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The Resurrection of Our Lord

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

WE HAVE REAL LIFE IN CHRIST

In the *2023 Easter Worship* supplement of the Wisconsin State Journal, the American Bible Society is quoted as saying, “The resurrection of Jesus symbolizes his victory over the power of sin and death.” I’m here to tell you that Christ’s resurrection doesn’t *symbolize* anything. What we are celebrating this morning is real. Christ’s resurrection is real. Christ really did die and really did rise bodily from the grave. His defeat of sin and death is not merely symbolic. Therefore on the basis of today’s reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 15, we find that we have real life in connection with Christ. For a few moments let’s focus on this truth: We have real life in Christ.

In contrast to the Koran and the Book of Mormon, the Bible was not given to only one individual in secretive circumstances. God the Holy Spirit involved many men in the writing of the Bible over a period of 1600 years. The various parts of the Bible were written quite openly and very quickly they were widely disseminated. Every part of the Bible had to corroborate with the rest or else it would be clear that this part didn’t come from the Holy Spirit. For God does not lie nor does He change His mind. He is able to give us a reliable word.

In the same way, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead did not take place secretly. Jesus wanted it to be known. It was a real resurrection. So Jesus made sure there were many witnesses, witnesses who saw Him, spoke with Him, touched Him, and even ate with Him.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, the Apostle Paul is writing to a congregation of believers in ancient Corinth, a congregation swirling with hot button issues. Like a true pastor Paul keeps their eye on the ball, the main thing that that they are all about: the resurrection of Jesus. As proof of the resurrection, Paul falls back on the reliability of Scripture and the many witnesses who saw the living Jesus. Listen again to 1 Corinthians 15:

Brothers, I am going to call your attention to the gospel I preached to you. You received it, and you took your stand on it. You are also being saved by that gospel that was expressed in the words I preached to you, if you keep your hold on it – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to over five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Last of all, he appeared also to me.

You know what, that is not even a complete list. For example, we know from the Gospels that Jesus also appeared to the women. Paul is just hitting the highlights. Many different people saw Jesus alive in many different circumstances.

On the morning of July 17, 1996, TWA Flight 800 took off from JFK Airport on the south shore of Long Island, New York. Twelve minutes into the flight, the plane exploded over the Atlantic Ocean. All 230 people on board perished. Several witnesses said they saw what looked like the vapor trail of a missile heading toward the plane just before it exploded. There was conjecture that it may have been a terrorist missile. Some suggested that it could have been friendly fire – an accidental shot from one of our own Navy ships in the area, but of course, such an embarrassment was being covered up.

I asked my brother who commanded his own ship in the Navy what he thought of the possibility of friendly fire. His answer was first, that if a missile fired off, everyone on the ship would know it. And secondly, even if the ship were a small vessel with only 50 personnel aboard, getting fifty people to stay quiet about it, much less getting them all to stick to the same story would be impossible.

But 500 people stuck to the same story that they saw the resurrected Jesus on one occasion, most of whom were still living when Paul wrote this. The Corinthian believers could easily have verified Paul's claim with them if they'd wanted to. Jesus' resurrection is a real resurrection. It is not symbolic. It is not philosophical. It is not a tradition or a legend. It is a verifiably historical fact.

OK, fine. Jesus resurrection is a real resurrection. But what good does that truth do us? The fact of Jesus' resurrection secures for us a real salvation.

As we read 1 Corinthians chapter 15 it is almost heart-wrenching to hear the Apostle Paul's struggle with his own guilty conscience. His guilt was real. And yet that only made God's grace more real to Him. Listen again to the reading: *Last of all, Jesus appeared also to me, the stillborn child, so to speak. For I am the least of the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not ineffective.*

How does this tie in to Jesus' resurrection? The first and most important salvation Jesus' resurrection brings us is release from guilt before God. The Bible says, *Christ was given over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* In other words, had Jesus stayed dead, there would be no way of knowing that His death on the cross had done anything special, that it had atoned to God for our sins. There would be no way of knowing that we are forgiven by God. But the fact that Jesus came back to life is the visible proof that our sins have been

forgiven by God. All who trust in Jesus stand in God's grace, no longer in His judgment. Paul knew that.

Guilt is poison to a relationship – any relationship. If you feel guilty about someone you can't very well face them or interact with the. In the same way guilt destroys our relationship with God. It separates us from Him – and that's really the essence of hell.

Every one of us has guilt. Some of it we feel acutely when certain memories pop up. Some of it we can't deny as we are living with the consequences right now. Some of it we try to shove back down and forget. Some of it is lying dormant – we may not feel the guilt, but it's there. It's real. And sometimes it manifests itself as it affects our mental or even physical health.

Christ does not want us to deny or run away from our guilt. He wants us to acknowledge it. He wants us to give it over to Him. He invites you to believe that because of His resurrection, your guilt before God is erased. Your standing with God is good. You are fully forgiven, fully approved. Even if God would permit something bad to happen in your life, no longer is it because God is punishing you. It is only because God loves you and is working all things for your salvation. That's a real salvation. Not something symbolic or philosophical. You have a real relationship, a real life, with God because of Jesus' resurrection.

Secondly, Jesus' resurrection accomplishes for us a real salvation from death and hell. Heaven is real and hell is real. It is the threat, the possibility, of hell that makes death terrifying. But if our sins are forgiven, then the punishment of hell is taken away too. In fact, death is no longer death for anyone who trusts in Jesus. Death is nothing more than sleep from which Jesus will awaken us. As Jesus physically rose from the dead, so also will anyone who trusts in Jesus also physically rise from the dead for real. He will do this on the Last Day of the world. He will raise us from our graves. He will recreate our bodies to be like His own, sinless and glorified.

This is not theory. This is not symbolic. This is real. A real resurrection from the dead for you and me and for all who believe in Jesus.

All this put together means that Jesus's resurrection has given us a real life – a life of harmony with God right now where even bad things serve our good, and a never-ending life in the glory of heaven alongside our Savior Jesus. Real Resurrection. For a real salvation. Result in a real life in Christ.