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1 Corinthians 15:21-34

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Image: When I heard the gospel for the first time, the resurrection baffled me.
2. Need: A gospel without resurrection leads to a life without hope
3. Subject: How do we persist in believing in the resurrection because it provides hope?
4. Text: 1 Cor 15:21-34
5. Preview: We'll talk about 4 ways to persist in believing in the resurrection.

#### BODY

- I. Remember the necessity of the resurrection (15:21-22)
  - A. One man's rebellion led to humanity's demise (15:21a, 22a)
  - B. One man's obedience led to the resurrection of the redeemed (15:21b, 22b)
- II. Anticipate the accomplishment of the resurrection (15:23-28)
  - A. Christ's resurrection foreshadows our resurrection (15:23a)
  - B. Christ's return establishes God's rule prompting the resurrection of believers (15:23b-28)
    1. Christ returns to resurrect believers (15:23b)
    2. Christ returns to conquer all authorities including death (15:24-26)
    3. Christ returns to establish God's rule (15:27-28)
- III. Ponder the influence of the resurrection (15:29-32)
  - A. The resurrection prompts people to be baptized (15:29)
  - B. The resurrection prompts us to persevere under trial (15:30-32)
- IV. Guard the concept of the resurrection (15:33-34)
  - A. Watch the friends you keep (15:33)
  - B. Watch the things you believe (15:34)

#### CONCLUSION

1. Review: Persist in believing in the resurrection because it provides hope.
2. Closing Image: Our hope crystalizes at the Christ's return.

## MANUSCRIPT

Thank you, Karen, for reading this morning's Scripture passage. As you know, we've been talking about the idea of the resurrection in preparation for Easter. I still remember my first run-in with the idea of resurrection. **When I heard about the resurrection for the first time, it baffled me.** It was Easter evening, my family gathered together for dinner. Since I came from an unbelieving family, I wondered: "Why do we celebrate Easter?" I went over to my cousin, Cezanne, who happened to be a Christian and asked: "Hey Cezanne! Why do we celebrate Easter?" She replied: "It's to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." I've never heard the word: "resurrection" before. As a nine-year old, my vocabulary wasn't quite robust. I asked: "What is resurrection?" She answered: "It's when someone dies and comes back to life." When I heard her answer, my imagination took over. My mind began to drift of images of zombies rising from their graves much like what you would see in the "walking dead". I thought it was the silliest thing I heard because people don't come back to life after they die.

A year later, my cousin invited my brother and me to Easter Service. At Sunday school, my teacher explained to us that Jesus Christ rose from the dead as proof that he had conquered death and that it was a promise of new life. For some reason, it made sense that time. I learned over time that the resurrection gives believers hope. For death and suffering is not the end.

We live in a broken world. This week, there was news of shootings, international conflict, and package bombs. We live in a world where there seems like nothing but bad news.

The world needs hope. It needs the hope that things will get better. Justice will be served. Children will not go hungry. Conflicts will cease.

**A gospel without the resurrection leads to a life without hope.** If you remove the resurrection from the gospel, then you remove its cornerstone. Without the resurrection, there is no assurance that Christ conquered death. There would be no hope.

In seminary, I had a professor who was from Hinckley, Minnesota: “Where the men are men, pansies are flowers, and the women are slightly above average.” Hinckley, Minnesota. While he was a child, he contracted polio. It prevented him from running, skipping, or jumping. Later, he received treatment for Polio. But he never recovered full use of his legs. After teaching at the seminary for many years, the effects of Polio in the form of Post-Polio Syndrome returned weakening his legs further. He shared during chapel how much he looked forward to the resurrection because he would be able to run again. Resurrection gives us hope.

In college, my mentor had a child who passed away a year or two after her birth due to complications. My mentor keeps her ashes on the mantel piece of his home. It’s reminder of a child’s life cut short. But he also looks forward to the day when he might see her again fully resurrection. He’ll be able to embrace her in a hug, hold her hand, or even listen to her voice. You see, the resurrection gives us hope.

If there was no resurrection, then my professor would not be able to run again. If there was no resurrection, then my mentor would not be able to see his daughter again. **A gospel without resurrection leads to a life without hope.**

Yet we live in a time and age when the resurrection is mocked. After all, some believe this is all there is and ever will be and so we ought to enjoy life while we can. There is nothing after death except an eternal sleep from which you will never awake.

**How we persist in believing in the resurrection?** How do we continue to fight for belief that there is a rising of the dead? How do we continue to persevere believing the resurrection?

Paul continues his argument about the resurrection in this morning's text from his letter to the Corinthian church. As you know the Corinthian church struggled with various issues: divisions, sexual immorality, food offered to idols, and disorder in church service. He also tackles the issue of resurrection. Please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians. Chapter 15. We'll begin at verse 21. Verse 21. 1 Corinthians. Chapter 15. Verse 21. **From this text, we'll talk about 4 ways to persist in believing in the resurrection.** What do we need to remember? What should we anticipate? What should we ponder? What we should guard?

What do we need to remember? **Remember the necessity of the resurrection.** Recall why the resurrection had to happen in the first place. Play back in your mind why the resurrection occurred. **Remember the necessity of the resurrection.**

In verses 21 to 22, we'll see two reasons for the resurrection. First, we see **one man's rebellion leads to humanity's demise.** One man's rebellion leads to humanity's demise. Read with me in verse 21: *"For as by a man came death"*. The man is specified in verse 22: *"For as in Adam all die."* What does this mean? When Adam rebelled against God's rule by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it introduced sin into the world. The New City Catechism puts it this way: "Because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, all

of creation is fallen; we are all born in sin and guilt, corrupt in our nature, and unable to keep God's law."

You may say to yourself: "Well... This is unfair! I didn't vote for Adam. He decided without my input to rebel against God. If I were there, then I would have chosen differently."

Would you have chosen differently? Pastor Thomas suggested this idea. Adam represented the best humanity to offer. There was no society or allure to draw away from relationship with God that exists now. There was no sin yet. In spite of the ideal situation, Adam still chose to rebel against God.

By the idea of reckoning, we now experience the effects of sin. Now you must think to yourself: "Why is one man's mistake reckoned to me?" Adam served as our representative. While it seems strange to American audiences, it's quite normal for Eastern audiences to see a person representing a community. For example, in the Disney film *Mulan*: Mulan's actions could either bring great honor or shame on her family. One person's actions affect a community. A few years ago, some Chipotle restaurants served customers bad food. But people didn't just stop going to those few Chipotle restaurants. They went to Chipotle restaurants around the US less.

The result of Adam's rebellion is death. Now Adam didn't experience immediate death in Genesis 3. But he eventually died after living hundreds of years. Likewise, with the exception of two men, all of humanity experiences death sooner or later. That's why as you grow older, your mobility lessens, your recall slows, and your diet changes. The effects again reminds us of our mortality. Hence, **one man's rebellion led to humanity's demise.**

But Paul also says: **one man's obedience led to the resurrection of the redeemed.** We see this also in verse 21 and 22. Verse 21 says: *"by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead."* Verse 22 says: *"so also in Christ all shall be made alive"*. Who is the "all" in verse 22? It refers to all those who have placed their faith in Christ. Why do I say that? Only those who have placed their faith in the saving work of Christ are considered "in Christ". How did Christ accomplish the resurrection of the redeemed? He accomplished it by being obedient to the Father by dying on the cross for your sins and rising from the dead three days later. If you have not placed your faith in Christ's saving work, then you're still in Adam. You're still on the train bound for death.

Now if you had problems with Adam representing you, then you have to also have problems with Jesus representing you. After all, you didn't have a vote either in Christ giving his life as a ransom for yours. You didn't tell Jesus: "You don't have to die for my sins. I got this." That is absurd. Jesus died on your behalf. The question is do you believe it?

The community reaps the benefits one person's success. Over sixty years ago, my dad got on a boat and sailed from China to California. He grew up as an immigrant in California. It was a difficult life. He told me stories of him being bullied for his Chinese heritage. Despite the difficulties growing up and adult life, he persevered to give my brother and I an opportunity we may never have had. My dad's immigration led to me receiving the blessings of growing up in the US. My dad's actions led to blessing my family. One person's action led to blessing for many. When Christ rose from the dead, all who believed in him benefit from it.

If you do believe in Christ's death, then just as Christ rose from the dead you too will rise. **One man's obedience led to the resurrection of the redeemed.**

Hence, the resurrection is necessary in order to save us from the result of sin – death. For God didn't create us to die, he created us to live. But we chose death much like a child would rather choose desert before vegetables for dinner. If Christ didn't obey God, then we would still be on the train bound for an eternity apart from God. For Christ's obedience to God led to the resurrection of those who believe in him. **Remember the necessity of the resurrection.**

What do we need to anticipate concerning the resurrection? What do we need to look forward to? **Anticipate the accomplishment of the resurrection.** Look forward to when the resurrection will occur. Foresee when the resurrection will happen. **Anticipate the accomplishment of the resurrection.**

Why should we anticipate the resurrection? **Christ's resurrection foreshadows our resurrection.** When Christ rose from the dead three days later, it hinted at and gives us a view of coming attractions. Like a movie trailer gives us an idea of what to expect in an upcoming film, the resurrection of Jesus gives us an idea of what to expect in the future resurrection. **Christ's resurrection foreshadows our resurrection.**

Read with me in verse 23: *"But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits"*. The first fruits referred to the first fruits harvested. If you had a grain field, then first grain kernels you harvested would be the first fruits. If you had a fig orchard, then the first figs you harvested would be the first fruits. These first fruits would foreshadow the upcoming harvest. For example, the very first iPhone would be the first fruit of the iPhone line. Every subsequent iPhone lends its manufacture to the first iPhone design.

When will the resurrection of believers occur? It will occur at Christ's return. **Christ's return establishes God's rule prompting the resurrection of believers.** When Christ returns, not only will believers be resurrected, but Christ will also establish the rule of God. Let's see where it says this in the text.

First, **Christ returns to resurrect believers.** Read with me in verse 23: *"then at his coming, those who belong to Christ."* When Christ returns, those who are Christian will be raised up as well.

Next, Christ returns to conquer all the authorities including death. We see this in verse 24: *"then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and authority and power and dominion."* Christ will rig all the various rule, authority, and dominion that rule this world with explosives and demolish them all. Verse 25 continues: *"For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."* At Christ's returns he has to mop up the remaining adversaries to God's rule. This is an allusion to Psalm 110:1, which says: *"the Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool."* God ensures that all of the forces in opposition to Christ will be subject to him. The last enemy is "death". Read with me in verse 26: *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."* After all God's enemies are subjected to Christ. The last one to go is "death". When Christ returns death will be no more. You don't need to go to hospitals to see loved ones in the ICU. You won't need to be afraid of people inflicting harm upon you. Doctors may need to find another job, because you won't need to provide treatment for ailing bodies. When death is destroyed, the world will be different.



Why does Christ do this? **Christ returns to establish God's rule.** He returns to quell the rebellion of creation and for creation to return under the rightful rule of God. Christ ensures that all is at it should be. **Christ returns to establish God's rule.** Read with me in verse 27: *"For God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says, "all things are put in subjection", it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him."* God is the one who ensures that everything and everyone will bow down to Jesus Christ. But this does not include God the Father. That's why Paul writes in the ESV: "he is excepted" referring to God. Verse 28 continues: *"When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all."* When Christ establishes the kingdom of God on earth, he gives authority of it over to God the Father. While God the Son and Father are the same in substance and equal in power, each person has distinct roles. The Son's role is to establish the kingdom of God. God the Father will then be supreme.

The image here is of a Roman emperor sending out his general to quell a rebellion in his land. Once the general has quelled the rebellion, he hands over the rule of the region to the emperor.

Hence, we anticipate the accomplishment of the resurrection because it will occur in the future. We look forward to its fulfillment. Meanwhile, we wait with eager expectation.

**Anticipate the accomplishment of the resurrection.**

What do we ponder concerning the resurrection? What do we think about? **Ponder the influence of the resurrection.** Think about how the resurrection affects everyday decisions. Ruminates on its effects. **Ponder the influence of the resurrection.**

Paul makes some observations that argue for belief in the resurrection. First, **the resurrection prompts people to be baptized**. The resurrection causes people to value the importance of baptism. **The resurrection prompts people to be baptized**.

Verse 29 reads: *“Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, who are people baptized on their behalf?”* Without a doubt this is an odd verse because our church does not practice vicarious baptism. You cannot be baptized on behalf of your dead relative, so that he or she might experience the resurrection. But within the Corinthian church, believers may have practiced a vicarious baptism adopted from the pagan culture around them. Note that Paul doesn’t condone the practice. He doesn’t support it or agree with it. But if the Corinthians value baptism, which symbolize the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our identification with him then why wouldn’t they believe in resurrection? There is no reason to raise someone from the baptismal waters if there is no resurrection. No reason to be baptized into death and raised to new life. If the Corinthian believers valued baptism so much that they would baptize believers on behalf of others, then why would they not believe in the resurrection.

I don’t know how many of you visit the graveyard, but I visit my dad’s grave every time I return to California. When my mom and I get to my dad’s tombstone, my mom begins to update my dad on what has transpired in her life. While the Bible doesn’t condone talking to the dead, many of us still talk to our loved ones when we visit their grave sites. There is some internal sense that this person is still alive and is awaiting the resurrection. Please let me make it clear that I am not saying: “talking to your deceased love ones” is right or wrong. But I am saying: it demonstrates that something within us realizes there is the existence of eternity.

Not only does resurrection prompt people to be baptized, it also prompts Paul to persevere under trial. **The resurrection prompts us to persevere under trial.** Resurrection encourages Paul to be faithful to God even when it gets tough. Verse 30 says: *“Why are we in danger every hour?”* It’s senseless for Paul to experience suffering if the resurrection is untrue. Verse 31 continues: *“I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!”* Paul faces the danger of death every day for preaching a message about the resurrection. Yet he continues to faithfully preach even though he faces danger because the resurrection is true. Paul continues in verse 32: *“What do I gain if, humanly speaking, “I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Le us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”* Now Paul didn’t really fight the beasts at Ephesus. He wouldn’t have been thrown to beasts because of his Roman citizenship. But the beasts at Ephesus serve as a metaphor for his opponents, which he faces. If there is no resurrection, then we should lead a hedonistic lifestyle fulfilling all our desires. After all, there is no accountability. If there’s a new restaurant you want to go try, then go eat. If there’s a movie that you want to go see, then go see it. After all, there is no purpose in life so enjoy it while you can because all that awaits you is death.

**Ponder the influence of the resurrection.** Think about how it might affect your life. It should encourage you to live with integrity because believers will be held accountable to their faithfulness to God. Think about how resurrection would affect the way that you testify to others to Christ. If you truly believed in the resurrection, then would you fear what people might do to your body?

When I went out sharing the gospel for the first time on my college campus, I shared with my trainer that I felt afraid sharing the gospel with others. He asked me: what is the worst

thing that could happen? I replied: They could get angry and say some mean things. He asked again: “what else could happen?” I replied: “He could beat me up”. He asked again: “what else could happen?” I replied: “he could kill me.” He asked me: “what would happen then?” I replied: “I would be with Jesus”. He then said: “Would that be so bad?” Let’s just say: I couldn’t argue with the logic. If resurrection is real, then no matter what happens to me I will come back to life because Christ returned to life.

What do we need to guard? We need to **Guard the concept of the resurrection.** Protect the idea of resurrection. Ensure that no one convinces you to disbelieve the resurrection. **Guard the concept of the resurrection.**

How do we guard the concept of the resurrection? **Watch the friends you keep.** Take care who you allow into your friend circle. Discern who you allow to advise you. For some live and die based upon the counsel they receive from friends. **Watch the friends you keep.**

Paul writes in verse 33: *“Do not be deceived. “Bad company ruins good morals”*”. In other words, don’t allow your friends to convince you to disbelieve the resurrection. Now people might not say: “belief in the resurrection is ridiculous.” They may encourage behavior that is contrary to belief in the resurrection. For example, they may encourage you to engage in a hedonistic lifestyle that exemplifies a life that says there is no resurrection. Hence, I am going to live my life in a way that I want it. After all, peer pressure is a difficult force to counter. To stand up against peer pressure sometimes feels like trying to force back a tsunami. **Watch the friends you keep.**

Not only do we need to watch the friends you keep, but also **watch the things you believe.** Look out for what you believe to be true. Sober up. **Watch the things you believe.**

Paul writes in verse 34: *“Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”* Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers to sober up and believe in the resurrection. For they are behaving in a way that denies the resurrection. How do we behave in a way that denies the resurrection? We begin to be cynical and pessimistic. We never think things will get better. Things just get worse and worse. Yet the reality is something better is coming – the resurrection. Hence, we need to live with optimism. Moreover, we need to think about what we believe. If we don’t believe in the gospel with a resurrection, then we don’t know God and no longer believe in the gospel.

If we take away from a car its tires, then it is no longer a car but a piece of junk worthy for the junkyard. If you take away cell phone signal and wireless, your smart phone becomes a computer and no longer a phone. If you take away the binding from a book, it becomes a collection of pages. If you take away something, then it changes its identity. If you take away the resurrection from the gospel, then the gospel is void. Hence, we need to **watch the things we believe.**

For review, persist in believing in the resurrection because it provides hope. I suggested 4 ways from 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 21 thru 34. First, remember the necessity of the resurrection. Second, anticipate the accomplishment of the resurrection. Third, ponder the influence of the resurrection. Finally, guard the concept of the resurrection.

Today is Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday we remember Jesus’s triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem. People threw palm branches on the road and shouted: “Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest.” They believed that the Davidic king had arrived. But a few days later, the same people would be shouting: “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

The people looked for a king, who would deliver them from the rule of the Romans. They desired a king that would restore the glories of Israel. They wanted a king that would lead them to economic prosperity. They didn't expect a king that would deliver them from something far more sinister: the penalty of sin.

We are a people waiting for the king. We await his return. For when he returns, he will put all rule under his feet. Death will finally breathe its last breath. We welcome his return. For then we will experience the resurrection. Until then, persist in believing in the resurrection.