

What if I were to tell you that, beginning next week, we will no longer have worship services on Sunday, but instead, all services will move to another day. What would happen? Besides the riot, I mean? People would probably want to know why. Some extremely compelling reason would need to be offered to move the day we gather for worship.

I bring this up because it happened some two-thousand years ago. For century after century, God’s people of Israel had observed the Sabbath from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. It was to be a day of rest patterned after God’s rest in the creation account. It was sacred time. And then, all of a sudden, it changed. A small group of people started gathering on another day. They began to gather on Sunday. The people doing this called it “the Lord’s day.” Why? How could they do this? Some extremely compelling reason would need to be offered to move away from the Sabbath. And these people had one. Sunday was the day their Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, had risen from death. They wanted to commemorate this victory every week. Every Sunday became a Day of Resurrection, and we have inherited this rhythm of remembrance. Here we are, on the Lord’s Day, to be fed and forgiven by that Lord, and He can only feed and forgive us if He is alive to do so. Every Sunday should be a little Easter. The reversal of death by Jesus is that important. As the apostle Paul writes in today’s epistle, “...if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep—the first of a great harvest...”

You see, it was worth changing the day. Jesus’ resurrection is the one thing on which everything else about our faith stands or falls. That is the strikingly simple point Paul makes here in 1 Corinthians 15. He basically says, you just heard it, that if Jesus’ did not really rise from death, we are doomed and dumb; doomed because the payment for our sins was rejected and dumb because we are living for a future reward that will never arrive. But, and take note of this, that Paul calls it a fact, that Christ has been raised from the dead, and he calls Christ Jesus the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. He is the first part of the harvest, the first fruit to appear, the living promise of a full harvest that is coming, a harvest of people who cannot be held down by death. You are part of that full harvest if you are willing to believe that Jesus did it; that He prevailed against the cold, cruel enemy of death and has paved the way for you to do the same. This is indeed the Lord’s Day; the Day He has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it; for He holds the key to unlock every tomb, every grave, every vault, and will lead His people out in celebration the likes of which has never been seen before.

Do you see what is available to a person who truly believes this?

Under the city of Rome, there are over 600 miles of catacombs. Six hundred miles of graves cut into the rock. In these alcoves, a great many generations of the dead have been laid to rest. Believer lies next to unbeliever. Take a look into the Christian graves. Their skeletons tell terrible tales: heads severed from bodies, ribs and shoulder blades broken, bones calcified from fire. Despite the awful sufferings they endured, the inscriptions on those Christian tombs shout of victory and triumph.

One resting place says, "Here lies Marcia, put to rest in peace." Another says, "Lawrence, borne away by angels." Yet another reads, "Being called away, he went in peace."

Now I would like you to contrast those graves with the tombs of those which hold remains of the unbelievers. Without faith in the risen Lord, they painfully warn: "Live for the present hour, since you can be sure of nothing else." Another bitterly states, "I lift my hands against the gods who killed me at the age of twenty." And yet another says, "Traveler, do not curse me as you pass. I am in darkness and cannot answer."

Do you hear the difference? What gives hope where there had only been horror, joy where once there had been judgment, peace where once there had been poison? Simply this: Christ is risen! Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Every Sunday has become a Day of Resurrection, and don't you see how much we need it? We need to know that someday our bodies will be repaired and restored. We need to know that a reunion with our departed loved ones is coming. We need to know that all the wrongs we could not make right will be handled by God; that His justice will be perfectly served. We absolutely need to know that the things we're ashamed of have been completely wiped from our record by Jesus. These are all things that His resurrection guarantees. To believe that Jesus left his tomb behind in a resurrected body means you hold all these things to be true for you, personally. And this faith in a risen Redeemer creates an inner power and stability and courage that nothing else can give; nothing else comes close to giving. It's what God wants for each of us.

Early one Sunday morning, the ground shook, the stone was rolled away, and Jesus stepped out of His tomb. The shock waves are still moving out into the world. The truth echoes in your heart. Christ has been raised from the dead!