

*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

*<sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed 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 comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. <sup>24</sup> Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:19-26)*

### **Certainty in the Face of Uncertainty**

No one actually enjoys feeling uncertain. Whether it's with your job, the economy, health, family relations, plans for lunch, or how things are going to work out, being uncertain leads to anxiety and added stress on life. While a surprise is fun and all, uncertainty leads to more questions that do not have answers. We find ourselves heading down the rabbit-holes of what-ifs, "What if this happens...then, what if that happens, and what if..." It paralyzes our decision making. Because we aren't sure, instead of moving forward, we just try to maintain the status quo. We would much prefer to have more stability and certainty in life. The simple fact is, very few things are. As much as you might hate change, you aren't stopping it. Things quickly change. Life happens. Even after this last year where we've heard more and more that nothing is certain, set in stone, there's more caution with long-term plans in case something happens, it doesn't change the fact: uncertainty is the worst.

In this section of Corinthians Paul addresses a specific uncertainty that has cropped up in the congregation in Corinth. Evidently some were not so sure of whether or not Jesus had really risen from the dead. Still others felt that, yes, Jesus had been raised from the dead; but, they were uncertain what that means for them. The thing is, if we are not certain with Jesus' resurrection and what this all means, there are serious consequences. Paul goes as far as to say, "**If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied**" (v.19).

Hope is a powerful state of mind. As long as there is hope for a win, the team will keep on playing their hearts out. As long as there is hope to beat the cancer, they will continue with the treatments. As long as there is hope things will get better, they will continue to work out their differences. There are lot of different hopes that we have in this life. But, they are short-lived. If our hope in Christ is only good for while we are here in this world, it is no different from all of these other short-lived hopes. It would be just another option in a buffet line of choices to deal

with the uncertain world that we live in with all the frustrations we have, the anxieties and stress it gives.

In fact, Paul says, this hope in Christ would be a terrible choice. If your hope in Jesus is only good for this world, then you are wasting your time being here today. There's really no need for God's Word or Church. You are wasting your life following Jesus. You are adding more misery to your life making a claim to be a Christian; what's the benefit? Why live as God tells you to? You are doing yourself a disservice refusing the pleasures of this world. We should be seeking to get as much possible out of this present life. Make sure to live it to the fullest now, deny yourself nothing; there's no certainty of a tomorrow. You better live it up now and enjoy what you have at this time, because it will all end.

In a world full of uncertainty, that's something we can be sure of. You've heard it said: two things are certain in life: death and taxes. I've known some who have been able to avoid taxes. Death on the other hand...it's coming for all. It's the constant reminder that no matter how you dress it up or try to ignore it, there's something very wrong with this world. It's not just that *they* will die; but I will. You will. And if my hope in Christ is only good for the years that I'm breathing this world's air, then death is the grim reaper ready to snatch away your soul. When the casket is closed and the urn is buried in the ground or ashes are tossed to the wind, that's the end in this world. But it's not the very end. Down deep everyone knows that one day they will have to answer for the things they do in this life. And if I don't have hope in Christ, then all that you've done wrong is still counted against you. You are stuck in your sin. And if my hope in Jesus is only good for this world, there is no hope.

**But now, Christ indeed has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep** (v.20). That first Sunday morning after Good Friday, the tomb is empty. "He's risen, just as he said," the angel told the women. Jesus is the first in a long line of fruit to be picked from the grave. Therefore, "In Christ, all will be made alive." That means, everything has changed. There are no what-ifs or maybes. There's no room for uncertainty or doubt. Christ is raised; therefore, you too will raised from the dead. Believe it! Your sins really have been paid for on the cross. God has accepted the payment of Jesus' blood. The debt of your sin—no matter how great you think or know it is—it has been erased. Right now you stand guilt-free before God. Nothing stands between you and God. You don't need to try and prove, win it, or work to show you deserve being with him. He's here today and with you every step of the way. Because Jesus is risen, just as he said.

Yes, Satan bit Jesus' heel—it was a real death after all! But Satan's head is crushed. And with his rising from the dead Jesus assures you that even the

certainty of death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54). Our hope in him doesn't end with our time on this earth. No, "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). We will be raised up, "And we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In the flesh with our own eyes we will see God. The chains of sin and death cannot keep you down; Jesus lives. You are set free. Play the "what-if" game all you want. It's a waste of time. Christ is risen, he is risen indeed.

This means, in Jesus, the end is certain! But what about right now, today? We haven't reached the end where Jesus will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. He hasn't completely wiped out every rule, authority, or power. Yes, the devil's head is crushed; but he is still roaring and seeking to devour more. Yes, this sinful world stands judged and condemned; but it's still coercing, lying, and deceiving. Yes, sin has been paid for and doesn't enslave you; but it still brings pain, suffering, and we too often chain ourselves to it. Yes, death's sting has been removed; but it still hurts to say good-bye and is coming for us all. And until that last breath, we must live in a world full of uncertainty.

So how are going to deal with it all? The easy answer might be, find some stability and certainty somewhere. So we hope for more stability in our nation. You might hope things would go back to the way they were before with some of your loved ones. We hope for better health and maybe just a little extra wealth. We hope for this COVID stuff to go away. We hope the decision we made was the best one for me and my family. We hope that tomorrow will be better than today; at least no worse. But, those hopes are just wishful thinking. They're not bad things. Many of our hopes are not. But, there's no certainty that those things will happen. There's no certainty that those hopes being fulfilled will bring you what you are looking for in your life.

But that's why the hope we have in Christ is so different. It's not rooted on wishes or happy thoughts. It's based on fact: Jesus lives. This means that although there is much that we are not sure of, one thing is for sure: he's got this. It's going to be okay. It's not left up to you. And that's a good thing. Would we like a little more certainty with job status, COVID, sickness in general, wealth, the future of our school and church, and so much more? Of course. But as we face more questions than answers, with the certainty of Jesus living on Easter morning, we can comfortably say: "I don't know." And leave it at that.

Why? Because Christ continues to reign. Jesus wasn't raised from the dead to twiddle his thumbs and ignore you. You have a flesh-and-blood living Savior who is King of kings and Lord of lords. He knows what you are dealing with. He knows

what it is to struggle with uncertainties in this world; he's been here. He's felt that. At that same time he assures you, "Nothing is uncertain to me. Nothing can surprise me. I know exactly what you need and the Father will provide. I'm ruling over all things for your good." How can you be sure of this? Jesus lives.

Thanks be to God, that tomb is empty on Easter morning. At the same time, your living Savior hasn't abandoned you to fend for yourself in this uncertain world. He's here in the Word where you hear his voice speaking to you. He's there working through your baptism as we daily to die to sin and are raised to that new life that he won for us. He's there with His body and blood given and poured for you in the Lord's Supper. There he assures you again with certainty, your sins are forgiven and you have peace with God. That's why it is important for us to be here in God's House. That's why it's not a waste of your time. It's here where Jesus comes to us! And it's here where he puts on your mouth and your hands and we support each other as brothers and sisters in Christ as we wade through this uncertain world.

There's a lot of uncertainty in life. That's not a shock to you. But because of the certainty that we have that Christ was raised from the dead and lives, we know we do too. Until that time when we are called out this world, we can be certain that everything is going to be okay because Jesus lives. Christ is risen, he's risen indeed. Amen.