



Losing Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12-28 | Jonathan K. Dodson | April 20, 2014

If you're visiting, thank you for sharing your time with us this morning. I hope it's meaningful for you. This morning is the culmination of what Christians call Holy Week, the week that Jesus of Nazareth made his way into Jerusalem to surrender his body to the authorities in order to be *the sacrifice for sinners* and rise from the dead as the *hope of a resurrected world*. I'd like to invite you to question all that. To see what happens when we: a) doubt the resurrection b) when we lose the resurrection? and c) when we gain the resurrection? Doubt it, lose it, gain it.

Questioning Resurrection

Too often Christians look down on doubt as a sign of weakness, but doubt can actually be a strength. This week I checked out a used car on Craig's List that was located in North Austin. The picture of the car was in a lot by itself, next to an office building. The description was written with a warm, friendly tone mentioning it was a "great family car." As I father of three, I set out to find it. I got entirely lost ending up in SW Austin instead of NE Austin. Two hours later when I finally found it, it was sitting in a rundown used car lot with a lone neon green flag fluttering on the antenna, *mocking me*. I fell for a used dealership when I thought it was a private owner deal! Now, what would have happened if I had doubted the car? If I questioned the owner in a text: "Are you a dealer?! Has it been hit?" I would have saved a couple hours and a lot of frustration! *Anything worth buying is worth questioning*, especially things of weight. *If you don't ever doubt something, how confident can you be of its reliability?* It should stand up to the test of our questions. Let's question the resurrection to see if faith in Jesus is well placed. As it turns out, there were a lot of people in the 1st century who questioned the idea that a body could be raised from the dead. Greeks, Jews, and some Christians. These beliefs were affecting the early church, which started because of purported encounters with the risen Jesus. So this passage of Scripture is addressing some confusion and doubt regarding the resurrection. Paul, the pastor who started this church in Corinth, doesn't brush aside their questions saying, "Just believe!" Instead, six times, he repeats the phrase "**if Christ has not been raised.**" He considers the question, engages their doubt. In fact, he goes so far as to say "**If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied**" (1 Cor 15:19). What's he saying? He's been arguing that if there is no resurrection—categorically—then there is no resurrection of Jesus, and if there is no resurrection of Jesus then hoping in Christianity is foolish. Now today people wouldn't be so harsh. We try not to trash other religions or say they are pitiable. Instead, an Austinite would say something like, "*If resurrection of Jesus works for you, then great. Who am I to judge? If it helps you live a better more peaceful life, then go for it. Even if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, I think his teaching like loving your neighbor as yourself is helpful. Religion is a crutch, but it can be a good one.*" Austinites see this as generous and accepting. However, the problem with this view of Christianity is that it isn't what Christianity—or Christ—actually proposes. He goes on to say: "**if Christ has not been raised then our preaching and faith are in vain.**" 17 The word "vain" means empty, hollow, worthless, like a colorful plastic Easter egg, when opened, containing nothing inside. That's what Christian faith is like if Jesus didn't rise from the dead. So the

resurrection isn't relative, a kind of take it or leave it thing. *See, Paul is being truer than a pluralist.* He is willing to stare Christianity in the face, and see its claims through, to follow the logic, and admit that if the founder of Christianity didn't rise from the dead like he promised to do, like he promised three times in the Gospel of Mark, then his teachings are a sham, not worth basing your life on.

Losing Resurrection

According to the Bible, the resurrection is the lynchpin of the faith. Pull it out and all the other teachings lose meaning, ring hollow. What do we lose. What happens when we pull out the pin? This passage shows us that we lose three important things: order, death, and life. First, an **ordered life**. If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is in vain. The central message of the Bible is the gospel—*the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to forgive sinners and reorder society*. The gospel is about reordering everything. First, Jesus death reorders your relationship with God. We all live with disorder. We all get things out of place in life, lose our priorities. We often put good but things less than God like work, entertainment, and family at the top. As a result, our life gets disordered. When work is on top, we end up overworking to get more influence or security but family gets marginalized. When family is on top, we try so hard to raise kids perfectly that we spoil them, they become the gods or we shelter them trying to protect like a god. Really everyone is struggling to figure out what to put on top, what will order our disordered lives. [Like children, we are prone to stack the blocks of life out of order. Little ones on the bottom, big blocks on top. As a result, the whole tower of life crumbles. And then set out to build them again.] Why do we do this? *Because we haven't found the right thing to put on top or we keep misplacing it. Our disordered lives are the result of disordered loves.* We love influence, security, comfort, and kids more than we love God. We'll put anything on top besides him. Why? Because we love him less, trust him less. But what if God the Father, leaned over us, and showed us how to build something that lasts? What if he rebuilt life for us? Reordered it. Realizing we have a propensity to build life on the wrong things, God came down reordered life for us? That's what gospel message does. It is God saying, you will flourish if you reorder your life around me, but I see that you can't do that on your own. You love other things too much (that's sin). So, I'll come down and show you a perfect life, but because you can't live it, I will die for your disordered loves and forgive you for putting all these other things on top, which cause your tower to sway. I will forgive you for marginalizing me. Then, I will come back to life to show you what life is like with me on top. Sinners forgiven, life gets order, and your soul gets satisfied. You find your chief love. When we put God on top, children, work, and entertainment take their proper place under God. We find true satisfaction and can sacrifice those things to serve others. In his death and resurrection, Jesus offers to reorder your relationship with God, and to help reorder society so it can flourish. A perfect little wooden triangle on top of your stack, stabilizing the whole of life. But **"if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your disordered loves"** (17). *Lose the resurrection you lose an ordered life.* The next thing we lose, according to verse 18, is the **dignity of death**: **"Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."** Falling asleep is a euphemism for the death of a Christian. It implies that when a Christian dies, they wake up to more, continued, better, eternal life. But if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then when you die, you don't wake up, you just perish. Decay. Rot. That's it. There's no life

after life, but perhaps even more significantly, there is no dignity for death. Without the resurrection, death is meaningless. It has no real significance. Death just is. A mere biological necessity—death, decay, and recycle the materials of nature. Natural selection. So there's no need for funerals, ceremonies, eulogies, or remembrances. Without the resurrection, people lose weight and death loses dignity. Death becomes not an interruption in life; it is an inevitable necessity. *We lose the dignity of death.* This week I spent some time with a friend dying of cancer. As I sat by his bedside, we reflected on his life. He told me how his life motto—act like you belong—got him into the White House, in front of chancellors, onto the deck of the USS Constitution and a whole host of things. Ever since he was young he learned how to act like he belonged, and as a result, talked his way into some pretty incredible places. So when I asked him how he expected to get into heaven. He said, well, I figure I'll just act like I belong, right? With a heavy heart, I told him that it doesn't work with God. The problem is that we can't act good enough to belong to God. Our lives are disordered, but worse, our loves are a wreck. But, I told him, the hope of the gospel is that Jesus acts perfectly on our behalf, through his death and resurrection, for our disordered lives and our disordered loves. I said, you can't act good enough to belong, but Jesus acted perfectly so we can belong to God the Father, to experience his reordering love. I urged him to put his faith in Jesus who is "the resurrection and the life." I told him I wanted to share in the resurrection life with him after all this. He closed his eyes, and weakly nodded, breathing out a faint "Yes." Five days later he died. Are you *acting* like you belong, when your heart is hollow? Or maybe you're just acting out and don't care if you belong? I hope you won't wait until your deathbed or until it's too late to accept God's gracious offer in Christ. **We don't have to act like we belong because Jesus acted perfectly so we can belong.** *See, lose the resurrection and you lose the dignity of death and the hope of life.*

Gaining Resurrection

I'm tipping over into the gains, now. The final thing we lose, and gain, depending on our response to the resurrected Christ is the **hope of life**. "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (20-22). Referring to the story Adam, the first human to disorder his loves, Paul is saying that Adam brought us death. Adam brought us disorder. And without the resurrection, we are doomed to death and doomed to disorder, spiritually and physically. Our relationship with God is dislocated. But if Christ did rise from the dead, then we can be relocated in Christ and gain life. Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. This word refers to the part of the crop that was harvested first and set aside in dedication to God. It is the first taste of new harvest. So the resurrection is the first reordered, renewed life. It's the beta app before the new app launches for everyone to use, except we get the Alpha not the Beta! We get life, spiritual life, satisfied life, and the promise of resurrection life! Lose the resurrection and you lose the hope of life. Gain the resurrection and you gain life. In the rest of this passage, Paul shows how the resurrection promises **order**. The Risen Christ will overthrow evil authorities and goodness of God's perfect authority will reorder all creation. Humanity will live a reordered life full of ordered loves. Everything will put under Christ's feet. His final foe will be **death**, which he destroys. Lose the resurrection and

you lose the dignity of death, but keep the resurrection and you gain the hope of **life**. *In the resurrection, death has dignity because it is placed within the larger scheme of life.* Death is a meaningful passageway into life. For those in Christ, either side of death or the other side of death they filled with life. Death is swallowed up by life, attaching dignity to dying persons and weight to living persons. And one day Christ will return to hand the kingdom over to the Father, a reordered creation, *for those who hope in Christ*. Sufferings will cease. Sorrows wiped away. Jesus will take his rightful place under God the Father, fixing the kingdom of God under the ordered authority and love the Trinity—Father/Son/Spirit—presiding over all creation in perfectly ordered life and love. Then we will see God as all in all. Lose the resurrection and lose all of this, but gain the resurrection and you gain his rules in and through all things—consummating our hope for life, granting dignity in death, and securing order for sinners and society. All things will be new!