

## OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

DOES LIFE OR DEATH RULE YOUR LIFE CHOICES?  
APRIL 5-11, 2015



### MAIN POINT

The resurrection of Jesus frees us from death's grip both in the future and in the present.

### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Do you think most Canadians give adequate thought to the inescapable reality of death? Why or why not? How does the reality of death influence most of our life choices?
2. For those of you who are followers of Christ, how has your relationship with Jesus changed your perspective on death?

**Leader:** We live in a culture that is constantly trying to avoid acknowledging the painful, inescapable reality of death. This can be seen in the countless lotions and creams and operations we seek out to hide our age. It can also be seen in the slogans like "YOLO: you only live once" that young people use to justify rash behavior. Nothing influences people's thoughts and decisions more than death. In Romans 5, Paul describes death as a king that reigns and has reigned over all people since Adam. But for Paul, death was not ultimately a physical reality. It was about eternity and our spiritual lives as well. Death is the curse of the fall and a destructive force in the lives of all people. Thankfully, however, God has done something to end death's dominion. By sending Jesus to die for sin and rise again on the third day, God rendered death powerless over all who believe in His Son. Through faith in Christ, death no longer reigns over our future or our present. The resurrection forever changes how we view this life—it is no longer what we live for!

### DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11.

3. According to this early church creed, what are the essential elements of the gospel? Why is the cross and resurrection crucial to the gospel story?

**Leader:** Before Paul takes the time to defend the historical reality of the resurrection, he reminds the Corinthians what is at stake: the gospel. It has been said that 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is one of the earliest statements of faith. These two verses contain the essence of the gospel: Christ died for sins. He was buried. He was alive on the third day. This is not a secondary message, but the very core of Christian faith, the only matter of first importance.

4. Why do you think Paul lists the many people who Jesus appeared to after His resurrection? What was he trying to communicate by pointing out that many of these people "are still living" (v. 6)?

**Leader:** When Christ rose from the grave, He did not simply ascend to heaven, but He stayed and spent time with people. The point Paul was making is that the resurrection really happened. It is more than a good story; it is a fact. Jesus appeared bodily to living witnesses. At the time of this letter, the Corinthians would have been able to meet someone who saw the resurrected Jesus because most of them were still alive. Were the resurrection to be brought to the court of law, there would be a pool of 500 eyewitnesses for the defense to call upon to testify to the reality of Jesus' resurrection!

It is also important to note that many of these same witnesses went on to die for their faith in the resurrected Christ. The most common argument against the literal, historical resurrection of Christ is that the disciples stole Jesus' body from the tomb. When we stop to consider how many of the people who saw Jesus rise from the dead gave their lives for their faith in the resurrection of Christ, such a notion is absurd. People often die for things that are not true, but no one gives their life for something they know to be false. If the disciples had made up Jesus' resurrection, we would have seen many of them recant their faith when they were threatened with execution for preaching the gospel.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-19.

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6. If the resurrection of the dead were a legend, what impact would that have on our present faith, forgiveness of sins, and our future?

7. Read verse 19. Why would Paul think that this is how people should feel about Christians if the resurrection is not true? Does this verse explain how some skeptics feel about Christianity? How so?

8. What does Paul mean when he suggests that without the resurrection we only have hope in this life? Why is faith in a Jesus who did not rise from the dead insufficient?

**Leader:** When Paul preached the gospel at the Areopagus, it was the resurrection that caused the Greek philosophers to stop listening to him (see Acts 17:32). Though they acknowledged the possible resurrection of the soul, the philosophers of the day denied any form of bodily resurrection. Much like the culture we live in, the society and worldview that surrounded the Corinthians on all sides scoffed at the idea of a bodily resurrection. However, the resurrection of Jesus is important because it verifies His identity as the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). Believing that Jesus is only a good man and moral teacher offers us an example to follow in this life, but it does not offer us life in the next. Christ's resurrection offers hope in this life as well as the one to come.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28.

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9. How should knowing that God, through the death and resurrection of His Son, "has put everything under Christ" affect our everyday decision making?

10. What does it mean to be subject to someone or something? How is death subject to Christ? What will Jesus do upon destroying death?

**Leader:** These verses describe the grand sweep of human history from the fall of Adam to the consummation of God's kingdom. The resurrection of Jesus is not merely a good ending tacked onto the story of Jesus—it is the consummation of THE story—the story of the universe. Through His death and resurrection Jesus destroyed all

powers physical and spiritual that would stand in the way of His supreme glory and put everything in subjection under Christ. In other words, God put an end to Death's reign and established a new and better King—one that would bring life to a world enslaved by death. Every Christ follower's story ends with resurrection and eternal communion with Christ. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, all believers can have unwavering assurance that they too will be raised. The resurrection transforms both the present perspective and eternal hope of all who trust Christ!

### DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- 11. What effect does the resurrection have on you today? What difference does it make in your relationships? In your work? In your leisure?**
  
- 12. What is one step you could take this week toward living with a greater awareness of Christ's victory over death?**
  
- 13. How might we, as a growth group, help one another acknowledge the supremacy of Christ as we make important life decisions?**

### PRAYER

Offer a time for group members to pray aloud, thanking God for salvation through Jesus Christ and for the truth of His resurrection that we celebrate on Easter. Close the group in prayer, thanking Him for the resurrection of Christ and asking Him to empower us through the resurrection of Jesus to live as His faithful witnesses during our time here on earth.

### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **Have you been more aware of the new life that has been secured for you through the resurrection of Christ since this week's study? How so?**
  - **Who do you know who doesn't know the good news of Christ's resurrection? How might you reach out to them this week?**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize 1 Corinthians 15:21-22.

**SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE****1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-28**

15:3-4. Paul next explained why it was important for the Corinthians to believe his teaching about the resurrection. He justified his insistence that they hold fast to the gospel, insisting that the resurrection was central to the gospel message. Why was this so important? Why was the resurrection a necessary element of the gospel? First, Paul received and passed on this gospel. In rabbinic Judaism, this terminology described the transmission of authoritative religious teachings. Paul told the Corinthians to maintain the gospel as he had given it to them, because it was a sacred tradition, not a human tradition. Second, he delivered this gospel teaching as a matter of first importance. In other words, nothing was more central or more important in Paul's conception of gospel than these teachings. Paul summed up his gospel as having two main concerns: the death and the resurrection of Christ. Both of these took place according to the Scriptures. Paul repeated this phrase to emphasize the importance of the scriptural witness and to demonstrate that the resurrection's importance paralleled the centrality of Christ's death. He spoke first of Christ's death, declaring, "Christ died for our sins." Christ's substitutionary death on behalf of believers brought salvation to those who would otherwise have been lost.

When Paul said that Christ's death was according to the Scriptures, he probably had in mind Isaiah's prediction that the son of David would suffer on behalf of the people of God (see Isa. 53:1-12). Second, Paul referred to the resurrection. Christ was buried, but he was raised on the third day. Paul never said that Christ raised Himself. Instead, the apostle taught that God the Father raised Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 1:4; Gal. 1:1). The resurrection was also according to the Scriptures. Paul probably had in mind Isaiah 53:10-12. The prophet explained that the son of David would come back from the grave to bring great blessings to God's people. Paul also may have thought of Psalm 16:10, a passage in which David recorded that God would not allow His Holy One to see decay. Jesus defended the idea of resurrection in the Old Testament by asserting that God was the God of the living (see Matt. 22:31-32). By including both Christ's death and resurrection as essential elements of the gospel, Paul precluded those who denied the resurrection from claiming salvation in Christ.

15:5-8. Paul continued by adding a third element that expanded the second. Christ was not simply raised from the dead. He also appeared; people saw and heard Him. Paul did not repeat the refrain "according to the Scriptures" here, because no particular prophecy focused on appearances of the resurrected Son of David. But Paul did note that several people saw the resurrected Christ. These included Peter, the Twelve, more than five hundred of the brothers (most of whom were still living), James, all the apostles, and Paul himself. Although Paul's main idea was that all of these people bore witness to the resurrection of Christ, his list had at least three major concerns. Christ appeared to: (1) figures of central authority in the church (Peter, the Twelve, James, all the apostles); (2) large numbers of people (Twelve, five hundred, all the apostles); and (3) to Paul himself. Paul declared that Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus "last of all ... as to one abnormally born." The expression "last of all" probably indicates that Paul was the last person to see the resurrected Christ. Viewing the resurrected Savior was a requirement for apostleship (see Acts 1:21-22). Yet, Paul admitted that his own situation had been extraordinary, because Christ came to him in a miraculous manner after the ascension. Thus, Paul saw himself as having been "abnormally born." This expression is difficult to translate, because it occurs only here in the New Testament. In an effort to express his humility, Paul compared himself to an untimely born child, indicating some degree of inferiority to those who had lived with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

15:9. In explaining why he spoke of himself in this way, Paul admitted to being the least of the apostles, not even deserving the title, because he persecuted the church of God. This probably resonated strongly with his detractors. They most likely thought, "Obviously he is the least—that is why we favor Apollos and Cephas."

15:10. But Paul went on to defend his apostolic authority by pointing to God's choice of him. As Paul considered his background, he had no doubts that he had been called as a Christian and as Christ's apostle (I am what I am) only by the grace of God. Paul taught elsewhere that the Christian life begins by grace and continues through God's grace received by dependent faith. Here the apostle evaluated his own life in these terms. Not

only had he initially believed because of God's grace, but every good thing in his Christian life also came from the grace of God. At this point, Paul concerned himself with one particular aspect of God's grace in his life. Divine mercy had great effect, or result, on his service to the body of Christ. This is the same type of argument he used in 9:1-27 to defend his apostleship. The one who had once persecuted the church worked harder than all the other apostles. Paul assessed the situation honestly, not speaking proudly as if he had accomplished anything on his own. He reiterated that he did nothing in his own power. He performed only by the grace of God that was with him. Paul knew himself too well to take credit for the good he had done in Christ's service. He knew that the only source that could produce these good works through him was the grace of God. Because he relied so strongly on God's grace, he became one of the most effective apostles.

15:11. Paul closed this section by bringing his readers back to the main idea. The Corinthians must believe that Christ had been resurrected. On this, all the apostles agreed—Christ's resurrection was central to the gospel. All of the apostles continued to preach this message, and the Corinthians at one time had believed it as well. Paul hoped they would reaffirm their commitment to Christ's resurrection.

15:12. Though it is uncertain what caused some Corinthian believers to deny the resurrection of the dead, Greeks viewed bodily death as final, with some saying the spirit survived disembodied. This view likely influenced the church at Corinth.

15:13-15. If Christ were not raised, then apostolic preaching of the resurrection was without foundation, the Corinthians' faith was void, and the apostles were false witnesses. "Faith" here refers to the content of the gospel message, and is synonymous with "system of beliefs."

15:16. A restatement, in reverse order, of the implications of the Corinthian skepticism regarding resurrection.

15:19. Christians should be pitied more than anyone if there is no resurrection, for in that case, we have placed all our hopes in a falsehood. Christianity is fundamentally a resurrection faith.

15:20. Christ's genuine, well-attested resurrection is the guarantee of our future resurrection. "First fruits" refers to the guarantee that Christ's resurrection is the first-of-a-kind resurrection that promises others will follow in the end time (see Rom. 8:23, where "first fruits" can be translated "guarantee" or "first installment"). In this instance, the phrase "those who have fallen asleep" refers specifically to those who have died in Christ.

15:21-22. Paul presents a parallel of necessary effects. Through one man, Adam, death came to humanity. If this is ever to be reversed, it must be done so through like kind: a man. God has appointed just such a man: Jesus Christ, who is fully divine and fully human. Through His resurrection, the promise of resurrection comes to a new humanity "in Christ." The second occurrence of the word "all" refers to all those who are joined to Christ through faith.

15:23. Jesus' resurrection precedes and makes certain the resurrection of those who belong to Christ at His coming.

15:24-28. The Son as the resurrected Messiah will conquer and subdue everything, including the last enemy—death. By saying He must reign, Paul touches on the set-in-stone divine plan that assures us that history will end in just this way: with God triumphant over all evil and God's people reigning with Christ forever (see 1 Tim. 2:12).