

The Resurrection To Life Everlasting John 14:1-3, **1 Corinthians 15:50-58,**

Just in time for Christmas we arrive at the end of a long discussion on those major beliefs of the Christian faith to which we should all agree; as advised by St. Augustine: *In major things to have unity.* And as our guide, we have basically followed an outline of the Apostles Creed (AC) to discern those major un-compromisable beliefs all Christians should share:

1. That Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together make up the triune and singular God, whom we worship
2. That God the Son came to Earth as Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's promised Messiah, to seek us and save us by offering His life in sacrifice for our sins.

This is now that time of year that we celebrate Jesus' coming to earth. But think on this, as the AC asserts, Christmas is only special because it leads us to Easter. For Christians, Christmas is just a birthday party now gone out of control, Easter is our real reason for celebrating this season; of which an old Appalachian carol reminds us: *I wonder as I wander out under the sky, why Jesus my Savior did come for to die. For poor on'ry people like you and like I? Without our Easter hope, Christmas would be just another cold day in the middle of winter.* (let's et back to the list).

3. That Jesus was miraculously born of a virgin, performed miracles in proof of his divinity, and then rose again from the dead so that we who put our faith in him can know we are forgiven.
4. That after his resurrection Jesus ascended back to Heaven sending the Holy Spirit to indwell, seal, guide, and assist Christians in living as His disciples; spiritually building us together into a symbiotic organism known as the Church.
5. And that as promised, this same Jesus will return one day first to judge all of humanity and then to remake the earth back into a place where *righteousness feels at home* (2 Peter 3:13).

Beyond these major beliefs, issues of predestination versus free-will, infant versus believer's baptism, two versus seven sacraments, women pastors, or whether there will be a pre, mid, or post-tribulation rapture, if any at all all of these other matters come under St. Augustine's further advice that in *minor things we are to have liberty, but in all things to have love.*

Which on this eve of Christmas, appropriately leaves us just one more major tenet of our faith to examine; the one with which the Apostles Creed concludes: ***I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.***

Now the first thing you need to realize is that **this phrase is not the end of a list** – but rather the **final piece of the puzzle of our faith**. Why is this distinction important?

Because, if the AC were simply a list then perhaps we could pick and choose those parts to believe or reject *Let's see there are about 12-15 assertions in the Creed ... if I accept 9 of them, I should be ok?*

No!

Like a puzzle, every line of the AC describes a major tenet of our faith, each piece fitting together into one complete and singular understanding of what I need to believe in order to call myself "Christian." Leave out any piece, and the AC is no longer a complete picture. That is why this creed was originally written for new converts to study, understand, and then affirm as their own faith; fully "Christian" before receiving baptism or being allowed to join to the Church.

So, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting is not just a final phrase it is the last vital piece that holds the entire Creed together. If you do not believe this truth then none of the other portions of the creed will do you much good. And since *the resurrection of the body to life everlasting* is one of the gifts that Jesus came to earth to give us, Christmas seems a very appropriate time to think on it.

Because the **Son of Man came**
not to be served but to serve,
and **to give his life a ransom for many.**
Matthew 20.28

What makes this essential teaching about our own resurrection so important to understand is that according to a 2011 denominational survey, only **86% of Presbyterians believe in life after death**. So what do the other 14% believe in?

(Presbyterian Panel: RELIGIOUS AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PRESBYTERIANS, 2011
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/panel14-fall2011s.pdf>)

Why would I even call myself "Christian," if I have no hope of living again in eternity with God and as promised with Christ? Which teacher has failed these people so horribly that they don't know about **the greatest hope of our Christian faith: that in being a forgiven child of God, like Jesus, we too shall rise again to everlasting life**. Which is the creedal truth that we affirm: **because Christ rose again from the dead so shall I**. As Jesus promised us.

Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Believe in God, believe also in me...
I go and prepare a place for you ...
so that where I am, there you may be also.
John 14:1-3

Earlier in his first letter to the Corinthian Church, the Apostle Paul wrote some very blunt remarks for just such a group of people, who while claiming to be Christian, still did not believe that anyone comes back.

Paul wrote...

If Christ has not been raised,
your faith is futile and you are still in your sins....

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

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead

1 Corinthians 15:17-20

So our best gift of Christmas comes at Easter when we celebrate not only Christ's rising back to life; but because of him, so shall we. Our Bible describes in detail how this happened for Jesus, but how will this happen for us?

Today's portion of Scripture from Corinthians gives some surprisingly detailed answers: our bodies "*will be changed,*" that which is perishable becoming imperishable, immortal. To help us understand how this might happen, let's first look at how Jesus came back to a changed life.

Jesus rose from the dead in a real and physical way that people could see and touch. His return to once again walk and talk with his disciples wasn't just their memory turned into metaphor, he wasn't a ghost, nor were they having a group hallucination.

On that first Easter morning, when Mary went to anoint Jesus' dead body, that body was gone leaving behind only the cloths that wrapped it. And after that, as recorded in every Gospel, Jesus shows up multiple times in person to visit with his disciples. Several times he eats and drinks with them (Ghosts can't do that). In John's account, he even invites Thomas to physically probe his wounds so that Thomas could be certain he was again seeing alive the same person whom he had watched die.

Now, having said that, it is also obvious that Jesus' resurrected body was not entirely the same as the one that went into the tomb. He was different in dramatic ways, so much so that sometimes – until he revealed himself – he was not recognized as Jesus.

- Until she hears his voice, Mary mistakes him for the gardener.
- On the Emmaus road, two Disciples walk several miles with Jesus without realizing who they are talking to (*but Luke 24:16 states that they were somehow intentionally kept from recognizing him*).
- Jesus can appear inside rooms without the need of doors or windows to get in there. And he can disappear in the same way (Luke 24:31 & 36, John 20:19 & 26).
- Also what three days earlier were mortal wounds, were now healing or had healed leaving only scars.
- And he can fly! (acts 1:9).

The resurrected body of Jesus is both the same and yet different from the body that was placed in the tomb. And it was this same Jesus who promised us the same thing.

because I live, you also will live.
John 14:19

But still, the big question for us is not so much whether the resurrection of Jesus actually happened long ago, but rather, how will this happen for me?

- And what does this change in my life right now?
- Because isn't my life still the same as it was before I became a Christian?

Well, yes and no. The circumstances of our current life do continue on through the same cycles of work and play, joy and sorrow, living and dying. But because of Jesus' resurrection, What has changed is our attitude about how our life should be lived. Because the *resurrection of the body to life everlasting*. Assures us that beyond our physical death the major part of our life is yet to be! Our physical death is no longer to be feared, it has lost its sting. Like Jesus we will one day rise victorious from the grave.

One of the most common questions I get asked as a pastor is, ***what happens when I die?*** The Bible's answer, is that as a believer in Jesus Christ, the same thing will happen to you as it happened to Jesus; just not in the same time frame.

The Bible teaches that:

- As it was designed to do, Our body will eventually break down and cease to function.
- Unlike Jesus, our body will then be cremated or placed in the ground to return to back to the dust from which we were originally made (one method is just faster).
- But our spirit, which includes our personality and everything we would recognize about a person other than their physical characteristics, comes up out of that broken shell and goes to live for a time with God and Jesus in Heaven, wherever that happens to be (Hebrews 12: 22-24).
- Then on that day when Jesus returns to Earth to rule as king and judge, our spirits will return with him to claim our own new physical yet eternal bodies – changed, more fit for life in the eternal realm – just like the one Jesus returned with and continues to wear.

This is what the Apostle Paul writes about in that portion of Corinthians we read today.

For the trumpet will sound, and
the dead will be raised imperishable,
and we will be changed. For this perishable body
must put on imperishability, and this mortal body
must put on immortality
1 Corinthians 15:52-53

Also realize that Bible's declaration that *we will be changed* means that the same cells making up our current bodies need not be brought back to life. That sort of thinking has led to a lot of unnecessary anxiety about airtight caskets and cremation.

For centuries people have worried that anyone whose body was blown apart or eaten by sharks could not be resurrected because there was no longer a body to resurrect. But except for those of us who are alive when Jesus returns, and Jesus himself who was prophetically promised that his body would not see "corruption" (Psalm 16:10, Acts 2:27), the rest of our old physical bodies will have long gone back to dirt. But not to worry, you are who you are because God knew you before you were ever formed in your mother's womb, so He can use any old clump of dirt to remake you another body.

AS Paul concludes: ***The dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed.***

But The second part of this last line of the Creed is equally important...
we believe in the life everlasting.

We may skim through this closing line or just mouth phrases like "forever and ever, Amen," but this notion of everlasting life is a big one.

Even though our earthly bodies give out, Our soul (our spirit) was designed to live on forever, no matter what...always; beyond life here, every single human will continue to live forever.

There's no doubt that this thought is of immeasurable comfort at those gut-wrenching times when believers face their own death or that of a loved one. We're still sad that they're gone. We miss them, but as the Bible teaches, our grief should not be like that of *those who have no hope* (1 Thessalonians 4.13). In a relatively short period of time, compared to eternity, we will see our fellow believers again – and **we will be like them as we will be like Jesus.**

For us this abundant and eternal life that Jesus came to give us, began the moment we were by faith "born again." As the Apostle John writes

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 1 st John 3:2
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So this notion of life everlasting has another major implication for everyone who has ever lived. If it is only our bodies that die, and the rest of us will live on in a different

form forever and ever Amen, then - in this life - who we become on the inside matters a whole lot more than what happens to our outside.

Realize that there are three people in life that you will never escape.

- God is one,
- you are another,
- and everyone else is the third.

We are all in this together, for the long haul...the really long haul. All humans were designed by God to live forever – that is part of His image that He designed into us.

Thus the major question is not IF but WHERE AND HOW WILL WE SPEND ETERNITY?

Life on earth in our earthly bodies was God's first gift to us to help us learn our basic lessons...how to live with and love God, ourselves and each other. And not one of us is going away...not if we ignore them, not even if we blow them up or feed them to sharks ☺. But, this is a truth that the world has grown completely blind to!

There is a cynical bumper sticker that reads: **Life sucks, then you die.** No you don't

Life is messed up right now because we humans are running amok! In case you hadn't noticed from the news, hatred and division seem to be infecting every inch of the globe and in the middle of all this, the Church has turned in on itself... forgetting its purpose to be sharing this good news of resurrection and life everlasting offered us by Jesus who declared "***I am come that you may have life and have it abundantly.***

We all have life everlasting, all of us, whether or not we are in or out of fellowship with God for that eternity.

So those who waste their life and die apart from God, are going to find out that they have missed the whole purpose of the life they had been given. Spiritually they will also have a form of eternal existence in which to come to grips with the fact that they have missed out on a personal and eternal relationship with God the Father, and Jesus the Son – who made them, loved them and then died to save them from where they have now gone.

The idea of resurrection and everlasting life should remind everyone of us that this earth is not all there is; it is only a blip in the radar when compared to the eternity in which we will all live. Jesus showed us on earth how to make sure that the eternity we all face will be in Heaven rather than Hell.

And this message, that we are only saved by GRACE though FAITH as a GIFT from GOD, is what He has left us here to share the world not only at Christmas and Easter but all year long.

- God is and always has been love, not hate.
- God designed us in His image to live eternally with Him.
- Our life was then structured so as to teach us these truths and lead us back into a reconciled relationship with God.
- If we ignore these truths it will eventually result in our eternal ruin.

So life is not about making ourselves comfortable here. It is about finding and being restored – through Jesus Christ - into a relationship with your creator who loves you and wants to spend eternity with you. Which is the best gift of Christmas that Jesus came to give you.

For the hour is coming when all who are in their graves
will hear his voice and will come out
those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and
those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.
John 5:28-29

The resurrection to life everlasting is coming. Are you ready?