundred churches planted in that country and over 8,000 Christians in the country. If the resurrection is not true, they wasted their lives.

[35 : 54] But if it is, then there are 8,000 plus souls in heaven today because of their radical sacrifice. If the resurrection is true, we should be people who live radically sacrificial lives.

And I'm guessing for most of us, it won't mean moving to terrible, torturous situations. But the question is not how big of a sacrifice God calls you to make, but whether you're willing to make it when he calls you.

So Christ has been raised. We will one day be raised. That is the great hope of the Christian faith.

And what we believe about eternity shapes our present. How can you live with radical bravery this week?

How can you live in a way that is radically sacrificial this week? Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your love.

[37 : 00] We thank you for the fact that you will be victorious over all. You will not let sin or death conquer in the end, but that you will raise up your people to life and you will give them in eternity physically present with you.

We thank you that we can live with hope today. Your promise enables us to have bravery and to live sacrificially because we know that this world is not the end.

God, we love you. Help us to love you more. I want to close this prayer with a quote from the funerals they would pronounce in later Judaism.

It says, He will cause you to arise. Blessed be he who keeps his word and raises the dead. Amen. Amen.