

**RISE**  
**Part 5 “The Life-Changing Power of the Resurrection”**  
**Text: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34**

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 4, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

**INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** The explosive rise of Christianity is a phenomenon of history.
  - Within 250 years of his life, this obscure man named Jesus was worshipped as God and Saviour by 50% of the Roman Empire including the emperor himself.
- How did this happen? Historians give many reasons. Let me give you two. First, Christianity grew because of *the way Christians died*. When faced with death for not worshipping the emperor as a god, those early Christians demonstrated astounding courage. In 202 A.D. a condemned Christian woman, and a new mother, named Perpetua was brought into the amphitheater to die. She sang a hymn of triumph. After two of her male companions were attacked by a leopard and mauled by a bear, a bull charged Perpetua.
  - She was tossed in the air but only her robe was torn. Since the bull refused to attack again, the gladiators were brought in to finish the job. Perpetua’s gladiator was new to the work. He stabbed her weakly in the ribs but did not kill her and so Perpetua took his trembling hand and guided the sword to her throat.
    - The Roman people were astounded by the courage of the martyrs. Galen, the physician to the emperor, wrote of the Christians that, **(SHOW SLIDE 2) “their contempt of death (and of its sequel) is obvious to us every day.”**<sup>1</sup>
- So the way the early Christians died won over the Roman people. But Christianity also grew because of *the way Christians lived*. Their moral values stood out in Roman culture.
  - Christians stood out because they treated women as equals to men. In sharp contrast to Roman culture Henry Chadwick writes that,
    - **“Christianity regarded unchastity in a husband as no less serious a breach of loyalty and trust than unfaithfulness in a wife.”**<sup>2</sup>
  - Christians also stood out for their morals in abortion and infanticide. Infanticide means to abandon an unwanted newborn to the elements. Archeologists have found a chilling letter from a Roman husband to his wife. It instructs her what to do if she delivers before he returns home: **“if it is a boy keep it, if a girl, discard it.”**<sup>3</sup> Infanticide was justified by law and perfectly common.
    - Christians demonstrated their high value for human life when they rescued discarded newborns and raised them as their own.
  - Finally, the Roman Emperor Julian said Christianity was growing because of how selflessly Christians cared for the poor. He wrote, **“It is their benevolence to strangers . . . that [has] done the most to increase [Christianity]. . . .The impious Galileans [ie. the Christians] support both their own poor and ours as well!”**<sup>4</sup>
- So here is the big question: what enabled those early Christians to die with such courage and to live with such meaning and with such high moral standards? Simply put it was their beliefs about what will happen in the future. They believed that since God raised Jesus from the dead, God

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 165.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 59.

<sup>3</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 97-98.

<sup>4</sup> Wilmer Cave Wright, trans., “To Arsacius, High-Priest of Galatia,” in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 3, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1923), 69, 71.

would one day raise all his people from the dead and bring them into a new world that will be free of death, pain, and evil.

- In verses 29-34 Paul shows that this belief in the future resurrection of the dead radically changes how we live in the present. Paul says that if you will embrace Jesus and the future resurrection God is bringing through Him then three things will be true of you.
  - First, you will have courage to face the most difficult challenges in life. Second, you will have meaning for why you exist. Third, you will have motivation to live a morally upright life.

## **COURAGE TO FACE THE MOST DIFFICULT CHALLENGES OF LIFE**

- So let's look at Paul's first point. **(SHOW SLIDE 3) If you embrace the truth that God will resurrect those who belong to Christ, you will have courage to face the most difficult challenges in life.**
  - Everything rests on believing in this future resurrection of the dead. Yet, as we have seen there were some in Corinth who did not believe God would raise the dead.
    - So first, he makes one further argument to show that the dead will be raised and then he shows how the resurrection of the dead gives you courage to face the most difficult challenges in life.
- To make the one further argument that the dead will be raised, Paul brings up this issue of baptism for the dead. Look at verse 29. **READ 29 - *Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?***
  - Mormons use this verse to support their practice of baptism for the dead. They believe that no one can be born again apart from baptism by a Mormon priest. But Mormonism is only a few hundred years old so what about those who lived before this? Mormons teach that people today can be baptized on behalf of dead people.
    - But this verse is very tricky. We do not know exactly what Paul is referring to. The idea of baptism for the dead does not appear anywhere else in the Bible or in ancient practices. Notice that Paul is not endorsing this and he is certainly not commanding that we do it. Furthermore, if it is happening in Corinth, false teachers who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead are doing it.
- But don't get sidetracked into this. Let's make sure we stay with the big point of why Paul has brought this up. Paul point is this: ***"You say you don't believe in the resurrection of the dead and yet there is a practice of being baptized for the dead. But why would anyone do this if we cease to exist at death? This practice reveals that you do believe in the resurrection of the dead. So stop being so inconsistent and believe that God will raise the dead."***
  - So he is simply showing them how inconsistent they are in order that they may believe that God will raise the dead.
- His next thought is much clearer. If the dead are not going to be raised then Paul also says it is absurd for Christians to endanger themselves to bring the gospel to others. Look at verse 30. **READ 30 - *Why are we in danger every hour?***
  - So if the dead are not raised and all we have is this life, then why do Paul and the other apostles risk their necks to tell others about Jesus?
- Then he speaks about himself in verse 31. **READ 31 - *I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!***
  - Paul says he looks death in the face practically everyday. This statement is as true as the fact that he is proud about what God has done in the Corinthian church. In verse 32 he gives a specific example of the danger he faces. **READ 32a - *What do I gain if, humanly***

**speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?** This is probably not a literal fighting of wild beasts in Ephesus since Paul, as a Roman citizen, would have been exempt from it.

- It could be literally true but he is most likely using a common ancient metaphor referring to people who violently oppose him. This makes sense because in the next chapter he speaks about going to Ephesus to preach the gospel and then says in 16:9, **“but there are many who oppose me.”** If you read the New Testament you know that Paul’s life was always in danger.
- Do you see Paul’s argument? He is saying, **“if the dead are not raised, then why would I risk my one precious life and put it in danger so that others can hear about Jesus?”**
  - Paul says the answer is very simple. He believed that since God raised Jesus from the dead God would also raise him. This is what gave Paul such courage to face every difficulty and challenge that came his way.
    - You see, if this life is all you get then your greatest fear is losing your life. But if you believe that you will be raised to an eternity of bliss then you aren’t afraid of anything. You are free to lay down your life for God and people.

## **COURAGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

- This is what has given Christians throughout the ages the courage to face great difficulty and danger in the cause of Christ. One of my favourite examples is that of John Paton. In 1843 he petitioned the London Missionary Society to take gospel to the cannibalistic peoples of the New Hebrides Islands. Only nineteen years earlier two missionaries had attempted this and had been brutally killed the minute they stepped on the beach.
  - A man named Mr. Dickson criticized Paton saying, **“the cannibals. You will be eaten by cannibals.”** Paton stood up and said, **(SHOW SLIDE 4) “Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now and your own body is soon to be laid in the grave there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the great day my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen redeemer.”**<sup>5</sup>
    - It was his belief in the resurrection of the dead that gave Paton the courage to go to the New Hebrides.
- But friends listen: since God will raise the dead like he raised Jesus, *you* can have courage to face the most difficult challenges in life. How do you gain courage to face the difficulty of grief when your Christian friends or family die?
  - You shout with Paul, **“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him...and so we will be with the Lord forever.”**
- How do you gain courage to stand up for Jesus when people are making fun of you for it? By remembering how Jesus’ words about how to respond when people persecute you for his sake. He said, **“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”**
  - There is a life beyond the grave where Jesus will reward every difficulty you have faced because of your allegiance to him.
- How do you get the courage to forgive instead of seeking revenge when people hurt you? If there is nothing beyond the grave then revenge should be taken in this life to make things right.
  - But since there is a resurrection of the dead Romans 12:19 says, **“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”**

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<sup>5</sup> John Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides*, 56.

- How do you keep serving other people when they make life so difficult for you? By remembering that all the troubles in this life are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.
  - Do you face difficulties today? If you will embrace and apply this truth that God will raise the dead like he raised Jesus then you will be able to face any difficulty in this life.

## MEANING IN LIFE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5) Second, if you embrace the truth that God will resurrect those who belong to Christ, you will have meaning in life.**
  - Look at the second half of verse 32. **READ 32b - *If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”***
    - This is a quote from Isaiah 22:13. The people of Israel had forgotten God. Since God was no longer a part of the picture they went ahead with their festivities saying, **“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”** If this life is all there is and death ends your existence, then it makes sense to focus only on the moment and live for pleasure.
- This is one of the dominant messages of our songs today. In their song, **“Can’t hold us,”** Mackeleore and Lewis sing, **“Raise those hands, this is our party/We came here to live life like nobody was watching.”** There is no God. This life is all there is. So we’re going to party.
  - Pitbull and Christina Aguilera sing, **“I just want to feel this moment.”** Many love songs basically say, **“We need to make love tonight because tomorrow may never come.”**
    - Again, if this life is all there is then it makes sense to eat, drink, live for the moment, and enjoy yourself for tomorrow we die.
- Yet, what is most fascinating is that once people try this path they discover that it does not give them meaning. They feel empty. You can hear this in the songs of today as well. For instance, Sia sings a song called **“Chandelier.”**
  - On the one hand the song celebrates a party lifestyle, **“I’m gonna swing from the chandelier/I’m gonna live like tomorrow doesn’t exist.”**
    - Yet, the song also has the feel of lament. Drinking a lot is not satisfying her. Yet, she doesn’t know what else to do and so she sings, **“Can’t feel anything, when will I learn.”**
- This is where the message of Christianity is so powerful. It begins by declaring that you are not just a random collection of atoms that is here one day and gone the next. Your life will not end at the grave. The Bible declares that you are the special creation of God, that God has a purpose for your life, that this life is very short and is preparation for the next, and that one day God will raise all those who belong to Christ from the dead to live forever.
  - This brings tremendous meaning to your life. Every little thing you do matters. Not only that but you can now sacrifice your own pleasure because you know God will make it up to you a thousand fold. You can give away money in vast quantities because you know that you are storing up treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. You can devote your life to causes and to serving others because you know that God will reward his people.
    - Dream about how you can serve Christ and then devote your life to it knowing that your labour is not in vain. Your life has meaning. You exist for a reason. Use your life for God’s glory.
- So when we embrace the good news that God will resurrect those who belong to Christ we have courage to face the most difficult challenges in life and we have meaning for life.

## MOTIVATION TO LIVE A MORALLY UPRIGHT LIFE

- (SHOW SLIDE6) Finally, if you embrace the truth that God will resurrect those who belong to Christ, you will have motivation to live a morally upright/godly life.
  - **READ 33-34 - Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”<sup>34</sup> Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.**
- What you believe affects how you live. Who your friends are influences you. We all know this and so did the people of Paul’s day. Like I just quoted some song lyrics from our day, Paul quotes a Greek comedy from his day. **READ 33 - Bad company ruins good morals.** Paul is saying to this church that if you keep company with people who deny the future resurrection, they will corrupt your morals. Why?
  - Because *ideas have consequences*. To cite Macklemore and Lewis again, if you don’t believe any God is watching then you live however you want.
    - If you don’t believe there is a future resurrection of the dead and there is no final judgement then you have no reason to live a godly life.
- So Paul is saying, **“Wake up guys. These people who deny the future resurrection in your church are leading you to sin. They act as if there is no God and therefore no future judgement. But there is. So stop sinning. You guys should be ashamed that this kind of false teaching and bad morality is going on in your church.”**
  - So you see once again that Paul is trying to get us to apply the truth of Christ’s resurrection.
- Let’s think through Paul’s point some more. Paul is saying that ideas have consequences for how you live. If there is no life beyond the grave then it *ultimately* it does not matter how a person lives in this life.
  - I listened to a fascinating interview with Jeffery Dahmer, the serial killer who confessed to murdering 17 people from 1978 to 1991. Here is what he said, (SHOW SLIDE 7) **“I always believed the lie that the theory of evolution is truth. That we all just came from the slime and when we die that was it. There was nothing [after that]. So the whole theory cheapens life...I mean if a person does not think there is a God to be accountable to then what’s the point of trying to modify your behaviour to keep it within acceptable ranges? That’s how I thought anyway.”**
    - Now I am not suggesting at all that everyone who denies the existence of God and the future resurrection of the dead will become a serial killer. We all agree that Dahmer’s actions were evil. But I am asking you *why* his actions were wrong. How would you argue against Dahmer?
- You might say, **“Because it’s wrong.”** Okay, but why? You might say, **“Because we just know it is.”** But if your brain is just the product of random chance then why should you trust your brain? You might say, **“It’s wrong because society says it’s wrong.”** Again Dahmer says, **“Why should I care what society thinks?”**
  - You see, without God there is no ultimate moral standard that stands above and beyond anything that human beings think. Without a future resurrection and judgement, Dahmer gets away with everything that he did.
    - But listen, Christians have solid grounds for believing in right and wrong. A Christian says, **“God exists and therefore right and wrong exist. God made human beings in his image and declared, “You shall not murder.” Furthermore, a day is coming when we will all be raised from the dead to stand before God and give an account for how we have lived our lives. That is why murder is wrong.”**

- So you see, I gave you this extreme example to make the basic point that your belief in what happens after death deeply impacts how you live in a moral sense. Ideas have consequences.
  - So Paul is saying, **“People who deny the resurrection will only lead you to sin because they have no ultimate motivation to live a morally upright and godly life. They will not lead you to love God, to serve Him, and to obey His commands. But since you believe God raised Jesus from the dead, you should also believe that God will raise all those who belong to him. Now stop sinning and live your lives in light of that future resurrection.”**
    - So how about you? Are you living in light of the fact that you will one day be raised? Is there any area of your life that you would be ashamed of before God? Stop sinning. Turn to Christ. Embrace the gospel and live in light of the fact that Christ will raise you to eternal glory one day.

## CONCLUSION

- Let’s wrap it up now. Do you see what Paul is trying to do this in this chapter? He is giving you a picture of the future that it might transform your life in the present.
  - Oh keep this before your eyes. All those who belong to Christ are heading to a glorious future. One day God will raise his people from the dead, give them new bodies, and bring them into a world that is free of death, pain, crying, and evil. And in that new creation God will dwell with his people forever.
    - Keep this ever before your eyes. Do not get sidetracked. Keep it ever before your eyes for it enables you to face the greatest challenges in life. Keep it ever before your eyes because it gives you meaning for your life. Keep it ever before your eyes because it motivates you to godly living.
- In C.S. Lewis’ book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* a ship by that name sails far into the eastern ocean of the world of Narnia. It is said that if you go far enough you will sail to Aslan’s country – Aslan, who is the Creator and King of all Narnia.
  - But the sailors are not sure if they want to keep going. But there is a valiant mouse named Reepicheep. He is a devout follower of Aslan. When asked his opinion he declares that, no matter what happens, he will keep heading straight for Aslan’s country:
    - **“While I can, I sail east in the Dawn Treader. When she fails me, I paddle east in my [canoe]. When she sinks, I shall swim east with my four paws. And when I can swim no longer, if I have not reached Aslan’s country, or shot over the edge of the world in some vast cataract, I shall sink with my nose to the sunrise...”**