

Why Does the Resurrection Matter?

Preached by: Matthew S. Black

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-20

Date: April 4, 2010

Series: Resurrection Sunday

Introduction: Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15. The title of our message is “Why Does the Resurrection Matter?”

- A. **Many people think it's important.** In the next 24 hours over a billion people will celebrate the Resurrection all around the world. Many who celebrate it don't understand it. A recent poll said that 78% of all people America believe that Jesus rose from the dead.¹ Yet most people have no clue what it's all about.
- B. **The Apostle Paul said there was nothing more important.** In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul said it was the most important thing to know in life. Look at **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**, “For I delivered unto you **first of all** that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that **he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:**” Paul says the thing that is “first of all”, literally “of first importance” in the Gospel, is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Friends, the resurrection is the most important event in human history!
- C. **The ancient Christians thought it was important.** It against the law to be a Christian, because Christians refused to worship Caesar. Yet Christians were willing to die, because there were over 500 eye witnesses of the resurrection travelling around the Roman Empire. **1 Corinthians 15:6**, “he was seen [after His resurrection] of above **five hundred brethren** at once; of whom **the greater part remain unto this present**, but some are fallen asleep [DEAD]”.

Why are we here today? How did a lot of very unknown poor people convince thousands and perhaps millions in the Roman empire that Jesus rose from the dead? They had seen Him.

- ❖ There were 500 of them all telling the same story.
- ❖ They were willing to die excruciating deaths. The resurrection of Christ was the single motivating factor for their willingness to die.
- ❖ Folks, no one dies while willingly believing a lie. 500 people do not risk their lives in unison. You'd have thought at least one of them would have cracked and said it was all made up. No it was true, and it radically changed the Roman Empire.
- ❖ Jesus appeared to these 500 people at once, and Paul says, go talk to these people. They're walking around the streets even as far as Corinth. Go interview them. They saw

¹ <http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/Easter-Poll-Majority-of-Cdns-Americans-Believe-in-the-Resurrection-589351.htm>

D. **It ought to be important to you personally.** Without the resurrection, we would not be talking about Christ today. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:19** – “if there’s no resurrection”, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” “The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. If the resurrection did not take place, then Christianity is a false religion. If it did take place, then Christ is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth.”² The resurrection matters because if it’s true, it will determine where you will spend eternity.

Why all the fuss? What’s all the commotion about? What does the resurrection really mean? If the resurrection took place, it confirms three things:

- ❖ Jesus can forgive my **past**.
- ❖ He can transform my **present**.
- ❖ He can secure my **future**.

Why does the resurrection matter? What difference does it make? We're talking something that effects your life right now! So what if Jesus is who He said He was? What does it mean to me in 2010 in northwest Chicago, Illinois, USA?

I. **First, if the resurrection took place, I can have my past sins forgiven.** How is that?

Look at **1 Corinthians 15:3-4**. It says Jesus died and rose again “according to the Scriptures”. From the time the first person sinned on earth, God promises a Savior to come into the world and take the punishment for our sins. It had to be someone who was God, but who became man. He had to live a sinless life. Jesus claimed to be the one the Scriptures promised. He claimed to be the one who would forgive our sins!

A. Jesus made some outrageous claims when He was here on earth.

1. Jesus said things like, "I'm God Almighty³.... No one can accuse me of sin⁴ ... I'm the exclusive way to heaven⁵ ... I'm the Savior of the world⁶..." With the resurrection, Jesus is who He said He is—“the Lord God Almighty” (**Revelation 1:8**). He said He came to this earth to wipe away all your sins. He is the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”.
2. Jesus claimed to be the exclusive way to the Father. **John 14:6**, Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” That's a pretty strong claim. Circle "the". He said I'm the way. He didn't say, I'm one way, I'm a good way, I'm one of the ways. Saying, "All roads get to heaven" is stupid. That's like saying I can dial any phone number and get home. There's one number that will get me home. If Jesus is God you would expect Him to say “I’m the exclusive way to heaven” and that’s *exactly* what He says.

² Henry Morris

³ Revelation 1:8

⁴ John 8:46

⁵ John 14:6

⁶ John 3:16, John 11:25

B. People try to make Jesus a good teacher. If Jesus says He's God, but He's not God, then He's not a good teacher. I could go out and teach people in Hanover Park the Gospel, and most of them would say, "Matt's a decent teacher". But if I started calling myself God you wouldn't think I was a good teacher any more.

C. Jesus was either who He said He was or He was the biggest liar ever. He was either God, or He was very, very evil. The Muslims often claim that He never said plainly that He was God. That's a lie. In **Revelation 1:8**, He said, "I am the Almighty."⁷ Jesus made some radical, over the top metaphysical, cosmic claims, and the resurrection validated all the claims of Jesus. You see you can't stay neutral. If Jesus is raised from the dead, then He's your God and one day you will appear before Him.⁸

Illustration (Reference Point of all History): Even if you don't believe Jesus Christ is who He said He was, you still use Him as a reference point. Every time you write a check, every time you date a contract, every time you put down an appointment in your iPhone or on your calendar, what's the reference point? 2010 years from what? Jesus came to earth. God came to earth in the form of a man so we could know what God is like. His name was Jesus Christ. He split all of history into A.D. and B.C. Every time you write a date, Jesus is the reference point. He said He was who He claimed to be. And the resurrection proves Christ is all that He said He was.

D. If the resurrection is a fraud, Paul says, "we are of all men most miserable" (verse 19). But if it is a historical fact, then your past can be forgiven. Indeed, Paul says in **verse 20--** "But now is Christ risen from the dead"! If that is true, it confirms that Jesus can save you!

- ❖ He said He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life".
- ❖ He is the *exclusive way to the Father*.
- ❖ He was a "friend of sinners".
- ❖ He's "the only Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus".
- ❖ He said he was a doctor that came not to heal "those who are whole, but those who are sick".

1. Have you ever been half way through a project and wish you could start over? Like painting the house or whatever? A lot of times I think people feel that way about life. They get half way through life and just wish they could start over. We all have things we wish we hadn't done and said things we wish we hadn't said, thought things we wish we hadn't thought. We all have regrets. We all have guilt.

Illustration (Bernie Madoff): It is estimated that Bernie Madoff, former chairman of the NASDAQ stock exchange, defrauded his clients of some \$65 billion, over a period of approximately 17 years. He was sentenced to 150 years in prison. After his sentencing he said, "I wish they caught me six years ago, eight years ago." He's so glad he doesn't have to pretend anymore.

⁷ Revelation 1:8

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:10; John 5:22

The majority of people in this world are dealing with serious guilt, but they are hiding it. You don't have to steal \$65 billion dollars to feel guilt. We have all felt that way.

Explanation (Guilt-Feeling/Fact): Actually, that guilty feeling is a gift from God. But guilt is not merely a feeling. Our guilt is a fact. You feel guilt because you are guilty. Our sin is primarily committed against and in the presence of a holy God. We all thought we were getting away with our sin, but you don't realize that God has night vision!

The Bible says Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn you. He says, you are "condemned already" (**John 3:18**). Your greatest problem in life is, how can I cleanse my sins? How can I get rid of my guilty verdict?

2. **You see you can be forgiven of your past, but you must experience repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.** What is repentance? Repentance is realizing my sin is against God, and I am broken because of it. Faith is trusting that Jesus died in your place and you have nothing to pay for on judgment day.

2 Corinthians 5:21 is the good news. For all who believe the Bible says that God "hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

If you turn from your life and give your whole life to Christ, then your past can be cancelled. Christ will blot out the record of all your sin. This is God's pardon program. I can quit trying to make myself better, trying harder, and failing miserably. He wants to forgive your past, but you must trust Him, confessing and forsaking your sin—come to Him!

3. **If God forgives you, He will never hold your sin against you again.** He says He wants to cancel every record of all debts you owe – every bitter thought, ever sinful deed. Canceled.

Illustration (Paid Bills are Forgotten): How long do you remember a bill that's been paid? I don't remember it at all. Once it's paid, I forget it. I think the point He's saying is this: Once God's forgiven it, I can forget it. That's good news! Even if there were no such thing as a heaven or hell and there is -- but if there weren't it would be worth it to become a Christian just to have a clear conscious, just knowing that I am free from all those things I've done wrong. That's the good news.

Because Jesus is who He said it was, my past can be forgiven. I don't have to go carrying a load of guilt around. It's unnecessary. "There is now therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (**Romans 8:1**).

Illustration (Etch-A-Sketch): Remember when you were growing up you had a Etch-A-Sketch? If you messed up the picture you just flip it, shake it, turn it over. There would be a clean slate. This is God's etch-a-sketch verse in the Bible. He says, I want

to wipe it clean. You can walk out of here tonight, knowing that every single thing you've ever done wrong up until this point is completely forgiven. That's good news. No condemnation! **Jesus Christ did not come to rub it in, He came to rub it out.** He said, "I came not to condemn the world, I came to save it" (**John 3:18**). He wants to change your heart, to help you, give you a new beginning, a clear conscious. That's good news!

II. Second, if the resurrection took place, **I can have my present life transformed.**

Here in **1 Corinthians 15:5-8**, we have a list of people whose lives were transformed, and they went on to transform the world. The religions of this world call these people "saints" but they were just normal ordinary people who gave their life to Jesus.

Look at **1 Corinthians 15:5-8**, "And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8 And last of all he was seen of me also".

The power of Christ was clear to the over 500 people, some of whom went to their death. They became *transformed* people! If the resurrection is true Jesus proved Himself to be all powerful. If He's powerful enough to raise Himself from the dead, then He can change your life.

A. The Bible says that Jesus Christ has cosmic, amazing power.

1. The Bible says that Jesus Christ created the world (**John 1:1-3**). It says that He keeps the entire universe functioning day after day after day. A beam of light can go around the world in one second. The universe is 146 billion light years wide, and Jesus Christ maintains it (**Colossians 1:18**).
2. The Bible says that Jesus is so powerful, that He raised Himself from the dead! In **John 10:18** He says, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." No force could keep Him in the tomb. The Romans killed Him, they put Him in a tomb, they put a massive stone in front of the tomb, and then sealed it with the Roman seal and they posted a 24-hour guard.
3. In fact, Christ said "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (**Matthew 28:18**).

B. Jesus wants to use His resurrection power to transform the life you presently live.

1. Only God has the power to change you or anyone else. You want to change your present difficulties. There are some habits you have that you know displease God. God wants to change you through His mighty resurrection power!

2. Much of life is unmanageable. *We weren't made to manage life alone.* In coming to Christ you will learn that you can't manage all that life is going to send you. But God can. And that's good news. *I can't control everything in my life, but God can.* So I want to hook up with Him and let Him control it and ask Him for help.

I talk to people all the time and the number one complaint I hear from people today is "My life is out of control," or "I'm busy out of my mind". I hear it a thousand times. "I feel powerless to change the situation... I feel powerless to break a bad habit... I feel powerless to save a relationship... I feel powerless to get out of debt... I feel powerless to manage my time and schedule." *What you need is a power greater than yourself.*

3. What kind of power is available? Resurrection power—God promises you the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. We read in **Ephesians 1:19-20** about "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." The same power that God used at resurrection time two thousand years ago can be used in your life right now. He wants to conquer every sin that holds you hostage. Unbelief. Depression. Fear, Anxiety, and Worry.

Transition: You don't know what the future holds. I don't either. I don't know what's going to happen next year, next month, next week. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow and neither do you. But it doesn't matter. Because even though it's out of my control, it's not out of God's. He will give me the power to face it.

III. **Third, if the resurrection took place, I can have my future secured.** You see, Jesus keeps all His promises. He promises me eternal life.

1 Corinthians 15:14-20, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable".

But what does **verse 20** say? "But now is Christ risen from the dead"!

If the resurrection is a fraud, Paul says, "we are of all men most miserable". But if it is a historical fact, then your past can be forgiven. Indeed, Paul says in **verse 20**-- "But now is Christ risen from the dead"!

A. Jesus secured His own future by predicting His own death and resurrection.

Look at **Mark 10:34**. Mark put it in the third person, but I'm going to read it in the first. Christ said: "...they shall mock [me], and shall scourge [me], and shall spit upon [me], and shall kill [me]: and the third day [I] shall rise again." The cross was no surprise to Jesus. He promised that He would die, but that He would also raise Himself from the dead. It

was all part of God's plan.

In **Matthew 28** we read the very account of His resurrection. **Matthew 28:1-5**, “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4 **And for fear of him the keepers [SOLDIERS] did shake, and became as dead *men*.** 5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. 6 He is not here: for **he is risen, as he said.**”

Circle the words “he is risen, as he said” (verse 6). He did what He promised. When God makes a promise, you can count on it.

How would you feel if you'd been the soldiers who put Jesus to death? You publicly executed this man in front of thousands of witnesses who had seen Him die. Then you have Him buried, a stone put over, sealed and a 24-hour guard. Christ kept His word! No matter how many armies would have surrounded His tomb, He was unstoppable.

B. Without Christ, your future is unsecure. One of the **universal problems we've all got is death.** Everybody dies. I'm going to die someday and so are you. Only a fool would go all through life unprepared for something he knows is inevitable. That doesn't make sense. Sometimes we get so busy in the here and now we don't stop to think about what's going to come.

People don't like to talk about death. Invite your friends over sometime, serve them some coffee and pie and say, "Let's talk about death." See what happens. But it's inevitable so let's talk about it.

1. The fact is everybody has a deep internal longing to know, "What's going to happen? Here we only spend 60, 70, maybe 80 years. This is just the first inch of the yardstick. This is preschool for what's going to happen in eternity.
2. The fact is there are a lot of misconceptions about heaven. Most of them come from bad movies.

Transition: What is it really going to be like? When you go to the Bible, what does God say it's really going to be like in heaven and in hell?

C. Ready or not, one day you're going to stand before God. You're going to need to know the right answers. Here's what the Bible says about the future -- about heaven and hell.

1. Heaven is a perfect place. There is total love, total peace, total joy, total perfection. There is no sin, no mistakes, no evil, no bad, no errors. It's perfect in every area. It's a perfect place.

2. In order for you to go there you have to be perfect because only perfect can get into heaven. That would leave us all out -- we'd never make it if we had to be perfect. None of us are perfect, we've all messed up.

D. There are two ways the Bible says you can get to heaven.

1. Plan A is to earn it. That's the **performance plan**. To earn it you only have to never sin and always do what's right for your entire lifetime. Always make the right decision, always say the right thing, never the wrong thing, be perfect. It would be as if they changed the rules of the Baseball Hall of Fame and said in order to get in you had to bat 1000 and play error free ball your entire career. Even the best get 300. Since none of us qualify for Plan A, God came up with Plan B.
2. Plan B is you trust Jesus Christ, you establish a relationship to Him when He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (**John 14:6**). He was the only perfect person who ever lived because He was God. He came so we could know what God is like. By trusting and establishing a relationship with Him you get in on His goodness.

E. There are a lot of wrong conceptions of salvation. A lot of people try different ways to get to heaven. Nobody qualifies as perfect, but neither do they want to trust in Christ, so they've come up with several other plans that are wrong.

1. Some people try **Salvation by Sincerity**. "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." Just think that one through. You can be sincerely wrong. ***I read the other day about a pilot who sincerely flew into a mountain.*** He thought it was lower. He killed himself. He was sincerely wrong and he sincerely died. I could pick up a glass of water and take a drink of it sincerely thinking it's water and if it's poisoned, I'd be sincerely dead.
2. There are some people who think **Salvation by Service**. I do all these good things and work my way there. I'll do humanitarian things. That doesn't work.
3. Some people try **Salvation by Subtraction**. You give up a bunch of things and then you get to heaven. "I don't drink, smoke, cuss, chew, run around with girls that do." I don't do nothing'. If being a Christian was a matter of not doing things then anybody who's dead qualifies as a Christian. They don't do anything.
4. Then there are people who try **Salvation by Religion**. I'll get baptized. You can get baptized in the ocean until every fish knows you by your first name. Maybe you'll join a church and think that will make you a Christian. Sitting in a church will make you a Christian about as much as sitting in a chicken house will make you a chicken or walking into McDonald's will make you a hamburger. You say you joined the church. If you joined the Lion's Club does that make you a lion? You say you were born in the church. If you were born in the car does that make you a spare tire? Think it through! Use your mind!

5. How about **Salvation by Heritage**. Your mother was a Christian. Your grandmother was a Christian. So what? You have to make a personal decision yourself. That's like saying, I know you're married because your mother was married and your grandmother and your great grandmother. No, you've got to make a personal decision.
6. My favorite of all is **Salvation by Comparison**. "I'm better than ... so and so." You're probably better than me. I don't doubt that. But God isn't judging you according to me or anybody else. Saying "I'm better than Hitler" is like saying "I can bench press more than my grandmother!"

God doesn't grade on a curve. It's either perfection or zip! It's either 100% or Plan B -- trust Christ.

Conclusion: Jesus said that the resurrection is the way to eternal life. Remember his words to Mary? "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25-26)

Do you believe this? Is the center of your world the resurrection? It ought to be.

- 1) Would you like to have every sin, everything you've ever done wrong completely forgiven? Would like to have a clear conscious?
- 2) Would you like to acquire a new power that would help you manage the problems in your present?
- 3) Would you like to have your future secured?