

# **“The Significance of Easter”**

## **1 Corinthians 15:12-26**

Pastor Eric Yee

### **Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

### **Sermon Introduction**

Happy Easter, everyone!

On this day, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But when it comes to celebrating, there are various *depths* of how we can celebrate.

For example, have you ever been to a birthday party of someone you didn't really know very well? How did you feel?

As people are singing “Happy birthday,” you *know* you're *supposed* to be joyful along with everyone and you *know* you *should* celebrate, and on some level you *are* celebrating, but because you don't have much of a significant relationship with the birthday person, your celebration never moves deeper than mere surface-level sentiments.

In the same way, we're here to *celebrate* the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But unless we have a significant relationship with Jesus and unless his resurrection has much significance for our lives, our celebrations won't go much deeper than surface-level sentiments.

So today, as we look to Scripture, I want to help us move beyond mere sentiments into a deeper understanding and appreciation for the significance of Jesus' resurrection. I want to help us answer the “so what?” question regarding Jesus' resurrection.

Why does it matter that Jesus resurrected from the dead? How does Jesus' resurrection affect my life? Or in other words, what is the significance of Easter?

That's what we'll be exploring more today.

### **The One Thing**

***Because Jesus Christ is resurrected,  
we can have hope in this life and the life to come.***

### **Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15:12-26.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

These verses are in the middle of an entire chapter that the apostle Paul dedicated to address the topic of the resurrection.

He spends the first 11 verses of the chapter establishing that Jesus' resurrection is *core* to the gospel message itself and that the resurrected Jesus was *eye-witnessed* by hundreds of people.

He spends the next 23 verses of the chapter connecting *Jesus'* resurrection with the resurrection of *all believers* in Christ on the last day.

And then he spends the last 24 verses explaining what the *nature* of believers' resurrection bodies will be like.

All this is to say that the resurrection is VERY important that Paul dedicates 58 verses to explaining it in detail. The passage we'll look at today is in the middle section, where Paul connects *Jesus'* resurrection with the resurrection of *all believers* in Christ on the last day.

## **Scripture Reading**

So let's read 1 Corinthians 15:12-26.

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This is God's Word.

## **Overview**

We'll look at this passage in two parts to better understand the significance of Easter—or the significance of Jesus' resurrection.

- I. "If Christ has NOT been raised from the dead" (vv. 12-19)
- II. "But in fact Christ HAS been raised from the dead" (vv. 20-26)

### **I. "If Christ has NOT been raised from the dead" (vv. 12-19)**

Verses 12-13 say this:

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

For some reason, even though the Corinthians were *preaching* that "Christ [*has been*] raised from the dead," some of them were also teaching that "there is *no* resurrection of the dead."

To say that "there is no resurrection of the dead" did *not* mean that *in principle* that there cannot be *any* resurrection of the dead; otherwise, there's obviously no way they could proclaim that Jesus was raised from the dead. The context shows us that's *not* what the Corinthians were saying.

Rather, they meant that there will be no resurrection of the dead for believers in Christ *on the last day* when Jesus himself returns. In other words, they were saying that *Jesus* resurrected, but *we* will never resurrect.

In order for us to better understand why this is so important *not* to deny, we need to step out a bit to better understand what it means to be “saved.”

Please listen carefully. When it comes to understanding our salvation, Paul actually talks about salvation in three tenses: past, present, and future; sometimes he says we *have been* saved (Eph. 2:8-9), sometimes he says we are *being* saved (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2), and sometimes he says we *shall be* saved (Rom. 5:9).

<Show salvation timeline (see below)>

SALVATION		
Past	Present	Future
We <i>have been</i> saved (Eph. 2:8-9)	We are <i>being</i> saved (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2)	We <i>shall be</i> saved (Rom. 5:9)
Justification	Sanctification	Glorification

To say that we *have been* saved is to refer to our *past* justification in Christ. To be justified means that God has forgiven us of our sins and has counted Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and he now declares us righteous in his sight.

To say that we are *being saved* is to refer to our *present* sanctification. Sanctification is an ongoing, progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and more and more like Christ in our lives.

To say that we *shall be* saved is to refer to our *future* glorification, when Christ returns and we will be given new, glorified, resurrected bodies to enjoy in the new heavens and new earth without sin, corruption, or death.

Salvation is not *just* past, it’s not *just* present, and it’s not *just* future, but it’s the *whole* package. If you *have been* saved, then you *are being* saved, and you *will be* saved. Paul brings it altogether in...

**Romans 8:29-30** = For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son [**or sanctification**], in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also **justified**, and those whom he justified he also **glorified**.

So right here, we have an unbroken chain of salvation from start to finish: we have been *justified*, we are being *sanctified*, and we will be *glorified*—and Paul talks about our glorification in the *past* tense, as if it’s already done, because it is *guaranteed* for all those who *are* saved in Christ Jesus.

<pause>

But some of the Corinthians were essentially denying this future “glorification” aspect of salvation. They were saying that there is no resurrection that awaits believers where we will receive new, glorified, resurrected bodies. Rather, perhaps they thought we would just remain as disembodied souls for all eternity.

But if we understand salvation *rightly*, that absolutely *cannot* be. If Christ was raised from the dead, he gave all those who believe in him the *entire* salvation package—justification, sanctification, and glorification. It’s an unbroken chain of salvation from start to finish.

To say that there is no glorification was to essentially unravel the *whole* of salvation. Either Christ *resurrected* and we have *all* of salvation, including glorification, or Christ did *not* resurrect and we have *none* of salvation.

To deny that we will one day have new, glorified, resurrected bodies as believers in Jesus Christ, then, was essentially saying that Christ did *not* really resurrect from the dead.

And from there, Paul begins to follow that supposed conclusion to its logical ends. If Christ did *not* resurrect from the dead—if Easter did *not* happen—then we don't *just* lose glorification, but we lose *all* hope in this life and in the life to come.

<pause>

Verse 14 says this:

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

Our preaching is in vain because the *content* of our preaching is a *lie*. The core message of the gospel that we proclaim depends on the fact that Christ *really* died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures and was buried, and that he *really* was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. But if Christ did *not* actually resurrect, then Christ just died and was buried, and there is *no* good news in that.

We *preached* a lie. And you *believed* a lie.

And I don't think any of us could ever say that's a good thing. Every movie with this premise understands that it is horrible to have your entire life based on a lie—"The Matrix," "The Giver," "The Truman Show," "Divergent," "Free Guy," and on and on. *Nobody* wants their lives based on a lie, no matter how wonderful that lie may sound.

No matter how sincere we are, there's nothing commendable about perpetuating a lie and basing our whole life on a lie.

<pause>

Verses 15-16 then say this:

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

If Christianity was just an ideology composed of a bunch of good advice on how to live life better, then I don't think we could really constitute them as *liars* because they were simply just giving advice that they thought to be good. They gave *bad advice*, but I don't think we would call such men *liars*.

But the fact is that Christianity is *not* just an ideology composed of a bunch of good advice; it is fundamentally about *good news*. They proclaimed that something *happened* in history—that God *truly* raised Christ from the dead.

*Advice* may be good or bad advice, but *news* is either true or not true.<sup>1</sup>

So if God did *not* do something, but we say that he *did* do it, then we are *lying* about God. We are "*misrepresenting*" him. We are *slandering* him.

And you could even say that we are leading people to believe in a *false* god. If we say that God raised Christ from the dead but he in fact did *not*, then we're leading people to follow a God who does *not* actually exist.

<pause>

But even worse, verse 17 says this:

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., TNTC (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 97.

<sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

If Christ has *not* been raised, then he was just another man who lived and died and *stayed* dead. Everything that Jesus said about him dying for the forgiveness of our sins would be void. Why should we believe him?

As one pastor said:

If Jesus rose from the dead, then you *have* to accept *all* he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about *any* of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.<sup>2</sup>

But if Christ has *not* been raised, then Jesus' death would have been no different than any other man's death. His death cannot be said to have "accomplished" anything any more than any other man's death could be said to have "accomplished" something.

In fact, it could be argued that other men's deaths accomplished *more*, for someone could take a bullet for another man and at least save a person's life temporarily before they would eventually die naturally. But if Jesus *willingly* gave himself up to die a criminal's death and he *stayed* dead, then he *foolishly* just threw away his life. Not only does that accomplish *nothing*, but that's a *terrible* example; I don't think any of us would say that it's commendable to just get yourself arrested, tortured, and crucified for *no reason* at all.

<pause>

God's Word says in...

Romans 4:25 (NIV) = He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

What's important to notice here is that *both* Jesus' death *and* resurrection are *crucial* to our understanding of how sinners can be forgiven and justified before God.

If God did *not* raise Christ from the dead, then God's verdict on Jesus would have *agreed* with the Jewish and Roman authorities who crucified him: "condemned." But in resurrecting Jesus, God *overturned* their verdict and *vindicated* him by giving a new verdict: "justified" (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16). And because Jesus is *our substitute* and because we are *united* to Christ through faith, we now *share* in that verdict of being "justified" or "declared righteous."

Through Jesus' death, God *condemned* Christ as *our substitute*, so that *we* may be forgiven our sins. And through Jesus' resurrection, God *justified* Christ as *our substitute*, so that *we* may be declared righteous in his sight.

In other words, Jesus' death and resurrection come as a *packaged* deal regarding our salvation. If Jesus did *not* resurrect from the dead, then God's final verdict on Christ is "condemned" and being united to him through faith does us *no* good. If Jesus did *not* resurrect from the dead, then we *still* stand as condemned sinners before a holy God and we *still* await eternal judgment for our sins against him.

<pause>

Even more, verse 18 says this:

<sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

To "fall asleep" was a euphemism for death used by Christians because they believed that believers in Jesus Christ would one day resurrect with new glorified bodies when Christ returned (1 Thess. 4:13-18). But if Christ did *not* resurrect, then there is *no* forgiveness of sins through faith in him, and that means that all those who have died believing in Christ as their Lord and Savior have "perished."

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 202, Kindle.

To “perish” does not mean that they have ceased to exist, but Paul uses the same word (*apólymi*) to mean final *judgment* or *destruction* (cf. Rom. 2:12; 14:15; 1 Cor. 1:18-19; 8:11; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10).<sup>3</sup> In other words, to “perish” is to experience everlasting judgment *in hell* for our sins.

<pause>

God’s Word says in...

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (NIV)** = Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. **For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.**

So what is the hope that we have? Because Jesus died *and* rose again, all those who are united to Christ through faith will *also* rise again.

But this hope entirely depends on whether Christ *really* did rise from the grave. If not, then there’s really *no* hope at all for any of us.

If Christ did *not* rise from the dead, then he has no victory over sin and death. And so, we are *still* in our sins, and all those who die are *totally* lost. There is no eternal life, but only death and eternal wrath await us all.

<pause>

Verse 19 *summarizes* what is lost without Christ’s resurrection by saying this:

<sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

If Christ did *not* rise from the dead, then Christians are the most *pitiful* people in this world; we *foolishly* commit our lives to a dead man who has *no* power to help us overcome death. If Christ did *not* rise from the dead, then we *all* live meaningless lives and we *all* have no hope in the face of death.

That’s exactly what Paul later says in...

**1 Corinthians 15:30-32** = Why are we in danger every hour? ... I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Paul is essentially saying, “If Christ did not rise from the dead, why in the world am I putting my life in danger every day to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—if in fact, it’s not true at all? Why am I subjecting myself to such terrible persecution, even fighting beasts in the arena? Why in the world am I risking my life to proclaim a hope that does not exist?”

If Christ was *not* raised from the dead, then the Christian life is all a *waste* and it’s the most *foolish* way Paul or any of us could live our lives.

Rather, if this life is *all* there is, then Paul says that we ought to just live to *survive* and *indulge* as much as we can: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” YOLO should be our life motto.

We should pursue *survival* (or self-preservation) because once we die, we’ve lost everything, so we want to live as long as we can. But we should also pursue *indulgence* (or pleasure) because once we die, there’s no other enjoyment to be had.<sup>4</sup>

<pause>

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner and Nicholas Perrin, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 310.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 167-168.

Taken further, if this life is *all* there is, perhaps you could say that there's very little motivation to care much about justice and making this world a better place. Why make sacrifices for the good of others? Why not just live completely for yourself?

I'm *not* saying that those who believe that this life is *all* there is are *necessarily* selfish; that's often *not* the case. But I'm just asking us to think *logically*: "If I *really* believe that this world is all there is, what motivation do I have to do good to anyone besides myself?"

If it's because you hope to be remembered by loved ones, you will die and they will die and you'll long be forgotten. Probably none of us here can give the names of our great-grandparents, and if we could, we probably don't know much about their lives.

If it's because you hope that your good works will be remembered in history, rare is that person who does such great works that they're remembered like that—and again, even the greatest kings of the greatest empires are just anonymous statues with disfigured faces in museums now.

If it's because of some set of morals that you have, why live up to those morals if this life is all there is and there is no divine accountability for whether you lived up to those morals or not?

And even if you *do* believe in divine accountability, what hope of salvation do you have? Our only hope in life and death is in the sinless Savior who died in our place for the forgiveness of our sins and resurrected for our justification, sanctification, and glorification. If Jesus is *not* the sinless substitute for us, how can we as sinners ever be good enough to stand before a holy God?

If Christ did *not* rise from the dead and this life is *really* all there is, then all of us would be *wise* if we just lived to *survive* and *indulge*—to "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

<pause>

Now a question for all of us to ponder *personally* is this: "Does the way I'm living actually *match* what I say I believe?"

If you believe that this life is *all* there is, then does the way that you're living *match* what you say you believe? What basis do you have for the way you're living? And how strong of a foundation is that basis?

For example, if social justice and doing good to others are important to you, why is that? Is it because you believe people have inherent value? Is it because you believe these are objective virtues that should be upheld? Well, what foundation do you have to believe those things?

And as Christians, if we believe in the resurrected Christ, that this life is *not* all that there is, that there *is* divine accountability, that we *will* one day be resurrected with new glorified bodies to enjoy forever in a new heavens and new earth, then does the way that we're living *match* what we say we believe? Or do our lives resemble someone who *functionally* just believes that you only live once and this life is *all* there is, and we better just live to *survive* and *indulge* as much as we can before we die?

As Christians, we would be *wise* to *soberly ask* ourselves whether we *really* believe that Christ resurrected from the dead, and we would be *wise* to *think hard* about the implications of what that means for how we live our lives now.

<pause>

So first, "If Christ has NOT been raised from the dead," and second...

## II. "But in fact Christ HAS been raised from the dead" (vv. 20-26)

Verse 20 says:

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

Remember that in the first 11 verses of this chapter, Paul established that Jesus' resurrection is *core* to the gospel message itself and that the resurrected Jesus was *eye-witnessed* by hundreds of people.

Now before we start thinking that the resurrection was just a legend or myth that developed over a long period of time, you should know that *every* historian agrees that Paul wrote this letter of 1 Corinthians just 15-20 years after the death of Jesus.

Modern people may tend to think that ancient people were more gullible than we are—that “of course, they would believe in the resurrection of the dead; they just didn’t know better like we do now.” That’s what C. S. Lewis calls “chronological snobbery.”

Throughout history, no matter what culture, the idea of Jesus resurrecting from the dead has been *rightly* questionable because it *defies* our everyday experience. The historical and cultural context of the Corinthians was no different.

But there was something that the Corinthians could *not* shake. Jesus was crucified and buried, and three days later, his tomb was empty and he appeared to hundreds of eyewitnesses.

The combination of the empty tomb and the eyewitnesses is important. If there was *only* an empty tomb but no eyewitnesses, it would be unreasonable to conclude that Jesus resurrected. And if there were *only* eyewitnesses but no empty tomb, then their eyewitness testimonies could have been dismissed; all anyone needed to do was to just present Jesus’ body still in the tomb. But the tomb *really* was empty and there were all kinds of *eyewitnesses* of Christ’s resurrection.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians was also a *public* document to be read aloud to the entire church, so this was an *invitation* for anyone who doubted to go talk with the eyewitnesses themselves to confirm Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>5</sup> After all, just 15-20 years after Jesus’ death, many of them were still alive to go talk to.

And let’s just say for the sake of argument that Jesus *somehow* managed to survive his crucifixion, do you think that that this half-dead, “staggering, wounded, crucified, and spear-stabbed man would have been able to convince his stubborn, skeptical followers that he was the Lord of life and the Conqueror of death?”<sup>6</sup> That’s very unlikely. Nothing short of a glorified, resurrected body would convince them that he was *really* alive again.

<pause>

So after painting such a hopeless picture of this life and the life to come if Christ did *not* resurrect, Paul now says “But in fact Christ *has* been raised from the dead.” And in effect, everything he just said can now be stated in the *reverse*.

Our preaching is *not* in vain and your faith is *not* in vain. The good *news* of Jesus Christ is *true*. We preached the *truth* and you believed the *truth*. Your whole life is based on the *truth* rooted in history that Jesus *really* did rise from the dead.

We did not lie nor slander God, but we spoke *truthfully* about him. The God who raised Christ from the dead is the God we *proclaim* and the God you *believed*—and he is the *one true God* whom we stake our whole lives on.

And if God *really* raised Christ from the dead, then Christ’s death *really* accomplished *something*. He was not just a man who threw his life away, but he was *really* our *substitute* who was condemned and put to death *in our place* for our sins and who was vindicated and declared righteous by God through his resurrection, so that we who are now *united* to him through faith can have *full* assurance that *all* our sins are forgiven and that *we too* are justified or declared righteous in God’s sight.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 203-206, Kindle.

<sup>6</sup> Greg Gilbert, *Who is Jesus?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 127.

That also means that all those who have “fallen asleep” believing in Christ as their Lord and Savior have *not* perished, but they are in his presence now (Phil. 1:23) and will one day resurrect with new glorified bodies when Christ returns, and we’ll *all* enjoy life with him and with one another in the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1-4).

That means that, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have no need to selfishly preserve our lives nor to exploit this world for our own indulgence because our hope extends *beyond* this temporal life. We’re not afraid to lose our lives for the sake of the gospel (Mark 8:35), for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

Those who only live to survive and indulge can only fear the inevitable—the loss of *all* this temporal life has to offer. But those who hope in Christ and his resurrection can live and enjoy life to the fullest without fear because death has lost its sting (1 Cor. 15:55-57), and we now have a living and imperishable hope in Christ (1 Pet. 1:3).

If Christ *indeed* has risen from the dead, then we can *gladly* give our lives away, not for personal gain but for the good of others and the glory of God’s name. If Christ *indeed* has risen from the dead, the risk-taking, persecution-enduring, disciple-making life is the *only* life that makes sense.

<pause>

Verses 21-23 then say this:

<sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

In history, there have been two major representatives for mankind: Adam and Jesus.

To understand what I mean by “representative,” think about David and Goliath and how they engaged in representative warfare. Rather than *all* the Israelites going to war against *all* the Philistines, they each put forward a champion to *represent* them as a whole. If David defeated Goliath, then it was a shared *victory* for all the Israelites; if David was defeated by Goliath, then it was a shared *defeat* for all the Israelites.

So where Adam *failed* as our representative, Christ *succeeded* as our representative.

In creation, God literally gave Adam everything, but he gave him one prohibition—not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). But Adam disobeyed, and sin and death entered the world.

And because Adam was our *representative* and he sinned against God, we are *all* born with a sinful *nature* and we continue to *choose* to sin against God.

But in redemption, God the Son literally gave up everything to come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, so that he could perfectly obey where Adam and all mankind had all disobeyed, to die to take the punishment that sin deserves, and to resurrect three days later to be vindicated and declared “justified” in God’s sight.

And because Christ is the *representative* of all those who belong to him, we who are *united* to him through faith are now born again with a new heart (John 3:3; Ezek. 36:26), we are forgiven all our sins, and we are now empowered to live lives that are obedience and pleasing to God (Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:27).

In other words, through *Adam*, *death* entered the world and it would be experienced by all who follow him, but through *Christ*, *resurrection* entered the world and it would be experienced by all who believe and follow him.

But there is an “already but not yet” nature to resurrection.

The term “firstfruits” is an agricultural image, which means that if you see the firstfruits, you know the rest of the harvest will come; the firstfruits *foreshadow* and *guarantee* the harvest to come. So if Christ has *indeed* been raised, then his resurrected, glorified body *foreshadows* and *guarantees* that all those who believe in him will *also* be raised from the dead and live forever with him and one another in our *own* resurrected, glorified bodies.

In Christ, we *already* have a *down payment* on our resurrection (so to speak), but we will *not yet* have our resurrection until he comes again. Christ *already* is the “firstfruits” of resurrection, but the resurrection of all who belong to him will *not* occur until his second coming.

<pause>

Verses 24-26 then say this:

<sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

The ascended Christ is currently reigning from heaven at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36; 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22), and one day, he *will* return, coming on the clouds of heaven in final judgment (Matt. 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62), when ultimately the *last* enemy to be put under his feet is *death* itself (cf. Ps. 110:1).

In the new heavens and new earth, “death shall be no more” (Rev. 21:4).

And this is an ironic reversal in this whole discussion with the Corinthians. In verse 12, some Corinthians were saying “there is no *resurrection*.” And here in verse 26, Paul is saying, when Christ returns, “there will be no *death*.”<sup>7</sup>

<pause>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the *foundation* for all hope in this life and in the life to come.

During World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian who was involved in the failed Valkyrie plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. And soon afterwards, in April 1943, he was arrested, and in April 1945, Bonhoeffer was hanged at the age of 39 in a concentration camp under the direct order of Hitler himself.

But on the day after the Valkyrie plot failed, when Bonhoeffer basically *knew* that his arrest and death were inevitable, he wrote to his friend saying these two simple sentences: “Jesus is alive. I have hope.” And right before he was hanged, Bonhoeffer’s last words were, “This is the end—for me, the beginning of life.”<sup>8</sup>

The resurrection of Christ meant *everything* to Bonhoeffer because it meant *hope*. Because Jesus Christ is resurrected, we can have *hope* in this life and the life to come.

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So what about us?

Globally, the pandemic has caused over 6 million deaths, there is an ongoing war in Ukraine that has added tens of thousands of more deaths, and refugee crises seem to be commonplace over the last few years that have displaced millions more.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., TNTC (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 99.

<sup>8</sup> Matt Tully, “The Life and Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Stephen Nichols),” February 07, 2022, in *the Crossway Podcast*, produced by Crossway, podcast, MP3 audio, 35:05, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/podcast-the-life-and-legacy-of-dietrich-bonhoeffer-stephen-nichols/>.

Personally, perhaps you're grieving the loss of loved ones, perhaps you're suffering through physical or mental health issues, or perhaps you're struggling through personal sin or others' sins against you.

Amidst all that our *world* is going through and all that *you're* going through, if you're a Christian, then you have *hope* in a Savior who did not stay dead but who *resurrected*.

Christ's resurrection is *proof* that *God can redeem* even the worst evils and the worst tragedies in this life. If he can redeem the crucifixion of his sinless Son for the salvation of sinners like us, he can redeem *anything* for our ultimate good.

No matter what we're suffering right now—whether it's physical, emotional, mental, relational, or spiritual—we know that it will *not always be*. Paul writes in...

Romans 8:18-21 (NIV) = I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Paul was well acquainted with suffering and loss. He was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, experienced many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst and in cold and exposure; he saw dear friends and brothers in Christ die for their faith and he saw dear friends abandon their faith for the cares of this world. He knew *great* suffering and loss, so he is *not* in any way trying to *minimize* any of our suffering and loss that we're going through; rather, he's trying to help us *maximize* our hope in glory. He's not *diminishing* our pain, but he's trying to *maximize* our sight of glory.

"Glory" here is referring to our *glorification* in the new heavens and new earth, where all those who believe in Christ will be raised from the dead and live forever with him and with one another in our own resurrected, glorified bodies.

Paul describes our lives right now as "sufferings" and "frustration," but also "eager expectation." In this life, as believers in Jesus Christ, we *grieve* deeply and we *hope* deeply. But our hope in glory *far surpasses* any grief that we experience in this life.

<pause>

Christ's resurrection is also *proof* that God cares about *this world*. Sin *corrupted* all of God's good creation, and God is *not* going to leave his creation *ruined*. And God's *definitive proof* of his *commitment* to the restoration of his world is in his giving Jesus a *physically* resurrected and glorified *body*—the "firstfruits" of our *own* resurrected bodies and the "firstfruits" of a renewed and restored creation to come in the new heavens and new earth.

God *cares* about this material world because he *created* it. He is *not* going to wipe out his creation but he will *renew* it and *restore* it. The new heavens and new earth will *not* be a world of thorns and thistles, pollution and global warming, sin and death, but it will be a *renewed* creation with all the things we love about this world *without* any of the death, disease, and decay.

For all who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, the resurrection *assures* us of God's forgiveness of our sins and *comforts* us with the hope of our glorification. But at the same time, it also *motivates* us to bring into the present a *glimpse* of what is to come in the new heavens and new earth where God's character and purposes are perfectly lived out. That's why we sacrificially give of ourselves to doing acts of mercy and justice, to using our work to cultivate society for the flourishing of all people, and most importantly, to giving our lives away to make disciples of Jesus Christ so that more people throughout the world would also share this hope that we have.

And that's why, if we believe that Christ resurrected from the dead, this is *good news* to be *shared*.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news for the whole world because it is a message of *hope*. It means that there is hope *beyond* this world, and if that's true, it means that there is profound hope that can be experienced *in* this world in the here and now.

But it all begins by receiving and believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and all its implications. Listen to what Jesus said to his grieving friends, which are still his words for all of us today; he says in...

John 11:25-26 = I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?

I'm not sure how we came into this Easter Sunday Celebration. Perhaps you came in feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, and despairing. Or perhaps you came in feeling casual, comfortable, and content. But regardless of how we came in, I believe Jesus has these *unshakeable* words of *confrontation* for us: "I am the resurrection and the life."

Jesus *really* did resurrect from the dead, and *in him* we *also* have hope of resurrection. In other words, Easter means *hope*.

And so, he asks us the same searching question: "Do you *believe* this?"

Church, even more, if we *do* believe, can we *celebrate* this? Will we *live* our lives in light of this hope? Will we *give* our lives to sharing this hope to the nations, starting with our own neighbors?

So as we're celebrating Jesus' resurrection today on this Easter Sunday, may we *not* be like *strangers* at a birthday party, never moving deeper than mere surface-level sentiments, but may we be *spiritual family* who have a significant relationship with Christ and who deeply understand and appreciate that Jesus' resurrection is our *only hope* in this life and the life to come.

And may our whole lives *testify* to that hope that we have, so that *our* lives and the lives of all *those* around us would never again be the same.

<pause>

As we close, here's the...

## **Life Application**

1. Reflect on how hopeless this life would be if Christ has *not* been raised from the dead and this life *really* is all there is.
2. Rejoice in the fact that Christ *has* been raised from the dead and what hope that gives us in this life and the life to come.
3. Reveal to others the *hope* offered to us in Jesus' death and resurrection if we believe in him as our Lord and Savior.

## **The One Thing**

***Because Jesus Christ is resurrected,  
we can have hope in this life and the life to come.***

## **Conclusion**

Can we all stand as we respond to God's Word?