

April 6, 2026

“Resurrection: The Future Hope”

1 Cor. 15:13-20, 51-58

Lesson 1

Intro

The church in Corinth was founded when Paul spent 18 months there during his second missionary journey. On his third journey, he was in Ephesus when he wrote a letter to the Corinthian church which we now call 1 Corinthians. There were many issues facing that church; the one we deal with in today’s passage deals with the resurrection of the dead. Some believers were still affected by their pagan backgrounds and those ways of thinking. The Greeks considered the body and the soul as two separate entities. Socrates views the body as a “prison” for the soul. Greek philosophers believed in the immortality of the soul, but not in a resurrection of the body. In the first part of chapter 15 (just before today’s passage), Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel he preached to them and which they believed and received. The foundation of the gospel is Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection (vs. 1-4). Paul then lists some of the appearances Jesus made after His resurrection. Paul now explains the huge negative consequences that will result if Jesus’ resurrection did not occur.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:13-20

1. vs. 13: The foundation of Paul’s argument here is about the possibility of a body resurrecting
 - If there is no resurrection of the body, then Jesus did not rise from the death either
 - That would mean the body is still in the tomb, or that His disciples stole His body
 - Paul will now address the faulty logic of those who deny the resurrection

2. vs. 14: Paul will use an “if—then” format in this argument
 - First, if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then the disciples’ preaching is “useless”
 - If it didn’t happen, then the disciples are lying, being deceptive
 - Many OT scriptures describe the Messiah and what will happen to Him
 - Ps. 16:8-11 says God’s “faithful One will not see decay”
 - If Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, then these OT scriptures are also faulty
 - People who believed this are in the wrong also, if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead
 - So the preaching is worthless, and so is the faith of believers, if Jesus didn’t resurrect

3. vs. 15: Paul now points the finger back at the apostles and their preaching
 - One of the 10 Commandments says not to give false witness
 - Paul says they have broken this commandment if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead
 - They have been preaching that Jesus did rise from the dead
 - If He didn’t, they have been preaching a falsehood, giving false witness
 - This includes not only the apostles, but also the 500 who saw Jesus alive again (vs. 6)
 - Paul notes that many of these 500 are still alive—they can be questioned
 - Peter and John were very sure Jesus had risen from the dead—they had seen Him
 - In Acts 4:20, they tell the Sanhedrin, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

4. vs. 16-17: Paul here essentially repeats what he has said in vs. 13-14

If there's no resurrection, Jesus didn't rise from the dead either

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, the Corinthians' faith in Him is futile (worthless)

Worse than that, if Jesus didn't rise, their sins are still present—they aren't forgiven

This line of thinking is completely opposite what Scripture repeatedly states

Rom. 4:25 says Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our justification

If this isn't true, then Jesus Himself is a false witness, claiming to be something He isn't

5. vs. 18: Paul now moves on to another group—the dead

What he has already described is devastating to the living, but what about the dead?

If Christ didn't rise from the dead, those who believed and are now dead are “lost”

They have believed in something that wasn't true

So like vs. 16-17, they have nothing to base their faith on

Jesus didn't rise from the dead, and those dead are lost in their sins also

6. vs. 19: In Chapter 13, Paul lists “hope” as one of three qualities that “remain” (faith, hope, love)

He says in Rom. 8:24 that we are saved by our hope in Christ

Christians who have an eternal hope are different from those with “no hope” (1 Thes. 4:13)

Everything Scriptures say about an eternal hope are null and void if Jesus didn't rise

Christian hope is based on the reality of Jesus' resurrection

Jesus' resurrection gives the Christian faith a power and distinction beyond other faiths

If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, that distinction is destroyed

7. vs. 20: Paul finishes this section with a bold, confident declaration

“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”

In the OT law about harvest, the firstfruits of the harvest belong to God

The Israelites were tenants / stewards of the land

Firstfruits implies that there will be more harvests to follow

Paul uses this image in connection with Jesus' resurrection

Jesus was raised from the dead as a “firstfruit”, implying more will be raised from the dead

God raised Jesus from the dead, and will raise others from the dead also

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

From vs. 20 to 50, Paul teaches about sin, death, and the possibility of being made alive in Christ. He proclaims Jesus' triumph over death, his ultimate rule with authority and power, and the heavenly inheritance available to those who align with Him. Paul anticipates questions about what happens with a resurrected body. He explains that we begin with a “natural body”, but gain eternity in a “spiritual” one (15:44). He then says that people must bear the image of the heavenly in order to inherit the kingdom.

8. vs. 51: Paul uses the word “mystery” here, one of 20 times he uses the word in his epistles

The word refers to a spiritual truth hidden for a time but now revealed

The mystery here is what the future holds for Christians

Sleep here refers to death

Paul says the Christian experience won't be death, but change

9. vs. 52: “In the twinkling of an eye” suggests that this event will happen suddenly
The change that Paul references in vs. 52 will be sudden, quick
A trumpet blast is associated with the coming of God’s judgement
Paul says in 1 Thessalonians that the trumpet will be joined by Jesus and the archangel
At that moment, the dead will be raised “imperishable”—not impacted by this world again
This alteration will happen to both believers and unbelievers, as God judges
10. vs. 53: Our physical bodies are “perishable”—they will decompose
But those kinds of bodies will not inherit the Kingdom of God—only imperishable ones
Our bodies will be changed from the human to the spiritual kind at this time
We will go from being mortal to immortal
11. vs. 55: Paul addresses death as if it was a person
He asks death where its sting is
Death can’t answer because Jesus defeated death—it has no sting anymore
Death can’t have a victory, because it lost the battle for supremacy to Jesus
12. vs. 56: Paul reminds the Corinthians of what gave death its power
Sin was defined by the law, so all knew that they were people who sinned
Paul later wrote that “The wages of sin is death”
The fact that sin causes death is what gave it a sting
13. vs. 57: Sin was defeated by Christ
Jesus died on the cross to take on all the sins of the world
Jesus rose again the third day, showing that He was stronger than death
Because Jesus had victory over death, we also have that victory through Him
Our response to gaining this victory through Christ is gratitude for what He’s done for us
14. vs. 58: Paul concludes this passage by telling the Corinthians to “stand firm”
Paul is connecting the doctrine he has explained to what they need to do
They are to stay grounded in the teachings that Paul has delivered
They are also to be devoted to the “work of the Lord”
All other labors are “in vain”

Application: Death is a mystery; it is not a friend, but an enemy. But the good news is that Christ’s cross and empty tomb defeat death for all time. Easter is the celebration of death’s defeat by Jesus. Because Jesus is risen, death is not the end of the story. It is a comma, not a period. As Christians, we believe the “comma” of death is just a pause leading to something far greater than anything this world can provide.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for the hope of Jesus’ resurrection. Thank You for the comfort it gives us to know that death is not the end. We praise You for the promise of eternal life in Jesus. Help us to live differently knowing the trials of this life are not the final word. In Jesus’ name, Amen.