

If you have your Bible this morning, turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 15. We'll start in verse 12. While you're turning there, I'm just going to read through the verses we're going to be considering this morning. Then I'll pray for us, and then we'll get after it. As I hear pages turning, I'm going to go ahead and start. Chapter 15, starting in verse 12. This is the apostle Paul.

"Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." Let's pray.

Jesus, we love you. We thank you for what you've done and for what you're going to do. Thank you for this time we have this morning to consider who you are. I just pray, Holy Spirit, you would fill this room, that my words would be a faithful representation of your Word, and that in all of our hearing there would be an understanding to the point of heart change and you would grant that by your Spirit. We ask in your name, Jesus. Amen.

In November of 2007, I did something I had never before done in my life, and I proposed to a woman. We had been dating for some time. We had talked about marriage. In asking this question, I was pretty sure I knew what she was going to say. I was pretty confident what her answer was going to be. Just in case, I spent a lot more money than I should have on a ring just to kind of seal the deal and took her to a park in Dallas. All of our family gathered there, and they kind of hid out in the trees and watched us.

I walked her around this park. We got to this bridge where I was going to propose and had it planned out. I had bought her a Bible. On the Bible, I had her first and middle name inscribed and left some space on the side for a new last name. Get it? Then when we got to the bridge, I read from her new Bible, and I got down on a knee, pulled out the ring, put it on her finger, and said, "Will you marry me?" She said, "Yes!" All of our family came out from the trees (which was kind of weird) and came and congratulated us.

At that moment, we started planning and started thinking. We started having a conversation about a wedding day. We talked to her school, my school, her family, my family, plans and all that and finally ultimately decided July 26, 2008. From then on, all of our plans, all of our preparation, were moving toward that day (July 26).

I realized very early on that as an engaged man, I was living in a very unique season of life. I was living in a very special season of life. That was a season that looked *back* on something that had happened in the past (the proposal) and looked *forward* to what would happen in the future with the wedding. My present was shaped by that event in the past and that event in the future. There was not a day I woke up that I was not cognizant of the fact that she had said, "Yes, I will," and that one day soon, she would say, "Yes, I do."

It changed things for me. There were just certain things I didn't do in that season of life. I didn't pursue other women. I wasn't romantically interested in other women. I didn't buy gifts for other women. I didn't plan a wedding day with another woman. Right? I found a girl, and we were planning our lives together. I didn't spend money the same. I didn't go out with the guys as much and eat terrible food or watch dumb movies. I picked up a second job waiting tables to save up for our honeymoon. It just changed.

Habitually, some things changed as well. All of a sudden, I just started going to bed a lot earlier. I don't know why. It's like 9:30, and my roommates were like, "Are you sick?" One guy just finished eating lunch. I was like, "I don't know. I watched *Wheel of Fortune*, and I am going to bed. I don't know what's wrong with me." It just changed. That season of life was changed. Looking back at that past proposal, looking forward at that future wedding, just shaped my present. It just changed things.

In these verses, Paul writes and speaks to a very specific issue in this church that he is writing to. We as Christians believe Jesus rose again from the dead. Because Jesus rose again from the dead, one day when he returns, those who have believed in him, put their faith in him, also will rise again. They also will be resurrected as Christ has been resurrected. Everyone in this church believes Jesus rose from the dead. They affirm that happened, but some of them are denying the resurrection of the dead.

Some of them are denying the dead are, in fact, raised. The reason they're doing that is they're living in a Greco-Roman culture. That culture is changing, that culture is controlling, how they thought about the

afterlife. Because what they believed in Greco-Roman culture is the soul is eternal. The soul is good. The soul lasts forever, but the body is not. The body is not eternal, and it's either neutral, or it's bad. Death, then, is not necessarily a bad thing. The death is the freeing of the soul from the prison of the body.

That was so prominent in that culture that it had made its way into the church, to the fact where some Christians were saying, "The dead don't rise again." What's interesting about this is Paul is going to respond to them in these verses. He says if Christ is preached as being raised from the dead (in verse 12), how can you say there's no resurrection of the dead? Then verse 13 says if there's no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised.

See what he has done there is he has put the Christian life in between two climactic events: one past and one future. He has put the Christian life in between Jesus' resurrection (looking back) and then Jesus' return where the dead in Christ will rise (in the future). He is not going to confront necessarily what they deny and go point for point in what they deny, but he is going to communicate to them and expose that they don't understand what they affirm. They don't understand how intricately connected those two events are.

He is going to start with them by saying, "Okay, you can have it, the dead in Christ don't rise, the dead don't rise again, but if that's the case, then Jesus didn't raise. If Jesus was not resurrected, then here's what life looks like." In verse 14 it says, **"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised."**

Very simply, Paul says this. "If Jesus is still in the grave, then everything we're doing here is meaningless. Our preaching is empty. Your faith is meaningless." Because what the gospel is is a declaration of historical facts. The gospel is a declaration of God intervening in history and doing things we believe happened in reality: Jesus' death, Jesus' resurrection.

What he is saying is if Jesus didn't raise again, not only is our faith empty, not only is our preaching empty, but we've made God out to be a liar, which isn't a good thing. If Jesus didn't raise again, then all the churches are doing and us going from town to town proclaiming he is alive, he is Lord, he is Savior, is for nothing. So shut down the church, cancel the service, and pull the preacher. You see, the gospel and the proclamation of the gospel is not powerful inasmuch as it's successful. It's powerful inasmuch as it's true. It's powerful inasmuch as it actually happened.

My wife and I have two kids. I love being a dad. I had waited to be a dad for a long time. When my son was born (he was our firstborn), I was ecstatic. It wrecked my life in a good way. I was really happy he was there. The day he was born, I had to go to the grocery store to get some things. I got all the things I needed and went up to the checkout line and put my stuff on the table and everything. The lady behind the register was checking me out. That sounds weird. She was doing what she does. That's her job. There's nothing romantic about it or anything like that.

Anyway, I looked at her, and I was just excited. I was just excited about what had happened that day! I said, "Hey, lady! I'm a dad. I became a dad today." She looked confused, so I felt like I needed to prove it to her. I pulled my phone out of my pocket, and I showed her a picture of my newborn son. She looked at my phone and looked at me and said, "Debit or credit?" I was like, "That's insensitive."

Honestly, here's the thing. That's not why I told her. I didn't tell her because I thought she would be excited with me. I told her because I was so excited I just had to tell somebody because of how true it was. Now how weird and awkward is that story if I didn't actually become a dad that day, if I had walked into the store really, really excited about telling a lie to a stranger? Then at that point, whose baby is on my phone? That's creepy, right?

What Paul is saying is the gospel is true. Inasmuch as it's true, all we're doing has meaning. If you take the resurrection out of the proclamation of the gospel, you have gutted the gospel of its power. It gets worse. In verse 17, he says, "**And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.**" What a statement. Verse 18: "**Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.**"

Jesus goes to the cross, and when he goes to the cross, he bears the penalty for sin, which is death. All of God's wrath toward sin is poured out on Jesus on the cross. Then Jesus goes into the grave. What we believe about the cross is it's the payment for sin. He bears our stripes in that moment, and yet if Jesus does not rise, if he does not resurrect, then the cross is meaningless. You see, because while the cross is Jesus' payment for sin, his resurrection is the receipt. The resurrection is the proof that he is who he says he is, that he did what he said he is going to do.

There was a guy in AD 132. His name was Simon bar Kokhba. He was a Jewish revolutionary. He led the Jewish people out of Roman oppression into freedom for three years. Because he led them out of Roman oppression and into freedom, because of what he was doing, people started attributing certain titles to this man. They called him things like "Messiah" and "Savior." They called him things like "King of the Jews." They would read their Old Testament, and they would read the prophecies about the coming Savior. They would apply those prophecies to Simon.

They printed coins with Simon's name on them and created a brand new currency and dated that currency at year 1 because they believed, in Simon's rule, history was starting over again for them. There's a very specific reason why many of us have never heard of Simon bar Kokhba. There's a very specific reason why we aren't running around with, "What Would Simon Do?" bracelets on. That reason is in AD 135, Rome killed Simon just like they killed Jesus. Yet when Rome killed Simon, do you know what Simon did not do? He didn't rise again.

Those who were foolish enough to die for and with him died for a lie, but everyone else looked back at his death and understood this: death for him was a defeat. Death disqualified him from claims like Messiah, like Savior, like Lord. They actually renamed him in history (those who had followed him) and changed his name from Simon bar Kokhba to something that means "Son of Lies." Why? Because he didn't do what he said he was going to do. He died. It was a good run but a tragic ending.

Listen. If Jesus comes on the scene, joy to the world, peace on earth. **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."** Jesus Christ came to save sinners. If he goes all the way to the cross and dies on the cross and that's the end of the story, the crucifixion is a tragedy, not a victory. The crucifixion is a defeat. Yeah. Then what Paul said is he says those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

In other words, if the penalty for sin (which is death)... What we deserve because of our sins is death. That's the final penalty of sin. If that is not handled by Jesus in his resurrection, then we're still all under the curse of death. When we stand at Christian funerals, the best we can do is say, "Death got another one and still has a perfect record."

Then in verse 19, Paul says, **"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."** So look. Paul is wasting his life. He is exhausting his life for the cause of Christ. Remember how his story started? If you don't know this story, it's a wonderful story. Paul's story started years before this when he was devoting his life to stomping out Christianity. He thought it was absurd his Jewish men and women would follow a man who Rome killed, that they would call a guy who is dead "Messiah" and "Savior" and "Lord."

He thought it was absurd, so absurd that it led him to a vengeful persecution of the church of Jesus. He would pull Christians from their homes and throw them in prison. He would oversee the shutting down of churches and oversee the stoning of the pastors, like they did to Stephen in Acts, chapter 7. This is what he is devoting his life to. He is on his way to Damascus to continue in this mission. He is on his way to

Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem so they would stand trial for their false claims.

On his way there, the Messiah he thought was dead met him in the middle of the road, knocked him off his horse, closed his eyes, opened his heart, changed his life, and gave him a job. He saw the risen Christ, and it changed everything for him. The guy he thought was dead was alive. From there, he goes on to plant churches like this one. From there, he goes on to write letters like this one, to preach, to heal people. As a consequence of that, he goes on to be beaten and shipwrecked and persecuted, all the way to Rome where he was finally beheaded.

If the risen Jesus he saw did not indeed resurrect, then Paul is boldly and courageously and pathetically living his life for a lie. Verse 20: **"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."** This is the transition for Paul. This is where Paul is going to make the connection between what Christ has done and what Christ will do. Before we move onto that, let's just think of how monumental a statement that is.

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead..." All of these consequences he just laid out are merely hypothetical. They're hypothetical because the tomb is empty. Our faith is not worthless. The preaching is not. What we're doing here has tremendous meaning because of the truthfulness of the gospel. We haven't made God out to be a liar but have faithfully proclaimed what he has done. We're not still in our sins.

The sting of death, the penalty of death, doesn't lord over our lives anymore because Jesus goes to the cross. On the cross, he is swallowed up in death. Three days later, death is swallowed up in victory. Death takes Jesus' life from him on the cross. Three days later, Jesus' heart beats. His lungs fill with air. He takes his life back and walks over death's dead body on his way out of the tomb. Death dies that day when Jesus rises again.

Now the scoreboard doesn't read that death has a perfect record, but it reads, "Jesus won." **"O death, where is your sting?"** Jesus alive again...death on its way out. That's why Paul here says that for believers, when they perish or when they die, he uses the metaphor that they fall asleep. My son (who is 2-1/2 now), when I put him to bed at night and I'll say, "Goodnight, Asher," every night he asks me this question: "Dad, can I wake up now?"

Here's why. He doesn't want to sleep. He has too many things to eat, too many toys to play with. He has a house to destroy again and again and again. Right? Even at his young age, what he understands is sleep is something that's temporary. Sleep is something that is temporary that is going to give way to a new day or

a new afternoon. Paul uses this metaphor for Christians when they die and says they are asleep, because the tomb is empty. We know it's going to give way to another day, as temporary as it is.

Then for Paul, he is not, of all people, most to be pitied. Paul is pouring his life out as an offering. He is losing his life, trusting the words of his Savior that losing your life is the only way to keep it. That's how we remember him. That's the event in the past, that Jesus rose again. It's the proposal. Because of it, we know the wedding is coming. That's what Paul says here in these verses.

At the end of verse 20, he says, "**...Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.**" What he says then is Jesus' resurrection is a picture in the past that we see in the past and look forward to what's going to happen in the future. Twice he uses this analogy that Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits.

That's a word, that's language, from harvesting. I don't know how many of you in here are farmers, but probably most of us, right? When he says the *firstfruits*, that is the initial sample of crop that comes in. In that initial sample of crop is an indication of what the rest of the crop will look like when it arrives. If it's wheat you're harvesting and the firstfruits come in and the first crop is good, you know the rest of the wheat is going to be good. If it's bad, you know the rest will be bad and you should sell your farm or something like that. Right?

Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruit, the initial sample that's an indication of what the rest will look like. Here's where you see that, in Jesus' resurrection, it's not a disembodied soul floating around. It's not a disembodied spirit just hovering over the earth, but he comes back human. Because what it means to be human is to be body and soul. That's how God made us, knit us in our mother's womb, knows the hairs on our head. We are our hands. We are our eyes.

He formed us, body and soul. When Jesus comes back, he comes back like that but with a body that is imperishable. Let me tell you why this is so incredibly important just to me personally. My little brother is four years younger than I am. He was born with spina bifida. The kind of spina bifida he has, he is paralyzed from the waist down. What this meant for us growing up is we very literally grew up in and out of the hospital.

My older siblings and I would... About every six months, my little brother would have a surgery. About every two years, he would have a major surgery. We spent a ton of time in the hospital. A couple of things

happened in that. Anytime he was in surgery, anytime he went to the hospital, the church would rally around and the family would rally around. They'd bring things to the family. They would bring things to John Mark (my little brother). They'd bring him toys or food or something, but they also brought things to my siblings and me. They also brought things to us. They'd bring us toys or whatever.

One time, a lady came and picked us up and took us shopping. We just bought new clothes for the next school season. One time, a lady came and picked us up and took us to Six Flags and brought us food and toys and all kinds of things. Now what's happened is, anytime I'm in a hospital, I keep waiting for something good to happen to me. Right? A nurse comes up. I'm like, "Hey, do you have candy or tacos or something like that?" It hasn't happened in about 20 years, but...

Also from a very young age, I became intimately aware of how painfully broken this world is just to watch him struggle and to still watch him struggle, to see the things he missed out on and then to know other patients in the hospital who we developed relationships with and whatever disability they have. To see him operated on and recover and operated on and recover, just at a very young age to begin thinking, "Somebody has to do something about this!"

Here is where the idea of the soul escaping the body falls miserably short. Because if what's waiting for him is his soul to leave his disabled body behind, that's not salvation; that's escape. That's not restoration; that's a copout. He is his body. He is body and soul. As a man, that's how God made him. What we see then in Jesus' resurrection is we see him come back just like that. We see him come back as a resurrected human body and soul but a body that is imperishable.

What that means for my little brother is those legs that have never had strength, that body that's been cut on countless times, when Jesus returns, that body will run and never be operated on again. The body that breathed its last through cancer-filled lungs will have clear scans for all of eternity. The loved one that never got to say goodbye will be reunited when Jesus returns, and *goodbye* will be retired from our vocabulary because the tomb is empty. Because we know that happened in the past, we know what's waiting for us in the future. We live in between those two.

A couple of summers ago, I was on a mission trip in Vancouver. I was working with a church planter. Basically, I was just helping him map out the area his church was trying to reach. I had a blank piece of paper. I was going in. When I'd find a neighborhood, I'd just draw in a neighborhood here. I was driving around, and I came to this one area. I drove through some trees, and the trees opened up. It was just this completely undeveloped land. It had gravel and rock and dead grass everywhere.

The roads weren't paved. It was dirt roads. I drove around and just kind of looked around there. All of a sudden, I looked off to the top of the hill, and there was this beautiful home. I drove up. As I got closer to the home, the road was paved. When I got to the home, there was green grass in the yard. The landscaping was pristine. You went inside, and there were wood floors everywhere and granite countertops and crown molding and pictures of beautiful fake families on the wall.

Then you walked outside, and you looked around. Nothing else looked like that. Everything else was flat and dirt. What it was is I was in the model home. The model home is the home they build in advance to give you a picture of what the whole neighborhood is going to look like when they get done developing, to give you a picture of what that area will look like.

One day you'll walk out of that house and it won't be gravel, it won't be dirt, and it won't be flat. You'll walk out, and you'll see hundreds of other homes that look just like that one, a little bit different, a little unique, but hundreds of other beautiful homes. The grass will cover all of that land. It will be green. There will be a community swimming pool. The roads will be paved. The way you know that is you look at the model home as a picture now of what's coming when they get done with their mission.

Jesus' resurrection is the model home for us Christians. It is a sign to us now of what this earth is going to look like when God gets done fulfilling his promise, when God comes and finishes what he started, when God is done developing through the gospel. We live in between these two events. In saying that, I think one of the things that has to be addressed and one of the questions to just answer pastorally is what does that mean now? In this culture, there's a lot written about the afterlife, a lot of things written about heaven.

If that's the case, living in between those two events, waiting for Jesus to return, what does that mean happens now? Listen. To be clear, Scripture explicitly says believers who die now, their soul goes to be with Jesus in heaven. That's wonderful news. When the thief dies on the cross next to Jesus, he says, **"...today you will be with me in paradise."** When Stephen is dying in Acts, chapter 7, he looks into heaven. He knows his soul is going to be with Jesus.

To die now is to be with the Lord. That's what Paul says. To depart is to be with Jesus, which is far better. But when you see the picture of heaven in the New Testament (like in Revelation), what you see are a couple of things happening. You see the elders and the four living creatures and the angels around the throne, and they're worshiping. There's worship going on in heaven. You see in a conversation a couple of chapters later between Jesus and the martyrs before the throne, they ask Jesus a question. He tells them to rest a little while longer. There's peace in heaven. There's worship. There's rest.

But then in that conversation, he says wait a little while longer, because what they ask him is, "When are you going to finish what you started? When are you going to avenge the death we died?" Jesus says, "Not enough of you have died yet. Wait just a little while longer." Heaven is worship, and it is rest, and it is waiting.

Listen. Heaven is not the end of the story. Heaven is not the point of the story. Heaven is great, but heaven is the rehearsal dinner. It's not the wedding. In Jesus' prayer, he says to pray, "**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**" We're not waiting for when we all get to heaven. We're waiting for when Jesus brings heaven to earth in his return. Why? That's a much more faithful picture of the story that's presented to us in Scripture, that it was creation, fall, redemption, new creation, a new heaven and a new earth where heaven and earth are one just like they were back in the garden.

We live in between these two times. I think living in the time we live in has to produce two things in us. The first is it has to produce a *love-motivated obedience and allegiance to Jesus*. What would you have done about your own death? Think about it. What would you have done? Would you have saved up enough money to buy your way out? I mean, come on. Would you have gotten smart enough to science your way out? What would you have done? What would I have done about my own death?

Without Jesus' resurrection, we are just left to speculate and just left to wonder and just left to try every other religion, trying to do something with death. It doesn't actually give your life back but promises something else. What would we have done? Steve Jobs, one of the most intelligent men of our time for sure, gave a commencement speech to the graduates of Stanford University in 2005. This was a year after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He spoke about death.

Here's what he had to say. "No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It is life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you, but someday not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it is quite true."

If Jesus doesn't raise from the dead, if no one has ever escaped death, this the best we have, that death is the best invention. I don't know about you. I've never sat at a funeral and thought, "Best invention ever." No! Then all of a sudden, life then... You are the new that becomes the old to be cleared away for the new that becomes the old to be cleared away for the new that becomes the old in a meaningless cycle of being some sort of insignificant change agent.

We're hopeless without Jesus. Hopeless! Without Jesus' resurrection, the best we can do with death is put a positive spin on it that makes for a great commencement speech but won't sell at a funeral. We needed Jesus to fight the enemy we couldn't fight, to defeat the enemy we had no victory over. One of my favorite movies is the movie *Troy*. Please don't judge me. In an opening scene of the movie *Troy*, two armies gather on a battlefield. The commanders of these armies meet in the middle of the battlefield.

They say, "Instead of putting all of our soldiers to the test, instead of all of us gathering and fighting, you put forth your best warrior, we'll put forth our best warrior, and whoever wins that individual battle will determine the outcome for each respective army. But not just the outcome for each respective army but also for the people each respective army represents." The army produces this big dude and says, "This is our best warrior."

Then the Greeks produce Achilles, who is their best warrior. Achilles comes out on the battlefield and kills the guy in one move. Why? Because he is Brad Pitt. That's what he does. Then the battle is settled, and the victory for that army is applied to soldiers who never picked up their sword. The victory is applied to families and people who never stepped foot on the battlefield.

When Jesus goes toe-to-toe with death and wins, his victory is then applied to all who belong to him. That's what Paul means when he says in Adam or in Christ. If you are in Adam, it means the consequences of being in the fallen state, namely death, still apply to you. If you have not put your trust, your faith, in Jesus, repented of your sins, turned to him, you still belong to the other king in the other kingdom.

But if you trusted in Jesus, if you are in Christ, yes, we still deal with the consequences of a fallen state like sin and those things, but death is not our final destiny. Because if you're in Christ, you become a citizen in God's kingdom. To be a citizen in God's kingdom is to be a beneficiary of the battles won by the King, not to mention those are battles he won for us while we were still fighting for the other kingdom, battles our King won for us while we were still his enemy.

Who does that? Who fights for someone who has their back turned toward you? How free are we to obey him? How free are we to keep his commandments, not perfectly but faithfully? How free are we from the fear of death? How free are we to forgive? How free are we to live by the principles of the kingdom while we wait for the return of our king?

Then lastly, please know this. Please note that as a Christian, hope is defined by Jesus' resurrection and return. The definition of Christian hope is the empty tomb and the sky that is ready to burst with the return of our Lord. I played on a few sports teams in my life. Maybe some of you have as well. The sports season

has a certain rhythm to it. Pre-season and practice and regular season. Everyone is working toward post-season and ultimately a championship.

In that rhythm, imagine if somebody, in the middle of the season, walked into your locker room and addressed your team. They had a trophy in their hand. That trophy was the championship trophy that had that year's date on it. They gave it to your team, and it had your team's name on it. I don't know how they got it. They're from the future, or something crazy.

They come in to the middle of your locker room, and they say, "Look. Here's the proof that at the end of this season you accomplished what you set out to accomplish. Here's the proof that at the end of this season, you win." Would that not then affect the way you practiced? Would it not then affect the way you deal with injury, the way you deal with loss, the way you deal with division on the team?

Maybe you're going to do something crazy, and you're going to climb Everest or something like that. You're at the bottom of the mountain, the foothills of the mountain. You are looking up at just this incredibly intimidating journey. Somebody comes up to you, and they give you a picture. It's a picture of you in all your hiking gear. You're on top of the mountain. It's a sign that you're going to make it. Doesn't that affect the way you climb, the way you deal with the cold?

Maybe you're in a really troubled marriage, and you don't know how you're going to spend another day. All of a sudden, somebody shows you a video, and it's a video of your fiftieth wedding anniversary. Fifty years of promises kept! You know you have 50 years of promises kept. Does that not affect the way you fight? Does it not affect the way you do...or better yet *don't*...talk about divorce? In Jesus' resurrection, in the promise of his return we get that picture. We make it.

I don't know what's going on for you. I don't know how it's been for you, but we make it. If you're in Christ, it's going to end well for you. We have the ending of the story while we're still living in it. The ending of the story says he is going to save you. He is going to rescue you. Does that not then affect how we deal with a bad doctor's visit? Does that not then affect how we fight temptation? Does that not then affect how we deal with that troubled relationship and extend forgiveness when we don't think it makes sense?

Look. We're about to start a new year. I don't know what 2013 was like for you and I don't know what 2014 has in store for you, but my prayer for us is we would know and we would let this reality sink in that this next year will be lived in between the two climactic events of the Christian life: Jesus' resurrection and his return where the dead in Christ are raised.

Living in between those two events...one past, one future...has to shape our present and fill us with a love-motivated obedience, fill us with an unshakable hope in the claims of Christ, the work of Christ, and what we're waiting for Christ to do. That's my prayer. We can pray it in confidence because Christ has died, he has risen, and he is coming again. Let's pray.

Jesus, we love you. You owed us none of this. You owed us none of this! You didn't have to look at our backs turned toward you and fight the enemy that was trampling over us. You didn't have to do that, but you obeyed the Father to the point of death. Then you rose again in victory, Jesus. We worship you and you alone. We thank you for interceding on our behalf. We thank you.

I pray for the person in this room, the man or the woman who would say, "The worst year of my life was 2013, and if I had to live it again, I don't want to live." I pray they would find hope and that hope would not be some sort of ethereal, "Tomorrow will be a better day" kind of pep talk, but that hope would be firmly rooted in an empty tomb and a sky that is ready to burst apart with your return, King Jesus.

I pray for those who are losing so many battles against sin, that they would know you've won the greatest battle on our behalf. We are free to fight well that you've already won. We love you. We thank you for a new year. Thank you for the blessings you've extended to us. We owe you everything. I pray we would honor you in our lives and we would honor you in how we proclaim this leaving this place. It's in your name, amen.