

Pray

Intro - Open to 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

Tax day doesn't mean as much since COVID does it? It seems that postponements mean that many don't even need to panic on April 15th. Yet, regardless of the delays, the tax man will call.

They used to say that the only two sure things in life were death and taxes. What would it take to add to that list? How much certainty is needed to add: resurrection?

The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to a church in Corinth full of problems and uncertainty about their resurrection. Paul wants us to know with certainty the truth about Christ, his resurrection and therefore the truth about us.

So let us look at three truths to reflect on this morning. Three truths that I hope you will see with certainty.

Truth One – Christ Was Risen

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

The whole of chapter 15 is about the resurrection. As I read and spoke of last Sunday, the verses 3-8 are Paul's description of the primary message of Christianity. Jesus' death, burial and resurrection of which there were many witnesses. Apostles all the way to 500 believers of which many were still alive. He challenges the Corinthians to go ask them! Is it true?

He states all of this because in verse 12, some Corinthians in the church were doubting the truthfulness of the resurrection. They did not believe that after a Christian died that they would be raised to life again by God. By extension, Paul argues that if there is no future resurrection then you are doubting Jesus' resurrection THAT we know as a historical fact.

This is where Paul brings us to in verse 20. In view of the evidence, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. This is not a religious or spiritual claim. It is a historical claim. It is a historical fact by which Paul says if its not true, he and all us Christians should be pitied if it is not real. We would have based our lives and our future hope on a lie.

So how can we know that Christ was truly raised from the dead? Well, first is to see the consistent eye witness testimony of the Bible. All four gospels, Paul's writings, and much of the New Testament which was written on the accounts of eyewitnesses affirming his physical resurrection from the dead. Even if you deny the divine origin and authority of the Bible but just treat them as historical texts. They have a remarkable, an uncanny historical reliability in documentary evidence compared to any ancient document. Five basic facts come out of what Gary Habermas developed as the "Minimal Facts" approach to prove the case for Jesus' resurrection.

First, Jesus died by crucifixion. The Bible, secular sources and the medical impossibility that Jesus made it off the cross alive make this very likely.

Second, the tomb was empty. My favorite reason we can affirm this is that women are the ones who find Jesus' empty tomb in all the biblical accounts. Yet women are not considered trustworthy witnesses in that age. So why would the biblical authors embarrass themselves with a made-up story of the empty tomb?

Third, the early Christian creed. This is our passage 1 Cor. 15:3-8, This creed is believed to have been written in the early 30s, just a few years after Jesus' death and resurrection make it the earliest historical record and does not leave any time for myth to develop. This coincides with the radical transformation of the disciples. They admitted in their testimony to doubting the resurrection and then being willing to die to claim that Jesus physically raised from the dead.

Fourth, The transformation of Paul. He was persecuting and killing Christians and then became the most prolific defender and famous missionary and martyr.

Fifth, the transformation of James. Jesus' brother did not believe him and was listed as one of Jesus' family who simply wanted Jesus to stop. Yet he becomes converted to believe in his brother and is a church leader in Jerusalem and is eventually martyred.

Paul writes convinced of the resurrection of Jesus. As objective fact he calls it the first fruits. The biblical concept that once the first fruit of the harvest has come, the rest will follow. Moses instructed the Israelites to offer their first grain that was harvested and then seven weeks later to offer another grain offering of the rest.

In Jeremiah 2:3, Israel was called the firstfruits and Paul used the phrase of the first converts of Asia Minor and Southern Greece in his closing of this letter to the Corinthians and his letter to the Romans. This theme runs through the Bible and affirms to us that what happens to Jesus will allow others to follow.

Who will follow? Those who have fallen asleep, those who have come into newness of life (Romans 6:4) representing the resurrection of all believers who fall asleep, or die in Christ. They are not dead, they are just temporarily dead. It's sting has been removed. The first truth. Christ is Risen, leads us back to the beginning of the Bible for Truth Two.

Truth Two – Those in Adam will die

Read 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

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.

If we were to break down these verses along the parallel lines of poetic construction, we would be able to see this not just as repetition but as two connected Truths. Paul emphasizes the representative nature of both Adam and Christ. Let's start with Adam who brought with him death.

Creation Fall

Adam brought death in his rebellion that we now, with a broken sin-nature, sin just like Adam. It is not just that we inherit Adam's guilt, but we inherit his nature which means we will be guilty of sin we will do.

They say a broken clock is right twice a day, well a broken sinner is never right before God. We became as Adam's children, children of wrath. Children who love our sin and without intervention will be objects of wrath. As God pours out his wrath on evil as a holy and just God does.

Paul said it this way in Romans 5:12

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned

One of the many disagreements that you may have with this line of thinking is that you have sought to maintain your innocence. To deny that you are a sinner by placing the blame on our world. The current idea today is that we are innocent and the world, the culture, the unjust systems have corrupted us. We don't have a sin nature, we are not sinners, we are victims of the world. The thinking goes: If I was left to myself, I would never have made the mistakes I made.

I understand that for you to accept that you are a sinner, you have to reject that line of thinking. The Bible confronts that thinking by showing you that your sin nature is rooted not the day you were born, or the day you met that friend or joined that community. It predates you by thousands of years going back to our common ancestor Adam. Your sin nature predated your existence. David in Psalm 51 says "in sin did my mother conceive me."

This is not saying that his mother corrupted him. David places the blame on the human nature that he inherited from his mother and from her parents all the way back to Adam. David accepted he was a sinner and cried out to God for a savior.

For in Adam came death and therefore all die. But for Truth Three: in Christ, all those who trust in him, will rise.

Truth Three – Those in Christ will rise

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I started earlier explaining Creation and Fall...

Redemption Restoration

Verse 23, right after this, says those who are in Christ and will be resurrected are "those who belong to him."

With Jesus' resurrection being true in history. With our descendant Adam we inherit and deserve death as an obvious truth of life. Death comes for all of us. Then those in Christ will rise as a fact because of Christ's promises and his resurrection that has come before.

The facts place you in Adam. Deserving and inevitably heading toward death. The facts also give you and me a way past death if... We are in Christ. Are you in Christ?

Conclusion

Romans 5:17

17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Friday night I warned you that every other religion and non-religion is about works. You earn your salvation. You earn your place in good society.

What I want to put before you this morning in the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness. Is the gracious gift of salvation if you trust in Christ alone, by grace alone. It is gracious because it is undeserved.

If you come before God this morning and confess your sinfulness that is precisely the basis upon which he offers his gift. Jesus says he came for the sick. Will you admit your sickness which we all share? Will you identify your need of grace in Adam and fall before Christ.

What will begin is the first fruits of your sanctification. He will begin a work in you to shape you into his image. He will begin to make you perfect so that at the day you are resurrected, when Christ's promise to raise you from the dead comes thru, you will be made fully perfect and glorified to dwell with God forever.

So reflect on your sin inherited from Adam, reflect on your sin you commit in your sin nature.

Then reflect on Christ's resurrection. Its truth. Its beauty. Reflect upon the resurrection we will have together with God forever perfected and freed from our place in Adam and found in our place in Christ.

Trust in him for your resurrection, secured in his resurrection at Easter.