

**What Does Jesus' Resurrection Say
to Us in this Time of Crisis?
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1 Corinthians 15:1-10

So what do you hope happens over the next few weeks? I think we all hope this crisis lessens or ends soon. So that what? So that we can get back to normal? So that we can get back to what we were doing before? So that we can continue on with our usual lives just exactly like they were before – back to working; school; schedules; vacations; recreation; going to malls; going out to eat; going to the park and whatever else we're missing at this time? I have to admit that is what I think and sometimes hope. I would like to get back to pursuing my own agenda and plans.

But what if we can't – or at least, not for quite a while? We are used to doing *what* we want, *when* we want. Yet, we have learned so much is beyond our control – Government decisions; Markets; Oil Prices; the caution or lack of caution by others concerning the virus. We see more clearly how little control we really have in many areas. If our primary hope today is for life to get back to normal and that's not going to happen for quite a while, are we left without hope?

As I approached today, Easter Sunday, I wondered what Jesus' resurrection might say to us in such a time as this. Just to be clear, I am talking about the physical resurrection of Jesus' dead body put in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea in or around the year 33 A.D. I'm not talking about the concept of resurrection or the spiritual resurrection of Jesus soul. I am talking about life returning to Jesus bruised and beaten body wrapped up in those burial clothes in a Jerusalem tomb.

What difference could Jesus' physical resurrection make in our lives right now in the midst of this pandemic? The answer for each of us depends somewhat on our belief about Jesus' resurrection. If you don't believe it happened, then it will make no difference in your life today. If we do believe it happened, then we can explore the possible impact on our lives today. But even those of us who say "I believe Jesus rose from the dead" need to examine whether we have let this fad actually permeate our lives.

To do that, rewind to 5 weeks ago. Life was normal. Did Jesus' resurrection make any difference in your life that week? Or did we pursue a life that primarily focused on earthly things? If we were honest, we can focus the vast majority of our lives on earthly pursuits.

There was an old saying made about some Christians – They were so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. Basically, the saying criticized Christians who would constantly think and talk about heaven

but would neglect to help people in need around them. Now, one author commented that Christians can be so earthly minded they are no heavenly good. We can get so busy pursuing our own lives, goals and dreams on earth that we seldom talk about heaven and our future resurrection. It's not that earthly pursuits are wrong, but if we don't have an equal concern for spiritual health and salvation, we are out of balance.

There's another challenge for those of us examining the depth of our resurrection belief. Many of us lived pretty good lives prior to the pandemic and still do in a sense. If life here is so enjoyable, Jesus' resurrection might not seem that relevant. We can almost live like it's possible to pursue and create paradise on earth. So why would we care much about entering paradise one day with Jesus? Or one day experiencing our own physical resurrection?

Then tragedy strikes or someone gets an incurable disease or the Humboldt crash happens. Or we experience a pandemic that may alter our world so that we don't even recognize our lives coming out of it. Then heaven and the spiritual become much more important. So we have a unique opportunity this Easter Sunday to think about what the resurrection of Jesus has to say in this abnormal time we experience.

To help us do this, I want to tell you the story about someone who did not believe in Jesus' resurrection. Then when he met the resurrected Jesus, his life turned upside down. He devoted the rest of his life to Christ that would ultimately cost him his life. So we will look at his story. Then we will read what the author wrote about Jesus' resurrection. We will conclude with several answers to the question "what does Jesus' resurrection say to us in this time?"

So first, let's meet this person. He grew up in a devout Jewish family. He lived a good moral life. People likely respected him in the Jewish community. He was smart with great potential. He received a good education under a prominent teacher. He also worked hard at his trade. So he paid his own way.

It's unlikely he encountered Jesus prior to the crucifixion. But he was alive and active soon after the early church birth of the early church. As a young man, he watched a mob of angry Jews stone a Christian to death. He stood watch over the mob's cloaks while they committed this execution. We're told he approved what they did. He then joined the active opposition to this new movement of Christ followers. He thought they posed a serious threat to society. He became their number one persecutor. He hunted down Christians and arrested them.

On his way to arrest Christians in another city, Jesus suddenly appeared to him. I know that sounds as impossible as the resurrection. But remember this guy was a smart and intelligent guy who was firm in his convictions. He describes the incident like this; Jesus said, “Saul, Saul (which was this guy’s Jewish name), why are you persecuting me?” Saul, who became known more by his Greek name Paul, answered. “Who are you Lord?” Jesus answered, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do.” This encounter turned Paul’s life upside down. He became convinced of Jesus’ resurrection and that Jesus was God in flesh. He joined the early Christians in Jerusalem. But he spoke so boldly and began to debate with his former Jewish colleagues. Some got so enraged with him that they planned to kill him. So he returned to his home town which was way up in modern day Turkey and worked for about 10 years.

Then God called him to spread the news about Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and hope beyond the Jewish community. He began to tell the message and establish churches in different cities. Then he wrote letters to encourage these new Christians. We have some of his letters preserved for us in the New Testament. In one of these letters, he talks about Jesus’ resurrection. He reminds a group of newer Christians about the importance of Jesus’ resurrection. This comes from 1st Corinthians 15 in the New Testament of the Bible.

1 Corinthians 15:1-10 (ESV)

15 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

So notice what he does to help these Corinthians belief in the resurrection. First, he points out historical facts. Christ died. Christ was buried. Christ was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Now that 3rd point is the disputed one. But, is there really any evidence? He appeals to eyewitness testimony. “The resurrected Jesus appeared to Peter. He appeared to the group of Jesus disciples. He appeared to more than 500 people at one time – most of whom were still alive. So people could go talk to them and ask what they saw. Jesus also appeared to his half-brother James and others. So first he gives historical facts and evidence.

Then he tells a little of his personal experience. He talks about Jesus appearing to him. He frames that moment with his own history. Jesus appeared to Paul even though Paul had persecuted Christians. Then he goes on to tell how this encounter with Christ affected Him. Paul completely gives His life to Christ. "His grace towards me was not in vain." (2 Cor. 11:23-28). He worked hard by the power of God's grace. Paul would take great risks; endure much suffering; experience multiple imprisonments and ultimately be executed for his faith.

Now here's where the question of Jesus' resurrection becomes relevant. Why would Paul go through all that if he did not believe the resurrection to be true? People can give their lives for something they believe to be true but later turns out to be false. But would Paul endure all that suffering and execution if it was all a lie? An intellectual, educated, respected member of the community loses all his status and his life for a lie? He could have just shut up about Christ and enjoyed a life tent-making in his home town. Instead he gave His life up for Christ because he believed others desperately needed to know this news. And he believed there was a much better life with Christ awaiting him on the other side of death. Through the rest of 1st Corinthians 15, he argues that Christianity is a false religion if Christ has not been raised. But because of Jesus' resurrection, Christians can look forward with hope to our own resurrection and paradise life regardless of the hardships of their earthly life. The longing for this resurrection life with Christ kept Paul and many Christians going through great hardship and misery.

With all that in mind, here's where all of this comes back to you and me and the possible impact of Jesus' resurrection on our lives today. What does Jesus' resurrection have to say to us today?

1- Jesus is alive and aware of all we're going through. It says to us that Jesus is alive right now. Right now, He is watching your life. He knows all you're going through, thinking about and stressing over. He is completely aware of COVID-19 and its impact on our world and our world and your life. We don't fall on a dead hero and try to keep this idea alive. He is alive right now!

2- The living Christ wants us to entrust our lives to him. He wants us to come to Him Lord, King, Savior and Shepherd. He desires to lead and care for us. But He will not force Himself into our lives. He invites us to come to Him where we will find soul rest.

3- What else does Jesus' resurrection say to us today? If things get worse, the living Christ is still there for us. His guidance, care and support do not depend on things returning to normal.

4- If you or someone you love gets sick from the virus, the resurrected Jesus is right there with you.

Jesus walks through the valley of the shadow of death with anyone who gets ill. He cares, ministers, can heal and give strength. If someone we know or love dies because of the virus and they know Christ, the resurrected Jesus will be right there to walk with them through death's valley into paradise with Him. The living Jesus will be right there with us to support us through every step of such a loss.

If we ourselves have trusted Christ with our lives and then die from this virus, the resurrected Jesus walks with us through death's valley into paradise with Him.

5- The resurrected Jesus will help us through future transitions permanently. If this pandemic changes our lives drastically for good, the resurrected Jesus will be right there with us as we make that transition. If we have to move because of a lack of jobs; if we have to change jobs – He will be with us through it.

6- The resurrection of Jesus also says to us today that we can live as forgiven sinners. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we are still in our sins. Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians 15:17 – “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” So you know that nagging sense of guilt that we all try to suppress for the wrong we've done? Or you know how we sometimes try make up for our bad deeds by doing some good deeds? But we never know if that really works and it doesn't.

Jesus paid for our sins with His blood on the cross. He substituted Himself in our place so that we might forgiveness and reconciliation with God. But if Jesus was not resurrected, then He's a liar. No liar can pay for other people's sins. Only a sinless substitute could do it. Jesus alone fulfills that through His death and resurrection, meaning we can live as forgiven sinners today.

So what does resurrection say to us today?

1- Jesus is alive and aware of what we're going through

2- The living Christ desires you to entrust your life to Him

3- If things get worse, the living Christ is still with us

4- If we or someone we know gets sick or dies from the virus, Jesus will walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death to paradise

5- if this pandemic permanently changes our lives, Jesus will walk with us through the transitions

6- The risen Jesus enables us to live as forgiven sinners

In my view, that's quite an impact. You realize you to to place your hope in Christ and not in things getting back to normal.

So if you have not trusted your life to Christ, you can do that right now. You can say something like this that you can repeat after me.

"Lord Jesus;
I confess that up to now,
I have lived my life apart from you;
I have lived as if I was lord;
But now I see that I need you;
I admit that I have sinned against God;
I put my trust upon you Jesus;
I depend solely on the sacrifice you made;
In my place on the cross.

So now, I receive you, the resurrected Lord into my life – as Savior, King and Shepherd.

If you did pray something like that today, that means that out of this terrible and difficult time, you have received the most important gift ever. You might only be watching today because of this pandemic. Yet out of something bad, God has brought good. That's what God does over and over. Out of Jesus death on the cross, He brought forgiven and eternal life for you today.

If you were already a Christian before this service started, I pray that you have gained encouragement from your resurrected Lord today. We need to turn to Him to lead us to look forward with hope to our coming life with Him. Then with that hope in mind, we love God and love others during our time here until Jesus returns or calls us home.

We started by asking if our deepest hope is that things get back to normal. But let's finish by putting our deepest hope in the resurrected Jesus to walk with us through whatever comes. Amen.