

Sunday, July 24, 2022 - "I Believe!" VII
"I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body and Life Everlasting"

1 Corinthians 15: 20-28

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Fifteen years ago at the end of seminary, my family had some choices to make. There were a couple of potential trips to St. Louis packed into the space of a couple of weeks. Call Day – the day I'd find out where I'd be sent as a pastor, came in late April. Graduation from seminary came in mid-May. The question was, which events were most important for my family to attend? They ended up coming to both but when I was asked which was more important, I didn't bat an eye.

Call Day. Call Day was the day all the guys in my class found out where they were going. It's an exciting and nerve-wracking time – when the day finally came, the class lined up in alphabetical order and each name was called. When it was your turn, the placement director would announce your name, the district, the name of the congregation and finally the city and state. Call Day was the day most guys and their families focused upon. Call Day was the day all the preparation over eight years of school paid off with something tangible, a place and a name of the people you'd be serving as pastor. Call Day, quite frankly, is more memorable today. Graduation, while important, was an afterthought.

What is the point of Jesus' resurrection? I mean that question seriously. Christians usually talk about Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus died, taking the punishment we deserve for our sin, so that we don't have to suffer that punishment. In other words, Jesus saved us from being punished for our sins. That's the basic answer about what Jesus did, right?

But what's the point of the resurrection? Let's be honest, it's usually treated as an afterthought. We know that Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose to new life and ascended into Heaven. His resurrection proves that He has power over death. But still, it's an afterthought – didn't the really important stuff – like forgiveness – happen on the cross?

Paul refers to Jesus' resurrection in our Epistle text today as "firstfruits." Some of you out there have a green thumb. You plant a seed, full of hope and promise. Then one day you walk by the plant and you see it has broken through the soil. Eventually, it starts to bear its fruit. Seeing that first fruit from the plant is an exciting thing to see. If you do a good job with your plant, you know the first fruit is only the first of more fruit to come.

The fruit that came forth in Jesus was remarkable. It's very rare that we ever see a true "first" of anything. Everything, it seems, has been done before. But this, this had never been done before. Someone who was dead came back to life. Not only back to life, but life in a perfect and immortal body that could never suffer or die again. The "fruit" that we're talking about here is life - new life for people who were dead.

As soon as the first person was alive, alive who was once dead, the fate of everyone else who had died in Jesus was now sealed. This immortal one, who would never die by the very act of rising from the grave laid down a claim on all the others of His kind, those who believe in Him, who had died. Anyone else connected to that same plant will also bear fruit. If He had risen from death, so would the others who had died. They will be raised.

The purpose of a deposit is to ensure a person follows through on their obligations. For instance, renters put down a deposit - both to deter them from breaking their lease, and to entice them to take good care of property. If they break the lease, they lose their deposit. If they leave the rental a mess, they lose their deposit. And so too with Jesus' resurrection. He has already risen from the dead but those for whom He died - they are still dead. The price has been laid down but the fruits haven't yet been claimed. The promise of our own resurrection is on deposit - already paid for but not yet delivered.

How did He pay? The deposit He laid down for you and me is this: His own resurrection. Paul tells us, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ

the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.” When someone puts down a deposit, they get immediate use of the thing they’re purchasing. You lay down your deposit on an apartment and it’s yours to start living in. What if you buy eternal life? The answer: it’s yours to have.

This may just be the most preposterous thing we claim to believe in the Creeds! Jesus’ resurrection from the grave is His final body and His final condition. It’s the very condition we look forward to on the Last Day. “The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting” isn’t about Jesus. We already talked about that when we said, “on the third day He rose again from the dead and ascended into Heaven...” folks we’re talking about US. And he’s the only one who could buy this claim. You see, buying eternal life in resurrected flesh is no ordinary purchase. Not just anyone can buy it. You have to have the means just to be allowed to bid – and His perfect life was necessary to earn the currency to bid.

It’s a price that ultimately, only Jesus could afford to pay. But once the purchase was made – His innocent blood shed – it was free for Him to give to whomever He pleased. Since Jesus lived perfectly as a man, the claim counts for all people.

Which means, the claim isn’t only for Jesus’ benefit. How do we know that? Just look at the extraordinary measures He took to make the deposit. The Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, has always existed. He is God. And the Second Person, God, became man and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. Do you get it? It couldn’t have been for His benefit alone, He went so far out of His way to make the deposit in the first place. After His resurrection, He sent the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith.

There are three things we can believe because of the deposit that Jesus made, His resurrection. First, we know that Jesus is in His resurrected flesh. It’s the final judgment, on the Last Day, thrown back into time – He gets His new, resurrected body right away. He earned that for defeating death.

Second, we believe He gets to use what He has claimed right away. When you rent an apartment, it’s yours to live in. When you claim eternal life and give it to others, they get it. Right away.

Jesus gives us blessings for our lives immediately. His deposit isn't only for your future benefit, it's for today! That's what baptism is all about – so that your sin can be put to death daily and then raised to new life in baptism. You are a new creation, already raised from spiritual death to eternal life. It's not just a promise, it's a current reality! You will never be separated from God! You're not just going to be forgiven, you are forgiven, present tense. He gives these benefits now because His resurrection guarantees that they're His to give – and He gives those benefits to you.

But most important, Jesus' resurrection is a promise of your own resurrection in the flesh. It's a deposit He hasn't cashed in, but He's paid for it already. It's purely a matter of Him coming back to claim it. Unlike fickle people who might be careless with their apartment deposit, Jesus' deposit is secure.

This is THE main thing in Christianity that matters for you and me. Just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. We're talking physically raised, just as He already is. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Take heart – it's not a matter of if, but when. Christ the King has claimed you by His own resurrection, and His Holy Spirit has called you to faith to be able to say, "I believe!" In Jesus' name, Amen.