



I'm sure we could all come up with a list of things which would be **pointless because they are doomed to failure from the very beginning**. There was somebody I used to visit who lived down miles of dirt and gravel roads. It wasn't just one of those roads that was stony, it was covered in a powdery dust. And whenever you drove down this road you could be sure that another vehicle driving by would spew up all that dust. It seemed pointless to ever wash my car right before heading that way. There was no way of keeping your car clean even for the first ten seconds down that road. When **failure is inevitable things become pointless**. The apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to some Christians who were beginning to consider their lives and religion nearly all pointless. They saw an inevitable failure to it all. But things are never doomed to failure if you have a reason for hope. Especially if that hope stands no matter how bleak things might get. That's the way it is for us. We have a reason for hope which gives real meaning and worth to every situation we face, even death. This morning we turn to another topic under the series, "What Does It Mean to Be Spiritual." We are once again looking at portions from the final chapters of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. And we see that to be spiritual means that you have a reason for hope. Our faith is far from pointless! It points us to the only source of hope.

In a very staggering way congregation in ancient **Corinth was beginning to say that their life and their faith was all pointless**. Some of them were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. In other words, no matter what you did or didn't do in this life it was over for you when you died. There reason for such a bleak and false teaching likely stemmed from their surrounding culture and the beliefs many of them grew up with. It also no doubt was influenced by what they could see and observe for themselves. When a person died, breathed their last breath, there was clearly no hope that that person would ever breath and speak again. When a body had its blood in the ground and began to decay, what hope was there according to natural reason that the same body might ever walk and live again? It stood to reason that death was the end for everyone. So that is just what some in the church in ancient Corinth were teaching.

Imagine walking into a Christian church and hearing some factions in that church spread the teaching: "It's all over when it's over. Dead means dead and that's a wrap." The teachings that would spring out of this false teaching would be very destructive. It's no wonder the congregation seemed plague with troubles of tolerating sexual immorality, selfishness, and were so divided they had lawsuits against one another! The phrase "everything is permissible" led to an "everyone for themselves" attitude that all ended in a hopeless view that made some wonder, "What's the point? I'm going to die in the end."

This is the **sad, hopeless view that many have today**. Outside the Christian church today you have many who consider the life we have right now to be the end-all. They believe that to die means to cease to exist. Like so many before they know and have seen the results of death. So they conclude, "life is hopeless." And if that truly is the case, if we truly cease to exist at the moment of death and our bodies will only return back to dust, they have a point.

**They are seeing is what is half of the story**. It is true that our bodies don't last. It is true that they will return back to dust in the end. What we witness at the moment of death is the crushing weight of hopelessness that comes with life in this world. When the first man was created, he had a perfect world to live in with a perfect marriage and perfect garden to work in. For him life was not only perfectly blissful, but he knew it would never end. Until he and the woman took their eyes off the goodness of God and tried to make life better by their own means. In doing so they rebelled against God. And like the devil they faced a heavy consequence for their rebellion. God pronounced the earth under a curse because of their sin. God warned them that what was to come would be hardship and troubles in their lives. And the ultimate result would be that all their hopes would end in death. "Dust you are and to dust you will return." Ever since that day that's the half of the story that we've been seeing and living in. A world doomed to decay and death. And if that is the only half of the story you've ever encountered, it would seem very bleak. Each and every person born from Adam and Eve would be doomed to failure from the start. It wouldn't matter how well you live or how well you try to follow every step of self-care and preservation. Each one returns back to dust.

But **that is only half the story!** And the Christians in ancient Corinth knew that! Some missionaries came and brought hope where there was once only darkness and despair. They spoke of a man who wasn't doomed to failure. It seemed completely hopeless and doomed after he suffered a terrible death and was placed in his tomb. But he was one who could not fail. This man rose back to life and showed himself alive to his disciples. Earlier in this chapter Paul a number of his appearances including to 500 of his disciples at once. All those witnesses echoed with that living man "we are not doomed to failure! The grave is not the end!" That living man, Jesus, who once was dead but now lives forever, is the same reason that so many millions and billions have a reason for hope today. We believe, and so we too proclaim that Christ Jesus rose from death.

This much was being taught in ancient Corinth too. But some, even though they spoke of Jesus as rising from death failed to teach that meant we too would rise from death. That's why Paul argues, "how can you say Christ is raised, but then deny that the dead are raised"? If the first truth stands so does the second!

In fact, if the first truth doesn't stand and Christ wasn't raised then everything in the Christian faith would crumble. It would mean. Then the real pointlessness wouldn't be found in those who live only for this life. **The real pointlessness would be those who are living for the next one. Who** would want to be a Christian if there is no resurrection of Jesus? Christians are called by Jesus to endure hardship and persecution for the sake of his kingdom. To be a Christian means to live under constant attack from the world and the devil. It means to follow Jesus through all the trials which face God's people. It means standing up to spiritual warfare and daily taking a stand against the enemies of God. Why live the trials we live as believers and carry our cross as we follow Jesus if we are only following him to the grave? We would be doomed to failure from the beginning if Jesus could not overcome the grave. Not only that, but our faith would be leading us down a most pitiful path. Why battle against sin when sin wins in the end and we die? Why pray when God doesn't answer us in love but allows us to remain in the silence of death? What good would it be to pray? Why turn to a God for help when he is powerless to help against death? What good would it be to trust? God would have lied about his prophecies to raise his Son from death as our victorious savior from sin. We are told we can trust in God at all times. But why trust in a God to work all things for our good when he couldn't even work out his own plan for us in his Son?

But everything seemingly doomed to failure and loss in the life of a Christian **changed when Jesus rose from his tomb.** Our prayers, our enduring persecution, our patient endurance in the face of hardships and loss, our persistent battle against sin to live a new life in thanksgiving to our God are all certainly not without reason. We pray, we endure, we live all because Jesus is alive. Without Christ's resurrection, we face a hopeless end. With Christ's resurrection, we have an endless hope. Our sins cannot rob us of this hope because Jesus has declared them all forgiven by his sacrifice on the cross. Our trials cannot rob us of our hope because God has not only told us they must come but will come to an end. Our prayers cannot fall on deaf ears because Jesus is alive to hear and to answer. Our struggles and pains cannot all be for nothing because Jesus promised to work them for our good just as he did his own. Even death is not a source of despair.

Jesus is our hope because he is the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." In that short expression Paul shares the reason for hope that we have. A first fruit is an expression that comes from a type of offering in the Old Testament. It was a selection of the best and usually first crop that was produced each harvest season. A farmer would go out to his field and find the first few heads of grain to sprout and gather them as an offering of thanks to God. An owner of a vineyard, before he would collect any more grapes or proceed to produce any wine would gather the first fruit and present it as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. The first fruits were an expression of both thanksgiving toward God and a confidence that he would bring more to follow. Jesus is the first to rise from death with a body that can never die. He is the first to rise back from the grave with a new and glorified body. There's more to come! Everyone who trusts in him will follow him because of his promised free gift of eternal life. Not just eternal life in some spiritual state, but with a new and perfect body. The first fruits have already been offered. Jesus has already rose. We have confidence, a certain hope, that the harvest will follow. All of us will rise from our graves and join with Jesus gathered into his kingdom. His sacrifice means the harvest has come! God will bring us home!

And the second part of this expression "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" captures another beautiful truth. Death is described as only a sleep. Some Bibles leave out this phrase "fallen asleep" and translate it "those who have died." But the expression is quite literally "fallen asleep." It is an expression for death that reminds us of a very important truth about our death. It's not the end. When you lie down to sleep you will eventually wake. That's the expectation for every one of us when we are dead. There will be a time when we will wake up, so to speak, from death. We will open our new and restored eyes and realize that God never fails. His promises always stand. And we will then see him with our own eyes and realize just what it means when we say, "Jesus is alive." It means so are we.

So when we **now** live out our lives **that truth sustains us and motivates us.** There are a lot of things in life that might cause us to say "why bother. I've already lost. It's doomed to failure from the start." Things like killing weeds during monsoon season, feeding vegetables to two-year-old, and keeping a vehicle clean that lives down a long forest road. But this much we know is not doomed to failure: your life as one who trust in Jesus. He is alive! That changes everything. Endure, brothers and sisters, every trial and hardship you face in this life knowing it never means God has failed or abandoned you. Jesus is alive! You now have every reason for hope for the future! Pray continually knowing that although it may at times seem like there is no reply and that no one is listening, he is. Jesus is alive! You now have every reason to pour out your hearts to him in prayer with your requests and thanksgiving. He lives to answer all our prayers just as he promised. Continue to live a life of thanksgiving to God as you daily struggle against sin. Not to earn anything for that would be a hopeless thought only ending in death. **But live** as part of that harvest that belongs to God who will because of his promise gather you into his barn. Live as those who now belong to a merciful and loving God who has taken away your sins and the curse of sin, death. And patiently endure all things not with the grave in view, but with the rest that will end in waking to eternal life. *What does it mean to be spiritual? You have a reason for hope and with it a reason for life now and forever!*