

No One Like Jesus: Why The Resurrection Matters
By Jason Huff
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Isaiah 53; Matthew 28:1-10; 1 Corinthians 15:1-26

Friends, our final Scripture reading today comes from 1 Corinthians 15:1-26. May God add His blessing on the reading of His holy Word.

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

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. 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. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Easter is the new Christmas as far as the retail industry is concerned. For the past several years, stores have been gearing up with Easter sales going far beyond chocolate goodies. Stores advertise baskets full of expensive toys and gifts. Spending is up, according to the National Retail Federation, which says Easter spending will be over \$17.3 billion dollars this year. The average American who buys merchandise for Easter spends \$146 dollars on candy, gifts, cards, food, flowers, and what not. But it's nothing in comparison to Christmas – according to their reports, Americans spend \$600 billion on Christmas.

But do we need another commercial holiday? It surprised me that Easter spending is up because church attendance is down; far less people celebrate Easter as a religious holiday than seventy years ago. Only 50% of Americans said they would attend church on Easter this year. So why are we spending all this money? Does it have anything to do with faith? Or are we looking for another excuse to get stuff? It makes us wonder if we are trivializing Easter in the same way many trivialize Christmas.

But Easter is the one thing we dare not trivialize. John Calvin, whose theology is the foundation of Reformed and Presbyterian churches worldwide, was not a fan of Christmas and Advent. He didn't celebrate Lent. He wanted little to do with events on the church calendar. His point was this: *every* Sunday, we should celebrate Resurrection Sunday. Every Sunday is the return of Easter, reminding us that Jesus rose from the tomb, proving He had defeated death. Obviously, Calvin's viewpoint didn't win the day; we celebrate Christmas, Maundy Thursday, and special days with other Christian brothers and sisters from different backgrounds.

But Calvin had a point. Every time we gather together, every Sunday we meet to worship God, we give praise to the resurrected Jesus. There is no point to our worship – there is no point to being a Christian – if the resurrection didn't happen. Because it did, every other event in history fades into the background. Absolutely nothing compares with Easter, not even the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, because it all hinges around the pivotal events of Easter.

Why does the resurrection matter? It's the only thing that matters! That's the point Paul makes in his passage today from 1 Corinthians 15. There is no point to Christianity if Jesus is not resurrected. There's no point to anything. If there is no resurrection, there is no hope of eternal life, no proof of redemption, no reason to believe that God actually loves us. No other religion tells us that God is merciful to sinners. Without the resurrection, there is nothing in Jesus' words to motivate or inspire us because His words are, at best, untrustworthy. But if the resurrection is true – as I believe and the church has believed for two thousand years – then we have cause to celebrate.

The resurrection matters for many reasons, but the first is that the resurrection gives us eternal truth. It gives us a baseline for everything else we know. Just as ancient sailors used the stars to navigate when they were far from land, the resurrection is the key to understanding history, science, philosophy – everything. That may sound bold, even contradictory. How could an event so hard to believe ever occurred make such a difference in our understanding of truth?

Here's why – we never have the full picture of everything. History is taught through the lens of culture. Whether Karl Marx is a hero or a villain depends on where you grew up. As culture changes, our views change; most of us in the room were taught that Christopher Columbus was a hero, and now he's a thieving pariah. It is hard to learn what really happened in many parts of history, especially since only one person's work tells us the story.

Science, we're told, never changes; everything happens according to universal laws. When we change our scientific views, we change them based on new evidence of the facts, right? Except we don't. Huge chunks of Darwinian evolution have been disproven by scientists with no religious axe to grind; science has shown that Darwin was mostly wrong. Yet we're still taught Darwin because it fits the worldview that there is no god. Science can become a religion. When it comes to the universal laws of science, can't God circumvent the science He created to accomplish His purposes?

We grasp at straws for understanding. Philosophy changes over time as the world changes around us. It's difficult even to know what's right or wrong. We need a plumb line to make sure our views are right and accurate and true. That plumb line is the resurrection. It makes sense of everything. If the resurrection is true, then there is a God who loves us, who knows us by name, and cares enough for us to take the penalty for our waywardness on Himself. The resurrection makes sense of the story of Scripture, how God makes a way for rebellious creatures to enter into His presence even though we are not righteous. Science – that fact that we have an orderly universe that has rules – makes sense. History becomes a chronicle of our human choices that took us far from God and God reaching out to us despite our sin.

The resurrection does all this because it gives us solid truth we cannot see on our own. We are beings who will live for eternity. We are known by the God who made us. He will remember us and bring life back to us, embodied life, life like what we know now, only far better for all who believe and trust in Him.

As Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 15, if there is no resurrection, then there is no eternal truth. There is nothing we can trust, not even our faith. But as Paul is quick to point out, the resurrection was not a story made up by Jesus' power-hungry followers. Jesus was seen by more than five hundred people, including Paul himself in the midst of his unbelief and murderous desire to stop Christians in their tracks.

No one made up a story where women, who held no credibility in the first century, were the first to hear. No one made up a story that caused all who believed to sell their possessions and give not to the church, not to the disciples' pockets, but to other believers in need. No one would have held to a story that attacked all the power structures of ancient Judaism and ancient Rome in one fell swoop, a story that got all but one of Jesus' core of disciples executed while giving them nothing of earthly value. Nothing explains the change in the hearts and minds of the disciples and those who believed on Jesus in the first century except that the resurrection is true.

As the resurrection gives us eternal truth, it also gives us eternal relevance. Relevance is a buzzword. There's a Christian magazine aimed at 20-somethings called **Relevant**. Go to a Bible study, a preaching seminar, a Christian conference, and people ask, "How is this relevant to me?" Many churches, even ones that agree with good biblical doctrine, don't preach from the Scripture, don't mention Jesus, because they want to be relevant. Tell us how to raise our kids, manage our money, have a happy home, stop bickering at work – and if Jesus works, great.

But relevance is fleeting. This week, since our regular gaming group didn't meet, a couple guys from the gang came over, we played a board game, and talked. I mentioned movies I saw as a teen in the 1980s, classic comedies and science fiction. This twenty-five year old across from me just looked at me and said, "I've never heard of those." At age 42, I've officially become an old fuddy-duddy! I am no longer relevant!

It's happened to every generation. When I was growing up, the oldies station played music from the 50s. Now the oldies station plays music from the 80s. And I dare you to find a modern country station that plays real country music! Books, music, clothes, fashions, even beliefs, go in and out of style. The advice well-meaning Christians gave to parents back in the 1980s about raising children looks backwards to people now. Nothing stays relevant for long.

But the resurrection is eternally relevant. It never stops being true and it never stops affecting lives for the better. It underlines the eternal relevance of Jesus' teachings, which hold their meaning across the centuries. The resurrection always gives us something important to talk about with others. People may call Scripture dry or boring or biblical morality old-fashioned, but it is always a part of the conversation because of the resurrection.

Western society is so influenced by Christianity that it's impossible to try and think of what our society would be without it. The English language was shaped by the King James Bible. Our medical advances were prompted by the work of Christians caring for the sick, which is why we still have tons of hospitals named Methodist and St. Francis. Much of our contact with the rest of the world was driven by a desire to share news of Jesus and His resurrection. Though often skewed, Western law codes were based on Christian morality. The list goes on.

This weekend marks the return of Superman to the screens in a movie that critics say is joyless and dreary. That's what relevance gets us. Superman was a Christ figure from the very start, an essentially immortal being, an only child sent by his father far across the universe to be the protector and guardian of Earth, one who could leap tall buildings in a single bound yet only used his powers for the good of others. Now we have a "relevant," smug Superman who doesn't smile and whose major purpose is apparently to beat the stuffing out of another superhero. I like realistic stories with grit sometimes, but come on! Who is this relevant to?

People might not like to hear about Jesus, but that's because He's always relevant. Mention His resurrection, and some laugh or jeer. That's because it still matters. Because He arose, there is proof that God is out there, and we need to get right with Him through faith in God's Son. The reason that we never talk about religion and politics in polite company is because they matter. Talk about the weather and it will change tomorrow. Talk about the Lions and they'll change tomorrow too. Those things don't matter.

But the resurrection is relevant even now, and in their heart of hearts, people know it. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection press on us, weigh on us, asking us to decide, pushing us to make a decision for or against God. Easter will always be relevant across the centuries.

Finally, the resurrection gives us not only eternal truth and eternal relevance, but eternal hope. The resurrection is the essence of hope, that there is life after death, that we will live on as we do today, only in a far better way because God has recreated us body and soul. The resurrection gives us hope that the world to come will be far better because we will live with God, in His presence, perfected by Him and perfect to serve Him joyfully for all eternity.

Hope is in short supply in our world and its religions. Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Sikhism are all founded on the writings and experiences of their founders, who are all very dead. These and other religions give hope of enlightenment, of a satisfying life, of a better afterlife than this one, but only based on your being good according to their standards. Grace isn't their path...and I know from my life that if there is no grace, there is no hope.

I am friends with several atheists. One finds meaning and purpose in the idea that if we strive hard enough, we'll wind up with a social utopia like *Star Trek* where things get better and better for everybody. (I haven't spoken to him this political cycle, so I don't know if the current political situation would get him to change his mind.) Another friend believes life is meaningless, that life is absurd, but that's all we have – following the philosophy of Nietzsche. Both try to find meaning and purpose, but there is no hope.

But with the resurrection, there is hope. There is proof of God's work in our world. There is hope of redemption, that we will see God face to face and not be rejected. As Paul writes, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Hope for this world alone is not enough. But instead, we live in the joy of 1 Peter 1:3, which reads, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." We can have joy! We can have peace! We can have love! All because we have been born again, into a living hope – a hope that someday, we will be resurrected just as Jesus was resurrected.

Friends, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the gospel, is the good news. If you haven't believed it or if you've strayed far from it, come to Him, return to Him, and find your hope. Is it hard to believe in the Resurrection? Sure it is. But we believe stranger things all the time. The resurrection was attested to by five hundred eyewitnesses; most their lives in order that we might know. Billions around the world have been touched by the living Jesus and know His compassion and mercy. It is yours today. Simply turn to Him, ask Him for forgiveness from your sins, make a clean break from your past, and He will give you resurrection hope.

Christ has destroyed death! The one thing we all fear, the one thing we cannot avoid, Christ has conquered for us! We need not be afraid if we belong to Him. While it's a terrible idea to commercialize Easter, there's one thing about it that's right – this is a day to celebrate. Every Sunday reminds us of Easter – that Jesus rose early on a Sunday morning and proclaimed to the universe that God has the victory, death no longer reigns, and all who will trust in Him will live forever by His side. Amen, and hallelujah!