Fear on the Roller Coaster

1 Corinthians 15

This week as I prepared for my sermon on 1 Corinthians 15 I kept having thoughts about Roller Coasters. If we took a poll today, I’m sure some of you would say that you love riding roller coasters while others of you could give me a list of reasons why you will never step foot on one.

I, myself, have mixed emotions with regard to roller coasters. I will share with you my thoughts while I am considering whether or not I will take the ride.

First off it costs money, usually more than I think it’s worth.

My second thought, which is probably more important than the first, is about the person who bolted the thing together and maintains it. In construction, I’ve heard my share of statements like, “That’s good enough.” Or “Can’t see it from my house.” Or “Good enough for the girls I go out with.” This single consideration is enough to convince me not to take the ride.

Third, you usually have to stand in a line to get on the thing. Every time I stand in line for a coaster I usually think of at least ten other things I would rather be doing.

But there is more…

Sometimes I feel sick to my stomach on the ride.

I have zero control of the ride.

There are plenty of exciting things in life, in which I have more control.

Did I mention the thought of the person who bolted the thing together?

And finally, you never really know, for sure if you are going to get off of the ride alive.

I do ride roller coasters, mainly because my wife and kids like to ride them. But if it was totally up to me, I’d skip it.

Unfortunately, life is a little bit like a roller coaster that you have to ride on. Our emotions, circumstances that are out of our control, and the ups and downs of life are inevitable.

So how can we feel safe in life? How can we overcome the fear that is unavoidably connected to life? And how can we enjoy the ups and survive the dips without screaming bloody murder?

The Gospel of Jesus is the only way. Let me shift from the roller coaster analogy.

Have you ever woke up in the morning and felt undesirable? Or useless? Or without purpose? Why is it that the day before you felt fine about yourself?

It is because our emotions, our experiences, and our circumstances can wreak havoc on our self-image. It also probably has something to do with the fact that, though most people survive roller coaster rides, no one gets out of this life without dying.

Which brings me back to asking, “How can we fully enjoy the ups and downs of life, knowing that the unexpected can happen at any minute?”

The Apostle Paul is going to answer the question for us in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus is the answer. As Paul gets ready to wrap up his first letter to the Corinthians he wants them to know where their hope and their security is found.

15 Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. 2 It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

3 I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. 5 He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. 6 After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. 9 For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I’m not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God’s church.

10 But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace. 11 So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed.

The Resurrection of the Dead

12 But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? 13 For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. 15 And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can’t be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. 16 And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. 18 In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! 19 And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

20 But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

21 So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. 22 Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. 23 But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

24 After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. 25 For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. 26 And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For the Scriptures say, “God has put all things under his authority.” (Of course, when it says “all things are under his authority,” that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) 28 Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under God’s authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.

29 If the dead will not be raised, what point is there in people being baptized for those who are dead? Why do it unless the dead will someday rise again?

30 And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour? 31 For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you. 32 And what value was there in fighting wild beasts—those people of Ephesus—if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, “Let’s feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!” 33 Don’t be fooled by those who say such things, for “bad company corrupts good character.” 34 Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame I say that some of you don’t know God at all.

35 But someone may ask, “How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?” 36 What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn’t grow into a plant unless it dies first. 37 And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. 38 Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed. 39 Similarly there are different kinds of flesh—one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

40 There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. 41 The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory.

42 It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. 43 Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. 44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

45 The Scriptures tell us, “The first man, Adam, became a living person.” But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. 46 What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. 47 Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. 48 Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. 49 Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.

50 What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.

51 But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! 52 It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. 53 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

54 Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

56 For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. 57 But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.

1 Corinthians 15:1-58 NLT

We are going to dig into this passage over the next few weeks. But before we leave here today I want to at least talk a little bit about the first four verses.

15 Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. 2 It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

3 I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4 He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 NLT

This is the message that will save you, this is the message that will bring you hope and joy in the midst of the ups and downs and fear and happiness.

Don’t believe anything else. Notice that Paul warns them that it is possible to believe something that was never true in the first place.

So don’t believe that you can be good enough to remove all the ups and downs.

Don’t believe that praying the sinners prayer, or getting baptized, or reading your Bible or going to church is going to save you.

Being good, doing what’s right and obeying God are all good things. But trusting in these things will lead to higher highs and lower lows.

We will talk about this more next week, but for now I will leave you with this.

Believe that Jesus died for your sins…and the sins of the world (in other words He has got you in the lows)

And believe that Jesus was resurrected to new life (So He is empowering you for the highs).

Life will never be without ups and downs. But knowing Jesus and trusting Him helps you to forget about the lazy mechanics who forgot to tighten the bolts and our evil adversary who wants our lives to run off the tracks.