

EASTER 1
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
LOGANVILLE, GA
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LIVING WITH A RESURRECTION PERSPECTIVE (1 Corinthians 15:12-22)

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

In attempting to come to right conclusions in life, perspective is not merely a passive lens through which we view the world; it is an active force that shapes our understanding and guides our actions. Consider, for instance, the concept of wealth. In a society like the United States, where material prosperity is widespread and often taken for granted, individuals might not perceive themselves as particularly wealthy compared to others. This self-perception is relative, though, as we are influenced by comparisons with those who possess larger and more luxurious homes, fancier cars, or take more extravagant vacations. However, if we were to transport ourselves to a third-world country, where the basic necessities of life are a daily struggle for many, our perspective would undergo a radical shift. Suddenly, the modest comforts and conveniences we enjoy would be viewed as signs of immense wealth and privilege.

I was reminded of this several years ago when I had the honor of hosting a pastor from Tanzania during his visit to the United States. As I drove to the airport to greet him, I arrived in a Ford Excursion, a sizable vehicle necessitated by the fact that my wife and I had been blessed with six children and were also caring for a niece at the time. The financial demands of raising a large family are considerable, particularly when it comes to providing nourishment for four growing boys and stylish clothes for three beautiful girls. Naturally, this places a strain on one's financial resources in which we actually lived pay check to pay check to provide and pay our bills.

However, to my guest from Africa, the sight of me behind the wheel of such a substantial vehicle sparked an assumption that I must be a person of significant wealth or status. In his homeland, only the most affluent or influential individuals would possess such a vehicle. It took some effort on my part to dispel this misconception and explain that, in reality, I am nothing more than a humble pastor, much like himself, blessed by God with a large family but also with a government that requires each occupant in a vehicle be seated and belted. Eventually, I managed to convey this truth by pointing out the irony that I, the supposed wealthy or important one, was the one driving him around, which, also from his culture's perspective, meant he was even more important or wealthy. This realization finally helped him grasp the reality of our equality. Yet, the whole experience also permitted me to have a bit of a different perspective.

This anecdote underscores the profound impact that perspective can have on our thinking leading to some often strange assumptions. Yet, just as our earthly circumstances can alter our view of wealth and privilege, so too can our spiritual perspective shape our understanding of deeper truths. When we enter this world, we do so with an influenced perspective on spiritual matters, a perspective marred by our broken relationship with our Creator. This distorted view leads us to embrace a variety of false assumptions—humanistic, atheistic, selfish, and self-righteous assumptions. However, the resurrection of Christ, which we celebrated just last Sunday, offers us a new and fresh perspective, one in which our relationship with our Creator is restored through His Son, Jesus Christ. This transformative event alters our perspective on spiritual matters, as we see in the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:

(ESV) Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? (13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. (14) And if Christ has not been raised,

then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. (15) 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. (16) For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. (17) And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. (19) If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (20) But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (21) For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. (22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

If you want to have a proper perspective of something, it is often necessary to rise up above it and see it from an elevated perspective. Years ago, the house my family and I were living in got hit by a hail storm. The hailstones in this particular storm weren't that large – only about the size of a quarter – two years later it was golf ball sized hail. Anyhow, the insurance inspector came to evaluate things and to give a report to the insurance adjuster. While he was looking over the property, he and I were talking. I said something along the lines of, “Well, it looks like the roof weathered the storm fairly well.” And it really did look that way, from the ground. There were no missing shingles and no obviously broken shingles. He kind of chuckled at me and said, “Well, let's go up and take a better look.” So we did. The first thing he pointed out to me was the amount of gravel from the shingles that was in the gutters. He said that's because the impact from the hailstones had dislodged all that gravel, and the rain carried the gravel into the gutter. Then he began pointing out some of the spots where the gravel was missing on the shingles, but it's what he did next that really changed my initial assessment. He pulled one of the shingles back to reveal that the shingle actually was broken. The impact of the hailstone caused the underside of the shingle to be punctured in a starburst pattern. A punctured shingle, of course, cannot do what it is supposed to

do, which is shed water. And there were hundreds and hundreds of punctured shingles making the roof a total loss. So that elevated perspective changed my evaluation. It was also the basis for the inspector's report and thus the adjuster's report as well.

So also, if we want to have a proper perspective of our lives we need to see our lives from the vantage point that God has. That's what the Bible offers us – a divine perspective, a heavenly perspective. We are all standing on ground level, so to speak, making all kinds of assumptions about what life is all about and even about our origins. We make assumptions about how we should treat people and how they should treat us. We make assumptions about our role in the universe as well as how we should treat the world in which we live. But when you think about it, isn't that kind of silly? I mean, we are so infinitesimally small compared to the vastness of earth, more so compared to our solar system, exponentially more so compared to the galaxy this solar system resides in, and mind-bogglingly more so compared to the universe our galaxy resides in.

We are all making assumptions about spiritual matters, but our assumptions are all based on our ground level perspective. Now direct your attention to other aspects of life that are also spiritual matters, such as tragedy, sickness, natural disasters, mass terror and man-made suffering, and don't forget to include death. Our ground level perspective on these matters – especially death – leads to assumptions that aren't just silly but are completely unreliable and wrong. Permit me to point out one specific human assumption about death – it seems so permanent! Indeed it does.

That was the assumption that the Apostle Paul addressed in the words I read from his letter to the Corinthians a few minutes ago. Listen again: *How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* Then he goes on to lay out the consequences of holding on to that assumption, the most significant one being that what Christians all around the world

celebrated last Sunday is a hoax and it never happened. That in turn makes the entire Christian faith – in every aspect, from preaching, outreach, worship, and godly living – nothing more than a hoax that should be discontinued.

To that conclusion, there are many people in the world who say, “Amen!” Like Karl Marx, they view religion – and perhaps especially Christianity – to be nothing more than a temporary pain relief to which we have become addicted in an attempt to make ourselves feel better about the painful and transient nature of life. In other words, “Yeah. Life sucks. So what? It’ll end soon enough. And just like you didn’t feel, think, or do anything before you came to life, you won’t feel, think, or do anything after your life ends. It just ends.”

That is the conclusion of those who stick with their ground level perspective of life. Even worse, many who hold on to this ground level perspective are all too happy to bring an end to the suckiness of life by making it even more sucky through war, terrorism, shooting sprees, legalized euthanasia and abortion, and doctor assisted suicide. They never stop to ponder that they are actively adding to the pain and misery of life, nor do they care to do so. They simply refuse to rise above this ground level perspective, choosing to remain in that base perspective that comes from living – and dying – in a broken relationship with the Creator.

It's important to keep in mind, though, that this is something we all struggle with – perhaps not on all the major aspects of life like war and natural disasters, but at least when it comes to our personal tragedies and our own impending death. Sometimes it just *feels* as though pain, suffering, hardship, and death have the upper hand and that we are just being bounced around through life until we leave it. The End!

That conclusion is understandable considering the perspective we all naturally have. We’re stuck down here on earth, with our

eyes, on average, about six feet above the surface, and our end about six feet under it. But the Bible... God's Word... allows us to get a different perspective – God's own perspective – from which it becomes clear that the brokenness of our lives and of our relationship with God have been restored by the good news of Christ's resurrection from death.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Doesn't that FACT change things? Paul says it does, and it really does when you compare it to the assumptions we make from our ground level perspective. If Christ is not risen – or if we continue to live and act and think as though He isn't – then we are still in our sins. What this means is that we could expect nothing but continued brokenness in our relationship with God. If you find yourself blaming God for all the suffering going on in the world, while at the same time rejecting Him as our Creator, can you not see the conflict in that perspective? Can you not perceive that such an approach automatically leads to a foolish assumption?

So, let's go back to a better perspective, a consistent perspective – one which is based in the reality of the situation in which we live and in the reality of what God brought about through Jesus Christ.

Through the resurrection of Jesus, God is showing Himself to you not just as a God of amazing power but also as a God of amazing grace. You not only have access to the Creator of the world, but also have peace with the One who invites you to call Him Father. You have a heavenly Father who has blotted out your sins from His memory and has written your name in the Book of Life.

This, in turn, gives you a new perspective on every event in this life. Being a child of God, you do not see random chance or random heartache. Instead, we find the plan of a God whose ways are higher than our ways, whose thoughts are higher than

our thoughts. We do not see the vengeful hand of an angry God, but the merciful hand of a compassionate Father who is working all things for our good. We do not see ourselves as being punished through our various afflictions in this life, but as being disciplined to bring us to full spiritual maturity. We see the grave without its sting. We see life as an opportunity to glorify our Redeemer. We see death as a doorway to heaven and to our Father in heaven.

With this resurrection perspective we also see the good that our God and Father is working for us in all things. That good is explained to us in the last few verses of our text: *“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”*

As the world continues to experience and witness all kinds of troubles and disasters—from famines to earthquakes to wars to diseases—the world scoffs at the Christians’ perspective: “If your God is so powerful and so loving, why does He permit such things?” They suppose they have, thereby, proven our view to be foolishness. Personally, in times of tribulation we ourselves may be tempted to revert to that old six feet off the ground perspective. We may question God’s love for us or wonder if He is getting back at us for some grievous sin in our lives. We may even want to blame God for the problem that is before us.

The truth of the matter, however, is that the resurrection perspective is not just the only perspective that can accurately explain the cause of such things, it also gives the only remedy for such trials and hardships. Far from being a reason to question God’s power and love – not to mention Christ’s resurrection – such things demonstrate His power and love for His children all the more. For though they are the direct result of sin, God uses them to produce in us perseverance, character, and hope, and through them to bring us safely out of brokenness to our eternal home in heaven, where perfection dwells.

The Christian has every reason to live this life in joy and peace. That doesn't mean that we walk around like a bunch of naïve children unaware of the dangers or hardships that exist to us or of the pain that afflicts others. What it does mean, however, is that the afflictions of this life do not our perspective of life. Christ's resurrection – His victory over death – does.

Christ is risen! Our sins are forgiven! Our God is gracious toward us and invites us into heaven through faith in His Son, who loved us and gave Himself for us and through His rising back to life overcame our great enemy, death, for us! What a beautiful new perspective – a resurrection perspective!

God grant us to see things so clearly in every circumstance of life, which means even in death. AMEN!