

Your Resurrection: Sure and Precious  
1 Corinthians 15  
Tim Becker – June 26, 2016

1. Introduction

The title of this message is “Your Resurrection: Sure and Precious.” To talk about the resurrection, we must take a look at death. For you to think about your resurrection, you must think about your death. Use your imagination for a moment. Picture yourself lying in a coffin. Your chest is not inhaling and exhaling air. Right now, put your hands together. Do you feel the warmth from your skin? In the coffin, your skin is cold. You’ve never been this cold before. Your heart has stopped beating. Your brain is not thinking anything. Your body is already starting to decay.

What will happen to your body ... after they put you in the ground? In the Garden of Eden, after Adam sinned, God told him, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19). Is that what will happen to your body ... turn back into dust? God says so.

But .... Not every body turns back into dust after death. Jesus’ body did not. Death did not hold him. He rose from the dead. And when he did, he obtained a new body. His resurrection body was similar to his old one, but different as well.

But what about your body? No doubt if you lie in the ground long enough, your body will decay to dust. Is that the last word on your body ... dust?

In Jesus’ day, some within Judaism believed there was no resurrection from the dead. Jesus disagreed. Listen to him in Matthew 22:31–32, “<sup>31</sup> And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” Jesus logic is that when God says that he is the God of these long dead men, God means that they are alive. Otherwise, God would have said, “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” God and Jesus both affirm that the bodies of men will rise after they are dead. So dust is not the last word on your body lying in a coffin under 8 feet of dirt.

But can you believe it? All the facts we see, make it seem impossible for a dead man to rise. How important is that ... if you don’t believe your body will rise from the dead? Is this some backwater doctrine that has no importance on the gospel, on your salvation, or on your living for Christ now? Some in the church in Corinth during the 1<sup>st</sup> century couldn’t believe that dead bodies will rise again. The apostle Paul thought it important enough to spend a number of paragraphs on it in his first letter to them.

Please turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 to read Paul’s pastoral words to a church he loves about the resurrection of the dead. This morning we’ll look through this passage

in chunks, reading and discussing one piece at a time. Before we begin that, please pray with me.

\* Pray

Father in Heaven, what I have seen in this passage has been good for my soul. You and your ways are more beautiful to me after studying this passage. Please do the same for my friends here this morning. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

## 2. Paul's general aim

Read 1 Cor 15:1-2.

Paul had lived with the people of Corinth, he preached the gospel there, and some came to faith in Christ. He is now not living among them. He is writing this letter to address some questions from the church and to give them some words of help. We see in the first few words of this chapter that Paul wants to remind them of the gospel that he had preached there. You remind someone of something when you think they've forgotten that thing. Paul must think that this church has forgotten something about the gospel.

How important does Paul consider this reminder? Is this like, don't forget to brush your teeth in the morning? When he writes that this is the gospel in which they stand and by which they are being saved, we can know that this reminder is important because standing and saving are important. To stand in the gospel means to hang on to the gospel, to live according to the gospel. The gospel is what is saving you, notice the present ongoing tense here. The gospel at work in you carries you and transforms you from here to glory at the last day.

But did you notice the "if" and "unless" in v. 2? Why did Paul add these phrases? He wants his beloved church to up their motivation to listen to his reminder. Paul wants them to pay attention to this reminder of the gospel because it is the gospel by which they are being saved. And it will save them only if they hold fast to the gospel word Paul preached. If they fail to hold fast, their initial belief will be in vain, it won't bear fruit, they will fail to be saved.

\* Summary

So let's up our motivation too. What Paul is about to share with the Corinthian church, God is about to share with us. Let's pay attention to Paul's reminder lest we fail to hold fast and our belief would be in vain.

### 3. Gospel specifics

Read 1 Cor 15:3-11.

Here is the gospel Paul preached to this church. Before writing this letter, Paul had spent 18 months preaching to the church and so he certainly preached many more words than these. But if Paul had to distill down the things he preached to those that were of first importance, it would be these 4 things.

First, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. Christ is not Jesus' name, but a title. The title means that Jesus is the Savior appointed by God. Who was he sent to save? Us ... all who would repent and believe the gospel. What was he to save us from? Our sins. Our sins earn for us God's anger and punishment in hell. All this was forecasted by God to us in the Old Testament Scriptures. God sent messengers to tell mankind who God is: holy, just, and yet merciful; who we are: wicked sinners, rebellious toward God, and unable to stop sinning or to cleanse ourselves from our sins; and how God would save his people: by sending a sinless Savior, who would receive the punishment from God that we deserve. This is what happened to Christ when he died on the cross. He died to receive the punishment we deserved for our sins, so that we don't have to receive it.

The second part of Paul's gospel is that Christ was buried. When he died, he really died. His lungs stopped breathing in air, his skin grew cold, his heart stopped beating, and his brain stopped firing. So Jesus' friends did the honorable thing for him, they prepared his lifeless body for burial and sealed it in a tomb.

The third part of Paul's gospel is that Jesus Christ was raised in accordance with the Scriptures. On the third day after his death and burial, Jesus cold body grew warm again. His heart, after being silent and still, began to beat again. Who raised Jesus' dead body to life? God did. Only God's power is sufficient to bring life where there is no life. Christ's resurrection was a key sign that he was the Messiah who came to redeem us from our sins.

Christ died, was buried, was raised on the third day. The fourth part of Paul's gospel is that Jesus appeared to many after his resurrection. Paul spends more words on this than on any of the other parts, detailing who he appeared to: Peter, the twelve apostles, more than 500 brothers at one time, James, then to all the apostles, and lastly to Paul himself. Why does Paul focus on Jesus' resurrection appearances? These appearances give proof that Jesus' resurrection was not just a rumor or a myth. Many people saw him.

#### \* Summary

The key parts of the gospel are that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day and seen by many, all in accordance with God's plan in the Scriptures.

4. Argument 1: If there is no resurrection from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Read 1 Cor 15:12-19.

In v. 12 we see that some in the church of Corinth were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. This is the central problem Paul is addressing in this chapter. Can you see why someone would say there is no resurrection from the dead? Likely, these ones in the church in Corinth had seen bodies of dead people. And they just couldn't believe that what they had seen could rise again.

Perhaps that is you. You don't know anyone who has risen from the dead. And the only accounts of it that you have heard of have been too sensational to believe. And besides this, you might be thinking, what does the resurrection of the dead have to do with believing in Jesus to be saved? It seems like an unnecessary part of the gospel. Paul's words here are addressed to people just like you. Remember, he wants to remind of you the gospel so you can hold fast to it and be saved. Stick with him and hear him out.

Paul makes 3 arguments to say that the dead are indeed raised. In v. 12-19, Paul explains his first argument. We see it in v. 13, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." If Christ has been raised from the dead, then the resurrection is at least possible. But if there is no resurrection, then not even Christ has been raised.

Does this matter, that Christ might not be raised from the dead? Paul shows that it matters in at least 3 ways. First, Christ's resurrection matters because Paul preaches a gospel that says Christ was raised. But if Christ wasn't raised, then Paul is misrepresenting God. Paul, the apostle, would be a false teacher. And the gospel he preached would be a false gospel. And the gospel received by the Corinthian church would be a fraud. And the gospel we received would be a lie too. A false gospel doesn't save anyone. And false teachers will be judged severely by God, even the apostle Paul.

To see the second reason that Christ's resurrection matters, look with me at v. 17. If Christ was not raised, then our faith is futile. Genuine faith in God produces the Christ-purchased cleansing of sins. But if Christ was not raised, then that faith is useless, it does not produce what it claims. If Christ was not raised, then people with faith in Christ are still in their sins. Their sins have not been cleansed.

The third reason why Christ's being raised from the dead matters is explained in v. 18. If Christ has not been raised, then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. To be in Christ means to become one with him such that his death is your death and his resurrection is your resurrection. If he died and rose to absorb the punishment for the sins of men, you want his death and resurrection to count for you. You want to be in Christ. The gospel promises that for those who have already died, but were in Christ, they will be given life with God after death. But if Christ was not raised, then rather than life, they

perish. Your loved ones in Christ who have died, have only perished if Christ was not raised.

\* Summary

Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> argument for the resurrection from the dead is that if there is none, then not even Christ has been raised and if so, you are left perishing in your sins.

5. Argument 2: But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first of many who belong to Christ.

Read 1 Cor 15:20-28.

In the previous paragraph, Paul argued that if there is no resurrection, then not even Christ has been raised. Here he argues that the fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. Remember all the people Christ appeared to after his death and burial? These are all evidence that Christ's resurrection is a fact.

But Christ did not just rise for himself alone. He rose as the first of many. All who die in Christ will rise again. This is what Paul means in v. 20 when he calls Christ the firstfruits. In the garden, God told Adam that when he sins against God, he will surely die. He did die. And so did his sons, both sin and die. And so did their sons. And so have your great grandparents. And so will you and your children. We are all in Adam by virtue of our birth and all who are in Adam will die. But unlike us, Christ's father was not Adam. Jesus Christ is not in Adam. Christ broke the curse of death that began with Adam. And for all of us who are in Christ, he became the first to rise from the dead. So that all who are in Christ shall be made alive.

Christ now reigns at the right hand of God. And at the end of time he will destroy every rule and authority and power that does not serve God. And one of those powers, the last to be destroyed, is the enemy, death. When death is destroyed, it will release its hold and all the dead will rise.

\* Summary

Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> argument for the resurrection from the dead is that Christ's resurrection is a fact and his resurrection destroys the power of death so that all will rise.

6. Argument 3: If the dead aren't raised, why endure gospel trouble? Why not live for the present, in sin, with no worry about the afterlife?

Read 1 Cor 15:29-34.

After Paul became a follower of Jesus, he regularly put himself in harms way in order to bring the gospel to others. Like what? Listen as he describes his gospel trouble:

2 Corinthians 11:24–28 <sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

You and I live in a place and in a time when Christians are almost never beaten or stoned. If we lived other places today or in other times, we might be beaten for following Christ. But if you and I are to obey Christ, then sometimes we ought to move toward danger. Listen to Jesus, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matthew 16:24–25). Jesus tells us to not make safety or pleasure our great aim, but make sacrificing and following him, our great aim. If your aim is to save your life here, Jesus says that you will lose your life in the end. But if your aim is to lose your life here for his sake, then you will find it.

Here’s Paul’s point in this paragraph: if the dead aren’t raised, why sacrifice for Jesus’ sake. You see, what you believe about your resurrection affects how you live your life now. If your body stays dead after you die, then it would be smarter to eat and drink and play as though food and drink and play are of the greatest value. An old beer advertisement said, “You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can!” If after life, there is only death, then grabbing all the gusto you can now is the smart move. But if the dead are raised, then that beer slogan is a deceiver.

Look at verses 33 and 34. Paul says to watch out where you get your life slogans from. Bad companions with their bad slogans corrupt the morals of even those in the church. Some of you are following the life principles of friends on social media, or song writers, or movie personalities, or authors, even though they are leading you to live as though you will not face God in the resurrection. Are you living to get all the gusto you can now, rather than denying yourself now? God’s word to you is right here in v. 34, “Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.” You think you know God, but your life tells otherwise. Wake up. Don’t be deceived.

#### \* Summary

Paul’s 3<sup>rd</sup> argument for the resurrection from the dead is that you know that enduring gospel trouble is God’s way for you to live and you know that living for the present, in sin, with no thought to the afterlife is ungodly. It is not foolish to endure those troubles because you will rise again after death.

## 7. Objection and Responses: With what kind of body are the dead raised?

\* Response 1: Like a seed

Read 1 Cor 15:35-41.

Paul can just about hear the Corinthian doubters saying, “But how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” When you look at a natural dead body, it looks completely unsuitable to be made alive again: perhaps it’s old, or sick, or broken. How can this kind of body, so weak and broken, be raised? If it is raised, will it be any good, worth anything? Paul's answer is that the resurrection body is as different from the existing body as the full plant is different from the seed.

Renee has been planting her garden. And even me, the non-gardener, knows that a carrot seed is not what a fully grown carrot plant looks like. If I looked at a carrot seed and then told Renee, “How are we going to eat one of those when it grows up?” She would rightly think me a fool for thinking that a tiny seed is what the full grown plant will be like.

When you plant a seed, it looks dead: no nourishing moisture moving from roots to leaves, no roots or stems or leaves at all. All we see is a tiny seemingly-lifeless kernel. This is what Paul says in v. 37. A dead body is like a seed to be sown. You don’t sow the body that is to be, but just a bare kernel: no breath, no warmth, just worn-out or broken. But at the resurrection, God transforms that dead bare kernel body into something he chooses.

So the first part of Paul’s answer to question, “With what kind of body are the dead raised?” is that the dead are raised from a seed kind of body from which God grows a resurrection body where the difference between the two is like the difference between the seed of a plant and the fully grown plant.

\* Response 2: Like that of Jesus Christ

Let’s read the next paragraph to learn more. Read 1 Cor 15:42-49.

Look at the words Paul uses to describe the seed of an earthly dead body: perishable, dishonor, weakness, a natural body. When we see the dead body like this, we can understand the unbelief of some that just can’t see how this body could possibly be raised. It is completely lifeless, often wore out, often broken by sickness or accident. What future does this body have?

Oh but this is just the seed that is planted. Look at the words Paul uses to describe the resurrection body that God gives: imperishable, glory, power, spiritual body. The resurrection body will never wear out. This body is not an embarrassment to its owner, but glorious. This body is not too weak to move or breath, but is powerful. Be confident, brothers and sisters, that your resurrection body will be lovely, reflecting God’s glory more fully than ever your body did here.

Your body now reflects the image of the man of dust, that is Adam. But just as sure as that, your resurrection body will reflect the image of the man of heaven. Who is this man of heaven? He is the last Adam, Jesus Christ. Just as Adam is the firstborn of all natural men, so Jesus is the firstborn of all spiritual men. Now we bear the image of Adam. At the resurrection, we will bear the image of Jesus. His resurrection body is glorious and yours will be too.

\* Summary

With what kind of body are the dead raised? Like a seed, your dead body looks lifeless, but will produce a glorious body that bears the image of your Savior, Jesus.

8. We shall all be changed

Read 1 Cor 15:50-57.

No one can inherit the kingdom of God in their existing body. Therefore, when the time comes for the resurrection of the dead, even those who have not died will gain a changed body.

When will the resurrection of the dead happen? Paul says it will happen at the last trumpet. In the Scriptures, a trumpet often announces the approach or presence of God. Think of the loud trumpet sounding at Mount Sinai, if you remember that story from Exodus. Jesus says in Mt 24 that “he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect.” The gathering of all men is described in Rev 20:13 where it says that all the dead will arise to be judged by God. This is when the resurrection will happen, at the great judgment.

An implication of this is that even those who have rejected Christ will get immortal bodies. Acts 24:15 says that “there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.” However the resurrected bodies of the unjust will not be suited for glorious use, but suited for everlasting punishment. If you are a non-Christian here this morning, God’s word is good for you too. Through these words you are hearing, God is lovingly warning you to repent of your sins and believe in the gospel while you still have time. Plead with God for mercy so you can escape the everlasting punishment you deserve for your sins. Brian or I would love to talk with you more if you’d like.

Christian, tremble with gladness as you contemplate what God has saved you from: your sins, death; and what God is saving you for: glorious life with him. When Christ rose from the dead, he broke the power of death. Death will not have the final say over you. Your perishable body will put on the imperishable and your mortal body will put on immortality. And when that happens, all the redeemed will sing praises to God for giving us the victory over death. “O death, where is your victory?” Gone! Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ!



## 9. Right response to the resurrection of our bodies

Since our resurrection is truly coming, how should we live in the present? First, we should worship God for redeeming us from death's hold, as we just saw.

To see the second way we should live in light of the resurrection, let's read the last verse of this chapter.

Read 1 Cor 15:58.

Notice this verse starts with "therefore." In light of all that Paul wrote in this chapter, this is the conclusion, this is the right response.

What are we to be steadfast and immovable in? Look back to v. 2. Steadfast and immovable are the same idea as hold fast in v.2. So be steadfast in the gospel, in the word of God. To be steadfast then is to know God's word, to regularly read God's word and meditate on it, and to live like you know and love God and his word.

When you are steadfast in God, some of that will only be seen inside of you. But being steadfast looks like something on the outside as well. Like what? Being steadfast in God looks like "always abounding in the work of the Lord." This means you are vigorously engaging in God's work now: raising your children to be responsible and know God, helping your husband, caring for your wife as much as you care for yourself, serving in the church nursery, taking the responsibility of being the Awana commander, teaching children's Sunday school, speaking of Christ to your co-workers or fellow students at school.

This ties back to v. 32-34. Look back there. If you are living for yourself as a wife, husband, student, church member, then you are living to get all the gusto you can now, for tomorrow you die. God's word would say to you that this looks like you have no knowledge of God. If you consider yourself to be a Christian and you are living for your own private pleasures, you ought to be ashamed. That's what God's word says in v. 34.

For some of you, you've had a fruitful life for Christ and now you are in your 60's and about to retire. The temptations are strong to pull back and stop abounding in the work of the Lord. We can be deceived into thinking that the ending of my employment means the ending of my labor for the Lord, that retirement from my job means retirement from serving in church. If that's you, God's word would say to you from v. 34, "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning." Even in retirement, if you are not doing what you can to labor for the Lord, you are sinning.

We all get tired. We all need some refreshment. And the older I get, the more I feel it. But where do we find the fuel to stay abounding in the work of the Lord? Look back to the bottom of v. 58, "knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." When I am hard

pressed with the temptation to stop abounding in the work of the Lord, I must fix my attention on what matters most. I must set my mind on the thought that my labor in the Lord is not in vain.

How does this relate to your assurance of the resurrection and your prizing of the resurrection? It is this. Go ahead and wear out your earthly body in service to the Lord. Your goal isn't to preserve this body. Your goal is to use every resource you have: body, time, money, relationships, passions ... to make much of God for the good of others. And know that as you do that, you aren't losing anything, but are gaining everything. When Christ comes, you'll have a new body, more glorious than this one. Once again, listen to Jesus: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24–25).

This is God's word for us this morning.