

**Finding Your Story in HIStory**  
**The Greatest Day in History**  
**1 Corinthians 15**

**Dr. Steve Horn**

**April 8, 2012**

**Text Introduction:** The flow of this letter to the Corinthians called in our Bibles “First Corinthians” is dependent upon questions that the Corinthian church had apparently raised with the Apostle Paul. Paul began his letter by addressing more crucial matters that he wanted to address. He addressed problems that were in the church—problems of division and problems of sin. Then, in chapter 7 Paul began to address some of the apparent questions raised by the Corinthians—things about marriage, about the church, about the use of spiritual gifts in the context of the church. The final two chapters seem to be a return to Paul’s ideas. The way that I read chapter 15 is basically, “OK, let’s get back to the main thing. Let’s return our attention to the most fundamental belief that we have as Christians. Let’s return to that foundational truth by which the whole of our belief either stands or falls—the resurrection.”

First Corinthians 15 is one of those chapters of the Bible that must be read as a single unit. It is not wise to choose one or two verses. We want, as best as we can in the time that we have, to see the argument of the whole chapter. Let’s begin with the first 8 verses.

**Text:** <sup>1</sup> Now brothers, I want to clarify for you the gospel I proclaimed to you; you received it and have taken your stand on it. <sup>2</sup> You are also saved by it, if you hold to the message I proclaimed to you—unless you believed for no purpose. <sup>3</sup> For I passed on to you as most important what I also received:

that Christ died for our sins  
according to the Scriptures,  
<sup>4</sup> that He was buried,  
that He was raised on the third day  
according to the Scriptures,  
<sup>5</sup> and that He appeared to Cephas,  
then to the Twelve.

<sup>6</sup> Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time;  
most of them are still alive,  
but some have fallen asleep.

<sup>7</sup> Then He appeared to James,  
then to all the apostles.

<sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one abnormally born,  
He also appeared to me.

**Introduction:** Superlatives like “greatest” ought to be used with great hesitation, don’t you think? A superlative like “greatest” means that nothing greater has happened before and the possibility of something greater in the future is also impossible. I think about the way that the word greatest has been used. The well-known boxer Muhammad Ali was rather famous for saying, “I am the greatest!” But Ali, himself, even lost 5 times. I noticed that the basketball players of University of Kentucky immediately put on caps after winning the National Championship Monday night that read, “No 1 Greater!”

Perhaps, we use, in error, a term like “greatest” all too often in life. However, I am completely satisfied with my choice of words this morning when I say that the day that Christ rose from the grave is “The Greatest Day in History.”

This year, we have examined history from the time of creation. We have sought to understand the major movements in history. All of this points toward the coming of Christ, His death, and His resurrection.

**This is the greatest day in history...**

**Because the Resurrection Completes the Gospel.**

*The Centrality of the Resurrection to the Gospel*

Notice how these phrases in verses 1-3 point toward the centrality of the resurrection to the Gospel.

- “clarify for you the Gospel”
- “received it and taken your stand on it”
- “saved by it”
- “as most important”

What was Paul referring to: (verse 3-4)

- “that Christ died for our sins”
- “that He was buried”
- “that He was raised on the third day”

The Gospel is not complete without His literal coming, His sinless life, His death, and His resurrection.

*The Credibility of the Resurrection (4-8)*

Then we have a statement of the credibility of the resurrection. Follow Paul’s logic. First, he underscored the centrality of the resurrection to the Gospel. Then, he made sure that there was understanding of the proof Jesus’ resurrection.

- The prophecy of Scripture
- The public appearances
- The personal testimony

**Because the Resurrection Conquers our greatest human fears.**

<sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, “There is no resurrection of the dead”? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised;

<sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is without foundation, and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup> In addition, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified about God that He raised up Christ—whom He did not raise up if in fact the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. <sup>19</sup> If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.

For a few lines, in order to make a point about the importance of Jesus' resurrection, Paul allowed himself to think about "What if Jesus had not been resurrected." He referred to several things actually, but the three that stand out the most are: (1) without the resurrection, life would be rather pointless (2) without the resurrection of Jesus, we cannot be forgiven of our sins and (3) without the resurrection of Jesus, when we die, that's it.

I remember years ago hearing a sermon by the famed evangelist, Billy Graham. The sermon was actually comments that he made as he received the Congressional Gold Medal. He said that every person has 3 great fears: the fear of emptiness, the fear of guilt, and the fear of death. He went on to explain how Christ helps us to overcome these fears. This is exactly what this text in 1 Corinthians tells us.

But because Christ has been resurrected our greatest fears in life can be overcome.

1. We can have a full and meaningful life.
2. We can be forgiven.
3. This life is not all that there is.

We don't have to be afraid of the penalty of our sin, and we don't have to be afraid of death. These truths ought to free us up to live.

### **Because the Resurrection Confirms our own resurrection.**

And because the resurrection confirms our own resurrection, we have the confirmation in Jesus of eternal life.

The promise that we live again is at the core of our belief. Our eternal life is based in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22--<sup>20</sup> But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

I came across this quote this week. "Hope raises no dust." I don't know the exact origin of the quote or what the original author might have meant, but here's what I take from this saying. Hope for hope's sake is meaningless. I could hope for example that I could throw a football like Drew Brees or hit a golf ball like Phil Mickelson, but all the hope in the world is not going to make those things happen. Hope for hope's sake is not what we are talking about in relationship to the resurrection. The provision of our resurrection is in Jesus Christ Himself.

As he said to Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, whom Jesus brought back to life, “<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)

**Because the Resurrection Changes our perspective about life. (1 Corinthians 15:31-34)**

Not only does the resurrection change our perspective on dying, we ought to understand that the resurrection of Jesus changes our perspective on living. Hear what Paul says in verses 31-34.

I affirm by the pride in you that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord: I die every day! <sup>32</sup> If I fought wild animals in Ephesus with only human hope, what good did that do me? If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” <sup>34</sup> Come to your senses and stop sinning, for some people are ignorant about God. I say this to your shame.

The atheist turned Christian, C.S. Lewis said, ““Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

For some of you, you are living as though Christ is only moderately important. You give a little lip service to Him. You are here today as a token. It cannot be that way. The resurrection is the reminder that our service to Him must be all the way.

**The Greatest Day in history Calls for a decision!**

Billy Graham in receiving the award closed his comments by calling for a decision. He said that he had walked the hallways of the buildings in Washington and viewed the pictures hanging on the walls. He said, “I’ve noticed the common denominator of all of those heroes whose pictures hang on the walls— They are all dead.” Then he asked, “Are you ready to die?” The message of Jesus, the message of the cross, the message of an empty tomb always calls for a decision.