



A World Without the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15; Isaiah 25

Some people ask for proof that Jesus raised from the dead. I can't offer that. I can make a historically plausible case, which I tried to do in *Raised?* Belief that Jesus rose from the dead requires just that, belief. But the idea that Jesus did not rise from the dead also requires belief. If you're a skeptic, I invite you to be more open minded about what is possible in this world. If you're a believer, I invite you to be more open minded about what God has done for you in Christ. Here's how—let's consider a world where the resurrection does happen and a world where it doesn't. Our moorings will come from the most famous explanation of the resurrection in the Bible—1 Corinthians 15. There we will see the resurrection is: a preview of things to come, a reordering of the things that are, and a promise of things that will be. Preview, Order, Promise.

Preview

The resurrection isn't just a matter of proofs; it's a matter of how you see the world. It is the turning point in a whole narrative about life. Perhaps like the dance in *Sliver Linings Playbook* changes the story or the Great Eagles change the outcome of *the Hobbit*. Because the resurrection is so pivotal, its belief affects a whole range of matters like ethics, sex, art, and death. How? After considering doubts about the resurrection, Paul says: "**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**" He asserts the resurrection of Jesus is a first fruit. This word "first fruits" comes from the agricultural world, referring to the first of a harvest (grain or vegetables) given to someone. It is the *first* of its kind. The first of many more heads of grain to come. Similarly, Jesus resurrection body is the first of many more resurrection bodies to come. His resurrection is also the *first of a kind* in another way. It is the first of this *kind* of human body. It has a different glory, or quality. It passes through walls but digests food; it lives and never dies. What he offers is unprecedented. It's a new *kind* of body. More on this later. *For now, we need to absorb the claim Jesus is making about the world in his resurrection body.* He is claiming that he is *the first of a kind*, a new generation of humanity, if you will. He is a preview of things to come. [SXSW app] Jesus is insisting that he is the first of a whole new world. If this is true, then he has interrupted history in a remarkable way. He has sent our story in a whole new direction. **Where, then, is it headed without him?** Paul continues by saying: "**For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.**" Without Christ, "In Adam all die." The first human died, so all others will follow. Death is the inevitable consequence of birth. If you've been to a funeral, you know there are few things that at bleaker. You can look back on their life but you cant look forward. Grief grips the room. Sadness sits because there is no more life. In the words of the great American author, Don DeLillo: "**All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of all plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers plots, narrative plots, the plots of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot. It is like a contract we must all sign.**" The contract is signed, sealed, and waiting to be delivered. Without the resurrection, we tumble towards death. If Jesus is not the first of a kind, then all our stories end with death. But *with the resurrection*, we have the possibility of an alternate ending. Jesus is the preview of a whole new story.

Order

How does this story go? Paul writes: “**But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.**”

There’s a beginning, middle, and end, an order to the story. It’s not a haphazard, disjointed B movie. According to the Christ story, each will be resurrected in his own order. Christ from the dead into a new body, then those who belong to Christ follow. In this version, not all plots have to move toward death. This is a better story, isn’t it?! Why? Because it has a better ending, yes, but as a result it also has a better **order**. **What you envision about the end affects the order of your story.** If a filmmaker wants the hero to win, he will order the story to show the odds but tip in his favor. If he wants the hero to lose, he will order the story to signal his demise. The end affects the plot. The same is true of life. **If death is the ending, then disorder will fill life.** If there’s nothing greater to live for, then we should live for the now: “eat, drink, and be merry.” Hedonism. Now, most people aren’t going to have Howard Stern hedonism. For most, it’s a qualified hedonism. If sex is your thing, go for it, but don’t take too many risks, have too many partners, because, well, you could get a disease and die early. That limits your pleasure. If influence is what gives you worth, then pursue your glory but don’t be a jerk about it or you’ll start losing friends. Be self-absorbed, just not too arrogant. Calculated hedonism. Or you may take gross pleasure in depressive, self-centered life in view of death. **What you envision about the end affects the order of your story.** In the film, *Silver Linings Playbook* both Pat and Tiffany try to impose order onto their hedonism. Pat is institutionalized by court order for beating his wife’s lover to a pulp. He’s just got out of the institute and has a restraining order. He’s free and full of resolve to find the silver lining in all his troubles. His counselor, an Indian psychotherapist, tells him he has to get a *strategy*. So Pat starts exercising, in a black trash bag to increase sweat. He reads voraciously. Tries new things. The problem is that he’s a little off. It’s hard for him to qualify his hedonism. Anger is his thing. He likes to blow up, like in the middle of the night, waking up his parents at 3 am, screaming over the ending of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*. Or jumping in a brawl at an Eagles game. He can’t resist a fight. But he tries. He’s trying to reorder his life, but getting it together isn’t enough. Hope leaks out of him. He wants more than an ordered life; he wants love. He’s desperate to win his wife back. But then he meets Tiffany—a sex addict—who sleeps with as many people as she can to cope with death of her husband. She knows it’s destructive so she tries something new. She imposes order on her hedonism by taking up dance and gets Pat to join her and enter a competition. But she too leaks hope. She’s into Pat, and Pat’s secretly into her. Both are responding to death, death of a marriage, in order to find a new life. You want them to succeed so badly, you realize that the imposed order—running, dancing, reading—isn’t enough. They, like us, leak hope for something more. They need more than order; they need one another. They need more than a strategy; they need a relational cure. Then comes the dance. They dance their socks off in a competition where they are in way over their heads. When it’s over, Tiffany runs away because she thinks that, now that the dance is done, Pat will pursue his cheating wife. Pat realizes his wife doesn’t love him, and runs after Tiffany.

Standing in the middle of the street he pronounces his love for her. The end. It's a compelling story...but you're left with a lingering thought: "Is it enough? The relationship? I mean, after all, they are pretty messed up." And so are we. Like Pat and Jennifer, we need more than order, more than qualified hedonism. We need a love dance. We need a relational cure. We need a deep, transforming love that doesn't quit, someone who meets us in our messed up lives, and loves us into a new one. We need the resurrection. See, the resurrection isn't blind faith in a proposition or belief in a doctrine. It is wide-eyed witness of the love of God to give up his Son to give us his life. It is belief in a person with so much love that he throws himself on the sword for us, and keeps on living after death, keeps on loving us in our failure. He opens his arms and invites us to dance. *Is this for everyone? "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive...those who belong to him"* No, because he says "in Christ" all will be made alive. When we say we are "into" something, into a band or running, we are often saying we identify with it. You might even call yourself a fan or a runner. Those who are in Christ identify with him. They aren't just into him; they've taken the whole plunge into his life and teachings. They are in him. In perfect love, Jesus accepts messed up people like us. **The point isn't to believe in the resurrection; it's to receive the love of the resurrected Christ.**

Promise

So, if the end affects the order, how does resurrection change the story? Paul quotes from Isaiah the prophet who had great visions of the future: "[Death is swallowed up in victory.](#)" "[O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?](#)" If the resurrection is true, then death is swallowed by Jesus. He dances on its grave. Victory dance, baby! This is celebration day, and not a prudish celebration. Christians are known for lame parties. Not Christ. When Jesus swallows death, he throws an epic party for all the nations: "[On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined](#)" (Isa 25:6). What greater celebration can you think of?! The end of death and the beginning of never ending life. An eternal dance with the one who loves you perfectly. All plots do not have to move deathward. Jesus offers a better story, an alternate outcome than hinges on his resurrection, a whole new kind of life. He is the first of a kind. Will you follow? Will you plunge yourself into his life and teachings? His body is a preview of things to come—a renewed creation, busting with a greater glory and beauty than we've ever imagined. His resurrection is a **promise** that the world does not have to end in death but will be reanimated with life. Jesus is the vanguard of renewal. The promise of new life, bodies, and new creation. This is a story worth believing. Lose the resurrection and you lose this hope altogether. Gain the resurrected Jesus and you gain a whole new world.