

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*For if Christ Is Not Raised.*"

We paused our verse-by-verse study through Luke's Gospel for a special message in honor of Christ's Resurrection.

At last year's annual meeting I told you I wanted to start meeting with the young men in the church. Typically, we meet at the Oak Tree restaurant, so I have become a familiar face there. The waitresses know what I want without having to ask: Cobb salad with blue cheese dressing. I've heard some people eat a Cobb salad without blue cheese dressing, but that's like eating popcorn without butter. It is offensive.

The other day I decided to mix things up and deviate from my usual meal. To be honest, I had some doubts about whether I made the right selection. My doubts were confirmed when they brought our plates of food and Justin Everett's plate looked much better than mine. I asked him if we could trade, and he said no, which is why I decided to stop meeting with him.

Now, quick question: do any of you have doubts after you place your order at a restaurant? Do you wonder if you made the right choice?

I think having doubts is a part of our Christian lives.

Sometimes we have doubts about insignificant things like our orders at restaurants or the clothes we put on. We get dressed and wonder if we should have put on something else...unless you are one of those famous people who always wear the same clothes, such as Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, or Barack Obama.

When I was going over the sermon with Katie, I said I wanted to start wearing the same clothes, and she said, "*You pretty much already do.*" That hurt.

Other times we have doubts about more significant things:

- Should I have taken this job?
 - Should we have moved here?
 - Should I have made this purchase?
 - Should I have married this person? And I would like to say that you should never have this doubt, because as soon as you're married your spouse became the right person.
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Now what does this have to do with this morning's sermon?

Good question. Believe it or not, the Corinthians were having doubts about – of all things – their resurrections!

Look with me at **verse 12**...

1 Corinthians 15:12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

It was **proclaimed** that Jesus was **raised from the dead**, but the Corinthians doubted their resurrections!

Let me briefly explain why Gentiles and Jews both struggled with this...

For Gentiles, their pagan philosophies and religions influenced them.

When Paul was at Athens he preached about the resurrection, and listen to what it says...

Acts 17:32 When they heard [Paul preach the] resurrection of the dead, SOME MOCKED.

Why did they **mock**?

They thought everything physical was bad, so they couldn't believe God would raise physical bodies from the dead. John MacArthur said the idea was actually "repulsive and disgusting" to them.

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The Jews struggled with resurrection because of the Sadducees, who didn't believe in anything supernatural. Listen to these verses...

Acts 4:1 As [Peter and John] were speaking to the people...the Sadducees [were] 2 greatly annoyed because [Peter and John] were...proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection.

Katie told me not to say this, but I'm going to say it anyway: that's why they were "Sad You See."

Because the Sadducees were prominent Jewish religious leaders, more than likely they influenced the Jews not to believe in the resurrection.

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So, Paul makes a logical point...

"If you believe Christ was raised from the dead, you should believe Christians – or those in Christ – will be raised from the dead."

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If they doubted Christ's resurrection, they wouldn't be believers, because there are certain non-negotiables in the Christian life, and Christ's resurrection is one of them. People who deny Christ's resurrection are heretics.

The Corinthians had many problems – as the previous 14 chapters reveal – but they weren't heretics.

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And this reveals why this sermon is so important...

According to [articles from 2017](#), one fourth of professing Christians deny the resurrection...which means one fourth of professing Christians are heretics.

Unfortunately, most of the articles said, "one fourth OF CHRISTIANS don't believe in the resurrection." This language is unfortunate, because it implies people can be Christians AND deny the resurrection. This is why I say "one fourth of PROFESSING Christians" deny the resurrection.

This one fourth must not be familiar with these verses, because Paul explains the problems associated with denying the resurrection. He plays a game with them. He says, "Let's pretend Christ was not raised."

And we're going to play the same game!

Look at **verse 13**...

1 Corinthians 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Paul is working backward:

- If there's no resurrection, then Jesus hasn't been raised from the dead.
- If Christians can't be resurrected, then Christ couldn't have been resurrected.

And if Christ hasn't been raised...look at **verse 14** to see what that means...

1 Corinthians 15:14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

And this brings us to Lesson One...

Lesson 1: For if Christ is not raised (Part 1) a believer's preaching is worthless.

We'll talk more about our faith being vain in **verse 17** when Paul repeats this.

The word **vain** occurs a few times in these verses, so let me explain what it means...

The Greek word for **vain** is *kenos* (pr: ken-oss), which means "empty." It's related to the word for **emptied Himself** in **Philippians 2:7**, where we get the [doctrine of the kenosis](#), that at the Incarnation Christ emptied Himself when He became a Man.

Paul says if Christ wasn't raised, then their preaching is in **vain** or empty.

This means...

- Every sermon you ever heard...
- Every teaching at Sunday school, a home fellowship, a midweek service, or on the radio...
- Every message at a funeral when people promised the deceased were in heaven and their loved ones would see them again...
- Every time you shared the Gospel...
- Every time parents shared the Word with their children...

The **preaching [was] in vain**. It was empty without the resurrection.

And it's not just that our preaching is in **vain**. Look at **verse 15**...

1 Corinthians 15:15 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.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

Lesson 1: For if Christ is not raised (Part 2) New Testament authors are liars.

I preach Christ's resurrection, but if Christ wasn't resurrected, I'm not actually a liar. I'm deceived, and I'm deceiving others. The New Testament authors are the liars because they claimed to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ...when He wasn't resurrected.

Look back at **verse 4**...

1 Corinthians 15:4 that he (this is Jesus) was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

Now Paul lists several people who saw Christ after His resurrection...

1 Corinthians 15:5 and that he appeared to Cephas (or Peter), then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep (they died). 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Now skip to **verse 11**...

1 Corinthians 15:11 Whether then it was I or they (referring to the witnesses of Christ's resurrection he just mentioned), so we preach and so you believed.

Paul says he and these people preached that they saw the resurrected Christ, but if Christ wasn't resurrected, they were lying.

Not only would they be liars, they would be some of the worst deceivers who ever lived:

- Think of the thousands of martyrs who went to their deaths because of what these people preached.
- Think of the countless others who might not have lost their lives, but sacrificed so much living for Christ, because they believed with these men preached.

While we're on this subject of the apostles lying, let me share something with you...

Charles Colson was involved in the Watergate scandal with Richard Nixon, but after that he became a Christian. Listen to what he wrote...

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

According to Chuck Colson – a man familiar with coverups – he says there's no way the 12 apostles could perpetuate a lie for 40 years...and go to their deaths for it.

If you're playing games, when you're about to be tortured or killed, that's when you throw up your hands and say you are joking.

Look at Paul's next point in **verse 16**...

1 Corinthians 15:16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

This sounds familiar because Paul said this back in **verse 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.**

Paul said this twice because it's that important: if people aren't resurrected, then Christ couldn't have been resurrected.

And if Christ wasn't resurrected, look at Paul's next point...

1 Corinthians 15:17a And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile

This also sounds familiar because Paul said this back in **verse 14**...

1 Corinthians 15:14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and YOUR FAITH IS IN VAIN.

Paul also said this twice because he wants us to understand how worthless our faith is without Christ's resurrection.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

Lesson 1: For if Christ is not raised (Part 3) a believer's faith is worthless.

Some years ago, a woman was cutting my hair and I saw a Chinese symbol on her arm. I asked her what it meant, and she said, "Faith." I was immediately curious because I thought she might be a Christian. When I said, "Faith in what?" it seemed to catch her off guard. It took her a moment to come up with an answer, but finally she said, "*Just faith. Believing. Faith in yourself.*"

Her answer captures a common belief that simply having faith is good. The problem with this thinking is faith is only as good as the object we put our faith in.

For example, when you drove to church this morning, you demonstrated significant faith:

- You got into a vehicle that contained gallons of flammable gasoline. You started the vehicle and had faith it wouldn't blow up even though parts of it became very hot and had sparks.
- If you weren't driving the vehicle, you had faith in the driver. You believed he or she would get you to the church safely.
- You also had faith in other drivers on the road. You headed toward traffic in the opposing lane, and you believed they wouldn't drift over even a few feet and crash into you had on.

Because you are sitting here this morning, it seems that your faith was well-placed.

Have any of you ever seen Fail Army videos?

It's a collection of videos of people trying to do things but failing. An army of people failing to:

- Climb something, but they end up falling
- Drive or ride something, but they end up crashing
- Carry something, but they end up dropping it

The point is these people had misplaced faith: they put their faith in their ability to do certain things. It doesn't matter how much faith you have, if you put that faith in the wrong thing, you fail.

If we put our faith in Christ, but He was not raised, our faith is misplaced. It is worthless.

- We put our faith in Christ, but He didn't do what we thought He did.
- We put our faith in the most significant event that's ever happened...but it never happened.

And look at the consequences in the rest of **verse 17**...

1 Corinthians 15:17b and you are still in your sins.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

Lesson 1: For if Christ is not raised (Part 4) a believer's sins are unforgiven.

Jesus's resurrection set His death apart from all other deaths:

- His death made Him like everyone else.
- His resurrection set Him apart.

Maybe you are saying, "*But what about other people who were raised from the dead, such as Lazarus? Weren't they like Jesus?*"

No. There's a difference between being raised from the dead...and resurrected:

- Lazarus – and others – were raised from the dead...only to die again.
- Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again. He was resurrected.

How could His resurrection set His death apart from other deaths?

Because His resurrection showed that He died a sinless man. Follow me on this...

Romans 6:23 says **the wages of sin is death.**

But because Jesus didn't sin, He couldn't remain dead. As Peter preached on Pentecost...

Acts 2:24 God raised [Jesus] up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by [death].

Death could not hold Jesus, because of His sinlessness.

When He was resurrected it showed His victory over sin and death, and He passed that victory along to us.

We say Jesus died for our sins, and He did, but it was His resurrection that forgave us and saved us.

Listen to this...

Acts 5:31 [Peter said], "God exalted [Jesus to] his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and FORGIVENESS OF SINS."

Did you catch that?

Peter is talking about **forgiveness of sins**, so we would expect him to mention Christ's death, but he mentioned His resurrection and ascension because His resurrection demonstrated His victory over sin and death.

Romans 4:25 [Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION.

This also isn't worded the way we'd expect:

- We'd expect it to say Jesus **DIED for our justification**, because we know He died for our sins.
- But it says He was **raised for our justification** because His resurrection demonstrated He died as our sinless substitute.

This is why Paul asks the Corinthians to consider what they are saying if they deny the resurrection. They're also denying that their sins are forgiven, as he said in **verse 17**...

1 Corinthians 15:17b and you are still in your sins.

Look at Paul's next consideration...

1 Corinthians 15:18 Then those also who have fallen asleep (or died) in Christ have perished.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

Lesson 1: For if Christ is not raised (Part 5) the dead cease existing.

Let's understand what Paul means when he says **perished**:

- He doesn't mean going to hell.
- He means ceasing existing.

If there's no resurrection, annihilation becomes the reality for everyone.

All we have to look forward to is this life, which is what Paul says in **verse 19**...

1 Corinthians 15:19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

If there's no resurrection, **we have hope in this life only** because this life is all there is.

And if this is the only life there is, there's one group who is worse off than everyone else...and this brings us to the last part of Lesson 1...

Lesson 1: For if Christ is not raised (Part 6) a believer should be pitied.

I don't like having a lesson that repeats a verse, but I don't know a better way to say it.

In **verse 19** the pronoun **we**, which Paul uses twice, refers to Christians.

If Jesus wasn't raised, **WE** are to be the most pitied because:

- We waste our time serving and worshiping Christ.
- Everything we do is false and foolish.
- We believe lies and live based on those lies, making us deceived and gullible.
- We deny ourselves, give up earthly pleasures, and forfeit enjoyment to live holy lives for no reason.
- Every sacrifice we make has been worthless.
- We suffer with no hope of glory in the next life
- Christianity is the cruelest hoax ever played on humanity and we are the victims of it.

We could've been living for the moment. Our motto could've been: "Eat, drink, and be merry." Instead, we gave it all up for a Man who's still dead in the grave. It's all for nothing! For that, we should be the most pitied.

I read about an elderly woman who went to church her whole life, but then heard someone on the radio deny Christ's resurrection and she believed the man's argument. She concluded that everything she lived for was untrue. Then in her hopelessness she committed suicide.

Now look at **verse 20** for the dramatic change...

1 Corinthians 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

This is what we celebrate today!

Firstfruits were the first produce of a harvest indicating a greater harvest to follow. To say Jesus is the **firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**, or are dead, is to say that because Jesus has been raised from the dead, and all those in Him will be raised as well.

The other side of these verses is that because Christ **WAS** raised, the opposite of lesson one is true...as we will see now...

Lesson 2: Because Christ was raised (Part 1) an unbeliever's works are worthless.

The New Testament is clear that we are saved by grace through faith and not by works...

Ephesians 2:8 By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is NOT YOUR OWN DOING; it is the gift of God, 9 NOT A RESULT OF WORKS, so that no one may boast.

If unbelievers don't repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ, they're going to be [judged by their works](#). God will look to see if their works have been good enough to get them into heaven:

- Twice in **Revelation 20** - in verses **12** and **13** - it says **[unbelievers will be] judged according to their works**.
- Then **verse 15** says they will be **thrown into the lake of fire**.

Why is that?

Because nobody's works could ever be good enough to get them into heaven. In that sense, works are worthless. If our works could be good enough, then Jesus died for no reason!

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Look at the next part of Lesson 2...

Lesson 2: Because Christ was raised (Part 2) New Testament authors are watchmen.

Because Christ was raised from the dead, the New Testament authors were preaching the truth.

Think of them as watchmen for unbelievers. Let me read a few verses that describe what watchmen do...

Ezekiel 33:3 The watchman blows the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then if anyone who hears the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life.

Watchmen did just what you would expect: they warned the people...but guess what was and wasn't their responsibility?

- They were responsible with telling the truth.
- They weren't responsible with people's responses.

The authors of the New Testament saw the resurrected Christ:

- They served as watchmen because they told people what they saw, and they warned people what would happen if they didn't repent.
- But they can't control how people respond to this truth.

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Look at the next part of Lesson 2...

Lesson 2: Because Christ was raised (Part 3) an unbeliever's sins are unforgiven.

Acts 4:10 God raised Jesus from the dead...12 And THERE IS SALVATION IN NO ONE ELSE, for THERE IS NO OTHER NAME under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

If unbelievers reject Christ:

- There is no other way for their sins to be forgiven:
- There is no other way for them to be saved.
- There is no sacrifice they can offer or religion they can follow.

They will die with their sins unforgiven and stand guilty before God.

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The next part of Lesson 2...

Lesson 2: Because Christ was raised (Part 4) the dead live eternally in hell or heaven.

If Jesus wasn't raised, then nobody would be raised. We would all cease existing as already discussed.

But because Jesus was raised, believers and unbelievers will all be raised...

Matthew 25:46 Jesus said, "[The unrighteous] will go into eternal punishment (referring to hell), but the righteous into eternal life (referring to heaven)."

Every person who has ever lived will be sent to one of these locations to spend eternity.

Your response to Christ's sacrifice determines which location.

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The last part of Lesson 2...

Lesson 2: Because Christ was raised (Part 5) an unbeliever should be most pitied.

Because Christ has been raised, think of how **verse 19** can be reversed for unbelievers...

1 Corinthians 15:19 [Unbelievers] have hope in this life only, [and they] are of all people most to be pitied.

This life is an unbeliever's only hope. This is all they have. Even if unbelievers could live 700 years, they will spend eternity in hell, and how can you not pity them when that's their future?

- No matter what they do in this life...
- No matter what they accomplish...
- No matter how good they think they are...

If they reject Christ, it means nothing.

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If you are an unbeliever who hasn't repented and believed in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, you might think:

- You're sitting here because someone invited you...
- Or you're here, because it's Easter and this is one of the two times – along with Christmas – that you go to church...

But this is not true!

You're here, because:

- God loves you, and He wants you to hear the truth.
- You're a sinner and God doesn't want you to spend eternity in hell.

So, He has allowed you the grace of hearing the Gospel.

Don't take this for granted!

- The bible says today is the day of salvation.
- What better day to be saved and look forward to a resurrection unto eternal life than the day that celebrates Christ's resurrection?

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If you have any questions about anything I've shared or I can pray for you in any way I will be up front after service and it would be a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.ⁱ

ⁱ Unused...

Listen to this verse...

Mark 14:27 Jesus said to [the disciples], “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’”

Jesus was quoting **Zechariah 13:7** which prophesied that the disciples would flee when Jesus was crucified, which is exactly what happened.

Now let me ask you this...

When did their discouragement turn to encouragement?

When Jesus was resurrected. His death brought them discouragement, but His resurrection brought them needed encouragement.