

Pity Not Them Who Rise With Christ

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes the critical importance of the resurrection of Christ for faith, justification, and living a life of sacrificial love.

Duration: 35:45

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:12

Topics: "Resurrection Power", "Faith In Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the consequences of Jesus not being raised from the dead and not being the Lord of the universe. He emphasizes the importance of putting our faith in the risen Christ and our own resurrection in Him. The speaker acknowledges that many people have a desire for more than the materialistic pursuits of this world and long for a life of sacrificial love. He encourages listeners to consider Jesus as the source of fulfillment and purpose in their lives.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org The scripture for this morning's message is taken from 1st Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 12 through 20. Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain. Your faith also is vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep.

Oh Lord, this is a great Sunday, and Christ is a great Savior. We are great sinners, and yours is a great Gospel, and eternity is a great long time. And I am in great need of your help to do justice to this text and

this event, and all of its stunning eternal implications for our lives.

So I ask you to come now and help me. I pray that you would humble me under your mighty hand, and may the words of my mouth and the meditation in my heart be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. And I ask for listening ears in this room, and hearts made soft by the providences of God in people's lives, and by the Spirit of God right now.

You have been preparing people for this moment, some of them for decades, some for days, and some for minutes. Come Holy Spirit, reveal Christ as only you can reveal Him through the Word. Validate the testimony of your Word concerning His resurrection, I pray in His great name.

Amen. This passage that Dennis just read describes five very sad consequences if Jesus is not raised and is not the Lord of the universe, and we will not be raised with Him. And I'd like to take these and just point you to them, and then pick out one of them, and show you in an unexpected way, perhaps, how it functions as an incentive to woo us to put our faith in the risen Christ, and in our own resurrection in Him, with Him someday.

And I'll be very honest with you up front, that my goal is that some of you would be won over to believe in Him, and trust in Him who may not now believe. And I say be won over, rather than I hope to win you over, because even though the Lord uses the words of men, He's the winner. He's the one who does it.

Only the Holy Spirit can move in such a way that you really hear what I say, and see through it to reality, and thus are moved by the glory and beauty of that reality to embrace it. So that's my prayer and longing as we do it. Let's start at verse 12.

He's riding to Corinth. It's a pretty sophisticated city. We know that from earlier things in the book to Corinth.

And they are denying that there is any such thing as a resurrection. You see that there is no resurrection of the dead. Some of them are saying, period, nobody rises from the dead.

That's just not done. It doesn't happen. Bodies don't come to life after they have died.

That's the end of it. Verse 13, Paul draws out the inference, if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised from the dead. And if Christ hasn't been raised from the dead, all these five sad consequences come.

Now before I list them off for you, let me show you what Paul does believe about the resurrection. What he believes is true. He doesn't accept this hypothesis.

We've got eight verses of pondering. What if this hypothesis, no resurrection, is true? And then he comes to verse 20, look at what he believes, what he's experienced. He saw this risen Christ.

He knows Him personally. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. So two things are asserted in that verse.

Christ has been raised from the dead. The hypothesis is false. And He is first fruits.

You know what that is in terms of farming, right? There's a harvest. The harvest has arrived. And you can take now some first fruits from the harvest.

And the first fruits signify there's a harvest. If there weren't a harvest, there couldn't be any first fruits. If there are first fruits, there will be a harvest.

That's what first fruits means. So the point is, the resurrection of Jesus is the first fruits of our resurrection. The resurrection of all those who are in Christ, who belong to Christ, who trust in Christ.

So, Paul believes Christ rose and we will rise with Him. The way he said it over in Romans is, If the Spirit of Him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also. In other words, faith unites us.

The Holy Spirit by faith unites us to Christ. And what happens to Him, happens to us. So if He rises, we're going to rise.

And as He died, we died in Him. And that's why our sins can be covered by His death. Now, he entertains this hypothesis.

Verse 13, if there's no resurrection of the dead, not Christ has been raised from the dead, and that has five sad consequences. Here's number one. Verse 14, if Christ is not raised from the dead, if Christ is not raised, then our preaching is vain.

Or, verse 15, moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God because we testified against God that He raised Christ from the dead. So the first consequence is one that Paul feels very personally, and the people that he's writing to, this little group, they probably say, there's no skin off our nose. If your preaching is in vain because you preach resurrection, that's not our problem.

So Paul is taking this very personally to himself here. He says, if what you say is true, my preaching is empty, and not only empty, an offense to God. It's a false witness against God.

I'm claiming He does something He doesn't do, and I'm a false witness against God. So Paul wouldn't do what he's doing if he believed this. I wouldn't do what I'm doing if I didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

I would quit this ministry. I wouldn't stand in this pulpit Sunday after Sunday. I sure wouldn't get on the plane this afternoon at 3 o'clock and go to talk about these things in Africa.

I don't like to travel. My wife loves to travel. I'm so glad she does because she's got everything figured out now, and we'll do all that needs to be done between here and Yondi, Cameroon.

But I wouldn't do that. My job would be over as I know it. My life would be over as I know it.

I would eat, drink, and be merry. Tomorrow, we die. Consequence number two.

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, I'm reading verse 14 at the end now. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, second. Your faith also is vain.

He says it again in verse 17. Your faith is worthless. Now, that's really strange because I want to ask Paul, what faith? They don't believe in the resurrection.

They don't believe Christ was raised. They don't believe humans are raised. What do you mean their faith? What faith? So they've got some kind of faith.

These are people in the church. These aren't pagans. These aren't the philosophers outside the church.

These are people in the church at Corinth who say, we don't believe in the resurrection. And we have faith. And I wish he would tell me what they believed.

Because I don't know. So I have to guess. And, you know, in our day, it doesn't take a lot of imagination to guess.

Because I know Christians like this. I talk to them. They don't believe in the resurrection.

I'll talk to one this week. What do they believe? There's a good example. Christ was a good example.

Christ, when the stories are told about his resurrection, they are stories that are symbols of his ongoing influence in the world, which is great. About 1.3 billion people claim to be followers of Jesus these days. Maybe it's a symbol of the divine world spirit that makes its way in the world, something like that.

Maybe my faith is in a kind of a God who's in all spirits and in all religions. But none of this resurrection stuff. None of this bodily resurrection of Jesus or of us.

So when they, or maybe that group in Corinth, hear that Jesus is raised and watch it and say, that's mythological, they don't reject it. They reinterpret it. It is amazing today how many professing believers do not believe in the doctrines of the Bible and don't reject the Bible.

For example, I said to this person, we were talking about eternal life and whether or not you had to believe in Jesus in order to have it, and I quoted Acts 13.47, I think, where it says, since you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, I now turn to the Gentiles. So I say, so you must believe this is false. This is wrong that they've judged themselves unworthy of eternal life because they reject Paul's message.

Because you don't think you have to believe Paul's message in order to have eternal life. All kinds of people in all kinds of religions are going to have eternal life. So you must believe this is wrong.

And he said, oh, I wouldn't use the word wrong. I said, well, what would you say? He said, well, back in those days he was getting at an ultimate reality that we all care about, an ultimate concern, and he used different mythological structures. We have our own story, our own language game, and we use different language.

We don't believe literally in resurrection and so on, but I don't reject the testimony. It's amazing. Thousands upon thousands of churches think that way and talk that way.

You take clear, plain sentences from the Bible and say, oh, we don't reject them. And you just reach inside and you pull out all the truth and throw it away and stick some other New Age or mythological or poetic or aesthetic truth in there and go on preaching, saying it, doing music with it. I think Paul responded to that by saying, if Christ is not raised from the dead, your faith is vain.

That's empty. That's worthless. This is a terrifying thing to hear.

Consequence number three. Verse 17, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless. You are still in your sins.

That's number three. You are still in your sins. This is serious.

You're still guilty. You're still under condemnation from a holy God. It's sin that separates us from God.

You're still in your sins. Now, think with me about this for a minute, because the Bible teaches real plainly, it's the death of Jesus that forgives sins. It's the death of Jesus that covers my sin, takes away my guilt.

I deserve to die for my sin. Jesus dies in my place, according to Romans 5, 8. And because he died, I don't have to die. I can be freed from guilt and condemnation and have eternal life forever.

But Paul says here, if he's not raised, you're still in your sin. Why? Why does he treat resurrection as the key? Here's the reason. It says in Romans 4, 25, Christ was delivered over to death because of our sins.

Our sins, not his. Because of my sins, he endured suffering. And was raised because of our justification.

Which means that his resurrection validated the effectiveness of his death in covering my sins. Because God could look upon the finished work of Jesus, all his righteousness, all his suffering, all of his climactic death, and say, because of that, I will cancel all the sins of those who are in Christ by faith. And then, he said, to show you that I mean it, and that it's valid, and that it's real, I'm going to raise him from the dead.

And for my justification, because of my justification, he raises him from the dead. So, if he was not raised, his death accomplished nothing for me. Zero.

But if he was raised, his huge stamp approved of God is on the death of Jesus. Totally sufficient. It is finished.

Easter is the validation of Good Friday. And that's why he can say here, if Christ is not raised, you and I are in our sins. And there is no atonement.

There is no forgiveness. There is no substitute. There is no justification for us.

Consequence number four. If Christ is not raised, then those who have fallen asleep in Christ, that is, Christians who have died, have perished. Now, the word perish there has to mean more than die physically, because everybody dies physically, whether they're in Christ or not.

This is something more that happens to people who are not in Christ. And if he's not raised, it happens even to those who are in Christ. Namely, they perish.

That is, they experience the wrath of God. They experience judgment. That's consequence number four.

You can see the building of these consequences. We're left in our sin, and therefore we meet judgment for our sin, instead of forgiveness for our sin when we die. That leads to number five, the final one.

Verse 19. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. That verse has taken me captive in the last several years.

I speak on it almost everywhere I go when I'm not here at Bethlehem, because it is amazingly full of stunning implications. If in this life only I hope in Christ, then the life I am choosing to live is stupid, pitiable, foolish. Now, what was he referring to? This is the one I want to linger over with you for a few minutes as we come to the end.

I want to linger here and show you how hidden in this verse is an incentive to us to believe. Something that I pray will be very compelling to you, and maybe something you've never thought of as one of the reasons

you can and should draw near to God through Jesus Christ and be reconciled to Him. That's my intent.

Here's the way it works. See if this fits you. I pray it fits many.

I don't think I've ever unpacked this verse on an Easter Sunday morning. It works like this. I am assuming now, this is a grand assumption, oh, I hope it's true, that most of you, almost all of you, maybe I could even dare say all of you in this room right now, at your best and highest moments, have dreamed of living a life that is not self-indulgent, but sacrificially loving.

You've dreamed of a cutting-edge, risk-taking, lay-down-your-life, gutsy, cause for other people, no matter what it costs, instead of just accumulating bland, middle-America, comfortable, self-indulgent, secure comforts. I just think almost everybody in this room has had moments, late at night, early in the morning, where your mind, in a moment of grace, has dreamed of not living wholly for yourself, but of giving yourself away in some great cause for the good of people, at cost to yourself. I know, I know we have other dreams.

There are high parts and there are low parts. And many of us, I would dare say all of us, have dreamed of maximizing our comforts, maximizing our physical pleasures, maximizing our sexual lives, maximizing our money, maximizing our fame and our esteem, maximizing our job advancement, maximizing our family, maximizing our neighborhood, maximizing our cars, maximizing our toys. We dream those dreams, and we don't feel especially happy with ourselves.

We like those pleasures. I know that's there, but I'm banking everything in the rest of this sermon on the fact that there's something in every one of you that has tasted moments where you've said, I don't want to be like the run-of-the-mill, living for myself, making a name for myself, making lots of money, just shrinking into a little nuclear family with a nice TV or a big sound system with big screens and a lot of games. I don't, I don't... He who dies with the most toys wins? No.

You know. You know in your best moments, it isn't so. So here's my question.

Paul lived such a life of cutting-edge, sacrificial, risk-taking, perilous love. And I want to know how he did it. Let me just acquaint you for a moment with Paul's life.

Verse 30. In this same chapter, Paul says, I'm in peril every hour. Think of it.

In peril every hour. He's in danger all the time. Why? He explains in the second letter he wrote to Corinth.

It comes a little later in the New Testament. It goes like this. I am often in danger of death.

Five times I received 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned.

Three times I was shipwrecked. In dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

And he asks just a few verses earlier than that paragraph in chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians. He says to this community, Why? Because I do not love you. God knows I love you.

You may not know I love you, but God knows I love you. That's why I choose this life. So here we have a person doing what we, at our highest moments, long to do, namely, live on the cutting edge of self-sacrificing love and not just constantly thinking about maximizing our own private, self-indulgent pleasures.

And now the question is, how do you do that? How do you live in peril every hour? How do you embrace risk and beatings and imprisonments and shipwrecks? Why do you make choices, Paul, that put you in harm's way over and over again? What is it with you? His answer is, Love. But how is that sustained? Now, let's go back to verse 19. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

If Christ is not raised and I'm hoping for a resurrection, I'm stupid. Living the life I'm living. My life is crazy.

My life is insane. My life is foolish. It's pitiable.

It's nonsense if I'm not going to be raised with Christ someday. Do you see? Are you, I'll ask you right now, are you living a life which is stupid if you're not raised from the dead? Wow. What an indictment of the American church.

What an indictment of the American church. How are your choices? They look like everybody else in the world. How much is it costing you to love people? Hardly anything.

Hardly any risks. Hardly any dangers. Hardly any choices that would be called imprudent.

And yet your heart, I believe from God Almighty, written on your heart is, Oh God, there's got to be more. There's got to be more. There's got to be more than this middle American way of prosperity that causes people to get just as sick with mental disease as all the sicknesses in the simple undeveloped places of the world.

There's got to be more than this. And Paul says there is more. There is so much more in this life and the next.

You know the great obstacle to living the life you dream about and that God has put in your heart as possible? It's 1 Corinthians 15 32. If the dead are not raised, let's eat and drink. For tomorrow we die.

If you believe tomorrow we die. That's it. Zero.

No resurrection. You will eat and drink. And you won't care about love.

You won't care about people. You won't take any risks in order to make yourself a means to other people's joy because you're going to maximize your own private pleasures because you've only got one life to do it. But if you've got 10,000 ages of years to do it with a Christ who will never let you be bored, this little prelude can be spent directing people to that and taking whatever risks it takes to get them there and you there with maximum joy.

I'll give you one closing illustration from Jesus' own teachings. Did Jesus think this way? Or is this just the way Paul thinks? Did Jesus really think that believing that you will be raised from the dead will make you invite different people for dinner than you would if you didn't? Hard people. Here's the text.

Gospel of Luke chapter 14 verse 13 goes like this. When you give a reception, a banquet, a dinner, when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed since they cannot repay you.

That's odd logic. You will be blessed because they can't bless you. They can't repay you.

You're not going to get any material out of this. So what's sustaining this uncomfortable Thanksgiving dinner where people can't speak English and you had them over because they're lonely and you wanted to just play risk with your kids all afternoon? What's sustaining that sacrifice? Here's the next line. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Do you see the logic? This is from Jesus. This is not Paul. This is Jesus here now.

If you choose, make choices today that are hard to make, not easy, hard to make, sacrificial to make, self-denying to make, the kind of choices you dream about making in your highest moments of satisfaction and fulfillment, you will be paid back ten thousand fold in the resurrection of the just with a kind of joy that will never end. So, I'm done. And I'm going to make a closing appeal to you to just think and pray and seek God in this.

If Christ has not been raised, the Christian life ought to look stupid, which means that believing in the resurrection of Christ and of ourselves is the key to the highest, noblest, and in the long run, most joyful life. Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. For the joy that was set before Him beyond the resurrection endured the cross.

Same thing with Him as with us. And if He has been raised, there is a power in the world, and in this room, and in the gospel that can lift you, both in this life and the next, to a level of significant living that God has written on your heart is beautiful and right and true. And almost everybody in this room wants it.

A few of you have checked out so completely right now, you're not even hearing what I say. I grieve for you. I pray for you.

I long for you. But some of you, many of you, are feeling what I'm saying, namely, yeah, perhaps those dreams were written by God, and perhaps the key that unlocks that dream is the Son of God and is the resurrection of the Son of God and is the freedom that comes from believing in the Son and the resurrection, my own resurrection. Maybe that is the key, and I just urge you to press in on Christ.

Come to Christ. Believe in Christ. He is the key.

He is the answer. And here's the way I want to end. Let me just sum up what I've said and then have you confess your faith one more time.

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied. But, since He has been raised from the dead, and since we who are in Him will be raised from the dead, then pity not those who trust in Christ and rise with Him. Now, I want you to confess your faith with, the Lord is risen indeed, one more time, and then be dismissed.

And after we are dismissed, I'll stand here a minute or two, and the prayer team members will be here. We don't have much time between the services, but we'll pray if you want to pray. The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! The Lord is risen! The website is

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