

# It is Finished

---

*1 Corinthians 15:12-19*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. Winston Churchill was one of the few commoners ever afforded a state funeral in the United Kingdom.
1. Churchill planned his funeral to the minutest detail.
    - a. At his instruction, a bugler played taps—the universal sign that day is over—immediately following the benediction.
    - b. Then, the most dramatic part of the funeral came. Churchill ordered another bugler in a separate part of the church to play Reveille—“It’s time to get up, it’s time to get up in the morning.”
  2. Churchill rightly believed that death was not the end, but a resurrection of life awaits the righteous.
    - a. “The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Cor 15:52-54).
    - b. “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16-17).
- B. But, what if that’s not the case?
1. What if there is no resurrection of the dead?
    - a. What if when we die, it is best simply to declare, “It is finished”?
    - b. Jesus uttered those words from the cross.
      - 1) “When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, ‘It is finished,’ and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (Jn 19:30).
      - 2) We have always understood this to mean that Jesus had accomplished the Father’s work on earth. But, what if we’ve been wrong in that understanding? What if he meant that his life was finished for all time?
  2. That’s precisely how some of the Corinthians seem to have understood death: “How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor 15:12).
    - a. In our text this morning, Paul says, “Okay. Let’s look at what a world would be like.”
    - b. This morning, I invite you to come with me to a fantasy world, a world where Jesus did not rise from the dead.
      - 1) This morning, we want to look at what life would be like if Jesus never had come from his tomb.
      - 2) Walk with me to the tomb in Jerusalem where Jesus’ body has turned to dust. There is a marker there with the name “Jesus Christ.” That large stone still stands at the tomb’s entrance. The women did not find it empty. The apostles never saw a resurrected Messiah.
  3. What would such a world be like? In such a world, we would **PUTREFY**, our faith would be **POINTLESS**, the apostles would be **PERJURERS**, we would be **PERVERSE**, the dead would have **PERISHED**, & we would be **PITIFUL**.

## IF IT IS FINISHED, WE SHALL PUTREFY, vv 12-13

- A. For Paul, the issue of the Resurrection boils down quite simply:
1. Either Jesus has been raised, signaling the resurrection of all the dead; or Jesus has not been resurrected, signaling that none of the dead shall be resurrected.
  2. It was one way or the other: You could not say that Jesus was raised but there would be no final

resurrection.

- B. Some of the Corinthians were declaring that the dead are not raised.
1. Most Palestinian Jews at the time of Paul accepted the future resurrection of the dead.
    - a. Most Jews accepted the resurrection, for Daniel had spoken of the final resurrection: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2).
    - b. The famous exception, of course, would be the Sadducees: We read at Mark 12: 28 that the Sadducees “say that there is no resurrection.”
    - c. The other exception were Jews influenced by Greek philosophical thought.
      - 1) It seems that the Corinthians would have fallen into this category, for Paul spends the first three chapters of this book dealing with the influence of Greek philosophy upon the Corinthians.
      - 2) Apparently because these brethren had bought into so much Greek philosophy and Greek philosophy said there would be no resurrection, these brethren said there would be no resurrection.
  2. The Corinthians wanted the resurrection of Jesus as a bedrock of their faith while at the same time they denied the resurrection.
    - a. Paul says, “Wait. You cannot have it both ways. Either Jesus was resurrected, foreshadowing the resurrection of all the dead, or Jesus is still dead & nobody will be raised.”
    - b. You see, if Jesus is still dead, it is finished!
      - 1) If it is finished, we shall putrefy; our bodies shall rot.
        - a) I understand that these bodies are going to decompose.
        - b) But, they shall also be resurrected.
          - i. “What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable” (1 Cor 15:42).
          - ii. Thus, whatever state of decomposition our bodies are in when Jesus comes again, they shall be raised without the possibility of decomposition.
          - iii. If we die in a fiery crash & there’s nothing left of this body, this body will be raised in a state it cannot come to nothing; if we die of some horrible disease & rot to dust in the ground, our body shall be raised in a state it cannot rot!
      - 2) But, that’s *only* if “It is NOT Finished.”

## **IF IT IS FINISHED, OUR FAITH IS POINTLESS, v 14**

- A. If Jesus is still dead, the apostles’ preaching is vain.
1. The main thrust of the apostles’ preaching was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
    - a. For example, Paul declared the resurrection of Christ at the Areopagus.
    - b. He says, that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).
  2. Yet, if Jesus is still dead, the preaching of the apostles is vain.
    - a. The Greek word for “vain” means “empty”—the idea is that the preaching is pointless, useless without the resurrection of Christ.
    - b. In other words, why did Paul go to the Areopagus and proclaim the resurrection if Jesus is not raised?
      - 1) About the conclusion of his sermon before those philosophers, we read, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked” (Acts 17:32).
      - 2) It was pointless for Paul to stand before those educated men & be mocked if Christ has not been raised.
- B. Likewise, our faith is pointless without the resurrection of Christ.
1. It makes perfect sense for Paul to lump preaching & faith together here, for it is preaching that produces faith: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rm 10:17).
  2. But, if it is finished, our faith is empty, pointless.

- a. Let those words sink in a moment!
  - 1) How many of you gave generously a few minutes ago because your faith? If it is finished, you need to come & get your money back.
  - 2) How many of you interrupted a good night's sleep to come here this morning? If it is finished, you need to go back to bed.
  - 3) How many of you have stood beside the grave of a loved one who died and had great faith in a resurrection? If it is finished, there's no point.
  - 4) How many of you have given up a treasured sin because of your faith? If it is finished, you need to go back to that sin & live it up.
- b. What a dark world this is *if* it is finished!

### **IF IT IS FINISHED, THE APOSTLES ARE PERJURERS, v 15**

- A. If Jesus Christ remains in his tomb this morning, the apostles are the biggest liars the world has ever seen—bigger liars than any politician, than any used car salesman, than anyone!
- B. They testified that God had raised Jesus from the dead.
  - 1. Why would the apostles go around the world proclaiming that Jesus was raised from the dead?
    - a. Because they had seen Jesus Christ raised from the dead.
      - 1) Notice again what Paul says in the previous paragraph: “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me” (v 8).
      - 2) Why would an educated person go from persecuting the church to enduring persecution in the church if he had not seen Jesus raised from the dead?
    - b. Yet, if Jesus has rotted to nothing, Paul never saw him raised from the dead!
  - 2. If Jesus is dead, we have had the largest fraud in the history of mankind thrust upon us by 12 largely uneducated Galileans.
    - a. Interestingly, these 12 Galileans taught us not to lie: “Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Eph 4:25).
    - b. Yet, if it is finished, they needed to put away falsehood above all other people!

### **IF IT IS FINISHED, WE ARE PERVERSE, v 17**

- A. If Jesus is rotting in a Jerusalem tomb this morning, we are so perverse; we still bear all our sins.
- B. It wasn't just Jesus' blood that was necessary to cleanse us from sin—his resurrection was also required.
  - 1. We are cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus: “In him we have redemption *through his blood*, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7).
  - 2. If we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus, why is Jesus' resurrection essential to our forgiveness?
    - a. Because without the resurrection, Jesus is a fraud.
      - 1) After Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, we read, “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the *third day be raised*” (Mt 16:21).
      - 2) If Jesus was not raised on the third day, he was a liar, and he could, therefore, not be the perfect sacrifice for sin.
    - b. It is also his resurrection that establishes Jesus as the Son of God.
      - 1) Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rm 1:4).
      - 2) Yet, if Jesus was not raised, he is not the Son of God whom we believe & whom we confess.
- C. Consider what a world without forgiveness would be like:
  - 1. We all know the guilt of sin all too well.
    - a. How many times have we wept the bitterest of tears because of sin?
    - b. David knew that guilt quite well: “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer” (Ps 32:3-4).

- c. But, if Jesus Christ is dead, we have absolutely no way to have our guilt removed.
- 2. How many of us have also needed forgiveness from family or friends?
  - a. We learn to forgive because God has forgiven us: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph 4:32).
  - b. But, if Jesus is still dead, I have no forgiveness from God & I have no example, therefore, by which I can forgive you or you can forgive me.
- D. What a horrible world *if* it is finished!

## **IF IT IS FINISHED, THE DEAD HAVE PERISHED, v 18**

- A. “Perished” here obviously doesn’t refer to dying, for Paul is speaking of those who are already dead—those “who have fallen asleep in Christ.”
  - 1. The Greek term is used to refer to killing. In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, a king gave a wedding feast for his son, sent servants to gather the invited guests, but some of those who had been invited to the feast killed his servants. The king then” sent his troops and destroyed [same word] those murderers and burned their city” (Mt 22:7).
  - 2. More pertinent to this text, the term also refers to eternal damnation.
    - a. “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy [same word] both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28).
    - b. “The heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction [same word] of the ungodly” (2 Pt 3:7).
    - c. What Paul declares here is that *if* “It is Finished” the dead in Christ are in torment & awaiting an eternity in hell.
- B. If Jesus is still dead, the dead in Christ must be in torment & awaiting hell, for Paul says that if Christ is still dead we still have sin.
  - 1. Sin leads to death.
    - a. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rm 6:23).
    - b. “Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (Js 5:20).
    - c. “As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rv 21:8).
  - 2. Haven’t we all be comforted at the death of a Christian loved one by the calm assurance that he or she will be raised with Christ on that Last Day?
    - a. Dad & I preached the funerals for his father, and both of my mom’s parents.
      - 1) I would read the obituary, make whatever comments I wanted to make, & then Dad would preach.
      - 2) But, when his mom died a year-and-a-half ago, he said, “Justin, I just can’t do this one. I want you to do the sermon & we’ll get her preacher to read the obituary & have prayer.”
        - a) Mammaw had been quite ill for some time & because she lived in Indiana, my family didn’t get up there very much.
        - b) We knew that the end was quite near, and I planned to take some vacation time, pull the boys out of school, & go up there so that she could see her great-grandchildren one last time. But, she died before I had the chance to do that.
      - 3) I closed the funeral service by saying that I had planned to come up & see her & bring RJ & Wil to see her.
      - 4) I then turned to the casket and said this, “Mammaw, I never got the chance to come & see you, but I pray that I’ll see you in the Morning.”
    - b. But, if “It is Finished,” there is NO HOPE!! Mammaw died in all her sin & she is in torment awaiting the Final Resurrection when she will be cast into hell.

## IF IT IS FINISHED, WE ARE PITIFUL, v 19

- A. How many times have you heard someone say something to the effect that if we die & find out that Christianity isn't true that we still have a better life than the atheist?
1. The argument is usually employed in discussions defending Christianity against attacks. The reasoning goes something like this: "Even if Christianity is false, I have still had solid convictions, hope, & I've kept myself from many of the heartaches sin brings."
  2. In this text, Paul says such an argument is false. Rather, if we have only had hope in this life, we are more pitiful than all others.
- B. Why should we be pitied if we have only had hope in this life?
1. Because we haven't lived "the good life."
    - a. If Jesus Christ is dead, we need to be concerned with pleasure, with riches. If Jesus was never raised, we need to seek all the pleasure in this life, for life is too short to do otherwise.
    - b. That's exactly the point Paul makes: "If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor 15:32).
  2. We should also be pitied, for we are in for quite a shock when we die.
    - a. We believe that were we to die today, we would go to the Paradise of God.
      - 1) Such an existence, we believe, would be far better: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil 1:23).
      - 2) In that Paradise of God, we believe, that we shall have comfort after all the heartaches of this life: To the rich man, Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here" (Lk 16:25).
    - b. But, if Jesus is dead, we shall go to a horrible place of torment.
      - 1) "It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:47-48).
      - 2) "The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night" (Rv 14:11).
    - c. How much we should be pitied!
      - 1) The atheist dies without hope. He knows he has no hope.
      - 2) But, we believe we have hope, but we have none, **IF** "It is Finished."

## CONCLUSION

- A. Paul seeks to impress on the Corinthians the full consequences of what they were saying. He wants them to understand what a world without the resurrection of Jesus would be like.
- B. But, the good news is the fantasy world we have examined this morning does **NOT** exist.
1. "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v 20).
  2. Praise God that Jesus has been raised from the dead!
    - a. Therefore, we shall NOT PUTREFY, our faith is NOT POINTLESS, the apostles are NOT PERJURERS, we are NOT PERVERSE, the dead have NOT PERISHED, & we are NOT PITIFUL.
    - b. Because Jesus has been raised, we have great hope. Do you have hope this morning?