

Title: In Fact
Text: 1 Corinthians 15.20-28
Theme: The Resurrection of Christ
Event: Resurrection Sunday, 2018
Prop Stmtnt: The resurrection of Christ confirms hope and judgment

Read Text:

This text begins with such an important word that addresses such an important truth and yet the word is sadly associated with anatomical properties. One commentator, referring to verse 20, wrote, "This *but* must rank with the great 'huts' of the Bible." I thought, if that writer had ever taught junior high boys, he would never have written that. It reminded me of the preacher from England who was preaching here in the states apparently unaware of the extent to which Americans have butchered the King's language. He was preaching on the text from 2 Kings 5.1. that says, "Namaan was a mighty man of valor, but he had leprosy." The four points of his sermon were:

- 1) Everyone has his or her own particular but.
- 2) No man's but is quite the same as another man's.
- 3) We can't see our own but, but others can.
- 4) What are you going to do about your but?

The truth is, verse 20 is a glorious text because Paul has just been pointing out the logical progression of thought, if Christ did not rise again. His conclusion is, if Christ did not rise again from the dead we have nothing to believe in, nothing to die for and therefore, nothing to live for.

Imagine that you are standing at the edge of a well and you look into the well and you cannot see any water, nor a bottom, so you drop a stone and you wait to hear the splash or the impact and you wait and wait and wait - and there is nothing. So, you drop another, and another and another and you never hear anything. What Paul is saying is that, if there is no resurrection, then this world is like that well and your life is like that stone. There's no bottom. There's really nothing. I'll explain why that is in a bit, but we do not have to fear that despair. As Paul says, "But, in fact Christ has been raised from the dead." Now, Paul can say this with absolute conviction because he saw Christ, which he mentioned back in v.8, but we haven't seen Christ, have we. So, are there any good reasons why would take the resurrection of Christ to be a fact, beyond the eyewitness account of Paul recounted here?

I. **Why the resurrection of Christ is a fact.**

Let's start with the big picture. Without the resurrection, it would be difficult to explain the sudden emergence of Christianity on the stage of world history. There are over 7 billion people on the world and about 2.5 billion of them identify with some aspect of the Christian religion. So, roughly, one third of the world knows about and identifies at least loosely with Christ. That's big! That is really big! No one doubts the present existence of

the Christian religion. So, how do you explain where this came from especially since it is a religion that came from such a hated country like Israel and eventually outlasted and in many ways conquered the pagan Roman Empire? What I am saying is that:

A. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is credible because it explains the emergence of the Christian church.

The reason why the resurrection of Christ explains the sudden explosion of the Christian church on to the stage of world history is because there are historical documents that support this. This is not historical conjecture. The punishment for blasphemy in the Jewish nation was death. This was the charge that was brought against Jesus. He was accused of claiming to be God. If this is how Jesus was treated, how should the followers of Jesus expect to be treated? They should expect the same response.

Now, in history there are plenty of examples of influential leaders who attract radical followers, some of whom are willing to die for that leader. But, all of the other guys who claimed to be a Messiah in those days, never claimed to rise again and never had any followers who claimed that he did. Therefore, those leaders, their followers and their movements faded into history. But not the Christian church. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is credible because it explains the emergence of the church.

B. The resurrection is credible because of the historical accounts.

1) 1 Corinthians

The historical evidence (surviving manuscripts for the NT) are demonstrably credible. The books that describe the life of Jesus; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were actually not the oldest books of the NT. One of the earliest books was this book of 1 Corinthians, where the writer. In less than 20 years from the event, Paul is writing down as a matter of history, the claim that Christ rose again from the dead, that he saw him, and that at least 500 others saw him too. Some of that is reflected in the gospels.

2) The gospels

An interesting feature of the gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus is how much of those stories involve the testimony of women. If, for example, we say that the early church just made this up because they wanted to believe it. They loved Jesus and they did not want to believe that he was dead and gone, so in an effort to make themselves feel better, they crafted his story that he rose again. Things like that have certainly happened in history. But, if that is what happened, then it would make no sense to feature women so much in the resurrection accounts. In that era, a woman had such a low position in society that the testimony of a woman was not admissible as evidence in a court of law. For a woman to claim to have seen something, held no legal and very little cultural weight. In many ways, her testimony did not matter. So, if the early church were creating a narrative and trying to convince others that this really happened, they would not have

used the testimony of women. The only plausible explanation for why they used the testimony of women, is because this is what actually happened.

C. Because of the testimony of the disciples.

But, that brings up another interesting aspect to the resurrection accounts of Jesus as they are given in the NT. The resurrection of Jesus involves both an empty tomb and personal meetings. If there had been an empty tomb and no meetings, then you could say that his body was stolen. If there were personal meetings and his body was still in the tomb, then you could claim that people were having visions, dreams, hallucinations, etc. But taken together, the eyewitness accounts are there. And these eyewitnesses, the disciples among them, demonstrated a devotion to this that was not easy, or well paying, or convenient in any way. They followed a path of martyrdom, not because of family pressure or cultural or community expectations. They obviously were willing to stake their lives on this. Do not forget that these disciples were Jews. How do you account for Jews who would kill people for blasphemy, now change their worldview and were willing to be killed for believing that Jesus was actually God? It is because of the resurrection. Believing in the resurrection was not a popular Jewish or Greek concept either. There was no circumstantial reason why declaring this truth would be a popular point with the Jewish or Greek world. In fact, in Acts 17 one of the early leaders of the church (Paul) spoke of the resurrection in Athens to a host of Greek philosopher and when he did, they basically laughed him off the stage. Why would he do that if he was trying to get them to take him seriously? Because it happened.

The early believers claimed the resurrection of Jesus was true from the very beginning. This part of the story did not evolve over time. From the beginning Paul says there were over 500 witnesses - because there were. The resurrection of Jesus actually happened. The resurrection of Jesus is not just a fact,...

II. It is a fact that matters.

A. It matters logically

Let's say that your family is fabulously wealthy and you have all sorts of money and time to do whatever you want to do, and you devote yourself to a study of the historical Jesus and particularly Christianity's claim of his resurrection and in your investigation, you discover the actual burial site of Jesus and his remains, you would singlehandedly wipe out Christianity. If you discover the bodily remains of Jesus, you will be able to do what no Caesar, King, Emperor, Dictator, Army, or movement has ever done or will ever do. You will destroy Christianity. If Jesus did not rise again from the dead, no one needs to worry about anything that he said. But, if Jesus did rise again from the dead, then everyone needs to be concerned about everything that he said. We know that the stakes are high on this issue. In Acts 17.31, when Paul was presenting the case for Christianity to the philosophers in Athens he said that God *"has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead"* (Acts 17.31)

If Jesus rose again from the dead; that means that he is really in charge. It means that you and I are under his authority, whether we want to be or not, doesn't matter. I am going to come back to this because this is not something you can be neutral about.

If Jesus rose again from the dead, that means that someone beat death. If you can beat death, then you don't have to be afraid of threats, afraid of cancer, afraid of others, or even afraid of death itself. If Jesus rose again from the dead, this really changes everything.

B. Theologically

This is what Paul explains beginning in v.21. *"For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead"* Adam was the legal representative for his society. The decision, on the part of Adam to disobey God impacted every human being to be born, because what the first Adam did affected us all. As such, Adam is the head of and representative of the old order. We are all born into the old order. In the old order, everyone dies because everyone sins. The old order is death. The old order is marked by doctors, lawyers, hospitals, chemotherapy, funeral homes, and cemeteries. The old order is isolation, loneliness, bitter words, contract negotiations, and broken promises. The old order is starving children, aborting babies, lying politicians, drug addiction, pornography, drunkenness, strip clubs, casinos, sexual abuse, racism, school shootings, war, anger and murder. The old order is bad guys finishing first, thieves who don't get caught, and liars who are believed. The old order is the bondage of sin that refuses to be broken and guilt that refuses to budge and fear that refuses to die. The old order is dreams that don't live and nightmares that don't die. In the old order, death reigns! Death is more than the loss of life. Death is the loss of God from our lives. When Adam sinned he was barred from Eden. He was separated from God. When Adam lost God, he became a separated person. He lost what it meant to be fully human because he was separated from God, and from what he was created to be, from Eve, and even from the earth that now worked against him. Death reigned and its ugliness affected everything.

The problem of our rebellion is serious because we have not just sinned and have done bad things; we have rebelled against and have therefore offended the Creator. We have sinned against an infinitely holy God. An infinite offense demands an infinite payment. How, can we offer to God a sacrifice that would appease his wrath against our sin? In order to offer a sacrifice to appease his wrath, the sacrifice would have to be perfectly pure and would have to be infinite. Our sin disqualifies us from being pure. No matter what we can offer or how sincere we may be, anything we offer to God is insufficient in quality and our finiteness disqualifies us as being able to offer a sacrifice of sufficient quantity. Simply put, we are in deep weeds. We have a problem that we cannot solve.

God did, what we could have never imagined on our own and God did what we could not do. God sent his own Son to this world in order to live the life that we could not live. Jesus Christ came to this earth, was born of a virgin, lived a perfectly holy life, and then died a horrific death in our place. It was horrific, not only because it was a death by

means of a Roman crucifixion, but it was horrific on a much greater level because Christ died as a sacrifice in our place. When Christ died, he was credited with our sins. In other words, he was viewed as and was being treated as if he was actually guilty of every single sin that we have committed. His death, therefore was the payment of our sins. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. The reason why the resurrection of Christ is very important is because the resurrection of Jesus is the proof that the wrath of God against our sin was appeased by Jesus Christ. The justice of God was satisfied in the death of Jesus. That means that when Jesus died, he actually paid in full the payment for every single sin for every person who will ever believe on Him. Therefore, the resurrection of Jesus means that the death of Christ accomplished our salvation.

And just as Adam represents the people of the old order, Jesus represents people of the new order. *"So also in Christ shall all be made alive"* The new order is life. The new order is the recovery of that which was lost. The new order is more than a resurrection and living in a cloud somewhere. The new order is marked by wholeness, truth, light, integrity, purity, freedom, joy, worship, and eternity. Every day is the new day without night. There is no separation, no bondage, no guilt, and no fear. The future is the eternal present and nothing can harm you. You are known even as you are known. You know that are loved perfectly even as you love perfectly. You are strong, complete and fully alive. Every sense is perfectly tuned by God to see, hear, taste, feel and smell His perfections. Every muscle and nerve responds with complete perfection to His Worthiness. The new order is eternal life that is completely perfect.

This matters, logically and theologically. But it also matters personally.

C. Personally

The resurrection of Christ benefits only those who belong to him. (23) *"But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."* Let's talk about firstfruits. Firstfruits mean that there is more to come.

Firstfruits refers to the first fruit that is on the vine or tree, which is an agricultural reality that has become a metaphor which conveys several ideas: A firstfruit obviously means that there is more to come. A firstfruit represents the whole batch that is yet to come and a firstfruit gives you a pattern of what to expect. By the way, the firstfruits were usually considered to be the best. In verse 20, Paul identifies the resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. This means that his resurrection is not the end, but the beginning of much more to come. That which is to come is more than the resurrection of those who die in Christ. That is glorious and wonderful, but what is coming is an entire change of order. The resurrection of Christ makes it clear that there is a new sheriff in town and he is taking care of business.

But, I fear that many of you still don't grasp this. I get the sense that you look at the resurrection of Christ as a fan up in the stands, or watching the boxing match on TV. You've been cheering for Jesus cause he's the nice guy, but he just got clocked and he is out cold on the mat and it looks like the match is over. So, while Satan is dancing around

the ring with the title belt held over high, the referee is pounding on the mat 1-2-3-4 and you are devastated. Christ looks like he is going to lose, when all of a sudden he gets up and inexplicably the match not only resumes, but Christ lands a right hook right on Satan's jaw and literally knocks him out cold and clear out of the ring and now the place is going beserk! You've never seen anything like this. So, here we are today, looking back at this event and saying, "Wow Jesus, that was awesome! You did a great job! That was incredible." That is NOT what this is about. We are not cheering Jesus because he did something amazing. Do not think of it like that. Think of it like this.

It is D-Day, 1944 and you are in the Allied forces storming the beach at Normandy. In front of you is the vaunted and feared Atlantic Wall, the elaborate German defense that unless it is broken, will shred every soldier. Under withering enemy fire, fellow soldiers are dying all around you, and it is only a matter of time before you too will be killed, when you see this tank the size of which you have never seen before, unleash a series of rockets that blow a hole through the wall large enough for the Queen Mary to float through. In five minutes, this tank silences every German gun and now, with that battle being won, Christ emerges from the tank and says to every soldier, "follow me, "let's go." We do not just cheer Jesus; we follow him because of the victory that he secured.

If you do not follow Christ, you should want to.

But, if you do not, you will be in subjection to him, either as a friend who believes and follows and is embraced, or as an enemy who rebels and is condemned. You are not neutral about this.