



# **BEYOND: EASTER 2017 DISCUSSION GUIDES**

**March 26 – April 16, 2016**

# INTRO

The resurrection of Christ is one of the most monumental events in all of history; it's up there in the rankings with creation and the incarnation. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that in the resurrection of Jesus, "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Cor. 15:55) The resurrection of Jesus is the reversal of death, under whose shadow we live our mortal lives. Think about it, death robs us of everything we love: our family, our friends, our health, and our own lives. Death is the final scourge, yet Jesus put death to death when he walked out of the grave. Without the resurrection of Jesus, we have no hope. It's the anchor upon which all of our hopes hang.

However, sometimes we don't operate as if the resurrection is crucial to our lives. Blaise Pascal was a philosopher and mathematician in the 17th century, and Pascal had a hard time reconciling Christian faith with what can be known. He had serious doubts that any of his Christian beliefs were true. He eventually came up with something we call Pascal's Wager. He said to live as a Christian was a sound bet, because if the Bible is true, you've lived faithfully, and if it isn't true and you cease to exist when you die, you've at least lived a good life. In 1 Corinthians 15:19, Paul speaks entirely against that idea: "If in Christ we have hope in his life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." Earlier in the chapter Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17) Without the resurrection of Jesus, we have nothing.

Thus the resurrection is central to our faith, as well as the way we evangelize. If we ever keep out or avoid talking about the resurrection, we proclaim a gospel that has no foundation for the hope we're calling people to. Ignoring or forgetting the resurrection empties the gospel of its power. As we approach Easter, let's consider that as we invite our friends, neighbors, and coworkers to hope in Jesus and join us on Easter Sunday. In response to the resurrection Paul says this: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58) Be encouraged by this as you seek to make the name of Jesus known during this season.



# 1. The Futility of this Life: 1 Corinthians 15:32

**March 26, 2017**

Don't get thrown off here by Paul's comment about fighting with beasts at Ephesus (though it sounds pretty gnarly). Paul is using his crazy experience to make the same point Jesus made in Mark 8: for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36) Paul is saying it doesn't matter how impressive or successful your life is if there's no hope of resurrection after death. He's basing some of this on 1 Corinthians 15:17, where he explains that without the resurrection of Jesus our faith is without meaning and obedience to that faith is useless. Thus he says if there's no resurrection, live it up; "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (1 Cor. 15:32)

Throughout the ages Christians have operated out of different central points for their faith. Some have focused primarily on tradition, moral behavior, individual expression, or just "once saved always saved." For Paul, both from a philosophical position and a theological position, that central point of the Christian faith is the need for resurrection and the fulfillment of that need in Christ. Upon the resurrection hangs every hope we have for life after death, the righting of all wrongs, and the fulfillment of Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

## Discussion

### Read 1 Corinthians 15:32

- **What does Paul mean by, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die'"?**

### Have someone read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

- **Why is the resurrection such a central aspect of Christianity?**
- **How does the centrality of the resurrection help us focus more on Jesus?**
- **If there's no resurrection, what would change about your life?**

### Have someone read Revelation 21:1-5

- **What desires do you have for life that are fulfilled in the resurrection?**
- **How does your hope for a resurrected afterlife affect the way you live right now?**



## 2. The Truth About Death: 1 Corinthians 15:50-53

**April 2, 2017**

Much of chapter 15 is Paul's response to the Corinthians' confusion over the resurrection. Many of the Corinthians said there was no resurrection because it didn't make sense to them. In response, Paul delves a little bit into the theological significance of the resurrection and a little bit into practical aspects of how the resurrection will work.

In verses 50-53, Paul is hinting at the eternal nature of God and how that affects his creation. God has an imperishable inheritance he plans to give to his people through Jesus, and he can't give an imperishable inheritance to humans if those humans don't have an eternal aspect to them. This refutes the claim that there's no resurrection, because resurrection is crucial to Christian theology, and simultaneously reveals the heart of God towards his people. God longs to give his people an imperishable, untarnished, unfading inheritance, and by his grace he does so through his Son.

### Discussion

#### Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-53

- **What does this passage reveal about the afterlife?**
- **What does this passage reveal about the kindness of God?**
- **What inheritance is Paul talking about in verse 50?**

#### Have someone read Romans 8:16-23

- **How does this section in Romans explain the inheritance we have in Christ?**
- **How do these passages about resurrection help you rightly understand death?**
- **How does the resurrection of Jesus give you hope as you consider your own mortality?**
- **How does Jesus' resurrection help us offer hope to others?**



## 3. You Have to Die to Live: 1 Corinthians 15:36

**April 9, 2017**

1 Corinthians 15:36 is surrounded by Paul's primary metaphor for explaining how the resurrection works. He compares it to how a single grain of wheat dries up and dies, then is sown and sprouts into a whole new plant. However, he adds on a further dimension of the supernatural. What starts as a natural, mortal body dies and is brought forth into a supernatural, eternal body.

We see throughout scripture that death is an aspect of Christian theology. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve introduced death into the world when they disobeyed God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Later in the Mosaic Law God explained that disobedience requires death, though that death could take the form of ritual sacrifices to atone for disobedience. Then came Jesus, who died on the cross as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of mankind. But Jesus didn't stay dead; he resurrected and revealed that God was powerful enough to turn death back on itself. Paradoxically, in Jesus death brings life. That's literal, in the case of Jesus' death for our sins, and figurative, as we pursue holy living in our lives. As Jesus explains in Matthew 16:24-26, dying to yourself (repenting of your sin and returning to the Father) produces life. Thus we die to sin and live to Jesus. (Rom. 6:11)

### Discussion

#### Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-43

- Can someone explain the metaphor Paul uses in this verse?
- How does this passage help explain death and the resurrection?

#### Have someone read Matthew 16:24-26

- What does it mean to "die to yourself"?

#### Have someone read Romans 6:5-11

- Based on these three passages, how is death an aspect of the Christian life?
- How can you make a practice of putting sin to death?
- How does the resurrection of Jesus give you hope as you practice putting sin to death?



## 4. The Death of Death: 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

**April 16, 2017**

***This is the final week in our Easter series. Next week we will start a six-week series in 1 Corinthians 13.***

Over the course of our Easter series we have focused on the death of Jesus, and how Jesus' death and resurrection broke the power of sin and the grave. (Rom. 6:5-11) Hopefully this past Sunday you were able to celebrate that victory alongside your family and friends and rejoice that we have been made alive together with Christ. (Eph. 2:5) This week in your groups we turn to 1 Corinthians 15:54-58 as an avenue for talking about the victory of Jesus and how we are given that victory. (1 Cor. 15:57) In this passage we see that Jesus is the conqueror of death, the "last enemy." (1 Cor. 15:26) Because sin produces death (Romans 6:23), Jesus' death to atone for our sins breaks the power of sin over us and allows us to share in his resurrection. As you'll talk about in Ephesians 2:1-7, this is the gift of a merciful God who brings us out of death and into life.

Through these questions, take time in your group to recount how God has moved in each other's lives through the Easter season. Let these stories fuel prayers of thanksgiving at the end of your group meeting.

### Discussion

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 15:54-58**

- **How was Jesus victorious over death?**
- **Why did death need to be conquered?**
- **How are sin and death connected?**

#### **Have someone read Ephesians 2:1-7**

- **How does God bless us through Jesus' death and resurrection?**
- **How have Lent and Holy Week been a reminder of the Good News for you this year?**
- **How have you seen God work in this season?**
- **Look back at 1 Corinthians 15:58. How does the resurrection of Jesus help us continue to be "steadfast" and "immovable"?**

