



Easter Sunday
April 5, 2026
1 Corinthians 15:1-11

I Am What I Am

Pastor Waterstradt had the privilege of saying it earlier, but can you let me have the privilege now? “He is risen!” *He is risen indeed.* Thank you. What a privilege to worship our risen Lord with you today!

You know, sometimes you just have to call “a spade a spade.” At your Easter gathering today, the nephews may get a little rambunctious, but don’t worry, “boys will be boys.” Tomorrow night, it may look ugly, but the college basketball champions won’t care. A win is a win. Likewise, if it works it works. What’s done is done. Facts are facts. A promise is a promise. A man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do. And a rose is a rose is a rose. Grammarians call such phrases where you define a term by repeating the term a tautophrase. *Tauto* means “the same.” I often feel sorry for people who are learning the English language. There are so many idiosyncrasies that make the language difficult. But tautophrases aren’t limited to English. Seventy years ago, Doris Day sang, *Que Sera, Sera* (“What will be, will be.”) And almost 2000 years ago, the apostle Paul wrote *eimi o eimi*, i.e., I am what I am.

And maybe that’s why you’re here today. You received a postcard that said, “Who am I?” Identity is a buzzword today and it has so many layers to it. Personal identity: traits, hobbies, values. Social identity: ethnicity, race, gender. Role identity: parent, employee, student, etc. If you’re struggling in one of those areas, I’m so glad you’re here. But even if you don’t think you’re struggling with your identity, I want to assure you today, and God wants us to cherish that we have an identity that’s even bigger than all those sub-identities. And that’s what the apostle Paul gets into as a matter of first importance in the opening verses of the great resurrection chapter. *Read 1 Corinthians 15.*

Did you catch it? What ultimately gave Paul his identity? Elsewhere in Scripture, he appeals to what I’ll call his subidentities. Sometimes he’ll reference his ethnicity – he was the Hebrew of Hebrews. Other times he’ll lean into his rights as a Roman citizen. We’ll hear about his academic background, just like you might tout, “I’m an alum of such-n-such university.” He’ll appeal to his role as an apostle. But when Paul concludes, “I am what I am,” what defines him more than anything else, is the resurrection of Jesus.

It’s noteworthy to note -- maybe that’s another tautophrase – but it’s noteworthy to note the detail Paul goes into to prove the validity of the resurrection. Which makes sense. If your whole identity is contingent on something, you want to make sure that something is real. So what does Paul do? He lists eyewitness after eyewitness after eyewitness of the risen Lord. “*He appeared to Cephas... then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 people at the same time. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, he appeared to me also.*” By listing all these credible witnesses, Paul lays out without a doubt the reality of the resurrection. Basically he says, the resurrection of Jesus, is well, it is what it is. No arguments.

And that’s an important point for us. You may be here just because you’re curious. What is Easter? Is it real? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Will I really rise from the dead? Is it just something spiritual and not physical? But even if you don’t question the reality of the resurrection, be aware of Satan’s schemes. The Corinthians, the recipients of this letter, were Christians. New Christians like many of us. So Satan planted this seed of doubt about the resurrection because he knew if he gets people to reject the resurrection, their faith is empty. Which is why Paul spends 58 verses – the longest chapter in all of Paul’s letters --- on the reality and result of the resurrection.

Satan is still up to his same tricks today. I don’t know if it’s because AI makes it so difficult to decipher what’s real and what’s computer-generated or if it’s just a generic skepticism of absolute truth, but belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is declining, at least in our part of the world. According to one study, only 58% of those ages 18-34 accept it as fact. Brothers and sisters, look at the eyewitnesses. This isn’t the telephone game of people saying, “I heard from so-and-so who heard from so-and-so.” First Corinthians is one of Paul’s earliest letters, written within 20 years of Jesus walking this earth. To have this much evidence, assures this is something you and I can depend on. And if for some reason you don’t trust Paul’s list of eyewitnesses, then look what else he points to. It’s not just eyewitnesses who substantiate the resurrection. All of Scriptures do. “Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures.*” This is what the Bible is all about. Christ crucified. And Christ risen.

Why is that the heart and core? Why is that a matter of first importance for you to know today? First of all, because it's this truth that makes an eternal difference for you. Did you notice the various words Paul uses for death? When talking about Jesus, he writes, "Christ *died* for our sins." That fits with all of Scriptures. Go back to Genesis 2. When God planted the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, he told Adam and Eve, "You must not eat from it. For when you eat from it you will certainly die." Or look at the laws that God established for his Old Testament people. How did he remind them of the seriousness of their sin? He had them sacrifice animals. Sin needs to be paid for with blood. You sin, something dies. Or look at what God says in the New Testament: the wages of sin is death. Christ *died* for our sins because that is the price that our holy God demanded. And that is the price that Christ paid on the cross. He died. But what happens when we breathe our last? We often use the word, "die," but because of Christ's resurrection, our death is different. And you see that in the way Paul talks about some of those 500 witnesses, "most of whom are still living, though some have *fallen asleep*." Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, our death is no longer death. As Paul says later in this chapter, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." It's no longer a separation from God. It's no longer an eternal separation of body and soul. Rather, because Jesus rose from the dead, you too, will rise from your grave. Because Jesus rose, you will only sleep. Ultimately, that is the greatest gift and result of Christ's resurrection. Because he lives, you also will live.

But if we only see Easter as having future ramifications, we miss out on half of its benefits. Easter not only means we live forever, Easter changes how we live here. Look at Paul. "*I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*" But when the risen Lord called him to be an apostle, "*he worked harder than all of them.*" And maybe you're thinking, 'I don't see that in my life or other Christians.' Our actions don't always reflect our faith. There are times that we fail to live brightly as children of the resurrection. For that we stand before the cross and confess our sins, knowing that Christ died for them. But why are you here today? Why are you singing praises before your neighbor rises out of bed? Why did you joyfully shout, "He is risen indeed!" when greeted earlier? Why do you face sickness and disease knowing that your time is in the Lord's hands? Why do you remember loved ones today with the certain hope of seeing them again? Why do you fall asleep at night with a prayer on your lips instead of being plagued by guilt in your heart? I'm not trying to give you a big head as if you're some kind of "Super Christian." But sometimes we become so accustomed to the blessings of faith that we don't even see them in our own lives. Do yourself a favor. Thank God that the power of the resurrection has had an effect on you. Thank God for the gospel you received and on which you have now taken you stand.

That's easier said than done. For those of you who worshiped with us last week, I mentioned that people may know what we do, but they don't necessarily know who we are. We fall for that, too, when we look at ourselves. We see how many times we do or don't lean on God's promises. We see how many times we do or don't live according to God's will. There's a place for that. That's why we confess our sins. But it can also be dangerous. Before we look at what we do or don't do, with Paul, might we first see who we are. See how the resurrection doesn't just change our actions. It changes our identity. The reason Paul could work harder and see the effects of the resurrection play out, was because God had given that comfort of knowing "by the grace of God, I am what I am." The resurrection changes our eternity, what we do, and who we are.

John Newton understood that. With eyes growing dim, he invited his friend over for breakfast every morning. In return, his friend would read the Bible to him. When the friend read these words from 1 Corinthians, it's reported that Newton sat silent for several minutes, then said, "I am not what I ought to be.... I am not what I wish to be... I am not what I hope to be.... Though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor yet what I hope to be, I can truly say I am not what I once was: a slave to sin and Satan. I can heartily join with the apostle and acknowledge that by the grace of God I am what I am!" And then he went on to pen, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

I am what I am. You may not remember that as a tautophrase. But because of the resurrection, you are no longer a tautoperson. Because Jesus lives, you are not the same. Easter changes your eternal future. It changes what you do. And it changes who you are. Because Jesus is who he is and because he did what he did, by God's grace each of us can confidently say, "I am what I am." Amen.

EYEDROP DEVOTION

Eyedrop Devotions are available every Saturday evening for subscribers.

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

What makes you, you? We can easily be defined by our jobs, our age, our relationships, etc. But there is no greater defining moment in history that defines us than what we get to celebrate tomorrow. The empty grave alters our eternity, as we can "fall asleep" in him, and not simply die. The risen Christ changes what we do, as we no longer live for ourselves but for him. Finally, Easter changes who we are. Come to the Light of the Valleys tomorrow @ 9:30AM to celebrate that by the grace of God, I am what I am.