

The Great Divide – 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

4/4/21

In the western US there's a line that runs along the Rocky Mountains that divides our entire continent in two. It's called the Continental Divide. This Divide extends through Canada and all the way to Alaska and the Arctic Sea, and it goes south through central America and all the way through South America into Chile. If it rains on the eastern side of the continental divide the water will eventually flow into the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean and if it falls on the western side of that divide it will make its way to the Pacific Ocean.

Now, what's so amazing about this is that there are thousands of creeks and rivers that all flow on the eastern or western side of the divide. The water could end up in any one of these tributaries, but the final result would be the same. Whether it's the Mississippi River or Tinker Creek on the family farm, the final destination is the same. If it's raining over the continental divide, the water drops could literally fall just a few feet away from each other and end up in different oceans.

This sort of stark divide is even more evident when it comes to belief in or denial of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Did a man, named Jesus of Nazareth, die on a Roman Cross some 2000 years ago and 3 days later rise from the dead? **The answer you give to that question puts you on one side or the other of a massive continental divide.** When you first answer the question, it may not seem to make much of a difference. **Your life may only be a few feet away from someone who answers differently.** You may think, why does it really matter if Jesus rose from the dead? Does it really change my day to day life that much? But the final destination and the end result will be two different oceans.

So, I want to put this question to you in no uncertain terms this morning and I want you to be as honest as you can with yourself. Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead 2000 years ago? Did that actually happen? **I know that many of you feel like you should answer that question "yes" this morning because you are in church.** But I want you to spend the next few minutes really thinking this through. **And I want to help you think this through by showing you what happens if Jesus didn't rise from the dead.** I want to trace out a no answer to that question and show the

logical results. What happens? Here are **4 Consequences if Jesus did not Rise from the Dead**. These are all taken from 1 Corinthians 15:12-19.

1. Nothing Past this Life (vv. 12-13, 18)

As we get into this passage and verse 12 in particular, it's important that you understand that Paul has just been clearly explaining the gospel in 1 Cor. 15:1-11. Look back to verses 1-2. In this passage, Paul focuses most intently on the resurrection as one of the key elements of the good news of the gospel. Look at verses 3-4. Then, in verses 5-11 he goes on to explain that Jesus rose from the dead and then appeared to many, many people in person. And this was the message that Paul preached and that the Corinthians believed. Look at verse 11.

So, in verse 12 Paul says, if Christ's resurrection has been proclaimed among you, then why are some of you saying there's no resurrection of the dead? Most likely some in the Corinthian church were falling back into some Greek philosophical beliefs that denied any sort of resurrection from the dead. Of course, the problem with this is that once you deny any bodily resurrection, you can't have Christ's resurrection. Look at verse 13.

I suppose it's possible to deny Christ's resurrection from the dead and still believe in some sort of afterlife, but if you believe in some sort of afterlife, why would you deny that Christ could rise from the dead? **Typically these go hand in hand to the point where denying Christ's resurrection from the dead ends up limiting our existence to these few years of physical life we get on this earth.** Paul makes this connection in verse 18. And, look down to verse 32.

So, my question for you this morning is this: If you deny Christ's resurrection, why do you believe in any sort of life after death? Why do you think you will see family and friends again? You can't really base this on anything solid at all. **To deny Christ's resurrection is to limit our being to our 80 or so years on earth.** How you live your life this week depends a great deal on what you think will happen after you die. Will that be the end or is there something else beyond the grave? Let's move on to our second consequence of denying Christ's resurrection.

2. None of the Bible is Trustworthy (vv. 14-15)

You may not often think about this as a result of denying Christ's resurrection, but Paul makes this quite clear here. Look at verse 14. There are two sides to this:

Paul's preaching and the faith of the Corinthians. Now, why would I say that to deny the resurrection is to say that none of the Bible is trustworthy? Notice what Paul's preaching was based on. Look back up in verses 3-4.

Paul says that he was preaching Christ's resurrection from the dead based on the OT Scriptures. Now, I suppose you could try and make the case that Paul and the other Apostles fundamentally misunderstood the OT and that Christ hadn't really been raised. The problem with this would be the massive historical reliability of their testimony concerning the resurrection. Paul mentions in verses 5-8 that hundreds of people, many of whom were still alive, had actually seen the resurrected Christ. So, you could read Paul's letter and go and find people who had seen Christ's resurrected body.

The Apostles certainly didn't live as if they were concocting a huge coverup concerning the resurrection. They were fundamentally changed by the resurrection and many went to their deaths believing it to be a real historical event, Paul included. So, to deny the resurrection is to say that all of these men and women were confused and misled. And to get back to our overall point here, to deny the resurrection is to say that Paul was confused about the risen Christ and that He misread the OT and misrepresented God. Look at verse 15.

The testimony of the Bible is that Jesus rose from the dead and if we can't trust the Bible on this, then we can't trust it on anything. And this brings us to our third consequence.

3. Your Faith is Worthless (v. 17)

If we can't trust the Bible on the resurrection, then no element of our faith is based on anything reliable. If you pick and choose what you want to from Scripture, why do you get to be the final authority on what is reliable? Either it's all reliable or none of it is. Look at the beginning of verse 17. Your faith in the resurrection is futile and when you lose the resurrection you lose everything else that goes with it that is taught in the Bible.

I think many people don't realize how much of the morality in our culture is anchored in the biblical tradition and without biblical authority you lose any solid foundation for it. So, for example, you will hear a lot of talk today about human dignity and how we should value all people as people. Where is a moral belief like

that anchored? Well, it's rooted in the biblical teaching that humans are image bearers of God and that because we reflect God life is inherently valuable. You can try to still believe that all people should be treated fairly without the Bible, but you are just deciding to believe that, not obligated to believe it because of a higher moral authority.

We were in South Carolina this past week and we walked by two women painting a sign on the side of a building that said, "Let's just love." If you throw away the trustworthiness of the Bible, what possible reason do you have to tell me to "just love"? Why? It feels good? It seems right? Who are you to tell me how to live my life? Why love? Why not selfishness? Why should I sacrifice anything for your good? The point is that so many people live on the borrowed capital of Christian ideas. We take it for granted that the highest and best good is love, but when you start to undermine the resurrection and the Bible you cut off the Scriptural teaching on so much else.

And perhaps the greatest thing you lose is the biblical teaching that there's hope for this broken world because our sins can be forgiven.

4. You Are Still in Your Sins (v. 17)

Look what Paul says at the end of verse 17. To deny the resurrection is to reject the hope of forgiveness of sins. You may think, well, I don't really need my sins forgiven. Here's the problem with that. Everyone acknowledges there is some problem with the world. Something is broken and needs to be set right. Most of us intuitively know that we aren't perfect too. We know that we've got issues that need to be set right.

The resurrection is God's act of reaching into human history and beginning the work of setting things right. It's His affirmation that Christ's death was accepted for our sins and that the new creation kingdom has come. If there's no resurrection, then nothing has been set right and we can't expect that it ever will. There's no hope that we will ever be fixed or that the world will be made whole. All those calls for peace, hope and justice today? Empty and vain hopes. The brokenness you are experiencing in your life is just the hand the universe has dealt you. Too bad. Tough it up and deal with it if there's no resurrection to new life.

Now, in light of these consequences, I want to conclude this morning by addressing two groups. Maybe you have come in here this morning and you don't really buy the resurrection of Jesus. I would just ask you to consider the consequences we have talked about this morning, particularly this last one regarding the forgiveness of sins and the brokenness of the world. Does your philosophy of life deal directly with the messed-up nature of the world around us? Does it offer a way for things to be made right in the end?

But there's another group I want to address. The vast majority of people in here this morning would verbally affirm the reality of the resurrection. Here's my question for you: Does your life demonstrate a real belief in the resurrection? You say you are on one side of the continental divide, but do you live consistent with your stated belief? The resurrection changes everything about daily life and your eternal destination. Let it change you today. Let's pray.