

Session 1: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

FOCUS

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's trumpet blast announcing that life can be lived victoriously in Him.

Nothing is too big for God. After the resurrection, death was defeated. Christ is alive. The glorious truth that breaks the boundaries of life's limitations is that He is risen! He goes before us, and His promises are true.

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Access the online version of the Leader's Guide at Sundayteacher.com using the password:

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Luke 24:13-49; John 20:1-29; 21:1-14; Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5:4; Philippians 3:20-21

COMMENTARY

Use the Commentary as background information and discussion material as you prepare and facilitate this session.

One cannot be a Christian without belief in the resurrection of Christ. All the major creeds of church history affirm it. It is also important as the foundation for belief in the resurrection of all. In that respect, Christ has become "the firstfruits of those who have died" (1 Corinthians 15:20, NRSV).

The most definitive discussion of the resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15.

Early Traditions (1 Corinthians 14:1-11)

Paul declares, we believe that, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Paul moves from the confession of Christ's resurrection itself, to cite examples of persons who had seen the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:5-11). Paul knows himself as the "last" (v. 8) and the "least" to have seen the risen Lord.

Let us remember that Jesus' resurrection was not a mere resuscitation. Jesus did die, and He was raised again. The resurrected body of Christ is imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Christ's Resurrection Guarantees Our Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-28)

Then, if Christ has been raised from the dead, there must also be a general resurrection of the dead.

It seems the Corinthians denied the general resurrection, but wanted to maintain that Jesus had been raised. Using the rhetorical "if," Paul says that if there is no resurrection of Christ, there is no resurrection of believers. One is dependent on the other; one cannot have Christ's resurrection as a wholly unique event unrelated to the rest of God's purposes.

Paul responds saying, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20). The "firstfruit" was the first fruit or grain harvested each year. It was offered to God in a sacrifice of thanks for granting another harvest. It marked the actual beginning of the harvest, which was immediately followed by the full harvest.

Paul says the order of the resurrection will be: “Christ the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (1 Corinthians 15:23).

Some Nagging Questions (1 Corinthians 15:29-34)

The question of baptism for the dead is complex. We cannot be absolutely sure of what this ritual was. Paul knows that the practice of baptizing for the dead presupposes a resurrection from the dead. So, his argument is not about baptizing for the dead, but the resurrection from the dead.

Paul believes that facing dangers every day supports the belief in the resurrection. Indeed, Paul says “I die every day” (15:31). According to him, if one endures dangers and faces death threats, it is because one fully expects to be resurrected. One does not willingly place oneself in danger, even for Christ’s sake, if there is no life after death. Quoting the philosophers of his day loosely, he says, “If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (15:32).

If this life is all there is, one might as well enjoy it to the full! However, Paul has already shown that Christ’s resurrection guarantees our resurrection. Therefore it is well worth every struggle to serve God in this life!

The Resurrection Body (1 Corinthians 15:35-41)

Someone at Corinth may have asked Paul the question, “How are the dead raised? With what body do they come?” Paul revealed his attitude toward this type of question when he said, “How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (15:36). Paul then moves on to answer the question at length. What one buries is a seed (15:37) . . . “but God gives it a body” (15:38).

This passage certainly suggests that a bodily resurrection is expected. But the physical body (i.e., “the seed”) dies, and God “gives it a body” (15:38) that is different from the body sown. For this reason, it does not matter if, for example, a body is lost at sea, mutilated, or cremated. The individual believer will still have a resurrected body.

There is no doubt that Paul believed in the resurrection of the body. He did not espouse the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul only, but the bodily resurrection which implies that the whole person will be resurrected.

Analogies of the Resurrection Body (1 Corinthians 15:42-58)

Paul’s comparisons shift to a consideration of Christ and Adam (15:45-49). “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit” (15:45). The order of their appearance was first the physical, and then the spiritual (15:46). The analogy is extended: “The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven” (15:47).

Just as Adam was “of dust,” so many others are in the same position. “Those of heaven” are like the man of heaven. Paul pulls his discussion together with this conclusion: “Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” (15:49). We shall bear the image of Christ! What more can we ask than to be like Jesus?

The good news is the perishable body must put on the imperishable (15:54), and the mortal body must put on immortality (15:54). When that happens, Paul’s victory song can be sung:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where, O Death, is your victory?

Where, O Death is your sting?” (15:54-55).



IN-SESSION COMMUNITY BUILDING OPTIONS

Select one or more of these activities to begin building bridges between group members as you introduce today's subject.

1. A Reading

Begin the session by reading aloud the following words from W. Phillip Keller's book *Rabboni*. Use this as a way of introducing today's topic on the resurrection.

Not for an instant should it be imagined that Christ lay inert in that tomb that weekend. Far from it! Death could not hold Him! The grave clothes with their myriad windings and heavy spices could not restrain Him! The great stone at the door could not stop Him! Decomposition and bodily decay could not taint or touch Him!

Quickened, enlivened, energized by God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son himself, He simply cast off the constrictions surrounding Him. He was alive in a radiant new dimension of supernatural living, instantaneously.

No man's hands unwrapped those heavy spices around Him.

No man's hands unwound those windings that bound Him.

No man's hands removed the bindings about His face.

No man's hands loosed Him and let Him go.

No man's hands rolled the great rock door away.

No man's hands broke the seal set upon the tomb.

No man's hands struck the guards to the ground outside.

This was only and all the work of God!

It had gone on in the absence of human interference.

It was as though the divine chrysalis had quietly emerged from the confines of its cocoon, without splitting the case or disturbing the wrappings.

He simply was not there. He was risen. . . .

And the only reason for opening the grave was not to release Him, but to reveal to His friends that He is alive.¹

Repeat the last sentence and ask your group to respond to it.

- What, according to the author, is the reason for the resurrection of Christ?
- What is your overall response to this quote?

2. You Are There

As you prepare to present this session on the resurrection, ask your group to describe what the resurrection of Christ means to them.

- When you think of the resurrection of Jesus, what first comes to mind?
- What do you think it would have been like to have witnessed it?
- Ask group members to describe in one word the meaning or significance of the resurrection of Christ. (For example, hope, power, life, and so on.)
- How does the resurrection of Christ impact or affect your life as a Christian?

PRESENTATION OPTIONS

Select one or more of the following activities to present today's topic.

1. What If There Were No Resurrection?

Display or pass out **Handout 1**. Use this to introduce your presentation of some or all of the material in the Commentary section. Allow time for group discussion. Ask these questions:

- Which of these consequences of “no resurrection” do you consider most devastating to Christianity in general?
- Which of these statements, if true, would have the greatest negative impact on your Christian experience?
- Can you think of any other negative consequences of “no resurrection”?
- Why do you think Paul stated that without the resurrection, Christians are to be pitied more than any other people?
- Isn't there some merit simply in living a Christian lifestyle—with or without hope of resurrection?

2. Student Teaching

Assign the five main sections of the Commentary to five of your group ahead of the session. Provide them each with a copy of the Commentary material, and ask them to be ready to teach their assigned sections to the group. Encourage them to be creative in their presentations.

SUGGESTED READING

Jesus is Lord (Frank Moore: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2013)

PRACTICE

Encourage your group to think about what Christ's resurrection means for us today. As they go about their week, ask them to consider the implications of the truth that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in their life right now.

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SUMMARY OPTIONS

Select one or more of these activities to summarize and give opportunity for group members to apply the truth learned through this session.

1. We Have Been Raised with Christ!

Close your session by reading aloud the apostle Paul's words of victory in Ephesians 1:17-20 and 2:1-10. This is Paul's thanksgiving and prayer to God, on behalf of the Ephesians, for what He has already done for us in Christ. Note especially Paul's emphasis on God's resurrection power given to us (1:19-20; 2:6).

Follow up by asking,

- What is the message of Ephesians 1:17-20?
- What is the message of Ephesians 2:1-10?
- How would you summarize the message of these two passages?

2. Celebration by Song

If your group has some musical talent, you might want to invite one (or several) of your group members to sing a special song of testimony about Christ's resurrection. Or, play a recorded song your group enjoys. Check the possibilities on YouTube, your church's hymnal, or check at a music store. Let this serve as a time of celebration and thanks for what God has done for us through Christ.

by Jerry McCant

What If There Were No Resurrection?

1. "Not even Christ has been raised" (1 Corinthians 15:13). But what about the empty tomb and the appearances of Christ to others after His death?

2. "Our preaching is useless" (1 Corinthians 15:14). But our message is bound up with Christ and His resurrection.

3. "Our faith is useless and futile" (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17). It doesn't do for us what we thought it would. But how then do we explain the transformed lives of thousands of Christians?

4. "We are all liars" (1 Corinthians 15:15). This includes all those who said they saw Him. And think of those who have carved out our various doctrines in church history: Paul, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley, Moody, and Graham. If Christ has not been raised, they are all liars.

5. "We are still in our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Think of your past life before meeting Christ. If there is no Resurrection, then we are still living like that.

6. "Dead believers have perished" (1 Corinthians 15:18). Those who have died believing in Christ are lost.

7. "Of all people on earth we're most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19). If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then "pity" is the one word that would describe Christians.

"BUT CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:20).