

**Proposition: Because Jesus lives, there are three certainties we can affirm, as explained in 1 Corinthians 15:20-24.**

- I. We know what Christ *did* (20).
    - A. He died.
    - B. He has been raised from the dead.
    - C. His resurrection guarantees ours.
  - II. We know what Christ *undid* (21-22).
    - A. In Adam, we have a problem.
      1. Through him, death came into the world (21).
      2. In him, all die (22).
    - B. In Christ, we have a provision.
      1. Through Him, the resurrection comes (21).
      2. In Him, all will be made alive (22).
  - III. We know what Christ *will do* (23-24).
    - A. Phase 1: Christ was raised first (23).
    - B. Phase 2: Those who belong to Him will be next (23b).
    - C. Phase 3: Then the end will come (24).
      1. Christ will destroy all rebels.
      2. Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father.
- Implications: There is hope because He lives.
1. We can be right with God now.
  2. We can be ready to meet God in the future.

What difference does the resurrection of Jesus make in your life? Take out your sermon outline, turn it to the back side, and write down the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the statement, "Because He lives, ...."

This morning we're going to discover three certainties in an uncertain world. Because Jesus lives, there are three certainties we can affirm, as explained in 1 Corinthians 15:20-24.

I. We know what Christ *did* (20).

1 Corinthians 15 is perhaps the greatest chapter in the Bible in addressing the subject of the resurrection. That's why we're exploring it in this current four week series entitled, "Because the Tomb Is Empty."

We ought not be surprised that the doctrine of the resurrection is under attack. Satan knows a Savior that is not risen is a Savior that cannot save. In Corinth, the attack came right into the church. Verse 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?"

What's going to happen to your body after you die? If you are a Christian, the Bible teaches that you will be given a resurrected, glorified body with which you will serve God forever (see 2 Cor. 5:1-10). That is our hope. But that's also the doctrine Satan seeks to undermine.

Why? As a brilliant lawyer, Paul defends the resurrection in verses 13-19 with three "if/then" arguments. One, if there is no resurrection, then Christ wasn't raised (13). Two, if Christ wasn't raised, we're in big trouble (14-18)--our preaching and our faith are useless (14); we are misleading other people (15-16); we are still in our sins (17); and

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when we die, we perish (18). And three, if this life is it, then pity on us (19): "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

The next two words are perhaps the most beautiful in all of Scripture. The first two words of verse 20, "*But Christ.*" It's a strong contrast. If Christ wasn't raised, we are most miserable. *But Christ.* But Christ what? But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!

Which leads us to affirm certainty #1. Today we can affirm beyond a shadow of a doubt *what Christ did.* What did He do? In this one sentence Paul presents the heart of the gospel story: "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead." Here's what Christ did. First...

**A. He died.** He was raised *from the dead.* Jesus died. On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame. He died. Peter put it this way (1 Pet. 1:3), "Praise be to the god and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus *from the dead.*"

On the day we call Good Friday, our Savior died. He died the death we deserved to die. He died to pay the penalty we deserved to pay. If He had not died, would could not live. He died. The Son of God died. But, death could not keep Him. Secondly...

**B. He has been raised from the dead.** "Christ has indeed *been raised* from the dead." He has been raised. The Greek verb is passive. From Paul's perspective, Christ did not merely rise from the dead, but He *was raised.* God raised Him. The emphasis here is on God's sovereignty. There's nothing outside of God's control, not even death.

Since Adam first sinned, death held mankind captive. Until God raised Christ from the dead. Christ arose from the dead. That's what He did. And thirdly...

**C. His resurrection guarantees ours.** "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep."

What's a firstfruit? Any gardeners here? In the Spring you drop seed in the ground with the expectation that in the Fall there will be a what? A harvest.

If you had been a Jewish farmer in Old Testament times, what would you have done when harvest season rolled around? You would have picked the first part of the harvest and gave it to God as an offering. You gave God the *firstfruits.* By giving to God that first sheaf, you acknowledged your conviction that the whole harvest would come *from* Him and would be used *for* His honor.

In essence, God told the Israelites, "If, by faith, you give Me the firstfruits, I'll bless the rest so it will meet your needs."

Listen to Leviticus 23:10-11, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them, 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day *after* the Sabbath.'"

Question: On what day was the firstfruit presented? Answer: On the day *after* the Sabbath.

Question: On what day was Christ raised from the dead? Answer: On the day *after* the Sabbath.

Do you see? What's the significance of Christ's resurrection? He is the *firstfruits.* Of what? Of "those who have fallen asleep." The resurrection of Jesus is God's pledge that there's more to come, that a full harvest is coming. The dead in Christ will live forever because He lives!

We know what Christ did, don't we? It's a certainty in an uncertain world. Jesus Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. There's hope in that statement, beloved. Make it personal. There's hope for *you* if you've placed your faith in Him. There's hope because we know what Christ did. Secondly...

## II. We know what Christ *undid* (21-22).

When Jesus Christ came to this earth 2,000 years ago, He not only *did* something, but He *undid* something. And His resurrection is the proof that He *undid* it! Do you follow?

Allow me to explain. The best way I know how is to tell you a story. It's a true story about a King, a kingdom, and two men.

In the beginning, there was a King. The King was God--One God who exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the beginning the King created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). According to the Bible, God is King. This is *His* world.

On the sixth day of His creative work, God formed a man to take care of His world (Gen. 1:26). His name was Adam. God created the man in His image, gave him a wife, and made them His vice regent over the affairs of the world.

But it was still God's world. God was king. And to remind Adam and Eve, God placed a tree in the garden and said, "You may eat from every other tree, but don't eat from this one. If you do you will certainly die (Gen. 2:16-17)."

But the first man committed treason against the King. Adam ate from the tree. He rebelled and went his own way rather than God's. Instead of seeking first God's kingdom, Adam followed the evil advice of the serpent and sought to establish his own kingdom. It was an act of cosmic rebellion.

Yet instead of becoming a king, Adam became a slave. By his fateful choice, Adam enslaved himself and all of his offspring to the kingdom of darkness. He placed the world under the wrath of God the only true King.

The rest of the Bible (from Genesis 3:15 through Revelation 22) is the story of what God has done and will yet do to reclaim His kingdom.

God sent the second Adam into the world to reverse the curse which the first Adam brought upon the world. He sent His Son, Jesus, on a rescue mission to restore His kingdom. Remember Jesus' words? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (Matt. 4:17)." Jesus did battle with the enemies of the Kingdom. Where? At the Cross. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated the foes of sin, Satan, and death. He gave His life to rescue from the kingdom of darkness all who will submit to Him through repentance and faith.

Which means we have a choice to make. In essence, it's the same choice Adam blundered. Will we submit our lives to the King, or will we foolishly live as though we are king? When we repent and believe in Jesus Christ, God restores us to the right relationship with Him that Adam forfeited.

Now do you see? When Jesus Christ came to earth, He not only *did* something, but He *undid* something. Paul explains what Christ *undid* in our text, verses 21-22. Christ *undid* what Adam *did*. "For since death came through a man [Who's that? Adam], the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [Who's that? Christ]. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

**A. In Adam, we have a problem.** It's a twofold problem.

1. *Through him, death came into the world (21).* Why is there death in the world? Because of Adam, there is death--physical *and* spiritual death. Like it or not, you inherited a problem (and so did I). From conception, we are spiritually dead. We are born separated from God.

Answer this. Are we sinners because we sin? Or, do we sin because we are sinners? According to the Bible, both are true. We are sinners because we sin--we willfully choose sin. But we also sin because we are, by nature, sinners--we've inherited a sin nature from Adam. And so, through Adam, death came into the world. There's more to our problem.

2. *In him, all die (22).* That's what verse 22 says, "In Adam all die." The last time I checked, the statistics verified this statement: one out of every one person born into this world dies.

It's true. When it comes to death, there's no negotiation. You don't say, "I'm not going to die. I think I'll live for 652 years." Not possible. You cannot resist the foe of death. In Adam, all die.

Perhaps you're thinking, "But wait! What about Enoch and Elijah? They didn't die." But why didn't they die? Because *God took them* directly to heaven. It wasn't anything they did. They had no more power over death than we do.

It's true. In Adam, we have a problem. But here's the good news.

**B. In Christ, we have a provision.** Christ *undid* what Adam *did*. Because of Christ, we have a twofold provision. Verse 21 tells us what we have *through* Him, and verse 22 informs us of what's true *in* Him.

1. *Through Him, the resurrection comes (21).* "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also *through* a man."

When I lived in Grand Rapids, I met a man who had immigrated to the USA from Greece. His name was Steven. Steven loved Christ. One time he told me about his name. In Greek the name for Steven is *Anastasios*. I asked him what it meant, and he told me, "Resurrection."

It's the word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15:21, *anastasis*. It's the reversal of what Adam brought into the world. Through Christ, the resurrection comes. Paul uses a different preposition in verse 22...

2. *In Him, all will be made alive (22).* Does that mean that everybody is going to heaven? Contrary to what many teach these days, the biblical answer is *no*.

Notice the text carefully. "In Adam all die." Who dies? All who are in Adam. Who does that include? Everybody. Every person on the planet is a descendant of Adam. We're all *in Adam*.

Now the next phrase, "So in Christ all will be made alive." Who will be made alive? Those who are *in Christ*. Who does that include? Is that everybody on the planet? No. Only those who have repented of their sins and believed in the Lord Jesus are *in Christ*. It's those individuals, those who are in Christ, who will be made alive.

So the critical question becomes this: *Am I in Christ?* Dear friend, from God's perspective there are only two categories of people. You're either *in Christ*, or you're not. Which is true of you? Do you know for sure? You can know today. There's hope because of what Christ *did* and *undid*. There's a third certainty...

### III. We know what Christ *will do* (23-24).

"But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power."

Did you notice that curious phrase in verse 23--"But each in his own turn."? The KJV translates, "But every man in his own order." The Greek word for "turn" (or "order") is *tagmati*. It's a military term meaning "division" or "rank." It originally referred to a detachment of soldiers.

Several years ago I visited the Air Force Academy in Colorado. I remember walking through the main courtyard, and seeing the mosaic tile walkways. If you were a Freshman cadet, you didn't just meander along. You had to walk in a certain pattern and manner through the courtyard. In military life, there's order.

When it comes to resurrection, God has an order, too. He operates by a plan, a sovereign plan. He's not wringing His hands. Death may be a problem to us, but not to Him. God is dealing with the problem of death, and His plan involves a process. There are different "times" or "phases" involved. Paul mentions three here.

**A. Phase 1: Christ was raised first (23).** "Christ, the firstfruits." When was Christ raised? Three days after His death, right? On Sunday, Christ became the firstfruits. In God's plan, Christ was raised *first*.

**B. Phase 2: Those who belong to Him will be next (23b).** When will that occur? According to verse 23, it will occur at the *Parousia*, that is, when Jesus comes again. "The text reads, "But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, *when He comes*, those who belong to Him."

The Greek word *Parousia* simply means "coming." It was commonly used to refer to a royal visit. The early Christians used it as a technical term for the Lord's return. When He comes again, it will be the visit of the supremely royal One!

So phase one--Christ was raised first. Phase two--Those who belong to Christ will be raised next?

But wait. What about those who do *not* belong to Christ? This text doesn't describe their fate, but others do--such as Daniel 12:2, Matthew 25:46, John 5:29, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Revelation 20:11-15. Those who do *not* belong to Christ will experience a bodily resurrection, too, but not for glorification. They will be raised and given a body suitable for eternal punishment.

Consider Daniel 12:2, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Jesus described the coming resurrection with these words (John 5:28-29), "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

Warren Wiersbe makes this observation (618), "Passages like John 5:25-29 and Revelation 20 indicate that there is no such thing taught in Scripture as a 'general resurrection.' When Jesus Christ returns in the air, He will take His church to heaven and at that time raise from the dead all who have trusted Him and have died in the faith (1 Thes. 4:13-18). Jesus called this 'the resurrection of life' (John 5:29). When Jesus returns to the earth in judgment, then the lost will be raised in 'the resurrection of damnation' (John 5:29; Rev. 20:11-15). Nobody in the first resurrection will be lost, but nobody in the second resurrection will be saved."

So Christ was raised first--that's phase one. Those who belong to Him will be next--phrase two. Then what?

**C. Phase 3: Then the end will come (24).** What's going to happen at the end of the world? Some people live in constant fear. "We're going to commit nuclear holocaust and destroy the planet!" No. God's in control. And right here He tells us what will happen when the end comes. Jesus Christ will do two things.

1. *Christ will destroy all rebels.* The KJV says He will "put down all rule and authority and power." Remember, Jesus came to earth on kingdom business. He came to deal with a cosmic rebellion. And the day is coming when He will finish the problem Adam started once and for all. He will destroy all potential rivals to the kingdom of God. After that...

2. *Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father.* You say, "I don't get it. How do you 'hand over' a kingdom to someone?" Last year, we spent a night camping at Ten Sleep, Wyoming. In the morning, Darrel, the owner of the campground, said to me, "Listen. My bank is 50 miles away from here and you're going to travel right by it. If I give you last night's deposit, would you deliver it for me?" Now there's a trusting man!

I agreed. When he handed me the deposit bag, it dawned on me the responsibility I had just accepted. This man had entrusted his livelihood to me! I want you to know I felt a great sense of relief when I finally reached the bank, walked up to the counter, and "handed over" the deposit to the teller.

Beloved, the day is coming when Jesus Christ is going to return to this world to rescue His people and establish His millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:1-4). Then He's going to destroy Satan and all kingdom foes, casting them into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). And then, He's going to *hand over* the kingdom in tact to His Father. Mission accomplished!

Do you believe Jesus is going to do that? He is. Here's why. *Because He lives.* In a sense what happened on Sunday morning two thousand years ago was a "warm up." It was D-day. And V-day is coming.

The truths we've discussed today are lifechanging. We've pondered what Christ did, what He *undid*, and what He will do. I want you to know...

#### Implications: There is hope because He lives.

Have you ever heard of Baripada, India? An event that took place there just a little over two months ago illustrates the difference it makes *because He lives*. Listen to the story as told by John MacArthur:<sup>1</sup>

"Baripada is a small city by India's standards--around 100,000 residents. It's located in Orissa, the eastern state known as the soul of India because of its abundance of Hindu temples. Since 1965, Baripada has been home to Australian missionary Graham Staines. It's where he brought his wife, Gladys, and where they chose to raise their children, Esther, Phillip, and Timothy.

"The Staines family built a thriving ministry in Baripada and the surrounding area. Through the leprosy center Graham established in 1982, they ministered to every person who came through their doors, addressing both their physical and spiritual needs. They supplied medical treatment and counseling to those suffering from the disease. More important, they told them of their need for Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>John MacArthur, *Grace to You* letter, March 22, 1999

"In 1983, they began hosting annual Bible camps for the tribes near Baripada. The camps provided opportunities for music, fellowship, and Bible teaching, as well as counseling and discipleship. In the nearby village of Manoharpur where they hosted many of the camps, thirty-five out of the two hundred families now profess faith in Christ--a powerful testimony to the fruitfulness of their labor.

"As you might imagine, those conversions didn't please everyone. In Orissa, as in many parts of India, there is a growing current of hostility towards Christians. While less than three percent of India's population professes Christ, that minority is considered a threat by some fanatical groups. In a recent interview, one Indian leader argued for laws that would forbid Christian conversions and cut off funds to Christian missionaries. His reasoning? Christianity, like any disease, must be rooted out before it festers and destroys the whole body.

"Such strong opposition comes as no surprise. Darkness hates light, and as bearers of light, Christians have always been and will always be the threat of attacks.

"On January 24, Graham and his two sons, ten-year-old Phillip and six-year-old Timothy, drove their station wagon to Manoharpur to attend Bible camp. Accommodations were scarce, so they slept in their vehicle. According to reports, during the night they were attacked by about sixty men, some armed with bows and arrows, others with sticks and rocks. Graham and his sons lost their lives when the mob pinned them in their car, doused it with kerosene, and set it on fire.

"The martyrdom of Graham and his sons made world news. Like many people in Baripada and everyone in the Christian community, I was shocked and deeply saddened when I heard about the deaths. Though we understand no events occur outside of God's providence, news of losing a brother so faithfully committed to serving Christ was difficult to hear...

"A week after the murders, I spoke with Gladys Staines by telephone. It was a remarkable conversation. Obviously, she was grieved over the loss of her husband and her two boys. But she also rejoiced in knowing they gave their lives for Christ and that they now rest in His glorious presence. She wasn't bitter over their murder; she was thankful no one else was hurt. She didn't question God; she expressed her confidence that He would continue to meet her physical and spiritual needs. She didn't lose heart; she told me she plans to continue serving in Baripada, where God has placed her.

"Although my purpose in calling Gladys was to encourage her during this most difficult time, in the end, I was the one who was encouraged. Her resilient response--her thankfulness, her peace, and her unshakable trust in God--said more about God's grace to help us endure trials than any sermon or book ever could.

"But what moved me most about my conversation with Gladys was hearing that she plans to keep ministering in India. After losing her husband and her two sons to violence, who would blame her for wanting to take her remaining child, Esther, and return to safety in Australia? After all, the anti-Christian sentiment behind the killings still exists, and remaining in India means keeping herself and her daughter in harm's way. But she wants to stay. She wants to continue serving in Baripada as long as God allows her to stay."

What a tragic loss. But at the same time, what a vivid portrayal of the power of the resurrection. It was a generation ago that another missionary martyr, Jim Elliot, said these words, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

There is hope because He lives. I'd like to mention two implications.

*1. We can be right with God now.* Today, you can be reconciled to the King! And...

2. *We can be ready to meet God in the future. We can be ready if we are in Christ.*