

First Baptist Church Smiths Falls

May 26, 2019

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:12-26 (NIV)

12 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? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 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. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Congregational Prayer: “Our Father”

Our Father, Which Art In Heaven, Hallowed Be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom Come. Thy Will Be Done, On Earth As It Is In Heaven. Give Us This Day, Our Daily Bread, And Forgive Us Our Trespases, As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us. And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil. For Thine Is The Kingdom, The Power And The Glory. Forever And Ever. Amen

Message: A Letter of Hope in the Resurrection

- From Rufus, a proud Corinthian merchant. To the apostle Paul, the deliverer of the good news of Jesus Christ.
- I send you greetings as an owner of wagons that hauls merchandise across the isthmus to allow goods to flow from east to west through

Greece. I send you greetings as a merchant in Greece's busiest town, known for its commerce, and for our strong desire for wisdom. I send you greetings from Corinth, a centre of worldwide belief.

- I wanted you to know, Paul, that I've been a proud Corinthian all my life. As a merchant with a number of wagons, I was kept busy moving goods from west to east, bartering and selling, dealing and actively watching our city grow to more than 250,000 free people. I wanted you to know that I have been proud of the fact that we have 12 different temples erected to 12 different gods whom we Corinthians majestically serve. I have spent much of my time in the temple of Apollo and, proudly (at the time), visited the temple of Aphrodite many times, believing that my time with the temple prostitutes was honouring to her. I have even spent time in the Jewish synagogue in town, where I learned about the past of the God of Israel.
- But I have had some growing health problems. Recently, my headaches grew worse. After visiting three physicians the diagnosis was clear - I have some sort of brain tumour. I went back to the temple of Asciepius, the God of healing, many times in the past months, both before and after my diagnosis, and yet my future seems to remain bleak.

- At all of the temples I've been to I've asked the same question: what will happen to me after I draw my final breath? What will happen to me when my life here on earth is done? Is my life only about all that I can take here while I am living now? And at each of these temples I've been told to "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die (v. 32)," for this, they told me, is my greatest hope. Oh, there is talk of a possible afterlife, but none of it adds up. None of it makes sense. None of it comes to a soul-satisfying place of peace.
- And that is why I'm writing to you now, Paul. I met a man who goes to Chloe's church here in Corinth named Sosthenes. He had copied on a portion of a letter that you sent to the church here Corinth. This passage talked about the resurrection of the dead. It has had a most profound impact on my life. This I wanted to share with you.
- Your letter talked about Christ being raised from the dead (v. 12). Right away I was intrigued. I wanted to know more about this Christ that you mentioned. I found out that He was a marvellous healer, teacher, rabbi, leader. I found out that He was the Son of God. That He died to pay for the sins of everyone in the world. My heart was on fire when I heard this, as my heart was also pierced by the conviction of the things that I

have done, and said, and the ways that I have led my life. But it was most intrigued that the story of Jesus, as your letter talked about, has been raised from the dead.

- And so I went to the house church of Chloe and the first thing that someone said to me was "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" I must say, Paul, this greeting made me step back, but then it filled me with great delight. The reading of God's word from that day was actually the same portion of the letter that you had sent to the church that Sosthenes had copied for me. You wrote: "*If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ is been raised (v. 13).*" At first I thought that this was too sad to be true. How could Christ be raised? But I then felt the belief in the room, and in the power of these words of hope. I felt a certain truth of God speaking to me, saying that what I heard was indeed true. Jesus was risen, therefore there is a resurrection. But I wondered how: how was it that we could be assured of being resurrected from the dead, as was Christ?
- The reading went on to firm up the fact that Christ has indeed been risen. If not, your letter said, that our faith is futile; we are still lost in our sins (v. 17). When you said that without Christ being arisen we

would be "lost" (v. 18), and that without the resurrection of Christ our lives are *"to be pitied more than all men"* (v. 19) my heart started to drop. I thought, perhaps, I had come, again, to the wrong place, to a God who did not exist, just as I had in the temples of Corinth. Perhaps, once again, there was no assurance that my life was worth anything more than what was evident before me. My aching head hurt all the more.

- And then, your letter had the word "*But*. (v. 20)" My heart soared. Maybe there was hope for me after all. You wrote: "*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* (vv. 20-21)." Ah, how my heart soared. For the first time since I was diagnosed as having this fatal brain tumour, I had hope. I saw the light of peace, and even truth shining through the dark fog of disease. and pain, and a future without hope.
- As a merchant who deals with moving commodities all the time, I understand the value of firstfruits - the beginning of the harvest, the first and the greatest. You said, Paul, in your letter, that Jesus is the firstfruits - the first to be resurrected, "*...followed by those who believe in him*"

(v. 23).

- Belief. This is something new to me. The gods in the many temples here in this bustling city do not ask for belief, just to do an action. The gods of the people of Corinth asked for loyalty and devotion, but not belief.
- When it was read out at Chloe's home Church that day the reader stopped here. His eyes filled with joy and wonder. A tear started to form as he talked about how great it was to fully believe in the risen Christ. He talked about how magnificent it was to be a believer of the Lord Jesus. My mind wandered over the word Lord for a while. I've been a free man here in this city that has 400,000 slaves. I myself have bought and sold slaves in my life. And I asked all of my slaves to make me their master, their Lord. Is that what believe in Jesus Christ is all about? Is belief in Jesus calling this One, who is the Messiah, to be my Lord?
- It was then that my heart started to change. It was like a hardness, a layer of disease and decay, started to flake away. As your word was read in Chloe's home Church that day, as the man freely cried out tears of relief and joy at the goodness of his Lord Jesus Christ and the power that he felt in belief to Him, I felt a ray of sunshine flooded into my soul like I never have.

- And while your letter talked about how Jesus will reign to the end, destroying all dominion, authority, and power, and how He will reign until all enemies are put under his feet (vv. 23-24), I sat bolt up-right when your letter said: *"the last enemy to be destroyed is death (v. 26)."*
- And that was when I felt a tear roll down my own cheek. That was when I felt my heart break, and my arms reached up to heaven, and I cried out to the One who came to this earth to give me life. I cried out to the One who is the resurrection and the life. I cried out to the One who asked me simply to believe. I believe. I choose to believe.
- I, Rufus, a merchant from the cosmopolitan city of Corinth, a man of wealth, a man of wisdom and knowledge of this world, a man who has gained riches and a reputation in business, fell before the Lord Jesus Christ that day in the house Church of Chloe. I gave my life to Jesus, my Lord.
- The elders of the church wish to gather with me this Sabbath to pray for my brain tumor. They firmly believe that Christ can, and will, heal me. I, too, live in this belief. But I am convinced that even if I'm not healed of my brain tumor, I await something much better upon taking my final breath here on earth.

- I await the resurrection. The certainty that I shall live forever in the presence of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ: *"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39 NKJV)."*
- The last enemy that Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord, will destroy, is death. I know that I will go to my death ready to be resurrected by the risen Lord, Jesus, my Christ. In this, I believe.