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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

1 Corinthians

“If the Dead are Not Raised”

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Jim, and good morning. We are back in 1 Corinthians 15 and the subject is the resurrection. Paul has developed it quite a bit so far in our text, and as we had pointed out it is the confirmation of the atonement that Jim just mentioned that we celebrate every Sunday night. How do we know that Christ's sacrifice was accepted for everyone who believes in him? Well, his Father raised him from the dead to confirm it. But there were doubts about that in Corinth, particularly doubts about whether Christians themselves would be raised from the dead. It seemed to some fantastical, so Paul has been seeking to establish the truth of the resurrection of the dead. He's done that to some degree, but now we read in verse 29 it begins to take up the implications of life, the implications for not believing that in life. He writes, “Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, Brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I die daily. If from human motives, I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus and what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals. Become sober-minded as you ought and stop sinning for some have no knowledge of God. Take this to your shame.” May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

Father, it's a good thing to be here. It's a blessing to be with the saints, with fellow Christians, where we can worship together. We can read the scriptures. We can take time to consider the meaning of the text, and in this case, the resurrection, the hope that every believer in Jesus Christ has that this life is not the end, that eternity is before us, and we will be raised in glorified bodies to inherit a glorified world and glorified universe. Our thoughts are really beyond our capacity to grasp, but it's what your work teaches and what we are invited to believe. And so as we consider this great hope that the church has, this great hope that every believer in Christ has, I pray that you would encourage us with it and ground our thinking in it, that we would live lives that bring honor to you. That we would live sober-mindedly. That was the problem in Corinth. They had some doubts about this. Some were not believing that they had this future hope, and so they were living a disorderly life. They were following the life of people who had denied these things and Paul has to correct that. The things we think, Lord, affect the things we do and so we pray that you would correct our thinking. We may have no doubts about the resurrection, but it may be that we tend to neglect it in our thinking. We get distracted by the things in life. We focus on the details of life, which have their place and have their importance. We can't neglect our work. We can't neglect our families. We need to focus our attention on all of our responsibilities, but we

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should never lose sight of the fact that this life is very brief – it well end – and for us there’s hope. That should govern everything we do in life. We live not for time, but for eternity and the hope we have, as Paul reminds these Corinthians, is vital to that otherwise we have no hope and will live an abysmal life. So give us an understanding of the things that he told them that apply to us as well and give us the joy that should accompany the reality of the resurrection. What a great hope we have. We cannot, as I say, comprehend, Lord, what You’ve done for us and what You’ve given us not because of anything we did to earn it. We don’t deserve anything. For some unknown reason You loved us and You called us and You sent Your son to purchase us and die for us and we give you praise and thanks for that. May we live a life that shows appreciation. And in this brief time that we have in this world – in this life – we have the assurance that You will take care of us.

If You can raise the dead, You can certainly protect the living and You do that every day in ways that we’re not even aware of. We give You praise and thanks for that. We thank You that You’re the God of Providence, that You’re governing history at every moment and that You can provide for Your people and You can take care of those who are in need. We pray that you take care of our members who are in need. Some are sick. Some are recovering from surgery. Some don’t attend here but they’re friends or family members of those who do. We pray for them. We pray that You’d encourage them. We pray that You would extend healing mercy to them. Give them a reminder of the promises that You give us and help them to rest in that. In fact, may these times of difficulty be an occasion to reflect deeply on who they are, on the fragility of life and the brevity of life and rejoice in the one who is in control of life and rest in You. So bless them. We also pray, Lord, for those in our country who are suffering right now. We think of those who have had homes and businesses and towns obliterated by these horrific storms that have come through. We pray that You would provide for them and may the Christians in the communities help one another and be of great service. We pray for blessing and pray for those who are grieving, that You give them real comfort and bless them. We are so thankful that we serve a sovereign God who’s in control of everything, and while things may puzzle us in the present, in the immediate, nevertheless someday You’ll explain it all and we’ll know everything. And everything will fit perfectly and we’ll see what a wise and gracious God You really are. But we know that. We know that by faith and our great faith is in that great work that You will do for us. You’ve done the greatest work in sacrificing Your son for us and You will raise us up someday who have believed in him. We look forward to that. Bless us as we continue worship and bless us as we study together. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

In the middle of the last act when he learns that his wife is dead, Macbeth sinks into despair. He calls life a tale told by an idiot, full of sound a fury, signifying nothing. If Paul had been there in the Globe Theatre when the play was performed, he would have agreed. Life is meaningless if the dead are not raised. If there’s no resurrection, if this life is all there is, then let’s go down to the pub after the play, toss down a few bumpers and forget about tomorrow because nothing matters. That’s Paul’s lesson in 1 Corinthians 15:29-34. He doesn’t believe that, of course, because he believes in the resurrection in fact is the greatest lesson on the resurrection. But there were people in the church of Corinth who didn’t believe it. It seemed fantastical to them. They believed in Christ, but they didn’t believe that at the end of the age the dead would be raised, that they would be raised to a new life, a life of glory and a glorified body. So Paul wrote this long chapter, chapter 15, to prove and explain the resurrection of the dead. He gives evidence for it. There were hundreds of eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, people saw him, they touched him. You read the gospels you see that. You read the last two chapters of the Gospel of John, he appeared, he walked through closed doors that were locked and bolted. He sat down and ate with them. He had a real

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physical body. The body that had been laid in the tomb had been raised. It was real, it could be touched and it was glorified. It was something they’d never seen before and they had been there. They had witnessed it. Paul speaks of these things. He had witnessed it. He knew people – over 500 people – that had witnessed this. If these Corinthians still had doubts after what he said, he makes the point – some of them, many of them, are still alive. They can go abroad and have an interview with them. Speak to them about these things.

So these things, this great teaching he gives, are based on real evidence, hard evidence, personal eyewitness evidence. He gives that and then he explains the theological necessity of the resurrection. If Christ was not raised, then we are unforgiven and lost. His point is if you’re not raised, if you don’t have that hope, then Christ wasn’t raised. And if he wasn’t raised, then we have no evidence that the sacrifice that he made, the death that he died on Calvary on the cross was accepted by the Father. In fact, if he wasn’t raised, we can be assured that sacrifice wasn’t accepted and in fact that death was simply a death. And so we are still in our sins. We are unforgiven. We’re lost. We have no hope. He’s argued that so far, but he’s pointed out, “But he has been raised.” He’s already given the evidence for that. Now his argument follows a little different line. He shows the Corinthians from their own experience the need of the resurrection because if the dead are not raised, then all our Christian obedience is useless. He focuses on three areas: baptism, suffering, and morality. Baptism is meaningless, suffering is pointless, and morality is impossible if the dead are not raised. He begins with the institution of baptism and one of the most puzzling statements in the Bible when he says that, “Baptism for the dead is useless if there is no resurrection.” And we wonder as we read that, if there is a resurrection, what is the point of baptism for the dead? It’s a very puzzling verse. “Otherwise,” he writes, “what will those do who are baptized for the dead?” If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them? There are at least 40 different interpretations of this verse and the meaning of baptized for the dead. The most natural way to understand this is of a practice of baptism by proxy in which believers in Corinth died before they were baptized so friends were baptized vicariously in their place. You might imagine here that you’ve witnessed someone and by God’s grace they came to faith, they believed, and they said what do I do now? You say now you need to be baptized as a profession of your faith. Make a public profession by standing up at the evening meeting and being baptized. So they said well, I’ll do that and they look forward to that next Sunday when they can but in the meantime they die. They never were baptized.

So you take their place and you are baptized in their place and that’s imputed to them. That’s how some have taken this and on the face of it, it’s the most obvious explanation of Paul’s words but it’s also very difficult to imagine Paul referring to such a practice without disapproval. In the second century, heretics did that. The Marcionites and some Gnostic groups practiced baptism

on behalf of unbelieving friends. Today, Mormons practice baptism for the dead. I understand that they practice that in the temple behind us. They baptize for the dead. This is the text that supports that. They believe that that baptism for another person guarantees salvation for those for whom they’ve been baptized. Dr. H.A. Ironside, who was a popular Bible teacher a generation or two ago, has written a handy little commentary. It’s not all that little, but he’s done a nice commentary on the Book of 1 Corinthians and in it he tells of a conversation that he had with a Mormon elder. He was in Salt Lake City and the man told Dr. Ironside of all the people that were being saved by people being baptized for the dead. He told of a wealthy woman from the east who had come west. She’d settled in Utah and she had been baptized over 30,000 times for the dead. Every time she was baptized she paid a sum of money into the church. She was using her entire fortune redeeming people through baptism for the dead. She’d been baptized for all of her family, all of her friends, and everyone in history that she could think of from Alexander the Great to Julius Caesar, Cleopatra and Napoleon. The man said with a straight face, “I believe in the Day of Judgment it will be proven that this lady, through being baptized for the dead, has saved more souls than Jesus Christ.” Modern Mormons and the ancient Marcionites had that in common, but it is completely contrary to the Bible.

It is salvation by the sacrament. It is salvation by pure magic. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. He alone saves. Salvation is of the Lord. It’s not us. We receive, through faith, what he has done for us. That’s all we can do and we can only do that by His grace. We receive the salvation that he obtained at the cross. Baptism is the public profession of that. It’s a public profession of faith. When a person goes down into the water they are saying, “I was baptized into Christ’s death. I was identified with him at his death.” When they come out of the water they’re saying, “I’ve been raised to a new life. I’m a new creature in Christ.” Baptism doesn’t cause that, it’s simply a testimony of it. It is a reenactment, so to speak, an illustration of God’s grace and what he’s done for us through his son, our Lord Jesus Christ. So obviously Paul isn’t teaching that we can save the dead through vicarious baptism. He would not have approved of the practice of being baptized for the dead for any reason. Now that’s my opinion, but look at the New Testament. We don’t have any instruction on that in the New Testament. We don’t have any examples of it other than this verse, but this is a disputed verse. We’re trying to figure out what it means. So it doesn’t give support to itself. There’s nothing in the scripture as I can see that would support these vicarious baptisms, so other explanations have been sought because many others agree that that is not Paul’s meaning.

One suggestion is that some believers had died and other people, maybe family members, accepted baptism as a confirmation – a testimony – of their faith in order to be reunited with them in death. So for the dead – baptized for the dead – means baptized with a view toward the dead. They were converted to Christianity; they had been baptized in obedience to the instruction that the Lord had given so that they would be reunited with departed Christian friends. That’s another interpretation. Another still is to take the preposition ‘for’ as meaning ‘over’ so that this describes the practice of believers literally being baptized over the graves of dead saints and martyrs. These are just a few of the over 40 explanations, but this gives you a sense of the problem we face when we read this. If you’ve read through 1 Corinthians, I know you’ve all read through it probably many times, you’ve probably puzzled over that verse and what that means. It gives you some sense of the difficulty. No one is really certain of what Paul is referring to now. The people to whom he wrote, they knew; and Paul doesn’t explain it because this was a real letter that he wrote and he wasn’t thinking so much about us 2,000 years later. He’s writing to his friends and they know what he is referring to. But to my mind, the best explanation interprets the word ‘for’ as ‘in the place of’

so that Paul is referring to the baptism of new believers who take the place of deceased believers. That’s the explanation that’s given in the *Scofield Reference Bible*. It states: “The argument is of what value is it for one to trust Christ and be baptized in the ranks left vacant by the believing dead if there’s no resurrection for believers?” It gives a picture of a regiment of soldiers after battle when they count up the dead, the missing, and then they fill their ranks with new recruits so they can go out and fight again.

Now that, in a sense, happens all the time in the church. People have come to faith, they’ve lived a Christian life, and then they die and we’re left without believers, soldiers for Christ. And then others believe, are saved. They fill the ranks of those who have departed. Soldiers, though, to go back to that analogy of the ranks being filled, don’t do that – don’t fill the ranks for the benefit of the dead, but to take their place. But if they’re taking their place, to go out onto the field of battle to fight a war that’s going to be a losing cause when they’re fighting hopeless odds, then of course they’re wasting their lives by filling the ranks. It’s a futile effort. And that’s the point of the Christian life that Paul is making here. The point for us is there’s no resurrection. Whatever the practice of baptism for the dead was, that’s Paul’s meaning. Baptism is pointless because conversion is meaningless if there is no resurrection. The Corinthians practiced it, but if the dead are not raised at all, then they have perished forever. Those dead are gone. There’s no immortality, so baptism of new converts, Paul is saying, is a meaningless act. There’s no hope. Life is a tale told by an idiot. But the Corinthians hadn’t seen that. They hadn’t seen the implications of this belief of theirs. They hadn’t recognized the consequences of their ideas. Martin Luther wrote: “A small fault in the beginning is a great and foul fault in the end.” That’s true of anything, but that’s particularly true in theology and that’s the point that Luther was making. He said one little error overthrows the whole doctrine. In other words, ideas have consequences. Small ideas, seemingly apparent ideas that are wrong can have huge consequences. It’s like tossing a pebble in a pond. Who hasn’t done that? We all, as kids, came to a pond somewhere, smooth as glass. We’d take a little pebble and throw it out into the pond and what happens? There’s a little splash and then there are ripples. The ripples go out to the far banks.

That’s true of ideas as well; they cause ripples and this is one. Your baptism is pointless. That’s one ripple, the first ripple of a bad idea. We can profess faith through baptism, but the profession is meaningless. But there are other ripples as well and Paul shows two more. The next is in verses 30-32: “If the dead are not raised, then our service to Christ is pointless.” Verse 30: “Why are we also in danger every hour?” In other words, if the dead are not raised, why do we risk our lives in service of the gospel? It’s pointless. There’s no reward. There’s no blessing for it. Paul says, in verse 31, “I die daily.” I don’t think he’s being – he’s overstating his case. I don’t think it’s much of an exaggeration to say that, because every day he looked death in the face. There were many things that happened to the apostle Paul that we probably don’t know about. I say that because when you go to 2 Corinthians 11, we learn of things that were not recorded in the Book of Acts, that are not recorded in his letters. They must have happened in those years between his conversion and his first missionary journey, a decade and a half or so of silent years. But he was a minister, he was doing things. And what we learned from that was something about his life. We get a glimpse of what it’s like to be an apostle. We certainly get a glimpse of what it was like to be the apostle Paul. It was a life of constant danger and frequent injury. He was always on the road traveling from city to city, where if he wasn’t trying to avoid the hazards of nature, he was trying to escape the threats of brigands and robbers, Jews and Gentiles. He was thrown in jail many times. He was beaten and scourged and stoned often. He was shipwrecked three times. Once, he said, he spent a night and day in the deep, out in the Mediterranean Sea clinging to a piece of wood, hoping

for rescue. Can you imagine that? That was the life of the apostle Paul. Paul could say, without exaggeration, “I die daily.” He was no armchair theologian who lived in his study writing books and preparing sermons. He was out on the dusty highways of the world going to the lost and dying daily.

Why? Why did he accept such a life and live it so bravely, so valiantly, so persistently, facing setbacks, discouragements, pain and injury, and yet he kept going. How do you explain that? Because he believed in the hope of the resurrection. He knew that it was true. But if it had not been, if it were not true as some in Corinth believed it was not, then dying daily would have been foolish because it means there’s no reward. Nothing that he did meant anything at all. It was pointless. Why would anyone run the risk of losing everything that he or she has in this life – in this very brief life – if at the end of it all is the grave and nothing more. Why would anyone leave civilization for an unknown continent like Africa, as David Livingston did, where he was attacked by a lion and lost the use of one of his arms, got malaria and was sick continually the rest of his life, lived a lonely, hard life as a missionary and then died? For what? Why give up the love of your life, as the New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen did when the woman he wanted to marry – the only woman he ever wanted to marry – finally confessed to him that she could not become a Christian. Why sacrifice happiness in this world? Why sacrifice and suffer pain in this world if in the end there is nothing to show for it? That’s what they were doing in Corinth if the dead are not raised. Paul asked that about his own exposure to danger in verse 32 with the question, “If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me?” If we take that literally, Paul being put in the arena with wild animals, that is a spectacular incident in his life of facing the threat of death. Lots of early Christians faced that very experience. Lots were thrown to the lions. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, was killed by wild beasts in Rome during the Reign of Trajan. And he wrote to the Christians before he arrived in Rome and told them not to try to save him from becoming what he described as pure bread for Christ by the grinding teeth of wild beasts.

So it happened. It happened to many professing Christians. And it may have been what Paul was professing about himself. There may have been an incident that is simply not recorded in the Book of Acts or in any of his letters where he was thrown into the arena there in Ephesus and had to fight for his life. But since Paul was a Roman citizen, it’s unlikely that he literally fought wild animals in the arena. It’s more likely that he’s speaking figuratively here, but it does refer to some great mortal danger that he faced in an event that we would assume was well-known in Ephesus and well-known in Corinth that he didn’t need to identify because they knew exactly what he was referring to. The silversmiths, you remember, rioted in Ephesus over Paul’s ministry. They threatened his life. In fact then they filled that theater and began to chant, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians,” and they went into this kind of frenzy for hours, Paul wanted to go in and speak to them and his friends kept him from going in there. They wouldn’t allow him to put his life at risk because it was greatly at risk. His preaching had so affected the city of Ephesus and the surrounding regions that it had basically dried up their business, and when money is at stake, men can get pretty hostile. The problem with identifying this with that is that occurred after Paul wrote this. Paul, remember, wrote this letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus. This was a letter he wrote during his great ministry in Ephesus, and so that event occurred later. He’s not referring to that, but certainly he’s referring to something like that. It was some occasion when he was almost torn to pieces by an enraged mob of men who were acting like wild animals and men can do that. It was something in which his life was in great danger. But if the dead are not raised, that incident has no advantage at all. It didn’t profit him anything. He put his life on the line for nothing.

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So the logic of this – the logical course that this would follow – is expressed in the worldly proverb, “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” That is actually a quote from Isaiah 22:13. They were the words of the rebellious men of Jerusalem, but something very similar to that is also found on an ancient Greek tomb, on the epitaph of that tomb where the dead says – this is what he wanted inscribed on his monument – “Drink, for you see the end.” This is the end of a life, the grave. The end of life is dust. And so the advice, in light of that, is eat, drink, live it up. Now that advice, Paul’s quote and that inscription, is not defiant. That is not a defiant statement, it’s a despondent statement. What it’s saying is there’s no hope in the grave, so grasp all the pleasure you can while you have the opportunity. What else is there to do, because if the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised and if Christ was not raised we are still in our sins, we are unforgiven and lost. Now this doesn’t prove the resurrection. Paul’s argument is that we must believe in the resurrection. It’s our only alternative. Otherwise life is meaningless and hopeless, so let’s hold onto something. This gives you some hope, some meaning to life. We have to believe in it. We believe in it because it’s true. If it’s not true we don’t believe in it. But we believe in it because the Bible reveals that God will raise the dead. Both the Old and New Testaments teach that. The Old Testament isn’t replete with verses on the resurrection, but there are verses there. Job said, “Even after my skin is destroyed yet from my flesh I shall see God.” Now what else can that mean but resurrection? I’m going to die, my body will turn to dust, but I will in the future see God from my body. Well, it will be raised up is what he’s saying.

Psalms 16 taught that. We considered that more than once in our studies in this chapter. The gospels teach it, the apostles taught it, and again there is lots of objective evidence for it. Paul has given that with his references to the hundreds of eyewitnesses to Christ’s resurrection. He himself had seen the resurrected Christ. What Paul is doing in all of this is demonstrating to the Corinthians the impossibility of denying the bodily resurrection and being a Christian. You can’t do that. You can’t say there’s no resurrection to come and be a Christian. The consequences of that are denying the faith. If the dead are not raised there’s no hope and there’s no morality. There’s no life to come, so we may as well pursue pleasure and numb our minds with drink or drugs. Now that’s fatal advise and obviously wrong, but that’s where a denial of the resurrection leads. It leads to despair and debauchery. One little error, Luther said, overthrows the whole doctrine, and Paul was showing the Corinthians that these consequences prove that they had believed in error. So Paul now gives them some wise counsel. He tells them to beware of those who are teaching them bad ideas, who are teaching false doctrine. Verse 33: “Do not be deceived; bad company corrupts good morals.” Paul’s actually quoting here a popular proverb of the day, one that was used by the Greek playwright Menander. We are influenced by our friends, so pick good friends. It’s that simple and it’s that obvious. Paul would never have said, I should say, that we shouldn’t have unbelieving friends, that we shouldn’t know non-Christians and we shouldn’t associate with them. We can’t escape people who are non-believers, not if we’re going to live in this world. Paul made that point earlier in the Epistle. You can’t escape living with and being associated with those who believe differently from the way you do. We need to associate with them. We need to be able to associate with them in a good way, a way that’s friendly, a way that’s helpful. George Whitefield, the great 18th century evangelist came from England to America many times, and among his good friends were Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin, two very different men. He was very close to Franklin. He spent time in his home. Franklin put him up and they spent a lot of time together. Franklin, in fact, was his publisher. Benjamin Franklin was a deist. Jonathan Edwards, a great Calvinist.

Whitfield had both as his friends. He associated with them and no doubt had an influence. He did not change the thinking of Franklin, but he could move within those circles and do so well. The danger is when unbelieving friends are all that a person has, or mainly what a person has, or what a person wants and that’s a danger because even good Christian conduct will be worn down ultimately by bad company. So this is important advice that Paul gives that the Greeks gave to young people. I want to say especially to the young people. I think it’s particularly urgent for young people, but because of that parents need to watch the company that their children keep and encourage them to have Christian friends. I grew up in a home where that was encouraged. I remember my father going to great efforts to encourage me to spend time with my church friends – my Christian friends – and that was good on his part and that was wise, but this is true for adults too. We all need Christian fellowship for encouragement and growth. We need to cultivate those friendships. We need lifelong friendships. That is vital for the Christian life. Otherwise, we’ll end up being old men or old women and all alone. I’ve seen that and that’s a sad state to be in. So value your Christian friends. It’s good to have non-Christian friends, be a witness to them, live a life that’s exemplary of Christ before them, but they can have a strong influence that is not good, that is harmful. That’s true morally, that’s true theologically. Bad company will turn Christians away from the truth. That’s the real problem here, that doctrine, because Paul warns, in verse 34, “Those who have no knowledge of God,” those are the people who were having an influence on these Corinthians. So Paul tells the Corinthians to come to their senses: “Become sober-minded as you ought.” Get right doctrinally is what he’s saying. Now Paul always chose his words carefully and he did so here because the word sober-minded was used sleeping off a state of drunkenness. That’s sort of been the thing he’s been talking about; eat, drink, be merry.

What that suggests is their behavior had been influenced by their denial of the resurrection. It wasn’t just that they denied the resurrection, it was affecting the way that they lived must as alcohol affects the way a person lives and behaves. And it’s that fact that doctrine – that he’s getting to here – the fact that doctrine determines conduct. It’s very important what you believe. Bad thoughts lead to bad morals. That’s why Paul tells us in Colossians 3:1-3 to set our minds on the things above, not the things on Earth. Keep thinking of the things of God, fill your mind with that. Good thoughts lead to good morals. Now even the Greeks understood that. They had a proverb recognizing that. Don’t think that doctrine isn’t important. Theological error leads to moral failure. It may begin with pride. It may begin with indifference. It may begin with just becoming cold a bit to the things of God and drifting off a bit, but it ends – if it’s not checked, it ends with sorrow. These Corinthians who were associating with people who didn’t believe in the hope of the resurrection were behaving like those people. They were living as they pleased and you’ll remember from our earlier studies in this book, Corinth was a place that had lots of opportunities to have pleasure. It was the *Vanity Fair* of the ancient world. So Paul tells them to sober up. That’s really what he means, get right in their thinking and right in their behavior. Those who deny the resurrection have no knowledge of God, Paul says. They don’t know who He is. He is the Almighty Sovereign God who created all things out of nothing. Go back to Genesis 1:1. God created everything. When there was nothing, God brought everything into being *ex nihilo*. He spoke it into existence. That’s the God of the Bible. That’s the God we worship. That’s the God of whom they had no knowledge. He’s the God who does the humanly impossible. Raising the dead is no challenge to him. It may seem fantastic to these people, but think about it. If God can create a man out of dust, he can certainly raise his body out of the dust. He promises to do that and anyone who really knows the triune God knows that He is always true to His Word. He will do it. The Corinthians should never have doubted that.

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So Paul says, “I speak this to your shame.” It was shameful that they had doubted the truth. It was shameful that they would doubt God and they would live a life of disobedience. Now Paul wasn’t trying to embarrass them here in what he’s saying, but he did want them to see the shame of their morals and the folly of their false doctrine in order to correct them, to figuratively sober them up, to get them thinking correctly, to motivate them to change. That’s what they ought to do, he said. Christians have hope. They have real hope. We have solid hope. Not some empty optimism or desperate wish for a good future. Everyone has that. But we have reason for this hope. Our hope is based on the revelation of God’s word that the dead are raised. The resurrection is true. Those without that assurance, they may live happy lives and enjoy wealth, but they have no hope, no real hope. William Barclay gives three epitaphs that were found on pagan tombs – ancient pagan tombs – that illustrate the hopelessness of the world. The first one stated, “I was nothing. I am nothing. So thou art still alive. Eat, drink and be merry.” Now that expresses the philosophy of Hedonism, what Paul has cited here. The second stated, “Once I had no existence, now I have none. I am not aware of it. It does not concern me.” And that is indifference. The third stated, ‘Caridis, what is below? Deep darkness. But what of the paths upward? All a lie.’ They were lost and that’s profound despair. The real lie is that there is no hope, that the dead are not raised. They are. They will be. God promises to raise every believer in Jesus Christ, raise us to a glorified state. This world is in despair, but the Christian has no reason for despair. We have hope. We will rise from the dead to glory forever, so we should live with that hope and live with purpose. This gives us purpose in life. Life is not meaningless. It’s not full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

What we do today counts forever. The things you think, the things you do, they count forever. Our service and suffering is profitable. It has great reward. So we have reason to be encouraged, to be joyful. But if you’re here without Christ, you don’t. But it need not be that way. We invite you to come to Him. Jesus Christ is God’s eternal son who became a man in order to die in the place of sinners and save all who believe in Him. And every one of us is a sinner. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1-2, that we were born in a state of sin. We’re born spiritually dead in our transgressions. That’s all of us. But there’s a way out of that and that’s through faith in Christ. He died so that everyone who believes in Him would be saved. He took our punishment in our place and all one must do is receive the gift of life that He intended. So believe in Him. If you’ve not, you’re forgiven the moment that you do. You’re justified. You become a child of God with a glorious future and the certain promise of the resurrection. Believe it, and you who have rejoice in it. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the great hope that we have in Christ. We recognize that the things Paul said here are true. If the dead are not raised, then there is really no meaning to life. That all that we do for Christ doesn’t – doesn’t have any point. But that is not the case. We will be raised and everything we do – everything we do in this life is significant. So may we live this life in Your service, vigilantly and vigorously to Your glory. And we thank You for the glory that awaits us. It’s all a gift. We thank you for it in Christ’s name. Amen.