

Resurrection: The Future Hope

Devotional Reading: Luke 24:1–12

Background Scripture: Luke 24:1–12; 1 Corinthians 15:3–20, 50–58;
Revelation 22:1–5

1 Corinthians 15:13–20, 51–58

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. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

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

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash,

in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Key Text

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

—1 Corinthians 15:20

Introduction

A. Groundbreaking News

The 1969 book *On Death and Dying*, by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004), proved revolutionary in identifying grief stages. The author named five parts of the grief cycle: *denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression*, and *acceptance*. These are typical stages experienced by a person diagnosed with a terminal illness. As a result of her research, Kübler-Ross pioneered hospice care for the terminally ill and served as an advocate for grieving families. Kübler-Ross received numerous honorary degrees for her insights. By July 1982, she had taught her grief model to approximately 125,000 students in various learning institutions.

Today we will consider the subject of death and dying too. As we do, we remember that the ultimate expert is Jesus. His experience of death and resurrection changed things forever.

B. Lesson Context

Corinth was a great commercial center in the first-century Roman Empire. It was situated between two seas on a very narrow strip of land in southern Greece: the Aegean to the east and the Adriatic to the west. A popular trade route grew between the two harbors because it was cheaper and less dangerous for merchants to freight their cargo overland than to sail around the Peloponnesian Peninsula.

Paul traveled to Corinth from Athens during his second missionary journey between AD 51–54. His initial visit lasted around 18 months (Acts 18:11). Then Paul traveled to Ephesus, where he made a brief stop before proceeding to Jerusalem. He returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and, while there, wrote a letter to the church in Corinth. We now refer to that letter as 1 Corinthians. (Paul mentions being in Ephesus in 1 Corinthians 16:8.)

Among an array of issues causing tension and debate within the Corinthian church was the resurrection of the dead. Some believers were still impacted by their pagan background and philosophical ways of thinking. The Greeks considered the body and soul as entirely separate entities. Plato

Social Teachings of the Church

Unit 2: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Family and Community

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the “mystery” of 1 Corinthians 15:51.
2. Explain how Christ’s resurrection brings believers comfort.
3. Compose a letter encouraging other believers that trials of this life are not God’s final word.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Groundbreaking News
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:13–20)

- A. False Witness (vv. 13–15)
- B. Futile Hope (vv. 16–19)
Hopeful or Hopeless?
- C. Faithful Firstfruits (v. 20)

II. The Mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51–57)

- A. Changed People (vv. 51–53)
- B. Victorious Promise (vv. 54–57)
Unforeseen Losses

III. The Work (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Conclusion

- A. Comma, Not Period
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

and Socrates viewed the body as a “prison” for the soul. They even had a saying to express their philosophical disdain for physical mortality: *Soma Sema*, which means “the body [is] a tomb.” Greek philosophers believed in the immortality of the soul but not a resurrection of the body (Acts 17:32).

Paul begins 1 Corinthians 15 by reminding the Corinthian church of the gospel he preached to them and that they received. The foundation of the gospel is Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). Paul then lists some of the appearances Jesus made after his resurrection, including his appearance to Paul, “as of one born out of due time” (15:5–8). In the first portion of our printed text, Paul describes the devastating consequences that result if Jesus’ resurrection did not occur.

I. The Resurrection

(1 Corinthians 15:13–20)

A. False Witness (vv. 13–15)

13. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Some members of the church of Corinth disputed the reality of future *resurrection* (1 Corinthians 15:12). Paul reasons that, if their belief is true, then either Jesus’ crucified body is still in Joseph’s tomb, or there’s credibility to the rumor that Jesus’ disciples stole it (Matthew 28:12–15). Thus, Paul begins to examine the faulty logic of the resurrection-deniers.

14a. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless

Paul sets forth what we might call a “chain reaction of consequences.” These if-then statements emphasize the importance of Christ’s resurrection on the Christian faith. In this verse, Paul says if Jesus didn’t rise, then Paul’s preaching and that of others like him amounts to nothing at best. It is downright deceptive at worst.

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus “died for our sins” and “was raised on the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Paul likely had in mind passages such as Psalm 16:8–11 that claim God’s “faithful one” will not “see decay” (compare Acts 2:25–28, 31; 13:33–37). Paul is say-

ing that if there is no resurrection and Jesus is not alive, then the Old Testament Scriptures presenting the Messiah in these terms are also worthless.

14b. and so is your faith.

A hypothetical deception such as this says something negative against both the preachers and those who accept their message. They (and we) put faith in a lie if Jesus is not raised.

15. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

The chain-reaction argument continues. If Jesus is not risen, then those who boldly proclaim Jesus’ resurrection are *false witnesses about God*. They violate the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16; compare Proverbs 19:5, 9).

The collection of people who become false witnesses if Christ is not raised includes Peter, the rest of the 12 disciples, a group of 500 believers, James, all of the apostles, and Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:5–8). Two of those witnesses, Peter and John, do not hesitate to voice their unshakable convictions before the Sanhedrin: “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

What Do You Think?

If Christ did not rise, what else is in vain or false? Who does a false resurrection affect, and in what ways?

Digging Deeper

How does considering the resurrection false deepen your understanding of its significance?

B. Futile Hope (vv. 16–19)

16–17. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

As if to underscore the seriousness of his argument, Paul repeats words from verses 13–14 above. Then he adds an independent clause: *you are still in your sins*. Paul’s argument personally affects his

New Testament Epistles Highlights from This Quarter

Epistle	Writer	Occasion	Date
Romans	Paul	Written in anticipation of a visit to Rome, Paul requests the house churches of Rome to collectively support his planned journey to Spain	AD 57-58
1 Corinthians	Paul	Written from Ephesus in anticipation of Paul's return to Corinth, after he receives word of divisions and selfishness among the believers living there; addresses questions received in a letter from the Corinthian church	AD 55-57
Galatians	Paul	Written to address false teachers who claim that circumcision is required for Gentile converts joining the family of faith	AD 48-49 <small>(more copies read later)</small>
Ephesians	Paul	Written while Paul is imprisoned in Rome; shares many themes with Colossians	AD 60-63
1 Thessalonians	Paul	Written to commend the young Thessalonian church for enduring persecution; addresses questions about ethics and eschatology	AD 50-51
2 Thessalonians	Paul	Written to address confusion about the day of the Lord and the need to hold to the teachings of God	AD 50-51
1 Timothy	Paul	Written to encourage Paul's protégé, Timothy, to stand firm in his leadership against false teaching	AD 63-65
Hebrews	Unknown	A sermon calling followers of Christ to understand Jesus' sacrifice as the fulfillment of promises to God's people	AD 67-70 <small>(written over a year)</small>
James	James, the half brother of Jesus	Written from Jerusalem to encourage Jewish Christians scattered throughout the world to put faith into action	AD 45-62
1 Peter	Peter	Written to believers who endure persecution as strangers and aliens in a world that does not recognize Jesus as Lord	AD 60-69

Timing the traditional letters of the New Testament is a complex task and often a matter of scholarly opinion and debate. The dates on this chart represent the best approximation from historical and biblical evidence.

Visual for Lesson 5. Utilize this chart throughout the quarter to enhance lesson contexts and historical timelines.

listeners. Presuming Christ did not rise, then they are holding to useless faith, and the hope of forgiveness and new life is gone.

Jesus' death and resurrection are inseparable. Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Without the resurrection, Jesus' crucifixion is nothing more than the death of a self-deceived, self-named Messiah. In this scenario, he, too, is a false witness of God. The ultimate tragedy of such an alternative is that humans are, therefore, still dead in *sins*.

18. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

Paul moves from the tragic results of "no resurrection" for living Christians to addressing the dire consequences for Christians who have already died. The Greek word translated *asleep* is used in both biblical and non-biblical literature. It can mean literal, ordinary sleep or figuratively represent the idea of passing away. In the New Testament, the former usage appears four times (example: Luke 22:45) and the latter thirteen times (example: Acts 13:36). We see one sense confused with the other in the case of Lazarus (John 11:11-15).

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

Earlier in the letter, Paul lists *hope* among the three qualities that "remain" (1 Corinthians 13:13). He writes that we are saved by hope in Romans 8:24. Hope for the future sets Christians

apart from others "who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

In this context, Paul refers to hope as "confident expectation." It is not the same as today's concept of "wishful thinking." Paul's point is that because Jesus conquered death, we have a "blessed hope" that eagerly awaits his return in glory (Titus 2:13).

Everything the Scriptures say about true Christian hope is null and void if Jesus is not risen from the dead. Christian hope is based upon the reality of Jesus' resurrection. If that foundation crumbles, our hope crumbles with it. That Jesus has risen, never to die again, instills in his followers a "living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). Jesus' resurrection gives the Christian faith a power and distinctive that no other religion provides. If Jesus' resurrection is untrue, that distinctive is destroyed.

What Do You Think?

What is the greatest gift resulting from Jesus' resurrection?

Digging Deeper

How does a false claim of resurrection affect the Christian concept of hope?

Hopeful or Hopeless?

I walked with my son every afternoon during the spring of 2020. As you probably remember, it was a challenging year. Many things felt dead and broken. Suffering, frustration, disappointment, and discouragement filled the atmosphere. Loneliness prevailed.

As a purposeful break from online school and the confines of our home, we trekked outside. My son picked the route, and it became "our walk." Our habit led to noticing the slow and steady process of winter turning into spring. Dead branches set buds. Buds opened to leaves and flowers. Bulbs bloomed with vibrancy and life. We challenged each other to behold new things and new colors every day. It became an encouraging and fruitful game. As spring proclaimed resurrection and renewal, we felt hope blossom in our souls. When was the last time you chose to be hopeful instead of hopeless? How can you purposefully share the hope of new life with those around you? —B. R. T.

C. Faithful Firstfruits (v. 20)

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

The gloom of the previous verses is replaced with Paul's declaration that *Christ has been raised*. Paul supplements his declaration with a noteworthy affirmation: Christ is *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. The term *firstfruits* is derived from the Law of Moses. After the harvest, the people of Israel were to bring the first portion of their crops to the priest as an offering to the Lord (Leviticus 23:9–11). There was even a specific “day of firstfruits” (Numbers 28:26–31).

This practice emphasized two realities. The first: harvests come from the Lord. The Israelites are just tenants or stewards of the land God gave them, and he blesses them with harvests. The second reality is that more harvests will follow; the *first* fruits are just that—the rest is yet to come.

Paul links the implications of God's provision and bountiful harvest to Jesus' resurrection. As the first soul God raised, Jesus paved the way for other souls to follow. The harvest of souls is by the power of the Lord of the harvest (Luke 10:2). That power brought Jesus back from the dead (Romans 8:11; Hebrews 13:20), so a bountiful future harvest could become a reality.

Additionally, Jesus' resurrection guarantees more to come. People were raised from the dead before Jesus (examples: 1 Kings 17:17–24; Luke 7:14–15). God's sovereign power also performed these miracles, but those individuals eventually died again. Jesus' resurrection is permanent. It is the prototype of what is to come, the hope of eternal life.

II. The Mystery

(1 Corinthians 15:51–57)

In 1 Corinthians 15:21–50, Paul teaches about sin, death, and the possibility of being made alive in Christ. He proclaims Jesus' triumph over death, his ultimate rule with authority and power, and the heavenly inheritance available to those who align with him. Paul challenges the Corinthians to consider their behavior (to “come back to [their] senses” in 15:34). Then Paul anticipates questions

about the characteristics of a resurrected body. He explains that humans begin in “a natural body” but gain eternity in a “spiritual” one (15:44) and then points out that people must “bear the image of the heavenly” to “inherit the kingdom of God” (15:49–50). Paul's teaching points to Jesus' ultimate and complete victory over death.

A. Changed People (vv. 51–53)

51. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—

The Greek word that is translated as *mystery* in this verse occurs 27 times in the New Testament, most often by Paul (20 times). When Paul uses the term “mystery,” he is not speaking of an unsolvable problem with no resolution. His definition indicates a vital spiritual truth that was hidden for a time but is now revealed (Romans 11:25). In the text before us, the mystery he's talking about concerns what the future holds for Christians. *Sleep* is a euphemism for death (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:18, above). Paul says the collective experience will not be death but rather change. His teaching here is consistent with what he writes elsewhere on the subject, especially in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 regarding the connection between our resurrection and the return of Jesus.

52. in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

The phrase *in the twinkling of an eye* indicates an event that will happen suddenly. Scripture highlights the suddenness of God's judgment (examples: Psalm 73:19; Isaiah 29:5–6; 30:13; 47:11; Jeremiah 6:26; 18:22; Mark 13:35–36). The idea that the

How to Say It

Adriatic	Ay-dree-at-ic.
Aegean	A-jee-un.
Corinth	Kor-inth.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Peloponnesian	Pell-uh-puh-ne-shen.
Sanhedrin	San-huh-drun or San-heed-run.

change will be instantaneous, not gradual, also predominates. Although God is “patient . . . not wanting anyone to perish” (2 Peter 3:9), when the time comes for his judgment to be carried out at the return of Jesus, it will happen quickly.

A feature of the Lord’s return will be the sounding of a *trumpet*. A trumpet blast is associated with the coming of God’s judgment throughout Scripture (Isaiah 27:13; Joel 2:1; Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; compare Revelation 8:2–9:14).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul states that the trumpet’s sound will be accompanied by a shout from Jesus and the voice of the archangel. At that time, *the dead will be raised imperishable*, no longer subject to the problems and limitations of a broken, sin-cursed world. When Jesus returns, the remainder of the “crop” following the “firstfruits” of his resurrection will be “harvested.” *And we will be changed!*

The alteration of our beings applies to both believers and unbelievers. Jesus speaks of a resurrection of the good and the evil, the former being a resurrection of life and the latter being a resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28–29; compare Daniel 12:2–3). In this sense, resurrection will apply to both the “righteous and the wicked” (Acts 24:15).

What Do You Think?

What types of change can believers expect when the time comes to inherit the kingdom of God?

Digging Deeper

Compare the use of a trumpet blast in Isaiah 27:13; Joel 2:1; Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; and Revelation 8:2–9:14.

53a. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable,

Our physical bodies are *perishable*. Since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50), a radical transformation is required. That transformation will happen at the resurrection.

53b. and the mortal with immortality.

We must take care to understand this phrase correctly. When we put on *immortality* we will not

become gods ourselves. To believe otherwise is to confuse the word *immortality* with the word *eternality*. The former means “without end”; the latter means “without beginning or end”—an incommunicable attribute belonging only to God.

B. Victorious Promise (vv. 54–57)

54. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

The word *mortal* reminds us of words like *mortuary* and *mortician*, which have close associations with death. But such vocabulary has no place in our promised transformation.

The saying *Death has been swallowed up in victory* is likely drawn from Isaiah 25:8. The second half of that verse features God’s promise to wipe away all tears. We see the promise’s ultimate fulfillment in the glimpses of heaven given in Revelation 7:17 and 21:4. The absence of tears in heaven is a by-product of Jesus’ *victory* over death.

55. “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Paul personifies *death* and addresses it to highlight Jesus’ triumph. He adapts the words from Hosea 13:14. Death cannot respond to Paul’s challenge, for death is a defeated enemy.

56. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

God warned Adam that *death* was the consequence of disobedience (Genesis 2:17). “The wages of sin is death,” writes Paul in Romans 6:23. Additionally, God’s *law*, as seen most clearly in the Ten Commandments, gives *power* to *sin* by making sins undeniable (Romans 7:7–11). Sin ensures we can never measure up to the standards set by God’s law.

57. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The death and resurrection of *our Lord Jesus Christ* gives us *victory*. The threats mentioned in the previous verse are all dismantled. The cross and empty tomb of Jesus are victorious (Romans 8:1–4, 11, 34). Gratitude rises for all God has accomplished. We say with Paul, *thanks be to God!*

Unforeseen Losses

One year, I taught a group of high school students who experienced loss on a scale I have never witnessed before or since. This tight-knit group of friends spent weekends at each other's houses, attended church together, and sat in the same classes daily. The losses came in waves and changed them forever.

There were about 15 students in the class. Three lost a parent suddenly. When the first student's parent died, the class mourned for weeks. They felt like family, having personally spent time in that home. The second loss happened months later, but just as unexpectedly. Devastated, they asked, "How could this happen *again*?" Then fear surfaced, "What if my parent is next?" Unbelievably, the same devastating loss struck the class a third time.

Nothing shakes the foundations of our faith like an unforeseen loss. Bereavement blindsides its victims, laying a minefield of grief. Because of Christ's resurrection, however, death does not have the final word. How does the hope of resurrection change your perspective on death? How do you keep an eternal mindset? —B. R.

What Do You Think?

What does it mean for death to lose its sting and the grave to lose its victory?

Digging Deeper

How does death's defeat shift your outlook on sickness, dying, hospice care, grief, and bereavement?

III. The Work

(1 Corinthians 15:58)

58. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

The word *therefore* links the crucial truths of Jesus' resurrection to the mechanics of how the Corinthians (and all Christians) are to live. Stated differently, it links doctrine with practical counsel. The doctrine of our future resurrection is the founda-

tion for present-moment kingdom service. Thus, Christians are called to *stand firm* and be unmovable in commitment to *the work of the Lord*.

What Do You Think?

How does Jesus' resurrection help you to be steadfast, unmovable, and work with faithfulness for the Lord?

Digging Deeper

How does the mystery attached to Jesus' resurrection increase your sense of joy, wonder, and celebration this Resurrection Day?

Conclusion

A. Comma, Not Period

The Lesson Introduction noted the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and her contributions to the psychological study of death and dying. Despite her extensive research and writing on the topic, she named death the "greatest mystery in science." Paul also used the word *mystery* in conjunction with death (1 Corinthians 15:51). There is much we cannot fully comprehend as humans in a fallen world.

Death is indeed a mystery. It is not a friend; it is an enemy. The good news is that Christ's cross and empty tomb defeat death for all time (1 Corinthians 15:26; 2 Timothy 1:10; Revelation 20:14). Death's defeat is what Easter Sunday celebrates! Loss still hurts; of that, there is no question. But the power of death is vanquished by the resurrection. Because Jesus is risen, death is not the period at the end of life's "sentence"; it is only a comma. As Christians, we believe the "comma" of death is just a pause leading to something far greater than anything this world can ever provide.

B. Prayer

Father, thank you for the hope of Jesus' resurrection. Thank you for the comfort it brings us to know that death is not the end. We praise you for the promise of eternal life in Jesus. May we live differently, knowing the trials of this life are not the final word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Christ is risen!