

April 21, 2019

“The Significance of the Resurrection”

1 Corinthians 15:58

FCF: The need to be reminded of the meaning of Easter

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Christ is risen.

(magnet) We must lay hold of the significance of this news.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Holiday traditions are a funny thing. We have the bunny and our egg hunts. The Greek island of Corfu has its annual “pot throwing “ - pots, pans, and earthenware go flying out of windows, pointing to the beginning of spring and the new crops to come. In France, the bells stay silent from Thursday until Easter Sunday. The story is that the bells grew wings and flew to Rome to be blessed by the Pope. Then they return with chocolates and presents for the children.

There’s nothing wrong with such things. But the importance of any tradition can begin to take over the meaning of the holiday itself. So we need to be reminded of the meaning of Easter.

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

What does the Bible mean when it speaks of the “resurrection” of Jesus? It’s not just that His influence endures. When President Makarios of Cyprus died some years ago, his followers spray-painted the buildings of Cyprus with the words, “Makarios lives!” His influence endures. But that’s not what the Bible means by Jesus’ resurrection. Nor is it merely His resuscitation, His being brought back from the dead only to then die again. Think of poor Lazarus here.

When the Bible speaks of the resurrection of Jesus, it means the miraculous act of God in which the decay and decomposition of Jesus’ body was reversed. His heart began to beat and His lungs began to breathe. His body was transformed and He was raised to never die again.

Which brings us to our text. Many in the ancient world believed that death was either the utter extinguishing of life or the door to a shadowy existence in the underworld. The idea of our having a physical existence after death was the stuff of myth. Not unlike today. So Paul was writing this letter to clear the air - connecting Jesus’ resurrection to one that is yet to come.

That’s what this chapter is about. But this isn’t something just to be understood. It’s to be applied. The resurrection of Jesus is the greatest event in the history of the world. It’s as if a great rock was dropped into the pond, sending out not just ripples but waves. Christ is risen. We must lay hold of the significance of this news. And we get hints of the significance of this news in this short text - with resurrection reality, resurrection unity, and resurrection certainty.

I. RESURRECTION REALITY

First, resurrection reality. It’s reflected in the critical word, “Therefore...” In view of all that’s happened, in view of all that’s coming, lay hold of the resurrection in how you think of it.

A) The Historicity of the Events

There are a couple of things here, the first being the historicity of the events.

1. The assumption

Paul is writing about 20 years after that first Easter Sunday, the day when the rock hit the water. He is assuming the reality of certain events that happened in the flow of space and time.

2. The assertion

That's why he begins this chapter with a survey of the events and a listing of the witnesses. He's throwing down the gauntlet. "Go ahead. Ask around if you don't believe me. They'll tell you."

Illustration:

Eyewitnesses are typically evaluated in criminal trials by asking four questions. Were the witnesses really present at the time of the crime? Can their accounts be corroborated in some way? Have they changed their story over time? Do they have biases causing them to lie, exaggerate, or misinterpret what was seen? We can examine the Gospels with those questions.

B) The Reliability of the Witnesses

And, as we do so, what we come to see is that we can trust the reliability of the witnesses.

1. Present

Were they present? Yes. The Gospels were written early enough to have been cross-checked.

2. Corroborated

Can their stories be corroborated? Yes. Better than any other ancient historical account.

3. Changed

Have their stories changed? No. There is a solid "chain of custody," passing down the record.

4. Bias

Were they biased? Not going into the events. But something happened and it changed them.

"Therefore..." Know the historicity and reliability. And lay hold of the resurrection.

Application:

There is a wealth of proofs to consider here, a wide range of strong arguments to be made. All of which is to say that, if you're wrestling with doubts about whether this is all true, you need not be rattled. If you're ensnared in skepticism, unwilling to take this seriously, you need to do your homework. Seek out and examine the evidence. Then let it speak. Let it speak.

Christ is risen. We must lay hold of this news - including in how we think of it.

II. RESURRECTION UNITY

Which brings us to resurrection unity. It's easy to miss but really profound (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:58a**). We need to lay hold of the resurrection in how we relate to one another.

A) Despite Our Differences

Despite all our differences, all that sets us apart, this good news has the power to unite.

1. All that separated

Think of the walls here. Racial and cultural - a Jew writing to Gentiles. Ethical and moral - a former-Pharisee and these folks in Corinth, a city known for its pagan idolatry and immorality.

2. All they shared

So much separated them. But they shared so much more. Together, a common relationship and partnership in Christ. And so they shared with one another of their persons and their possessions.

Illustration:

So much separated them. But they shared so much more. I was reminded of this a few weeks ago, talking to a man from Eleuthera Island in the Bahamas. Carl is a policeman, the son of a retired contractor. As with 90% of those on that island, Carl's skin is a bit darker than mine. He talks funny and drives on the wrong side of the road. But he knows Jesus. So we could talk.

B) Despite Our Difficulties

This news overcomes all our differences. And, beyond that, even all our difficulties.

1. The great controversies

Again, think of Paul and his readers. Scanning this letter, you pick up on infighting, immorality, legal wrangling, idols, and worship wars. Paul has to say some strong hard things to them.

2. Their shared identity

But it doesn't destroy the relationships. Think of that. Strong hard things said and friendships still intact. How can that be? Their shared identity in Jesus. The conviction they were all saints and sinners both. So Paul was freed and impelled to say what needed to be said. And his readers were freed and enabled to hear what needed to be heard. Can you imagine such relationships?

(**READ 1 Corinthians 15:58a**) Lay hold of this news in how you relate to one another.

Application:

You say, "That sounds too good to be true. How is it possible?" Three things. First, the principles. Jesus has set forth His commands - love for God and love for neighbor. Even love for enemy. Those are our marching orders. Second, the pattern. Jesus didn't just tell us. He has shown us, submitting His desires to the needs of others. This is who we follow. But the One we follow hasn't left us alone. Which takes us to His power. This message resonates. And so it transforms. But through His Spirit - indwelling us and empowering us to love as we have been loved. (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:58a**) These aren't platitudes. These are real possibilities.

Christ is risen. We must lay hold of this news - including in how we relate to each other.

III. RESURRECTION CERTAINTY

Which brings us to resurrection certainty (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:58**). Lay hold of this in how you think of it, in how you relate to each other, and then in how you live out each day.

A) Persevering

Everything that has happened and will happen means we can persevere, pressing ahead.

1. Holding nothing back

Always abounding - holding nothing back. Remembering who we are always ultimately serving.

2. Standing firm

Standing firm. There's labor in this work. The footing may feel loose, the resistance stiff. We may go through times of real hardship or simply the mundane ordinary. But we are to stand firm.

Illustration:

When I hear of perseverance, I can't help but think of Wilma Rudolph (**READ quote**):

Wilma Rudolph was born prematurely, the 20th of 22 siblings. At the age of four she contracted infantile paralysis (caused by the polio virus). Until she was nine, Wilma wore a brace on her left leg and foot (which had become twisted as a result) and for another two years, wore an orthopaedic shoe. In addition, by the time she was twelve she had survived bouts of scarlet fever, whooping cough, chickenpox, and measles.

In 1952, at the age of twelve, she followed in her sister's footsteps and began to play basketball. In the tenth grade, her potential was recognized in track and field which she had taken up to remain active between basketball seasons.

At 16, she earned a berth on the U.S. Olympic track and field team and came home from the 1956 Melbourne Games with an Olympic bronze medal in the 4 x 100 relay.

At the Rome Olympic Games in 1960, at the age of 20 she won the 100 meter, the 200 meter, and got her third gold in the 4 x 100 relay with a world record. After these wins, she was acclaimed "the fastest woman in history". In 8 years she went from overcoming the effects of paralysis to Olympic glory, and became...a great example of perseverance in the face of adversity.

It's quite a story. And it's the same sort of perseverance and pressing on Paul speaks of here.

B) With Assurance

But not just a bare gritting-of-the-teeth perseverance but perseverance with assurance.

1. Everything matters

The assurance that everything matters. What does "the work of the Lord" mean? It means telling your neighbor about the difference Jesus has made in your life. And loving that neighbor in times of crisis. It means a student knowing the Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And so every subject is an opportunity for exploration. It means the parents of young children knowing that every meal prepped, every story read, every diaper changed matters. It matters.

2. Nothing is wasted

And so nothing is wasted or in vain. All that is done out of love for Jesus and others, in service of others, and in His strength will surely be seen, count, last, and endure. Nothing is wasted.

Easter brings resurrection certainty and, with it, a call to persevere with assurance.

Application:

All of us, no matter our personality profile, are future-oriented hope-driven people. And resurrection hope is not wish projection. It is far more than hoping for a raise, a grade, sunshine, or a winning lottery ticket. Resurrection hope is a firm conviction that the promises of God are real and that they will be fulfilled. That's what we have because of Easter, resurrection certainty.

Christ is risen. We must lay hold of this news - including in how we live each day.

CONCLUSION:

No doubt most of you know of the devastating fire that struck the Notre Dame Cathedral this past week. There has been mourning across the globe. It has been a fixture in the skyline of Paris for so long it seemed as though it had always been there. But this beautiful structure had a beginning. It took several centuries to complete but the cornerstone was laid back in 1163.

There are other beautiful things with beginnings worth tracing. By the end of the third century, the Christian gospel had swept through the Roman Empire. And it brought with it some

startling things. Women were respected. Children were valued. Care was given to plague victims. Courage was demonstrated by countless martyrs. How did this compelling way of life begin? Scholars have referred to it as “the Easter effect.” These people knew Jesus of Nazareth had died a brutal death upon a cross. And yet, three days later, He had risen from the dead.

And it changed them. Put another way, if a time traveler living in the years before Jesus’ coming had jumped forward several decades, they would have seen some startling changes, changes that would have demanded an explanation. And the explanation was the resurrection.

Christ is risen. He is risen. He is risen indeed. We too must lay hold of the significance of this event. And we can - this resurrection reality, resurrection unity, and resurrection certainty.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Christ is risen.

(magnet) We must lay hold of the significance of this news.