

1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 12, 16-22 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 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, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

1 Peter 1:3-5, 13, 21 (New Revised Standard Version)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

A Sunday School teacher asked the students in attendance that day,
"what do you suppose or hope that your family and friends
will say about you at your funeral service someday?"

One of the men in the class said, I hope that they'd recognize
that I was a loving & faithful husband, and a wonderful father.

A school teacher explained,

I hope that they would say that I was committed and effective,
and had a significant and positive influence on my students.

Another in the class said, I hope others would say that I contributed
as a good and ethical businessman, and a generous humanitarian.

The last guy to speak, "at my funeral, hope they say,
"Hey look, he's moving. I think he's alive!"

He's alive. He is risen!

Even though several times, Jesus had said that it would happen,
the resurrection of Christ was difficult to accept and believe,
and even his disciples were puzzled & struggled to make sense of it.

Three of the Gospels, Matthew, Luke and John,

each describe public appearances of Jesus after his resurrection,
various appearances that did finally convince his disciples...

... but how the resurrection happened remained a mystery, an unknown.

It remains a sacred mystery far beyond and outside
our life-experience or any rational explanation.

It was that same issue, the mystery of the resurrection
that the Apostle Paul was writing about to the Corinthians.

According to popular and accepted Greek philosophy at that time,
the soul or human-essence is imprisoned within the human body,
and the physical body, a corruption or tomb that entraps the soul.

So the bodily resurrection of Jesus made no sense to them,
but Paul was adamant, that Jesus really did die a physical death,
and that God really did resurrect Jesus from the grave... vs. 12,

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no
resurrection of the dead?

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth,
this passage addressed some serious problems they were having,
which he recognized as **an essential to Christian faith**, vs. 3-4,

For I handed on to you as **of first importance** what I in turn had received: that
Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was
raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

Paul was not trying to explain how the resurrection happened,
but rather, his focus is on **why the resurrection of Jesus matters**,
and why it is so necessary and critical to our Christian faith,
including the promise and hope of **our** future resurrection.

Years ago, one of our elders had a near-death experience one time,
and he told me about his amazing vision of heaven's promise,
and I noticed afterward, **how it changed his perspective.**

He endured years of terrible pain and endless health problems,
but his gentle spirit, his courage and faith never wavered,
for he never questioned the glorious Kingdom that awaits us...

**... for it's that promise & hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ
that most defines and guides every aspect of the Christian life.**

**Paul's point is that if there really is no resurrection,
and if the corpse of Jesus is still buried somewhere,
then our Christian faith is false & meaningless.**

If God did not really raise Jesus alive from the grave,
then our sins still separate us from the grace of God, vs. 17 & 19,

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.

No resurrection means, when we die, we're just gone and that's it,
and there really is no hope or escape for us from our sins & failures,
and that there is no hope for our loved ones who have died,
nor any hope for us beyond the limits of this mortal life,
for what does anything matter, if there's nothing beyond the grave,

if there really is nothing more than just this mortal life?

To be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus Christ by faith,
is to accept and believe that the resurrection of the dead is true,
just as Paul declares and explains that hope, vs. 20-22

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

It is our faith, **our trust and hope in the resurrection – eternal life**
that enables us to see beyond this life's pleasure, gain & success,
to see beyond life's disappointments, failures, flaws & losses,
to perceive that God is at work on our behalf to build us up and bless,
because Jesus Christ is alive, present with us and up to something.

In truth, I cannot explain or really even describe
the resurrection of Jesus Christ in scientific terms,
and I certainly don't understand the details or the process,
or how **the promise of our own resurrection** will be fulfilled...

... but throughout the witness of the New Testament, it testifies
that Jesus Christ was buried and raised by God from the dead.

As Christian believers, the Holy Spirit dwells within us,
who speaks to us through God's Word, our walk of faith with him,
who nourishes our faith and lives within Christian community,
all of which is part of the meaning of baptism and church membership.

So this message of resurrection hope & promise, what's it mean to us?

It means we can be so certain of God's love, promises and purpose
that we're not defeated, powerless, abandoned or crushed,
even when life does go awry or our worst disappointments.

There is hope beyond our mistakes, problems and failings of the past,
and there is far more, much more than just this one mortal life.

It's being able to trust that God's wisdom **is greater than ours,**
that God does perceive and know beyond the obvious & immediate
ahead toward deeper and greater good and growth in our lives.

It's knowing and trusting that God can redeem, heal and transform
even our worst suffering and disaster for our good and benefit,
that **can give us courage to face anything in life or in death.**

It is the promise and hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ
that defines and guides our living an authentic Christian life.

I most passionately believe in the resurrection of Jesus on Easter,
not because of Jesus as event way back in history,
but because of **Jesus living** powerful and present with us today...

... which becomes our hope, with truth and promises toward tomorrow,
which is also the message of our reading from 1st Peter today.

1st Peter is one of the later books included in the New Testament,
written during a time of intense and extreme difficult persecution,
a message of hope based on taking a somewhat longer view, vs. 3-5, 13

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

By his great mercy he has given us a **new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ** from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; **set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.**

These verses from this letter of 1st Peter...

celebrate what having **resurrection faith can** mean for us,
and how that hope can change everything about our lives.

I knew a young man who worked hard preparing for the future,
for a home, spouse and children that he did not yet have,
effort today to provide the for a family he hoped to have.

Though it wasn't completed until sometime in the distant future,
it was something he was already working toward **expectantly now...**
...which is like living an authentic & faithful Christian life today.

Our trust, faith and faithfulness in this life, **at work in us now,**
is preparing us for eternal life in God's Kingdom in the future.
That means, we're not in the land of the living moving toward death,
but we're in the land of the dying moving toward eternal life...

... which means, that even the very best that this world has to offer,
is really nothing more than a passing bouquet of **cut-flowers,**
which are pretty and smell nice for a short while,
but then quickly fade, turn brown and decompose.

The Christian life with Jesus is about having that **hopeful vision,**
a bold and defiant hope even amid struggles, troubles or suffering.

And far more than just anticipation of something distant and ahead,
it is about today, striving through faithful living to reach it,
preparing for way more than we can possibly know or imagine...

... which is how we experience hope, the power & promise of God's grace,
so to use the gifts & blessings of God faithfully, usefully & well,
and grow by living up to **the very best that God created us to be.**

The call to faith and action of this 1st Peter passage is,
because of what God has and is giving to us – eternal life, vs. 13 & 21,

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Through him you have come to trust in God, **who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.**

The message is be vigilant and live spiritually disciplined lives
focused with our hope set on God's grace and promises in Christ,
and don't be set or conformed into this passing & finite world...
... living a life of love, compassion, purpose, trust & devotion to God.

Our call is to grow, enlarge & deepen our faith and God's grace,
as by our faithful response, **our lives become a gift back to God.**

This is how the Apostle Paul explains it, 2 Corinthians 4:14, 16-18,

We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. So we do not lose heart. ... For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for **an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure**, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.