

**Easter Sunday
April 5, 2015**

"Our Faith and Hope in a Bodily Resurrection"

1 CORINTHIANS 15:16-26

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. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits 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 first fruits; 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.

Mary, what are you and the other women carrying in your baskets? Are those linen clothes and spices? Are you going to the tomb of Jesus to finish wrapping his body? Have you forgotten his promise to you that he would rise from the dead on the third day? Shouldn't your baskets be filled with the best of foods to have a glorious breakfast with your risen Lord?

Wait! Before I become too critical of these women for their lack of faith in Jesus' promise to rise from the dead, I need to take a closer look at my own life. Have there been days when the challenges of life have so consumed me that there was no room for me to celebrate Jesus' bodily resurrection and my own bodily resurrection on the last day? Martin Luther often found comfort during the difficult days of his life by simply saying to himself the Latin word, "Vivit" which means "he lives."

Let's take a closer look at the words which just read to you. It is my prayer that these words will strengthen our faith in Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead and our hope in our own bodily resurrection on the last day when Jesus returns in glory.

We believe in Jesus' bodily resurrection

We are gathered here this morning because we believe that Jesus bodily rose from the dead three days after he died on the cross. The dear Christians in Corinth also believed that Jesus rose bodily from the dead but they had a hard time believing fully that someday they would bodily be raised to life again. Greek and Gnostic philosophies said everything spiritual is good and everything physical such as our bodies is evil. Recall how the Greek philosophers in Athens cackled with laughter when Paul talked to them about a bodily resurrection.

To help them overcome their lack of hope in the reality of their bodily resurrection Paul points them back to their faith in Christ's bodily resurrection. "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." If someone questions whether a dead body can be raised to life on the last day, then they must also question whether Jesus was actually raised to life with a physical body after he died.

The women saw firsthand what the soldiers did to Jesus' body when they nailed him to the cross. They were there when Jesus died. They saw the soldier take a spear and stab the dead body Jesus. They saw the water and blood poured out of that gaping wound. They watched as the body was taken down from the cross and laid into the tomb. They went to the tomb fully believing they would be touching a cold lifeless body.

But then Jesus arose with a real body. He appeared personally to Mary. With her own ears she heard Jesus say her name, "Mary." That night Jesus appeared to his disciples and showed them the nail marks in his hands. He even asked for some food to eat and they gave him some broiled fish which he ate in their presence. He allowed Thomas, doubting Thomas, to put his finger into the holes in his hands and put his hand into the gaping wound in his side. Jesus kept those wounds on his body to help strengthen our faith in the fact that he physically rose from the dead with a real body.

What are the consequences of not believing in Jesus bodily resurrection from the dead? Paul tells the Christians in Corinth, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." The Christian faith teaches that the physical body of Jesus, God's Son, suffered and died for the sins of the world. No other religion in all the world teaches anything like this. Colossians chapter one says, "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation." Isaiah says of Jesus, "He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for iniquities. The punishment for our peace was upon him." Without the bodily resurrection from the dead, everything Jesus did on the cross to save us is in doubt. Our faith in his atoning sacrifice is futile or worthless. As Paul says even our loved ones who fell asleep in Jesus would be lost.

I cannot produce anything in this body of mine that can reconcile me to God or gain favor or peace with God. What Paul said about his sinful flesh in Romans seven is true of my flesh and your flesh. "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful flesh, for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Even on this glorious day when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead, there are sinful things that happen inside of us that are not pleasing to God, that fall short of his glory.

That is why we find such comfort in seeing Jesus rise from the dead with a glorified body. He kept the spear wound in his and the nail holes in his hands to assure us that what he did for us on the cross is genuine and real. By raising Jesus back to life with a physical body our heavenly Father is clearly telling us he totally accepted what Jesus has done for us. Romans 4:25 says, "He was delivered over to death for sins and was raised to life for our justification." The physical body of Jesus was delivered over to death for us. The physical body of Jesus was raised to life to justify us and to declare us not guilty.

I want every day to be Easter. I want to wake up every morning thinking about Jesus and his bodily resurrection from the dead. I want to wake up every morning thinking maybe

this is the day Jesus will return and give me a resurrection body similar to the body he had when he rose from the dead.

We believe in our own bodily resurrection

Paul wants the dear Christians in Corinth to have greater hope in their own bodily resurrection on the last day. "If only for this life we have hope in Christ we are to be pitied more than all men." Is Jesus only for this life? No, not at all. The best is yet to come. I remember my mother telling me about the death of her good friend Lorraine. When she went to the funeral and viewed her body, she noticed that her family had placed a fork in her hand. I told her about that story of a woman who was famous for her desserts and always told her children to save their fork. Lorraine was famous for her desserts and she raised four big boys who ate a lot of food. They put a fork in her hand because to the desserts they ate, they knew the best was yet to come.

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep." God's Old Testament people gave the first fruits of their crops to the Lord because they knew the rest of the crop would also be good. Several years ago we had the first apricot from a tree that my son Daniel planted for us. It was so good. That first fruit was the indication that more good fruit was on the way. Jesus bodily resurrection from the dead is the guarantee that those who believe in Jesus will rise up and live again on the last day.

Death came to us through Adam as Paul writes, "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Because of Adam all of us sitting here this morning will die. Your heart is beating as you listen to this sermon, but each heart beat brings you one beat closer to the time your heart will stop its beating. Adam brought death to all of us. Jesus brings life. The Greek word for resurrection is anastasis which literally means to stand up again. Even though we lie down in death we will rise up or stand up again on the last day, not with these old bodies that have broken bones and arthritis and weak hearts and poor eyesight, but with glorified bodies.

Paul says that the end will come when Jesus destroys all dominions, authorities and power. He will reign and then he will destroy the last enemy and that is death. Death is our enemy. It has a terrible sting that hurts when it comes. Death can have a terrible sting but always in the midst of worst experiences with dying there is the hope of the resurrection on the last day.

An elderly retired pastor said to his friend, I always thought that I was not afraid to die. But then when I received this report from the doctor that I had only six weeks to live I was afraid. I couldn't laugh. I was afraid. But then he said, "Now I can laugh." and leaned back in his chair and laughed. What changed him from someone afraid of dying to someone ready to face death? He told how he tried to read the Bible and even read some hymns but always his devotions were interrupted with the words "six more weeks." But then one day he read from John 10 where Jesus says "My sheep listen to my voice ...and I gave them eternal life." He thought to himself, "Why am I thinking about six more weeks. I am going to have eternal life." Such is the hope we have in a bodily resurrection on the

last day.

Last January the British people celebrated the 50th anniversary of Winston Churchill, the great statesman who led them through the horrors of WW2. Before he died in January of 1965 Churchill wrote his own funeral service which included Christian hymns and words about the resurrection and the prayers from the historic Anglican service. The service was held in the great cathedral of St Paul's. Over 110 countries were represented. At the end of the service a trumpeter sounded out taps, the same taps we hear at our military services today. But then a second trumpet sounded Reveille, the sound that soldiers hear in the morning to wake them up. Churchill planned his funeral service with the hope of a bodily resurrection on the last day.

Some day the trumpet will sound, and there will be the shout of an archangel and the dead in Christ will rise first and then those who are still alive will be caught up to be with the Lord forever. Here is how Paul describes this hope that is ours later in this chapter, "Listen I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable." We believe in a bodily resurrection. That makes every day of life on this earth special. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.