

INTRODUCTION

Cinderella, the Dance and Sweet Sixteen. No, it is not about fairy tale. To the college basketball fans it is called the March Madness. It is when the best teams from among the colleges in U.S. compete for the championship. One of the most exciting moments is when teams fought back to win games after trailing behind. Just last Sunday night my alma mater captured the biggest comeback in the history of college basketball. We were down by 10 points when it was less than 30 seconds to go in the game. I exchanged texts with a brother who graduated from the same school and now lives in another state. “It is over,” I texted. “Unless a miracle?” he responded. Miracle or not, we tied the game then won it after two over-time periods. One report calculated that in the final minute of the game our opponents had a 99.9 % chance of winning. What a comeback! In 2001 Sports Illustrated magazine published the top ten comeback of all times. What is on the list are not just sports stars. It also contains Elvis Presley, late President Harry Truman and Japan after World War II. On the top of the list of the best comeback of all times was Jesus Christ. The article reads: “Jesus Christ. AD 33. Stuns Romans and defies critics by his resurrection from the grave.”

Jesus was the greatest comeback hero in the human history. His resurrection is the core of the gospel. It is the reason why we are here this morning to celebrate Easter. We are not to remember the dead founder of a religion, but to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15 the apostle Paul clarifies the doubts in believers’ hearts about the resurrection of Jesus. Then he goes on to explain the significance of resurrection. More than two thousand years had passed. What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to you and me? It is not just about a historical fact. It is also about our present. The resurrection of Jesus is the true foundation of our faith. It is also about things to come. The resurrection of Jesus promises our sure future.

EXPLANATION

1. 肉身的复活：不是个骗局 Bodily Resurrection: Not a Hoax (v. 1-11)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the true foundation of our faith. In the passage Paul affirms that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is not a hoax.

A. 神的话语 God’s Word

The first evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is in the fulfilled Word of God. Paul says in **verses 3-4**: 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Twice in these two verses Paul repeats the phrase “according to the Scriptures.” The death, burial and resurrection of Christ occurred in the same way as they were prophesied in the Bible. In a preaching by the apostle Peter in **Acts chapter 2** he says in **verses 23-24**: 23 This man (*referring to Jesus*) was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the

cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Peter then quotes a section from Psalm 16 in his message. Afterward Peter explains in **verses 30-31** how the passage was fulfilled in Jesus: 30 But he (*meaning David, the author of Psalm 16*) was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. The prophecies in God's Word about Christ's death and resurrection had been fulfilled accurately.

B. 神的证人 God's Witnesses

Besides God's Word being fulfilled the second evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is based on the account of God's witnesses. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 15:5-6** - 5 ...He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Jesus' appearance to His disciples is well recorded in all four gospels. For example, the apostle **John** records in **20:19** of his gospel: On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Notice Paul emphasized that most of the eye-witnesses were still alive when he wrote the letter. The book of 1 Corinthians was written in about AD 55, which is 23 years after the resurrection of Jesus. The believers in the Corinth church could have interviewed those witnesses who were still living to validate the resurrection account. Why did Jesus appear to some but not all people? Jesus had a special purpose. After Judas hanged himself the other disciples of Jesus saw the need to find a replacement. **Acts 1:21-22** tells us the criteria for such a candidate: 21 "Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 ...For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." This person had to be someone who were following Jesus along with the other disciples from day one. More importantly, from then on this person had to openly testify about Jesus' resurrection. In fact the word "martyr" is derived from the Greek word for "witness." In the book of Acts and in subsequent church history many of Jesus' witnesses were martyred because they proclaimed about the resurrected Christ.

C. 神的作为 God's Work

While the fulfillment of prophecies in God's Word and the account of God's witnesses are objective facts, God's work of changing lives is a personal experience many Christians can attest. Paul shares his testimony in **verses 9-10**: 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them - yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Three times in verse 10 Paul gives thanks to God for His grace. Paul felt undeserved to be named among the disciples of Jesus because he had never spent time with Jesus in-person nor was he an eye-witness of Jesus' resurrection. More importantly, Paul was a persecutor of Christians before but God changed him to a follower of Christ. Besides Paul there are other followers of Christ in the Bible who experienced the life changing work of God. In Acts chapter 4 Peter and John, two of Jesus' disciples, were detained because they miraculously healed a crippled beggar and shared the

gospel to the crowd. When questioned by the rulers and religious leaders Peter boldly testifies in **verse 10**: "... It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." Surely Peter understood that he was looking for trouble by blaming the leaders for crucifying Jesus. No wonder even the leaders saw the change in this former fisherman, who cowardly fled the scene when Jesus was arrested. **Verse 13** reads: When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Such change was undeniable. It could only be the work of God.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is not a hoax. It is supported by the objective evidences from the Word of God and from the account of God's witnesses. It has been over two thousand years since Jesus' resurrection and none of us sitting here saw the event first-hand nor met the resurrected Lord in-person. We believe that Jesus did resurrect because of the testimonies of the disciples of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. Believers also experience the life-changing work of God. Every Christian can identify with Paul when he shared that "but by the grace of God I am what I am." Our belief is not based on feelings. Christianity is based on truth. Truth is real not because you choose to believe in it. Truth is real because it is authentic whether or not you choose to believe in it.

2. 肉身的复活：如果...? Bodily Resurrection: What if...? (v. 12-19)

After Paul presented the evidences to support that Jesus did resurrect from the dead he flipped his arguments around and asked what if there was bodily resurrection. From verse 12 to 19 there are 7 "if" questions. Let me briefly summarize those questions into 5 statements. (1) If it is impossible for a person to come back to life after death, then Jesus had not resurrected (v. 13). (2) If there was no resurrection then Paul and his coworkers were preaching a lie (v. 15). (3) If there was no resurrection then there was no forgiveness of sins (v. 17). (4) If there was no resurrection then there would be no hope for those who had passed away (v. 18). (5) If there was no resurrection then there will be no hope for those who are still living (v. 19). But because Jesus had resurrected there is forgiveness of sin, we have hope in this life and hope in our future.

3. 肉身的复活：我们的盼望 Bodily Resurrection: It's Our Hope

The resurrection of Jesus is the true foundation of our faith. The resurrection of Jesus also promises us a sure future.

A. 信徒的复活 Resurrection of the Redeemed

First of all, the resurrection of Jesus gives us hope because it guarantees the resurrection of Jesus' redeemed people. The resurrection of Jesus triggered a chain reaction in completing God's salvation plan. Let us look at **verse 20**: But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. The term "firstfruits" here relates to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. The Jew offered firstfruits as an expression of faith looking forward to a coming harvest. Paul borrows the imagery to illustrate that since God's firstfruits, Christ, had resurrected, the resurrection of God's redeemed people must take place in the future. That is exactly the meaning in **verses 22-23**: 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be

made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Every human being is a descendant of Adam, the first man. Adam sinned and died and we will also die someday. However, for those who are in Christ we will be resurrected just like Jesus did some 2,000 years ago. It will happen at Jesus' return. In the second half of 1 Corinthians 15 Paul provides further details about our resurrection. For example, we can take a look at **verse 52**: In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. When Jesus comes back all the redeemed will be resurrected with a glorious and imperishable body.

B. 死亡的终结 The Death of Death

The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope because it guarantees the resurrection of those whom Jesus redeemed. It also gives us hope because Jesus will eventually put death to death. **Verses 24-26** read: 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. After our resurrection all God's enemies will be subdued under Christ's feet. All the evil force that had been causing rebellion against God in mankind since Adam and Eve sinned would be put to an end. The last enemy Jesus will destroy is death itself. Death is an inevitable separation in this life. When Paul wrote to the believers at the Thessalonian church he consoled those who had loved ones passed away. He says in **1 Thessalonians 4:14** that: We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. By describing people as "fallen asleep" Paul highlights that believers who had passed away will rise again when Jesus comes back. When Jesus returns all the believers will be given a glorious body that will not die anymore. On that day there will be no need for doctors. You do not need to take supplement or exercise to stay healthy. Even funeral homes will be out of business! When we say "see you" to brothers and sisters in Christ we will surely see each other again. That is our hope!

C. 今生的力量 Strength for Our Struggles

The resurrection of Jesus gives us hope because it guarantees the resurrection of those whom Jesus redeemed. It also puts death to death. How does all that truth have to do with us in this life? The resurrection of Jesus does not only give us hope for the future it also gives us strength for our struggles today. Paul says in **verse 29**: Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? We do not know the background of such practice. Some commentators said it was a baptism for those on death bed. Others understood it as someone receiving baptism on behalf of another deceased believer who was not baptized while he was still alive. The point Paul tries to make is that if the Corinthian Christians did not believe in a future resurrection they would not have baptized for the dead. Besides this unknown ritual the hope of resurrection gives us strength to overcome our daily struggles in other ways. Paul shares in **verses 30-31** that: 30 And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? 31 I die every day - I mean that, brothers - just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. For the sake of preaching the gospel Paul and his coworkers always put their lives to danger. Why bother if there is no hope for the future? Paul elaborates the hardship he faced in **2 Corinthians 11:26**: I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own

countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. Paul concludes that if it is not because of the hope of future resurrection he would not have the strength to overcome all those struggles.

Brothers and sisters: what are your struggles today? As much as you enjoy the worship today you will return to the reality after you leave this place. There may be housework waiting for you. Some of you have to work over-time to prepare for a project presentation tomorrow. There will be school assignments to complete, rebellious kids to worry about, bills to pay, chronic diseases to treat, loneliness to deal with, etc. Christians or not there may be countless struggles we have to face. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope for the future. With this hope Christians can overlook the gain or loss in this life. Our life is in Christ. The resurrected Lord lives in those who put their trust in Him. He gives us strength to overcome all our life struggles.

CONCLUSION

The resurrection of Jesus keeps our feet planted because it is the true foundation of our faith. The resurrection of Jesus also keeps our head up because God promised us a sure future. The question is: do you have a personal relationship with this resurrected Lord? If you don't this Easter can be a new beginning for you. Jesus died for your sins and He was resurrected to give you a new life. Come to Him, confess your sins and receive His grace of forgiveness. To our brothers and sisters: this Easter can also be a new beginning for you. You say that you know Christ. But all your life you are still living on your own effort. Come to Him and confess your ignorance and pride. Let the resurrection power of God infuse into your life so that from now on you live for Christ who died for you and redeemed you. As we conclude let us sing again the song "There Is a Hope" to help remind us of God's wonderful grace.