

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

The "What if" of the Resurrection

There are some things in life if you don't get right everything else is affected. If you do an Algebra problem and you put a negative sign where the positive should be your going to get the whole problem wrong. Trust me; I have flunked several tests because of that mistake. If you take a highway that says east and you want to go west your not going to make it to your destination. I remember when Machele and I took a trip to California; without us being aware the highway changed from west to east. We pulled up to a country store to get directions to I-5 and there were a group of longhaired country boys drinking beer, sitting at a table at the front of the store. "Hey are we near the I-5 exit." They kind of chuckled a little and said, "You done took the wrong way; your headed to Wyoming." Nothing like being set back two hours. There was another time when Machele and I were in San Francisco celebrating our first anniversary when I decided to go for a walk in the morning. Not wanting to bother Machele who was power napping, I threw on a hat without turning on the light. Minutes later some dude started calling me "pretty boy." I ignored him and I became really irritated. I said, "What on earth about me would make that guy want to cat call me." Then I took off my hat and I realized I was wearing Machele's hat. On the front of it was a pink stripe and the words "Princes." Bottom line: There are things in life if you get wrong everything else is affected.

The problem at Corinth was that some in the church did not believe the dead could be raised. Apparently they believed that once a person dies his or her spirit leaves the body behind forever and goes to heaven. Now some of you don't like your bodies very much and that sounds like a good idea. The problem was that if the dead aren't raised then, then everything else is affected. I'm not talking something minimal; I mean everything about the faith is bankrupt. Here's how Paul puts it. .

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 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. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

That section can be summed up by the word "if." If the dead aren't raised then all these things will follow.

- a. Christ never rose from the tomb
- b. We are preaching heresy.
- c. Our faith is hollow and empty
- d. We have not been forgiven our sins
- e. Those loved ones we lost are gone forever
- f. People will feel sorry for us

Think about the "ifs" in your life.

1. If you don't go to this event you don't meet your spouse
2. If you would of gone to college you would of made more money now
3. If you only said "no" you wouldn't have had to struggle raising that kid at such an early age
4. If you didn't move away from the bad influences in your life, you would have been just like them

We live lives full of "ifs!" If I only did this! If I only said no! If I only said yes! If I only took a chance. Now some of these "ifs" are rocky but they turn out alright. The young mother regrets she has no husband but loves her daughter more than life. The person who didn't go to college struggled initially but now has a good job. Some "ifs" don't bury you in regret. But that is not the case when it comes to the dead not being raised. It changes everything! This "if" will not turn out to be okay.

If the dead are not raised. Then Christ was not raised. If that is the case, I made a mistake being a pastor. You made a mistake telling other people about Jesus. Christianity is not just meant to bring you peace and affirmation in this life; but eternity forever.

Last week Norma Colter had a massive heart attack. I went to visit her yesterday and she is not doing well and is struggling for her life. Her lungs are filled with fluid, her kidneys are failing, and her heart is so weak it cannot pump on its own. Let me tell you it is at a time like that where your faith is put to the test. You have to believe there is more than this life on this earth. You have to believe that if she doesn't make it God can raise the dead. If there is no resurrection of the dead then this is all there is for her. If there is no resurrection for the dead the doctors look at me praying for her and have pity for me. If there is no resurrection everything falls apart. But Paul confirms that is not the case.

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24

Paul emphatically says that Christ has been raised from the dead and that his physical resurrection is a pattern that has been set in motion for his followers. One reason why this is important is because it demonstrates the humanity of Christ. In other words, Christ was not just some spirit man that was unlike you and I. His humanity was just as real as ours. He experienced the same things in life that we go through. He had some good relationships but he also experienced some bad ones where he was rejected. He knew what it meant to love but he also felt the pain of losing a loved one in John the Baptist. He was tempted in every way we were. There was also a time when he was on the cross where he was angry with God. "Father why have You forsaken me!" When Jesus came to earth the Scriptures tell us he emptied himself. What that means is that he choose not to utilize his divinity on earth. He came to earth as a servant—not one who was to be served. He was human in every way. He was one of us. In fact, when it comes to humanity the two most influential men that shaped humanity was not Johan Guttenberg, it was not Isaac Newton, it was not Albert Einstein, it was not Stephen Hawking, it is not Bill Gates, it was not Mohamed, it was not Gandhi. The two most influential people were Adam and Jesus because they affected the quality of life. Through Adam came the sin nature. Since then, everyone has had to experience the consequences of sin, the biggest being death. However, through Jesus came life to all those that believe.

What that means is that mankind has two options when it comes to life. They can either be "In Adam" or "In Christ." Being in Adam leads to death and being in Christ leads to life.

Some of you may be thinking what about the other people who follow Mohammed, or Buddha, or Krishna? I would respond the same thing that happened to Mohammed, Buddha, and Krishna will happen to them. Eventually they will die. The only way one can live is to be *in Christ*. If you are not in Christ—by default you are *in Adam*. That is why the resurrection of the dead is so important. Christ was the first fruits of what is to come for those that believe in him. Some of you may wonder when the dead will be raised. Paul answers that question here.

Notice he talks about the order in verse 23. Christ was the first fruits. He was the example of how Christians will be physically raised from the dead. Then the Scripture says at his coming—a reference to his second coming—those that belong to Christ will be raised physically. Some of you may be wondering, "Okay what happens when I die?" You go to heaven immediately (Luke 23: 43; Philippians 1:23). However, you do not receive your resurrected body until after the second coming of Christ. At that time you will enter the new heaven with your new body. Imagine you having a body that is perfect by God's standards. Imagine having a body that is free of pain and aches. That is what will happen during the second coming of Christ. The amazing thing is that everyone will get their new body at the same time. Everyone will enter the new heaven for the first time together. The loved ones that are in heaven will experience the newness of heavenly bodies and the New Heaven together with you for the first time. I cannot help but stress this is a certainty. Okay, back to the Scriptures.

Then comes the end, when he (Christ) delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For “God has put all things in subjection under his (Christ) feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he (Christ) is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Okay there is a lot of talk here about subjection. Here are the cliff notes: In the end, everyone and everything will be in subjection to Christ. Satan—his buddies, the demons, false prophets, mankind that was antagonistic to God and His people, those that rejected Jesus, creation, diseases, and ultimately death itself. I remember being in an English literature class where we read a story about a person running away from death. Throughout the story it appears this person will get away; but then something happens and death catches him unexpectedly. I was not a believer then and the story had a real impact on me. The moral of course was that in the end death always wins. Death in a sense has always been the undisputed heavyweight champion. It has taken on all shapes and sizes and has proven victorious. Sure, someone might have a story of when someone cheated death. You hear stories of people who were revived it seems from death. But in the end, death always catches up to them. You can run but you can't hide.

Well the Scriptures reveal that death has already been defeated. The physical resurrection of Christ was when the knockout occurred. Just when death appeared to have notched another casualty Jesus is the one that does the surprising. In the end, death was in subjection to him. The Scriptures say here that everyone and everything is in subjection to Christ. He now wears the heavyweight belt. He is the champion. What that means is that if you believe with a heartfelt conviction that Jesus died for your sins and then was raised—you also will become victorious over death. In the end, your body will be raised from the dead. Let's continue reading.

29 Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

Okay there is a theological brainteaser. What in the world does Paul mean when he says some people are being baptized from the dead? Mormonism has created a whole doctrine out of this. They have baptisms for the dead in their temples. They believe these baptisms make it possible for those that rejected the teachings of Joseph Smith to come to saving faith in heaven. Here's the problem. This line of thinking totally contradicts the teaching of the Scriptures. In fact, Paul, who wrote this book has said many times in the Scriptures that a person comes to saving faith by believing in Christ (Romans 10:9; Galatians 3:24; Ephesians 2:9). In addition Hebrews 9:27 states “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment. What that is saying is that we only have one opportunity to get salvation right. We cannot bring other people salvation because we are baptized for them. The problem here is that this was obviously happening in the church at Corinth. Furthermore, Paul does not try to fight them. He just uses the situation as an example by saying of the dead aren't raised your practice is useless.

I'm not certain what was really going on because there just isn't enough information. Instead all we have is two questions from Paul. I personally think it is a bad idea to develop a cardinal doctrine like proxy baptism when there is no other mention of such a practice in the Bible. Not only that, but there is no mention of such a practice in the early church after the apostles died. I spent last night going through at least 15-20 interpretations and I just can't find one that satisfies me. I do think people at Corinth were being baptized for the dead. What that meant I am just not sure. It could have meant some believed that baptizing for the dead assured a dead person's salvation. It also could have meant that people were influenced by martyrs and were baptized on their behalf. It could have meant that there were some Christians who died before they were baptized and some were getting baptized on their behalf. The Corinthians had some weird ideas about baptism. If you recall in chapter 1 they were a factious bunch which leads Paul to say, “Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. In short, if you look at the Christianity displayed at the church of Corinth you would understand they were *not* the model for building a church. To build a doctrine around the practices of Corinth is unwise. Remember these guys were eating food sacrificed to idols and having fellowship in pagan cults. Instead you must piece together a

doctrine by using the whole Scripture. When you do that, it is clear one is saved according to their personal faith in Jesus in *this* lifetime. Back to the Scriptures. Paul is now going to defend the resurrection of the dead through his mission as an apostle.

30 Why are we in danger every hour? Answer: Because he believes the dead were raised. **31 I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!** **32 What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus if the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”** What is saying there is that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then we should all party as Prince would say, like its 1999! Forget Christian virtue. If there is no resurrection we have to make up for lost time. We need to start sleeping around, get drunk and eat bacon. We need to go to strip clubs and watch pornography. If there is no resurrection of the dead we need to suck every piece of nectar we can get out of this life because this is all there is. But then the Scriptures say....**33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals (Who you hang around with matters).” 34 Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.**

What he is saying is that if we know that the resurrection of the dead is true our lives should reflect that reality. The way we live our lives should be a testimony to the work of Jesus. I'll be the first to admit that it is easy to take for granted that through Christ we have conquered death. We live in a world where there are things we desire. We desire to be liked relationally. The reality of religion is that it can cause other people to stay away from us. We have this intrinsic desire to be liked. We also live in a world where we need to have money to survive. Consequently, we invest a lot of our time in work. No one else is going to pay the bills. We live in a world where we need to survive. Finally, we all have perceptions about what will make us truly happy. For some of us what makes us happy is sin. Sleeping around with people who are not our spouses. Going out and getting drunk. Bottom line is that we are all fragile people.

That is why it is important that we take time on a consistent basis to have some downtime where we train ourselves to focus on Jesus. We need this time so we can process our own lives. Many of us simply need time to repent and invest in relationships with people who love Jesus. That's what I had to do when I first became a Christian. I had to make some new friends. Let me tell you it wasn't easy. It is never easy to “break in” sort of speak. But if you don't find Christian friendships you are going to struggle because it is hard to appreciate Jesus without others to encourage you spiritually. The world we live in does not want you to think about Jesus. It wants you to think about yourself and how it—not Jesus—can fulfill your greatest need.

In the end, no matter what happens to you one thing will never change. Jesus died for your sins and he is the firstfruits of being raised from the dead. He lived his life with laser like focus. Why would he live a life of such sacrifice. Simply because he loved his Father and you mattered to Him. In his lifetime there was no two things more important. Think about that. It is a wonderful thing that someone took the time to care for you so much. So I just want to encourage you that in the midst of the busyness and the duties and struggles you have in life, take the time to remember what Jesus has done for you. He gave you eternal life. He is the first fruits of what will happen to you. Just as he conquered death so will you.