

Let me introduce myself. My name is Beau. And I don't know if you are aware but the Village Church is a church that operates on two campuses. So we have the Highland Village campus, and then we also have a campus in Denton. And my role here at the church is I lead the Denton campus. So I live in Denton, I think about Denton, I dream about Denton, I lead our staff up there, I sit down with our people up there, I suffer with them, I love our neighborhood up there, and that's what I do. So it's always a pleasure for me to come down here and to be with you. I'm telling you that I'm up in Denton for a couple of reasons. One of which is to bring greetings from Macedonia down here to Jerusalem. The men and women in Denton love you, we think about you, we pray for you often. And though we are one church on two campuses separated by about 25 miles, we very much feel united, very much feel in the loop with what's going on in your lives. And so we're so grateful for you. The second reason I tell you that's what I do is to brag a little bit about what the Lord is doing at our campus in Denton. It's such a unique opportunity that we have up there. For whatever reason, I'm beginning to think that the Lord had His glories and namesake in mind when He put us in the city's center. It's just such a weird town because it's kind of in the middle of nowhere so to speak, but there's a campus of 35,000 students and a campus of 15,000 students, and it's the 9<sup>th</sup> fastest growing city in the nation right now. And the Lord, in His sovereignty and His grace, decided to gift us a campus right in the center of it all. Literally we sit a block away from UNT and about a mile and a half away from TWU and about a half a mile from downtown Denton. So He has put us right in the middle of it all, and the men and women that God has called to be a part of that campus up there are doing a phenomenal job taking His name to the nations up there. So it's really neat to be able to watch them become sort of a city of God's people within the city of Denton. It's a really cool deal, but I just wanted to let you know about that. And then the third thing, each time Matt asks me to come down here and to share with you, which is maybe once a year, I take it very, very seriously. And it's not because Matt's just such a phenomenal communicator and to stand up here is nerve-racking for any man, but more so for me because of the influence that God has given our church. And to come up here and unpack the Scriptures for you is just a weighty deal. And I know Matt talked about that last week, but it really is. So I believe that the Holy Spirit has put on my heart and lead me to some Scriptures that, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, might just change our lives. So I'm hoping you feel that way as well, I'm hoping you're not just here because it's Father's Day and this is just what you do. And if you are, that's okay, but I'm praying that the Holy Spirit would speak to us.

And so 1 Corinthians 15, let's talk about it. There's a couple of things I want to let you know before we jump right in to it. Firstly, the church in Corinth is a church that Paul planted around the year 50A.D. And if you want to read about that, you can go read Acts 18. It talks about how Paul got there and the men and women with whom he planted the campus there in Corinth. It's just a really young, urban, hip town. It's in the middle of a port, so there's all kinds of different cultures. It's kind of a melting pot. And the church in Corinth is a very young church, and not just age wise but more so in maturity in the Lord wise. The gospel has only been around for about 15 years. Jesus died and was resurrected around 15 years prior to this. So the people whom Paul is writing to are very much like many of us at the Village, young Christians. So it's very applicable right off the bat. The second thing I want you to know is 1 Corinthians is one of Paul's longest letters that he wrote. It's 16 chapters (although He didn't write it in chapters). What becomes crucial as we look at this this morning is this is the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter in the letter. And you say, "Why is that important?" Well in an oral culture, when you're writing a long letter, you tend to put what's most important or what you really want to say and leave them with at the end. So what Paul's going to write and what we're going to read is very, very crucial in his mindset as he wrote this letter to this very young church because he put it at the end. In fact, it's the very last chapter that he puts before he just says, "Hey, see you later. I'm coming to see you soon. I miss you." This is what he wants to leave them with, this is the doctrinal thoughts and life application that he wants to leave them with. So as we read this, we should read it knowing and feeling

that the weight of what he's saying he leaves right here for us. And it's incredibly applicable to us this morning. So let's get into it, let's see what he wants them to remember, let's see what Paul thinks is crucial for this young, cool, hip, urban church that has a lot of men and women coming from all different backgrounds and socioeconomic status.

Let's read what he says, starting in 1 Corinthians 15:1. "*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel...*" Gospel means news. It's not even a religious term; it's a military word. When an army was victorious in battle, they would send a messenger that would take a gospel, the news of the victory back to the town. That's what he's saying. "We left you news, and I want to remind you of the victorious news that we left you about the Lord Jesus Christ" is what he's saying. "*...of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.*" Right off the bat, Paul tells us what he wants them to remember. He says, "I want you to remember the gospel. I want you to remember the news of Jesus Christ." And he's going to describe that here in a moment, but I don't want you to miss what he just said. Living in the Bible Belt, we tend to think of the gospel as the basic of Christianity. Like the gospel for Christians is Theology 101. And what Paul just said is, "No no no. I know there's a lot of things you're going to learn. a lot of things are going to happen, but you cannot forget the gospel. It's not just basic to your faith, it is central. It is the central news to your faith. It's not Christianity 101, it's Christianity 101, Christianity 201, Christianity 301 and Christianity 401. It doesn't get past this." He says, "The gospel is what you received, what you should stand in and what you are going to be saved by. So in other words, you don't ever move past this. Don't forget this, don't drift away from this and don't ever think you are too mature to understand and to continue to look into the gospel." So if you've developed that mindset of, "Okay, I got it. I got the story. I got the news. Really? You're going to tell me the gospel again?" Absolutely we are. That's why if you listen, Matt says the gospel every week. Because we never move past it. Sure you can talk about predestination and free will or spiritual gifts and this and that, but the gospel is the filter by which the Christian sees life. We never move past it. It's not normative and basic, it is crucial, it's central. And he's reminding them of this. He just got through talking about spiritual gifts in chapter 14, and now he's going, "But here's what I want to leave you with. The gospel. Do not forget and move away from the gospel, which I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand and by which you're going to be received if you hold fast to it." So in other words, if you drift away from the gospel, it's not going to go real well for you. I want you to hear pastor Paul's weight behind this. He just introduced this last thought with a lot of weight. So let's continue with him. Verse 3, "*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins...*" So now he's getting into, "Here's what I want to specifically tell you. Here's the gospel..." He's telling us the news that they received, that Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, the Anointed One of God, who was born of a virgin, who was fully man and fully God and walked on earth, inaugurated the kingdom of God, the reign of God, Christ, that He died. He really died. And I know you go, "Yeah, we know that." Listen, some men and women want to write books and tell you that He didn't really die. And Paul's going, "Remember, He died. And He died for our sins to absorb the wrath of God for us. It wasn't just some random Galilean peasant who just decided to be a cool martyr. Jesus died for our sins, in our place, imputed to us the righteousness that He earned that we don't deserve. He died for our sins." Paul says this is the first part of the gospel, that He died for our sins "*in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried...*" Why does he put that in there? It's an important part of the gospel, that Christ was really buried. Because you don't bury people that aren't really dead. So there were people coming to the Corinth church saying, "Listen, Jesus didn't really die. They just kind of faked it and he just sailed away over to Europe. And then the *Da Vinci Code* was written and all that stuff. That's what's happening here." So Paul's saying, "No no no. He really died and He was really buried. You don't bury people that aren't dead." He really died, He was really buried and "*he was raised on the third day...*" And again, if you can think of something

that's more intellectually challenging for you to believe than the fact that God came in the flesh, lived a perfect life, was fully man, fully God, that He was crucified because He was nice to everybody and loved them and told them the truth and that He raised from the dead, if that's just basic for you, I pity you. Because he's saying this is it. He says, "*he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*" For a history guy like me, this is an amazing statement. Jesus appeared to 500 people. This is 15-20 years after Jesus Christ walked the face of the earth, was crucified and resurrected, and Paul is saying, "By the way, in case you're tempted to doubt that this really happened, there's about 500 people, most of whom are still alive, who actually saw Him. If you need a first hand account, go back and talk to them." For those of you who are kind of skeptical, this faith of ours is not just something that we made up. It's not something that a bunch of men in the 5<sup>th</sup> century had a council and got up in a room and said, "Jesus Christ died." This is the earliest evidence that we have in account that the resurrection of Jesus Christ happened, that everything about the gospel is true. He just said, "Go ask the eyewitnesses. There's 500 of them. 500 people saw Jesus Christ. This is the gospel." And he's just moving through it. He says, "*Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*" This is just biographical on Paul. The image that he just conjured up is a baby untimely born, a baby being ripped from his mother's womb before it was time for him to be born. He said that was what his salvation experience was like. He wasn't looking for Jesus, wasn't thinking about Jesus, and God, in His mercy through Jesus appearing to him, ripped open the eyes of his heart. He wasn't ready. He didn't care. He said, "As one untimely born, it wasn't just 500 people who saw Him, I saw Him. I saw Him when I wasn't looking for Him. I literally, physically saw Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. I saw Him, and He changed my life." He's putting the weight on "This is our faith. This is what's real. This is what we stand in." Then he finishes. "*For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*" He's essentially saying, "Listen, all these people saw Him, but that doesn't really matter. What I want you to get is what you have believed in is the gospel. What you have been saved by and will be saved by is the gospel. So do drift away from that." That's what he's saying. "Don't drift away from the news of Jesus Christ, the story of Jesus Christ, the manger and the incarnation, the cross and the redemption there and the resurrection." So he opens it up saying, "This is the gospel. This is what I want you to remember. This is why I'm putting it last in the letter. This is what you as a young church are going to be tempted to move away from. You're going to start having conversations about this and getting too smart for this and thinking this and you're going to be tempted by this teacher..." And he's saying, "Stay in the gospel."

And the he's going to move not just into the gospel, but he's going move into a particular aspect of the gospel: the resurrection. So he's going to say, "This is the whole gospel, but this is the aspect of the gospel that's being threatened in your church." And what was happening in the Corinthian church was men and women were coming in and they were influenced by Greek thought. And here's what the Greeks believed about resurrection. The Greeks believed that the spirit, the soul was good and the physical body was bad. So even if you read some of the Greek philosophers, this is why they thought the highest good was to be thinking all the time. This is why slavery really got started to gain some momentum. Because if they could not work with their body, because that was bad, then they could spend their time in the spirit, in the soul thinking and that was good. So they developed slaves to do what they didn't want to do because they believed the body was bad. So these men and women are

coming into the church and saying, “Hey, Jesus Christ didn’t physically rise from the dead. It was just a spiritual resurrection. He didn’t really resurrect in his body. It wasn’t a literal physical resurrection. It was a spiritual resurrection.” So they’re saying, “When you die, you’re going to go to heaven and it doesn’t have anything to do with the physical world. Heaven is just about spiritual stuff. So the gospel isn’t really about the physical at all. It’s just about the spiritual. So if you get your spiritual life right, the physical doesn’t matter. The resurrection is going to be all spiritual. Forget those verses that Paul’s going to talk about later in this chapter when Jesus comes back and resurrects the dead and their bodies meet their souls and the new heaven and new earth are physical and literal.” It’s not just some ethereal, spiritual afterlife that we live in for eternity, it’s literal, physical. But this is what he’s about to attack. So he’s talked about the gospel, and then these Greeks are coming in and attacking the doctrine of the resurrection, the doctrine of the physical, literal resurrection of Jesus. And you may be going, “Well, what does that matter?” Well, if you believe that this whole thing is just about getting your soul right before God and it has no outworking in the physical arena, why did we do Transform this weekend? Why would we paint if that’s menial and even outright evil, it’s worthless? If you’re going, “Let’s get our souls right, get our minds right before God and we’ll go to heaven and be with God spiritually. It’s not about my body, it’s about what I do with my soul,” I’d say to you yes it is. It absolutely is, but the resurrection also says it’s about your body and the new heaven and the new earth are going to be physical like Jesus being glorified and eating fish after He resurrected, proving that the new heaven and the new earth are going to be physical, literal reality for us. Paul is saying, “This is really important. Because if you don’t get this, this is what you’re going to wind up being. You’re going to be a church that cares nothing about today and everything about how it’s going to be in heaven one day.” And this is a big deal for Paul. It’s so big in fact that I want you to listen to the language that he’s going to use in these next few verses. He’s going to use the word “if” six times, and what he’s going to try to do now is paint such a glorious picture of the literal, physical resurrection of Jesus and correct their doctrine, not just so they’ll have the right doctrine, but hopefully it will cause them to live their lives in a certain way that they wouldn’t live otherwise. And so he’s going to paint this doctrine for them, and he’s going to use some really strong language in the hopes that the Holy Spirit uses it to convict their heart so that they go and live differently. It’s just amazing, and I think he wants to say some of the same things to us this morning. Here’s what he says starting in verse 12, “*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*” There’s the argument. He’s going, “Listen, I’m hearing what’s going on, that the people are saying there is no resurrection from the dead. But if Christ is raised from the dead, how can you say that? 500 people saw Him, I saw Him, Peter Him. Everyone saw Him physically. James saw Him. Thomas touched His wounds because he didn’t believe it. He thought He was a ghost.

And so if you’re saying this, then what do we do with Jesus?” Verse 13, “*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.*” And that is a massive statement for Paul to make. And Paul’s not just of guy that says stuff just to get a little shock value out of it. Paul just said, “It’s not just a mistake to say that Jesus didn’t physically resurrect from the dead, it makes your whole faith empty and pointless. And it makes my preaching and my work empty and pointless if it didn’t happen.” So if Christ is not raised from the dead he says, “*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.*” In the Old Testament the worst thing that you can do as a person of God, as a prophet of God, as a preacher of God, is to misrepresent Him, to lie about him. So Paul is saying, “Not only is our faith in vain, our preaching in vain, but I’m misrepresenting God to you. I’ve not told you the truth, and that’s damnable. That’s not good news for me, because God has stricter judgment on the teachers. So listen, this is not just something that’s a big deal for you, this is a big deal for me because I’m a teacher. And if I’m teaching you that this happened and it didn’t happen, we’ve got a big mess

on our hands here. Your church is not going to function correctly. It is crucial that we understand this.” And then verse 16, *“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.”* Do you hear the language he’s putting on this, the weight he’s hanging on the resurrection? And let me read John Calvin, because I think he says it a lot better than I can. This is what Calvin says about these verses. “But in the death of Christ, considered in itself, there is seen nothing but ground of despair, for he cannot be the author of salvation to others, who has been altogether vanquished by death.” So if He can’t conquer death and He can just go to a cross and die, how’s He going to help me? There’s nothing important in Him just dying, that in and of itself. Some more by Calvin, “For although Christ by his death atoned for our sins, that they might no more be imputed to us in the judgment of God, and has crucified our old man, that its lusts might no longer reign in us, and, in fine, has by death destroyed the power of death, and the devil himself, yet there would have been none of all these things, if he had not, by rising again, come off victorious. **Hence, if the resurrection is overthrown, the dominion of sin is set up anew.**” In other words, a dead Messiah is no Messiah at all. And if you take away the resurrection, if you don’t believe in the resurrection, you’re still in your sins because Jesus’ death didn’t accomplish anything, it was just some Galilean dying on a cross. Do you get how crucial Paul is saying the resurrection is? Because here’s what it proves. The root of death is sin, and Jesus rising from the dead proves that He has conquered sin. The resurrection validates the cross and says sin has been overthrown because death has been overthrown. The way we know that Jesus conquered sin is because He conquered death. And if He’s conquered death, it’s glorious, but if He didn’t physically and literally rise from the dead, you and I are still in our sins and what in the world are we singing about? This is incredibly important to Paul.

And listen to how he finishes, and this is where I want to camp out for the remaining time that we have together. He says, *“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.”* He’s talking about “we,” not just him, but you and me. We are of all men and women most to be pitied. Before I came back to Texas, I moved to Portland, Oregon to be a youth pastor for five years, I remember having a conversation with one of my pastor friends at Portland. I was Carol’s Corner Cafe, the No. 1 breakfast place in Portland. So we were sitting here having this hearty breakfast and having this phenomenal conversation, talking to each other, encouraging each other. And sometimes as a pastor, you have some really dark seasons, so you kind of get together to encourage each other in those low seasons, those valleys. But sometimes it just seems like God’s doing unbelievable things by His Spirit in the church and you get together and it’s just such an encouraging meal, and you leave inspired. So it was one of those kind of meetings. I was talking with this man, we were just talking about what the Lord was doing, how it seemed like the Holy Spirit was just causing things to work in these people’s lives. And we were leaving when he said something to me I’ll never forget, because it struck me kind of awkwardly. He said, “Even if this wasn’t true, even if the gospel wasn’t true, I think I would still live my life this way, because it works.” And what I think he was trying to say was God has designed the universe in a certain way, and if you live in the way that God’s designed it, it seems logical that it will go better for you. He was kind of talking about the doctrine of common grace, but he said “it works.” Really? There was a man, a Romanian pastor who got caught when the Communist came through Romania and was put in red prisons for fourteen years. For the last three years, he was in solitary confinement. This man never saw the sun, didn’t see the stars, didn’t smell the flowers. He was in a cell where the only people he saw were his torturers and the guards for three whole years. And finally after fifteen years, he was bailed out by his friends in Norway for \$10,000. In one of his books, he tells this story that he got out of jail and remembers watching this interview on Italian television. The interviewer was interviewing a Cistercian Abbot, and the interviewer was just fascinated with the way the abbot had lived his life in

silence and solitude and service. So the interviewer said, "What if you get to the end of it and atheism is true? What if you get to the end and the gospel is not true and your God's not real? How would you feel about that?" The abbot said this, "Service, silence and solitude in and of itself is virtuous. And even if it's not true, I would have lived my life well." That sounds so chivalrous, doesn't it? There's something in me when I hear that that goes, "That's courageous. That's a courageous, bold statement. I mean, if I was on TV, I hope I'd be that smooth and courageous." But it seems like the apostle Paul just completely disagreed with the abbot. He said the exact opposite. He said, "If this isn't true, I am of all men most to be pitied. And if I get to the end of my life and I find out that Christianity's not true, I will have completely wasted my life." So I think the question you and I need to be asking ourselves is: why would he say that? Because the abbot's answer sounds so good and probably resonates with more of us. That would probably be our answer if we were interviewed. But Paul's answer was, "What would I do if I found out it wasn't true? I would ask you to pity me and to feel sorry for me, because I've wasted my life." What did Paul know? What did Paul understand about the resurrection that we don't that would cause him to say this?

Let's continue to read. Verse 20, "*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.*" Death has been overthrown in the resurrection of Jesus. "*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. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*" I really wish I could spend time to explain all that, but what I want to get back to is Paul's train of thought here of why he would say that if this isn't true he's of all men most to be pitied. Why would he say that? He picks it back up in verse 29. "*Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?*" I was going to skip this because it's one of the weirdest Scriptures in the entire Bible, but I thought it would be fun to talk about it. What he seems to be saying here really is one of two things. Either there's certain men and women who are on their death bed and they haven't been baptized and their fellow Christians are wanting to go be baptized on their behalf. That's what some people think he's saying. A second circumstance he could be describing is that there were Christians that died before they were baptized and people were getting baptized on their behalf. What he's not saying is that if your grandma died and she was a Christian and was never baptized, you need to get baptized for her. He's not proscribing baptism of the dead, but what he is saying here is simply, "Listen, your practice and your theology aren't matching up. If Jesus didn't raise from the dead, why are you getting baptized? Why are you doing a physical symbol for the physical body? If it doesn't matter, why are you doing that? If you're saying this but you're doing this, it doesn't make sense."

Let's keep going. Verse 30, "[If Christ didn't resurrect from the dead] *Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!*" Paul is saying, "I'm of all men most to be pitied because if Jesus Christ wasn't really resurrected, I sure am getting the mess beat out of me physically through persecution for no reason." And in Paul's time, this was a real sentiment that if you were a Christian, you would get the mess beat out of you. There was a good chance that you were going to be persecuted. And Paul's saying, "If this didn't happen and I have been persecuted as much as I have been persecuted, you tell me if I'm not a fool. What kind of man gets persecuted for something that's untrue?" My wife and I just went to Rome a couple of week

ago. We actually got to go into the dungeon that Paul and Peter were in right before they were executed. And I walked this thing, and the only way you can get in is they would lower the prisoners down through the roof. And at that moment as I'm in that room, ducking my head, I can just smell the fears of 2000 years in that room. It was just unbelievable. I was sitting in that moment going, "If this wasn't real, Paul really is of all men most to be pitied. Because he sat in this room for days and weeks and months waiting to have his head chopped off. And Peter sat in this room for days and months and years waiting to be crucified upside down. If this isn't true, these men have the saddest biographies in the history of the world. They absolutely wasted their lives." And that's what he's saying. "One of the reasons I'm of all people most to be pitied," Paul says, "is I am suffering, I am choosing to suffer for my belief in the resurrection. And if it didn't happen, I'm an idiot."

And so I know most of you are going, "Well that's great, Hughes. I live in Highland Village...I live in Plano...I live in downtown Dallas, the belt buckle of Evangelicalism, not quite the center of persecution of the Christian faith." True. Two things though. First of all, it might not always be that way. And there may be a day where America's not the center of the world and Christianity is not the center of America or the center of the Evangelical belt buckle down here. Secondly, it really doesn't matter whether you choose to suffer, because suffering is going to choose you sooner or later. Cancer will come...maybe not to you but someone you love, someone you care about. Marital strife will come. I learned that this year. Disobedient children will come. Car accidents will happen. And listen, if you're in that place right now, if you're in that cavern, have hope. Suffering will choose you. How are you going to respond? Are you going to base your hope in the resurrection or are you going to quit on Jesus when it comes? A couple of weeks ago a young lady dropped a prayer card into one of these black boxes on the way out, and it just said, "Hey, will you pray for me?" It was real ambiguous. Donna Burke, who is one of our most faithful women up in the Denton campus, takes the cards each week and calls the people. So she took this card and she called this young lady. And she came to find out that this young lady was born with her insides not working. They had to do surgery on her when she was an infant and pieced it back together. She grew up and it was really hard because obviously her internal organs didn't function correctly but they were functional. She had to take some medications and do some other things, but around the age of eighteen, her insides began to shut down on her. Eventually they had to remove her stomach because the organs in her body began to fight against her body. And she is on all sorts of medication and all sorts of stuff. She hasn't eaten in four years. Once a week she drives down to Dallas at midnight so she can be fed through the pores of her skin, that's her daily bread. So she dropped this card off, not wanting to draw any attention to herself, but Donna took her to lunch and found this all out. And what's began to happen is she's taken so much medication that she's began to develop brain tumors. She's 22 years old, about to graduate. And Sunday she came into the church and brought the Village Church a little cross that she made. She makes crosses by hand. The crosses are made out of broken pottery. And on her little card that she gave to me our family traits were on the back and on the card it says, "Sometimes our life is shattered into a million pieces, but thankfully God is always there to pick us back up and put us together." It's one of the cards that we're so cool here at the Village that we would make fun of if we read it. For this little girl, you can't tell me that she's not suffering in a way that if the resurrection's not true, she is of all people most to be pitied. And even last night as I preached she had internal seizures that she had to go out into the yard. I talked to her on the way in this morning, and she's sitting in the service right now. She's sitting in the service and every service that she goes to, she has to inject herself five times just so she can make it through the service. She's sitting in service, and she's going to greet after the service. I said, "I don't know if this is any consolation to you, but your story is encouraging our church this weekend." She said, "It's worth it then. Internal seizures are worth it. Not having a stomach and not eating is worth it. Not being able to take communion with my church every week is worth it, because one day I know my body is going to be resurrected and I'll sit at the table and I'll have good

wine and I'll have good food and I'll sit with good friends and we'll celebrate that this was just a vapor. It's worth it." And so I want to ask you – is it worth it? Whatever you go through, when suffering chooses you, is it going to be worth it? Because I tell you, if you spend some time with this friend of mine, she will shame you. Most of us will never have to prove it like her. So that's the first thing that Paul says. "Suffering makes my life pitiable because I'm doing it with such hope. And if this hope is not based on something more than a figment of our imagination, I'm an idiot. I'm foolish and pitiable." That's the first thing he says.

And I know that most of what I just said doesn't relate to most of us because we're not in that place, because everything's okay right now or at least it seems like it's okay. So most of us are in that place, but I think the second thing that Paul's going to say here is going to be very applicable for most of us. "*Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*" So not only is he choosing to suffer by choosing persecution, but what he just says is, "I'm choosing to believe that the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ and the life to come in Him are better than the trivial pleasures that I could have today. And because I do believe that, I'm choosing not to have these pleasures. And it's not because they're bad, but because I can waste my life pursuing the good instead of the best." And let me just tell you, I think the greatest enemy for most of us in our faith is not going to be the bad, but it's going to be the good. The greatest enemy to the best is not the bad, it's the good. And Paul just said, "I'm sacrificing the good for the best, not because I have to, not because it's sinful, not because if I don't I'm going to go to hell, but because in doing so I get more of Jesus. And I'm pitiable to do that if it's not true. Because if Jesus hasn't resurrected, we should all eat, drink, spend our money, go do this, go do that, let's go waste our lives on the iPhone." And Paul's saying, "The iPhone is not bad, but I am willingly choosing to not take part in those things, not because they're sinful, but because they will distract me from Jesus and from valuing the best. They will rob my passion for the best. So I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to take part in that. I'm going to choose to do this, I'm going to choose to sacrifice here. Because I know one day it's all going to be mine anyway. So I can wait for that. And if this isn't true, I'm an idiot for waiting for it. But it's true, so I'm waiting for it. So the question that's been haunting me all week long is this: if you were interviewed, could we say we were living our lives with such faith in the doctrine of the resurrection, do we have such a beautiful picture of the doctrine of resurrection that it's causing us to suffer well and to give up things that we wouldn't ordinarily give up? If you were interviewed and were asked what if it's not true, would you be able to say, "If it's not true, I am of all men and women most to be pitied, because I have wasted my life as if it were true?" Is your life pitiable?

Let's pray. "Father, I love you. We love you. We know we don't love You near as much as we want to or that we need to, but we do believe the gospel. We believe it with our heads and sometimes we believe it with our hearts. And that's why we go to Transform, that's why we love our neighbors and that's why we do what we do. So I don't want us to leave defeated, but at the same time I don't know that we could say with the apostle Paul that we are of all men and women most to be pitied if it's not true. So would You help us to take a step closer today to being able to see that? And so for encouragement, we look not just to the apostle Paul, but we look to Jesus Christ Himself, who modeled this better than anyone, that though He was God in the flesh, He set aside His privileges and He came in the form of a human being to be among sinful, broken man. And He humbled Himself even to death because He believed His own story, He believed in His own glory. So we thank You for Jesus. We leave looking to Him, coming to Him, repenting to Him. Change us, I pray. In Jesus we pray. Amen."