



If There Were No Tomorrow

A sermon from I Corinthians 15:13-34
by Jeff Lind

It's amazing how important one detail can be. Sometimes one factor can make the difference between success and failure, or life and death.

- In 1912, engineers were sure the Titanic was unsinkable because it had separate watertight compartments, but they failed to consider that when a moving ship scrapes along an iceberg it could tear open several at once.
- In the thirties, hydrogen seemed like the perfect gas to carry huge airships, and transoceanic travel was beginning to grow, until a stray spark sent the Hindenberg burning to the ground.
- In the 1980's, the space shuttle Challenger exploded a few seconds into launch because designers had accepted the wrong assumptions about the seals for its rocket engines.

One part, one assumption, one detail can make all the difference.

SOME PARTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THEY APPEAR

Sometimes when you look at a finished product, it's not obvious at first glance how important one part of it can be. **Take this building for example.** You may have walked in and out of this room a hundred times, but for the most part, I bet you don't give much thought to these beams that hold up the building, or to that on beam up there that holds up the roof. Think of how important that one beam is

to this building we sit in. If someone took a chainsaw to that beam, this building would be in a world of hurt. It's the main beam. It holds the roof together.

THE RESURRECTION IS OUR MAIN BEAM

Well in I Corinthians chapter 15 Paul, after meandering through many serious concerns he had for his readers, finally comes to the main beam. The main beam of the entire Christian faith, the physical resurrection of Christ. The transformation of the cold dead breathless body of Jesus by God's power into a warm, breathing, walking, huggable person again. And he explains for us that the resurrection is without question, the main beam.

FOR 14 CHAPTERS, PAUL HAS FOCUSED ON BEHAVIORS, BUT IN CHAPTER 15...

It's striking that Paul comes to talk about the resurrection at this point, because for 14 chapters the book reads like a laundry list of behaviors not to fall into, things not to do. Look at the list...Divisiveness, Pride, Idolizing Human Personalities, Incest, Lawsuits between Christians, sexual immorality, misuse of spiritual gifts. And more!

PROBLEM	CHAPTER
• Divisiveness	1-4
• Pride & boasting	
• idolizing Human Personalities	
• tolerating Incest	5
• Lawsuits	6
• Immorality	6
• Marriage Bashing	7
• Misuse of Liberty	8
• Legalism	
• Improper Worship	11
• Misuse of the Gifts	12, 14
• Disorderly Ministry	14

You can see that all the way up to chapter 15 Paul has been mainly talking about **behaviors** that people can fall into. Now, all of a sudden in chapter 15 he comes to one last big problem, but **THIS ONE** is **DOCTRINAL**. It has to do with what they **believe**.

ENTER: THE BUILDING INSPECTOR

It's kind of like I'm a building inspector and I walk in here and I say you'll have to leave, this building is about to fall down. And you say, "why?" And I walk over here and say because this pillar is rotten, this pillar is

cracked, this pillar has termites, and this pillar is coming apart. That's like Paul pointing to all the behavior problems in Corinth. Then he points to the top and says there's a problem with your main beam, it's out of joint and it's letting everything else sag.

THE PROBLEM IN CORINTH

You see Paul is concerned because some of the members of the church had begun to back away from the physical resurrection of Jesus. As Ben explained last week, in their culture it was very popular to believe that the human body is bad, it's just a boat anchor that drags us down, and what we

really need is to be free of our bodies. So, they thought, why would you want to be physically resurrected some day. All you really need is your spirit. Travel light! Sound familiar?

SIMILAR BELIEFS COMMON TODAY

It ought to, because in much of today's popular religious thinking, the body is still viewed this way, as extra baggage to slough off. When you die you simply join the energy of the universe, join the Force, become a glint of light somewhere. But one of the most beautiful things about what the Scriptures teach us about heaven is that it's so real

and so tangible that you're going to want to have a body there!

Well these Christians had begun to make the resurrection less than it is, something more theoretical and less physical. So Paul is very concerned. Not only are their behaviors wrong (remind of VF), but the main beam of their faith is in disrepair.

It's into this context that we come in chapter 15:13-34. In these verses we'll see Paul explain how the resurrection holds everything else up, that the resurrection is the main beam FIRST for our faith, SECOND for human history, and THIRD for our individual lives.

If there is no resurrection...

First, in verses 13-19, Paul explains that...

I. The Resurrection is the Main Beam for the Christian Faith. -- Paul presents the negative argument that if it didn't happen, our faith is worthless.

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 to be pitied more than all men.

Make no mistake about it, the Christian faith, as a system, doesn't hold together if Jesus did not rise physically from the grave. Basically, here Paul sets up several logical conditions. If God doesn't physically raise dead people to life, **then** certain other facts must necessarily follow. What facts?

If God doesn't raise people physically from the dead, if he just doesn't do that, then:

1. **Christ is not raised.** -- because he'd be an exception to the rule.
2. **Our message is empty** -- because Christ is the message
3. **Your faith is empty** -- because the Gospel is untrue
4. **We're preaching error** -- We're preaching that lie

And these all lead to the bottom line, the one that hurts:

5. The dead in Christ are lost -- Everyone who has ever trusted Christ and died, is lost and gone, and sooner or later we will follow them. And if that's the case, we **Christians are a bunch of pathetic fools** -- We have our memorial services, and we sing our songs of hope and we have great Easter concerts, big dinners, but if dead people don't rise THEN there's nothing to sing about! End of story.

Religion abounds with pathetic stories of misplaced hope, isn't it? In October 1843, Reverend William Miller and hundreds of his followers gave away their homes and possessions, and went to the top of a mountain because they were convinced this was the day Jesus would return. Didn't happen. Looked pretty pathetic. A few months ago, members of the heaven's gate cult committed

suicide because they believed the Hail Bop comet was an alien pickup ship for the spiritually aware. We say, what a tragic waste?

Basically, Paul says we're as pathetic as that if God doesn't raise dead people from the grave because those who've died are gone and we will soon follow.

If you've ever had a loved one die and experienced the deafening silence that comes over a home when someone who was there last week and ought to be there this week is GONE, you know resurrection is crucially important if we are to have hope. Four years ago, my father died, after a struggle with Parkinson's disease. In January of last year, my mother died suddenly of a heart attack. And last year my older sister was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, now on a good day, we think she knows who we are. [What was a family of six is becoming a memory.] And I am tired of this dying thing. I never thought it would affect me or my family, but of course inevitably it did. It will affect us all. And death hurts like nothing else. It disturbs the neatly aligned rows of our lives. It fills our busy noisy lives with an unwelcome and unnatural silence.

When someone dies, those of us who are left behind are left wondering what happened. Perhaps you saw on the news a few weeks ago the local story of a young woman with an 18 month old baby who drove off of the edge of a 150' embankment. Her car landed on a ledge, and then rolled off another 150 foot embankment. Thankfully, they came through it ok, but it occurred to me that that experience is a little bit of what it's like emotionally to lose someone. When you find out that someone you love is dying or has died suddenly, it's like driving off an embankment, and at the bottom you may look "OK", but you've lost someone

close to you, you've suffered loss you cannot simply erase, and inside you're wondering what happened. [And we're left trying to recall the last conversation, the last touch, the last smile] Paul says, if there's no resurrection, then that's it. They're gone and the ultimate problem is unresolved and unresolvable.

The Christian faith claims that Christ arose and that he IS the answer to that problem. But Paul says without that resurrection, our faith system falls apart.

Beginning in verse 20, Paul explains that...

II. The Resurrection is the Main Beam for Human History

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 his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Here Paul makes the POSITIVE statement that Christ DID INDEED rise. "Christ is risen indeed !" As Christians we believe this, it's why we're called "believers". We believe that Jesus rose from the dead in accord with OT prophecy and that he publicly demonstrated that he

was alive to a wide audience of people who KNEW for sure he was dead. Why do we believe this? Well, to say I believe in the Resurrection of Christ is an act of faith, but it is NOT blind faith, it's faith based on historical evidence.

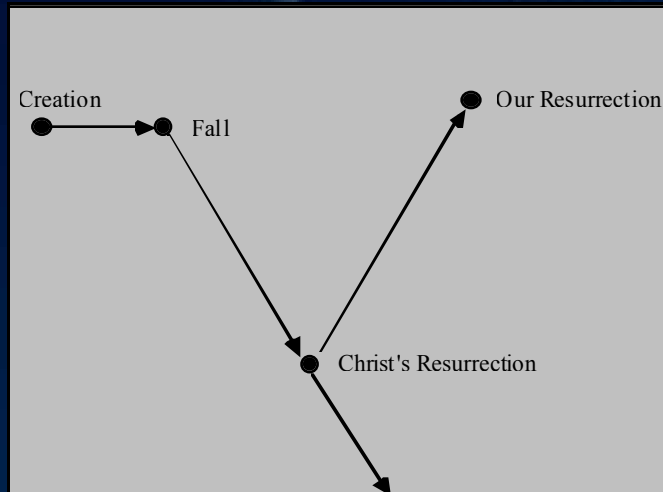
We don't believe Christianity just because it's an attractive religious philosophy, but because it has roots in an historic event, recorded in black and white, in a way that can be checked out and could have easily been refuted in the years after it happened, but it was not.

The problem is, most people don't rule it out based on the evidence, but on their assumption that it **simply cannot be true**, because it's *impossible* for dead people to come back to life. Everybody knows that! This makes very little sense, since if there IS a God who could create a life in the first place, not to mention the universe, he could certainly restore life. And if you assume there is NO God, you've got an even bigger problem in explaining why there is ANY life at all, and why it means anything. If there's a God, resurrection is a piece of cake.

In fact, the Bible teaches that the hardest part of this whole plan was **not** making a body come back to life, but dealing with our sin problem while satisfying God's justice. Jesus solved the hard part on the cross, and after this God raised him up.

So Paul says, Christ is risen indeed!

After this strong statement, Paul goes on to explain how it fits into Human History. **V21 "For as death came by one man, so the resurrection of the dead came through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."...Human history is a very long but simple story and were it not for the resurrection the story would have a very sad ending. I drew up the story this way...**



This diagram shows a very simple "theological history" of mankind. The story goes like this: First, God created us for **fellowship** with Him. But then the worst thing happened, the first man sinned and broke that fellowship and we all became **separated** from God, and at physical death separated from our bodies and from one another. Jesus came, lived a sinless life, and was crucified. But because he was sinless, death had NO RIGHTS to him, and he was able to turn this downhill story line of separation and make possible a new story line of eternal life in human history. He took a sad story and made possible a happy ending.

At this point, it all sounds great, but it raises a couple of questions which Paul answers for us.

QUESTION 1: I might object and ask; "So what if Jesus rose again, how do we know THAT applies to US?"

To this Paul says **"Jesus is the FIRST fruits of those who are fallen asleep"**. This is a beautiful picture for us. For people in Paul's time, the yearly harvest meant the difference between survival or starvation for their families. If

the first fruits were good, they had confidence that the whole harvest would be good too. If there were no first fruits, it meant death was waiting at the door. Now, Paul says Jesus was the first fruits from the dead FOR US. He was the first man to rise permanently from the grave. He was the first fruits of God's plan, and WE are the harvest. His new life guarantees our new life.

The second question you and I might rightly ask at this point is:

QUESTION 2: "But why does it take so long? If Jesus death and resurrection applies to us why do we still get suffer and die ?

Well, verse 24 says **"But each in his own turn. Christ the first fruits, then those who belong to him. Then the END will come."** Now here's another great picture to help us understand. It's in this Greek word "the end", TELEOS. This word means far more than just the termination of a thing it means "completion or goal of a PROCESS". That's teleos. The **completion** is yet to come. God's PLAN is not yet reached its teleos. The process is still under way.

Paul unfolds that process further in verse 25 **"He must reign UNTIL he has put all his enemies under his feet, and the last enemy to be destroyed is death."** The idea here is that there is an ORDER to the outworking of God's plan. It pictures the orderly movement of military troops, one step at a time. The victory was accomplished on the cross, but its results unfold in precise order. **And the LAST enemy to be destroyed is death.** Death and its separation are our enemy, which Christ will destroy in his time. In the mean time, we experience separation, and separation hurts because we weren't made for separation.

Five years ago our parents were still living and we were all together, as families should be. Now we're separated. A few weeks ago I came across an old camera that has been sitting around my parents home for several years. I realized there was a roll of undeveloped pictures in it. And for a moment I imagined that somehow there might be something in that roll of film that could bridge the separation. People don't like separation because we weren't made for it.

Over the last several months we've been working through my

sister's decline due to Alzheimer's as she gradually developed backwards to the level of a 12 year old, then a 7 year old, now about a three year old. We realized that we were gradually being separated, saying goodbye to the person we used to know. We don't like separation. It's not normal.

You see, while separation is routine, it is not normal. And in that story, the separation started THERE, at that point in the story where things went downhill. Separation from God, and separation from one another. We weren't made for separation. So it's perfectly normal for us to hate

disease and death. God hates them too. So much so that he sent Jesus to destroy them. This is his plan and HIS plan will be complete in HIS time.

The resurrection is the main beam of human history.

If God simply doesn't raise dead people to life...

Thirdly, in verses 29-34, Paul explains that:

III. The Resurrection MUST Be the Main Beam for the Way We Live Our Individual Lives

29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? 30 And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? 31 I die every day --I mean that, brothers - just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." 33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." 34 Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God --I say this to your shame.

In these verses Paul says that the various things we do as in living out the Christian life are all meaningless if people are not

raised from the dead. He lists a few examples:

1st. Paul says Baptism is Pointless. "If there is no resurrection what will those do who are baptized for the dead?" Now Paul is talking about baptism here, saying it's no use if there's no resurrection. In baptism we place a person under the water, symbolizing dying with Christ, and bring them out symbolizing resurrection to new life with Him. If Jesus didn't rise, it's pointless. Now just a footnote on this little phrase "for the dead". This is considered one of the most difficult phrases to interpret in the New Testament because nowhere in Scriptures is its meaning explained. It may be referring to people who converted based on the testimony of Christians who were killed for their faith. One way or other, the main idea is baptism is a waste if there's no resurrection.

2nd. Paul says Sharing Your Faith is a Waste of Time. V30 *"Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour. I die every day."* He's saying, "Hey, I'm suffering persecution for sharing the gospel

and if there's no resurrection, it's a waste!" Paul was IN Jeopardy for telling others about Jesus.

3rd. Paul says Living a Godly Life is Unnecessary. *"If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow WE DIE"*. That's pretty blunt Paul.

But do you hear what Paul is saying, he's saying we are not naive about what it means if there's no resurrection. We realize we're wasting our lives, IF THERE'S NO RESURRECTION. IF NO RESURRECTION we shouldn't baptize people, we shouldn't preach the gospel, and we should cut loose. ALL WE DO AS CHRISTIANS, it's all pointless if no resurrection.

But, on the other hand, IF Jesus DID rise again in history, in time and space, then the opposite is true and Paul's saying we can't go on living as if he didn't. And that's what the Corinthians were doing by the sin they embraced into their lives.

They were spitting in the face of Jesus sacrifice and resurrection. Remember the list? Pride, division, arrogance, lack of love, sexual immorality, he's saying, Christians, all of these behaviors are signs we're living as if there's really no tomorrow, no resurrection, regardless of what we *say* we believe.

OF THEM -- AND US

Are we like them? Are we faking it? Are we prideful? Arrogant? Divisive? lacking love? Mistreating one another? Are we busy in ministry but actually doing it just for recognition? Do we divide among ourselves over petty envy. Are we legalistic? Do we lack love? You may be a part of a great church, but we today are just as vulnerable as they were to living double lives. Affirming the resurrection with our words, while denying it by our actions. Did you know that in a Gallup poll not long ago a huge majority of Americans said they believe in the resurrection? But where's the beef?

So what **SHOULD** we do? Paul concludes **V33 "Do no be misled. Bad company corrupts good character. Come BACK to your senses, and stop**

sinning" Notice those four words "stop sinning" and "come BACK". It implies that they were already way down the road, very distant from where they ought to be. Paul says, *It's not too late to turn around and to COME BACK to where we ought to be. Come back and live our lives as those who believe in, share in, and demonstrate his resurrection life. Turn around. Come back.*

AND SO...

Resurrection is not about theory, its about life, togetherness, reunion, home, hugs and closeness. What Paul says in theological terms here, Jesus said in personal terms to a group of bewildered followers in John 14 when they were realizing that HE was soon going to be separated from them, he said (quote 14:1-4) Unfolding: John 14 "In my Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself." Jesus is preparing a place, a home. It is NOT OZ, it is real. It is physical, has color, smell, light, it's real like the bench you're sitting on and the persons

there are real like the persons on either side of you. The beauty there is real. That's what Christian faith is about. A risen Lord, physically risen followers. A historic fact pointing to a future historic event that defines true North for the Christian life.

MAKING IT PERSONAL...

When my father died in 1993 I was asked to write the obituary, the story, to be printed and to be told at his memorial service. It was August and I went and sat on a beach in the sun with a pad of paper and began to write. As I wrote I wondered -- "Is that it? Is the only hope of sustaining this life just memories and a few written lines?" Does all that life come together for just a few years and then it's gone like a dead battery? Or does the course of it all know how to preserve the soul and reconstruct the body? The Bible says yes. Jesus was the first fruits from the dead, because he lives we shall live also. If he didn't rise physically from the dead, the story is over when the obituary is finished. But Jesus indeed rose from the dead. This is the main beam of our faith, our history, and our personal lives.

I Corinthians 15-12-34

1Cor. 15:12 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. 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 to be pitied more than all men.

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