

April 12 Lesson 7 (NIV)

A RESURRECTED SAVIOR

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 53:4–12

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 16; 1 Corinthians 15

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–8, 12–14, 20–23, 42–45

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

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¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

.....
²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

.....
⁴² So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a lifegiving spirit.

KEY VERSES

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. —1 Corinthians 15:19, 20

JUSTICE AND THE PROPHETS

Unit 2: God Promises a Just Kingdom

LESSONS 6–9

LESSON OUTLINE

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- II. Key to Faith (1 CORINTHIANS 15:12–14)
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 - Of Logic and Truth*
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 - The Promise of Resurrection*

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- A. The Twinkling of an Eye
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

AegeanA-jee-un.

CephasSee-fus.

isthmusi-smes.

MatthiasMuh-thigh-us (*th* as in *thin*).

PeloponnesianPell-uh-puh-*nee*-shen.

propitiationpro-pih-she-*ay*-shun.

syllogismsi-le-ji-zem.

Introduction

A. Will We Live Again?

In the midst of his suffering, Job asked rhetorically, “If someone dies, will they live again?” (Job 14:14). He soon answered his own question when he declared, “After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God” (19:26). Centuries later, God put a massive exclamation point on Job’s conclusion when Jesus rose from the dead. Easter Sunday worship services today will likely feature songs, Scripture readings, and preaching to celebrate that fact—the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Many Christians even prefer to call this Resurrection Sunday.

For the first-century church, every Sunday was Resurrection Sunday. Every week was a celebration and recognition that they served a living Savior. But at least one church had problems with regard to the implications of Jesus’ resurrection.

B. Lesson Context

The city of Corinth was located on the Isthmus of Corinth. That was a narrow strip of land, about five miles wide, that connected upper Greece with the Peloponnesian Peninsula to the south. This allowed Corinth to prosper as a trade center for goods coming from the eastern Roman Empire across the Aegean Sea to the Gulf of Corinth on their way to Italy and Rome (and vice versa). Corinth became a large, wealthy city made up of a business class, workers, and—sadly—slaves. The city attracted entrepreneurs from around the empire, giving the city a cosmopolitan culture and a mix of religions.

The apostle Paul’s first visit to the city of Corinth turned into a stay of 18 months in the early AD 50s (Acts 18:11). That was some two decades after the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul ended up planting a church of considerable diversity in Corinth, including Gentiles from many different religious backgrounds and Jews (see 18:8). After Paul’s departure, the Corinthian church endured many self-inflicted problems (examples: 1 Corinthians 3:3, 4; 5:1, 2; 7:1–16). He wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth in AD 56 to address these issues.

Perhaps the most serious of the Corinthians’ problems was a misunderstanding of the nature and significance of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul understood that the resurrection could not be neglected; there could be no compromise about it. This issue is dealt with more completely in 1 Corinthians 15 than anywhere else in the Bible. For this reason, the chapter is often called the Resurrection Chapter.

I. Key to Preaching (1 CORINTHIANS 15:1–8)

A. Not in Vain (vv. 1, 2)

1. Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

Although Paul has been absent for several years, many in the Corinthian church remember his preaching. He reminds the Corinthians that what he taught them in the past is still valid. Since they had *received* his message as truth, Paul can say that the Corinthians *stand* on his preaching. They continue to believe *the gospel* (see on 1 Corinthians 15:3b–8, below; compare Galatians 1:8). They can still use his teaching as a guide for their faith and practice.

2. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

It is the continuing acceptance of Paul's *gospel* that gives the Corinthians assurance that they *are saved* from eternal punishment for their sinful rebellion against God (see also Romans 1:16). Paul urges the Corinthians not to forget his gospel essentials (which he is about to review). Otherwise, all their earlier commitments will be *in vain*.

B. According to the Scriptures (vv. 3, 4)

3a. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance:

Paul presents himself as a conduit of his message; he is neither its originator nor its final recipient. He *received* it from the Lord himself (Galatians 1:12). Paul's plan for evangelism has always been to deliver the gospel to faithful people who will pass it on to others (see 2 Timothy 2:2).

The phrase *first importance* indicates that what Paul is about to say is of primary, bedrock, and central importance.

3b. that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

From his birth to his death, Jesus' life provides the ultimate example of God's love and the ideal human reaction to that love. No one, including Paul, seeks to trivialize Jesus' life and ministry. But for Paul, the very core preaching of the gospel requires three things: Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

Jesus' death was scandalous, the execution of an innocent man through treachery and injustice (compare Galatians 1:4). Though history bears witness to many unjust deaths, Jesus' death is unique because he *died for our sins* (John 1:29; 1 Peter 2:24), something no other human could do. In that regard, his death served as a propitiation, which means "something that turns away wrath" (see Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

All this took place *according to the Scriptures* (see Isaiah 53:5, 6; Psalm 16:8–11). God had planned the gospel events before they happened. And the Old Testament Scriptures, written centuries beforehand, bear witness to this preordained design (compare Matthew 26:24; Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 17:2).

4a. that he was buried,

Paul insists that proclamation of the gospel must include the fact that Jesus *was buried* (see Matthew 27:59, 60). Mary Magdalene and other women, not to mention Peter and other apostles, went to Jesus' tomb fully expecting to find a corpse (Luke 24:5; John 20:13). The angelic report that the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive was soon backed up by personal experience (Matthew 28:8–10; Luke 24:1–49; John 20:14–29).

During Paul's ministry, lies were circulating that Jesus' body had been stolen from his tomb (Matthew 28:12–15). Paul does not tolerate such nonsense. The security surrounding that burial is well attested (Matthew 27:57–66; etc.). And no one contests that the burial took place.

4b. that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Jesus' lifeless body lay in the tomb all day Saturday. Then he *was raised* from the dead, brought back to life by the Father (1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:15), *on the third day*. That is the day of the week we call Sunday. On the phrase *according to the Scriptures*, see reference to Jonah 1:17 by Jesus in Matthew 12:40 (compare John 2:19–22.)

The resurrection serves as God's stamp of approval for all time on Jesus (compare Acts 2:29–32; Romans 1:4). He was not a madman when he claimed to be God's Son. God had designated him as the sacrificial Lamb who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). That happened when he paid sin's price by dying on the cross.

C. Testifying to the Resurrection (vv. 5–8)

5a. and that he appeared to Cephas,

The Gospels record that one of the first witnesses of the risen Christ was Mary Magdalene (John 20:16; compare Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1, 10; Mark 16:1). Paul begins his list instead with *Cephas*, the apostle Simon Peter (compare Luke 24:34). Peter boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:24; 3:15; 10:40; 1 Peter 1:3). Peter might have visited the Corinthian church, giving him special influence there (see 1 Corinthians 9:5). Indeed, a factional party within this church identified itself as Peter's followers (1:12). For the believers in Corinth, Peter's witness holds great weight.

5b, 6. and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

Paul then expands the list of witnesses to all 12 apostles; these are 11 of the original 12, now minus Judas but replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:12–26). As the number of witnesses expands from a few to a group of *more than five hundred*, we see rapid and exponential expansion. It leaves the impression there are many more post-resurrection witnesses that might be included.

We have no other information on the appearance of Christ to the crowd of more than 500. But Paul's statement that *some* of these *have fallen asleep* suggests that he knew some of these folks personally and had kept track of them.

We should also take care to note the importance of the words *brothers and sisters*. With one exception, there is no record of Jesus appearing to any of his enemies or to unbelievers after his resurrection, only to believers. That one exception is Paul, when he was known as Saul (see 1 Corinthians 15:8, below).

7. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,

We take care to note that this *James* is neither of the apostles of that same name in Matthew 10:2–4. Since those two men are included in “the Twelve” of 1 Corinthians 15:5b, above, they are already accounted for. This James is one of Jesus' half brothers (Mark 6:3).

Jesus' brothers did not believe in him before his death (John 7:5), but they did afterward (Acts 1:14). The mention of James in the text before us coincides with the fact of his leadership in the first-century church (15:13–21; 21:18).

The mention of James helps us understand why Paul writes here *then to all the apostles* when “the Twelve [apostles]” have already been noted two verses prior. The solution is simple: more individuals in the New Testament have the designation “apostle” than just the 12. James, the Lord's half brother, is one of them (see Galatians 1:19; compare Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7).

8. and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Paul ends his list of witnesses to the resurrection with himself. He did not see the risen Jesus during the 40-day period between the resurrection and the ascension. Paul's personal encounter with the risen Lord came later, while he was a persecutor of Christians (Acts 9:1–6, 17; 22:6–9; 26:12–15). That encounter means that Paul is not merely repeating stories as secondhand hearsay (Galatians 1:1, 11, 12).

Paul's status is the same as that of Peter or James (see 1 Corinthians 9:1). Yet he acknowledges that he came to this position based solely on an untimely and unexpected event. For Paul to be visited by the risen Christ (*appeared to me also*) was not in keeping with any predictable pattern, but out of the mercy and plan of the Lord.

II. Key to Faith (1 CORINTHIANS 15:12–14)

A. False Teaching (v. 12)

12. But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

Paul has now emphasized both the centrality of Jesus' resurrection and the credible evidence for it. This is a review of things the Corinthians had heard him preach when he was among them.

Despite what Paul taught the Corinthians, there are some in the church who want to deny the possibility of *resurrection* while still maintaining that *Christ* had risen *from the dead*. So Paul proceeds to rebut this illogical position. The rhetorical question of the verse before us begins that rebuttal.

B. Futile Belief (vv. 13, 14)

13, 14. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

Denying all *resurrection* logically denies Jesus' own resurrection. If we affirm his resurrection but deny the possibility of bodily resurrection for all people, then we are negating Jesus' humanity (contrast John 1:14). Such a denial nullifies the sacrificial power of Jesus' death that gives us new life (compare 11:23–26; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). That would mean that we are still liable to the penalty for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:18). Without the possibility of resurrection from the dead, the entire Christian message collapses; the Christian life becomes an exercise in futility (compare 2 Timothy 2:18).

III. Key to Hope (1 CORINTHIANS 15:20–23, 42–45)

A. Firstfruits (v. 20)

20. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Paul pivots from arguing about the centrality of resurrection for all believers to some specific implications of Christ's resurrection. The agricultural metaphor of *firstfruits* invokes the idea of the choice parts at the outset of a harvest (example: Exodus 34:26a). It is the opposite of leftovers. There is no harvest produce that comes earlier than the firstfruits. This is true of the resurrection of Christ. His is only the first resurrection of many to come (Acts 26:23; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Peter 1:3).

B. New Adam (v. 21–23)

21, 22a. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die,

Genesis identifies *Adam* as the first human being. He disobeyed God and brought sin into the human realm. The inevitable result of this sin was *death* (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12, 14). Adam is thus the prototype of a sinner under the curse of death. Adam is humanity's father of sin and death.

22b. so in Christ all will be made alive.

The new prototype or template is *Christ* (Romans 5:14–19). Christ has overcome the power of death through his resurrection (Acts 2:24; Hebrews 2:14). This has two implications. First, there is an order to the resurrection of humankind. As the author of Hebrews puts it, Jesus is the “captain” of our salvation, implying his priority and leadership (Hebrews 2:10; compare 12:2).

23. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Second, the resurrection of Christ is not the end of God's display of resurrecting power. We will follow in due time according to God's plan (1 Corinthians 6:14). Paul ties this fact to the second coming of Christ (15:52, not in our printed text).

C. Resurrected Body (vv. 42–45)

42, 43. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Paul later deals with questions concerning the nature of the resurrection body we will enjoy (1 Corinthians 15:35–41, not in our printed text). His premise is that all bodies have their own unique characteristics. Though we do not know what our resurrection bodies will be like, we can be sure that God has determined this.

Paul characterizes our current bodies as *perishable* (subject to deterioration), dishonorable (associated with shameful acts), and weak (limited in strength and endurance). By contrast, our new bodies will be *imperishable* (not subject to disease or decay), glorious (free from sin and shame; compare Philippians 3:21; Colossians 3:4), and powerful (completely adequate in all things to serve the Lord).

44. it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Our current bodies are *natural* (subject to the physical laws of nature). But our new bodies will be *spiritual*. We understand this incompletely, but Paul is likely aware of the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples in a room with locked doors; that was something no natural body could do (John 20:19, 20). Jesus did not become some sort of spiritual blob or glowing mist (Luke 24:39, 40). He had a recognizable body, one that even carried the scars of crucifixion on his hands, feet, and side (Luke 24:39, 40). We will recognize each other after our resurrections too.

45. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.”

Paul uses the two-Adams analogy again, but in a different way than to contrast sin and death versus eternal life. He reminds us that Adam's body was lifeless until God breathed life into it (Genesis 2:7). Only then did Adam become *a living being*.

In the resurrection, our dead bodies will receive life again, given by *the last Adam*, who is Christ. The risen Christ participates as *a life-giving spirit* in our bodies' return to life from death (compare John 5:21; 6:54). Christ is the one who has the power to recreate and restore life to our bodies. The new body in and of itself is not enough, even if it is imperishable, glorious, and powerful.

Conclusion

A. The Twinkling of an Eye

Before and during the first century AD, there were instances of the miraculous restoration to life of a dead person (examples: 2 Kings 4:32–35; 13:21; Luke 7:11–17). But those people eventually died again. Jesus' resurrection, however, was different. He rose from the dead never to die again. Because he lives, we can be confident that we will live with him in resurrected bodies, never again to face death (Romans 8:2).

Paul's Corinthian readers had produced fruit and would continue to do so as long as they remained faithful. However, their faith was endangered by the choices some had made to abandon the doctrine of the resurrection—and so the danger is with us. We should join Paul therefore in seeing resurrection as victory over humanity's greatest enemy: death. On the glorious day of Christ's return, we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52). As we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, let us anticipate the promise of our own resurrection.

B. Prayer

Father God, we look forward to the resurrection of the dead, made possible by your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Christ's resurrection gives us the certain hope
for life after death.¹