

The Greatest Comeback in the History of Ever
1 Corinthians 15:1-14

I. Introduction

A. Connection Question

1. Have you ever faced miserable personal failure and made a dramatic comeback?
2. Lincoln Illustration

Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the United States and author of both the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address didn't arrive in the White House in 1861 on a bed of roses.

Born in 1809, Lincoln failed numerous times before attaining the highest office in the land. His long series of failure began in 1832 when, at the age of 23, he lost his first job. He also, that year, lost his bid for Illinois State Legislature. Three years later, Ann Rutledge, the love of Lincoln's life, died. Three years after that, at the age of 29, his effort to become Speaker in the Illinois House of Representatives failed.

Ten years later, in 1848, at the age of 39, Lincoln sought to become Commissioner of the General Land Office in Washington, D.C. He failed. Ten years after that, at age 49, he was defeated in his campaign to become a U.S. Senator.

Not until 1861, at the age of 52, did Lincoln make his great comeback when he secured the office of President of the United States.

B. "Comeback" Definition

1. Definition - A "comeback"
 - a. is a return from failure to success.
 - b. It is a dramatic recovery of good fortune after disaster,
 - c. a satisfying rebound after a miserable defeat.
2. Sanders Illustration

Harland Sanders was born in Indiana eighty years after Lincoln was born in Illinois. His father died when he was 5-years old, leaving only his mother to fend for and support three children, including Harland.

In order to support her children, Harland's mother left for days on end. Her absence forced the young boy to help take care of his siblings. He became a proficient cook during this time, learning how to make bread and vegetables and advancing in his knowledge of cooking and preparing meat by the age of just 7-years old. By 10-years old, he was already working as a farmhand.

Life, however, continued to throw curve balls at Harland. In 1902, at the age of 12-years old, his mother remarried. At age 13 Harland left home. By 14-years old, he began working as a

farmhand at another farm in Southern Indiana.

Over the course of years Harland moved from job to job. He owned a ferry boat company on the Ohio River, sold tires in Winchester Kentucky, and later, in 1930, opened a restaurant inside a Shell gas station in Corbin, Kentucky where he began serving chicken dishes. He was 40-years old at the time.

In July 1939, he came to own a motel and a restaurant, which was destroyed by a fire just 4 months later. A year later he began to finalize what would one day be called his “secret” 11 herbs and spices chicken recipe. He was 50-years old by now. But during WWII, he sold his business and subsequently got divorced in 1947.

In 1955, he tried the restaurant business again, but that restaurant failed after an Interstate that led traffic past his front door, was rerouted. He was 65 years old. He had just a \$105 social security check to his name. At retirement age and almost penniless, he set out to sell his franchised-chicken model to restaurants across the country. 1,009 restaurants rejected his proposal before Harland Sanders made his comeback and Kentucky Friend Chicken was born.

C. The Greatest Comeback in the History of Ever

1. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8
 - a. We all love a good comeback story.
 - 1) We love to hear of failure leading to success, of hard work finally paying off, of grueling effort reversing debilitating defeat.
 - 2) In fact, when the apostle Paul recounts for believers in Corinth the most important truth they will ever know, he recounts the story of the greatest comeback in the history of ever! Listen again to the words of the apostle:
 - b. **1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV)** ³ *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,* ⁴ *that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,* ⁵ *and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.* ⁶ *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.* ⁷ *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.* ⁸ *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*
2. **The account of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the record of the greatest comeback in the history of ever!**
 - a. Jesus came into the world, God in human form.
 - 1) You would think there would be pomp and circumstance at His birth, but there was only poverty and persecution, a humble manger and a murderous king.
 - 2) You would think the arrival of the Son of God would be greeted with shouts of gladness and joy among the masses,

but instead they called out, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” and the terrible sound we hear echoing through the halls of history is the sound of iron nails hammered through tender flesh pinning the hands of the Creator to a tree made by His own hands.

- 3) You would think the voice of the Sovereign King would call out in triumph and power; he could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set him free, but what we hear is the Savior making His final holy sacrifice, “It is finished! Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.”

b. And He died.

- 1) He died.
 - a) He died in our place.
 - b) He died on our behalf.
- 2) He took on Himself the punishment our sins deserve.
 - a) The Bible says that the souls that sins, it shall die.
 - b) The Bible says the wages of sin is death.
 - c) But here He is, sinless and innocent, not deserving death, and yet, Christ dies.
 - d) He died the innocent for the guilty, the Savior for the sinner, the Creator for the creature, Love for the unloving and unlovely.

3) He died.

c. And He was buried.

- 1) And the ground shook, and the sky turned dark and the soldiers marveled and the women wailed and the stone rolled into place and they set a seal and stationed a guard and then . . . then there was silence.
- 2) It was the Sabbath and the Savior, Jesus Christ, fully God fully human, shrouded in the darkness of the tomb, ceased all the work He had worked and God rested.
- 3) It all seemed like such defeat: all his prospects destroyed, all his potential ruined, all his promises emptied of power
- 4) He died and was buried and there he lay in silence: Friday . . . Saturday . . .

d. And then it was the first day of the week . . . then it was third day . . . then it was comeback time!

Matthew 28:1-10 (ESV) ¹ Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like

dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

II. Comeback? So what?

A. Jesus Christ, crucified and buried, was raised from the dead by the power of God.

1. **It is the greatest comeback in the history of ever!**
2. But I ask you this morning, “So what?”
 - a. How does the greatest comeback in the history of ever relate to any of us, personally?
 - 1) I mean, its great when our favorite baseball team overcomes a 21 run deficit in a single inning and wins the playoffs in overtime, but “so what?” Tomorrow’s another day and another game. “So what?”
 - 2) I mean, its great that Col. Sanders and KFC now have over 25000 restaurants and outlets in over 145 countries and territories around the world, but I live here in Grand Marais, and we all we got is a lake? What does Col. Sanders’ comeback mean to me on a daily basis? “So what?”
 - b. What does the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for me, right now, right here?
 - 1) What impact does the greatest comeback in the history of ever have to do with me?

B. There are so many, many answers to this question.

1. The resurrection of Jesus proves the validity of all Jesus was and did taught.
2. The resurrection of Jesus proves the supernatural origin and substance of the Christian faith.
3. The resurrection of Jesus proves the availability of divine forgiveness and mercy.
4. The resurrection of Jesus proves the depth of God’s love and commitment to His promises.
5. The resurrection of Jesus proves the sufficiency of His redeeming work on our behalf.
6. The resurrection of Jesus proves that He alone is the Lord of heaven and earth whose right it is to rule.
7. The resurrection of Jesus makes faith possible.
8. The resurrection of Jesus proves God has the power to keep the promises

He makes.

C. One Epic Impact to Focus On

1. Every one of these truth statements deserves time, and I do not have time this morning to do more than mention them, plant them as seeds in the fertile soil of your mind and heart and soul.
 - a. So, I had to choose one.
 - b. There is one epic impact of the greatest comeback in the history of ever I want to ask you to consider carefully this morning, because, after I've shared this impact with you, I will ask you to put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior.
 - c. Of all the proofs the resurrection of Jesus provides, there is one whose impact hits particularly close to home in our day and time.
2. **The greatest comeback in the history of ever, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead proves that those who put their faith in Him never again have to fear death.**
 - a. *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14-15, ESV)*
 - b. Lifelong Fear of Death: We spend our lives enslaved to the fear of death.
 - c. Generally, there are two reasons we fear death.
 - 1) We fear death because we don't know what comes next after death,
 - 2) or we fear death because we've heard the word of God and we DO know what comes after death.
 - 3) We live in lifelong slavery to the fear of death.
3. COVID as a Fear of Death Illustration
 - a. Don't believe me? You can see that fear of death in our public efforts against the effects of COVID-19.
 - 1) Look at the pandemic and the strategies most often being used to motivate vaccination. Think about it for a moment.
 - 2) What is the number one motivation cited for being vaccinated? So you won't die.
 - 3) What's the second most frequently cited reason for being vaccinated? So you won't infect others and they die.
 - b. Fear and guilt.
 - 1) Fear of death and guilt over contributing to someone else's death are the two most frequently used, most powerful reasons for urging mass vaccination.
 - 2) Fear and guilt, two of our most primal, human emotional and behavioral motivators are being harnessed to motivate public compliance to the social agenda in our day.
 - c. **Please don't misunderstand, I beg you!**

- 1) Understand this, please.
 - a) The public vaccination campaigns are not manufacturing fear and guilt.
 - b) They are simply tapping into something that already exists in order to further their goals.
 - c) Fear and guilt are part of the human condition, a part of what it means to be a sinner in a fallen, sinful world
- 2) **Please understand this as well, getting vaccinated or not, for the time being, is up to you to decide based on the information you have available.**
 - a) **I'm not offering an opinion vaccination.**
 - b) I am telling you this:
 - when you put your faith in Jesus Christ and trust God to forgive your sins and give you new life in response to faith, whatever else you have to deal with in life and in the world, you never again have to live in fear of death.
 - **When you put your faith in Jesus Christ and take God at His word, you remove fear of death as a variable in the quadratic equation of life.** (I finally got to use Algebra 2 in real life!)
4. Let me explain: When God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, death died.
 - a. **2 Timothy 1:8-10 (ESV) ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,**
 - b. Jesus' death on the cross accomplished two specific goals relative to death
 - 1) **Removed death as a threat of eternal judgment**
 - a) Removed the guilt of sin from us by experiencing the punishment our sin deserved
 - b) Satisfied the justice of God toward us by experiencing the punishment our sin deserved
 - c) Christ having subjected himself to death in our place on our behalf has undergone the penalty of the law,
 - he has taken away the curse and condemning

- power of sin and guilt that drives our fear
- He “has,” says the apostle Paul, “redeemed us from the curse of the law, being” himself “made a curse for us.” (Gal. 3:13.)
- “There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1.)
- The death of Christ has satisfied every demand of the broken law:
- The law of God has nothing now to accuse God’s elect;
 - > it owns the blood of Christ to be a sufficient compensation for their violations of it;
 - > there are no petty satisfactions to be made by themselves, since Christ has made complete satisfaction for them, and in their behalf.

e) How do we know this is true?

- Because of the greatest comeback in the history of ever, the resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Had Christ’s death failed to adequately account for man’s guilt and satisfy God’s justice there would have been no comeback, no resurrection!
- **The greatest comeback in the history of ever proves the adequacy of Christ’s sacrifice**
- **The resurrection of Jesus frees those who put their trust in Him from the fear of condemnation and punishment presented by death!**

2) Removed death as a threat of permanent separation

a) **2 Corinthians 4:14 (ESV) *knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.***

b) On account of the greatest comeback in the history of ever we are certain God will raise those who trust Christ as well.

- Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, we know that He will one day raise as well those who put their faith in Him.
- So, if we know that death cannot keep us down, that we are destined through faith in Christ to eternal life, we have no reason

whatsoever to ever fear death again.

- c. The Effect of the Fear of Death is Cancelled
 - 1) How does the fear of death bring us into bondage?
 - a) Firstly, it imposes a *sense of futility* upon all our achievements. 'I looked on all the works that my hands had done', wrote Solomon, 'and on the labour in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun' (Eccles. 2:11).
 - b) Secondly, it confronts us with *the terror of the unknown*.
 - What lies beyond death?
 - Nothing, say some.
 - Heaven or hell
 - 2) **Christ delivers us from the fear of death, for he has passed through death and returned, triumphant over it.**
 - a) 'Death is swallowed up in victory' (1 Cor. 15:54).
 - b) For the believer, 'To live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21).

III. Conclusion: Cancel the Fear of Death Through Faith in the Resurrected Christ

A. The Certainty of Death Calls for Fearless Faith in Response to the Greatest Comeback in the History of Ever

1. Healthy Cartoon
 - a. One day, we will all die.
 - b. I have a friend who, hearing me struggling with this message, reminded me of a cartoon he saw once. A lifelong health conscious runner is laying in a hospital bed, dying. He ate well-balanced, nutritious meals, exercised daily, cultivated good habits, was never sick or ill. And here he is, dying. A visitor stands at the nurses' station, looking into the room and recognizing the man asks, "What is HE dying of?" The nurse looks at the man and says, "Nothing."
2. All of us will die, even if we die of "nothing"
 - a. The Bible says, "It is given unto every man once to die and the comes the judgment."
 - b. **Every single one of us will face and experience death in our lifetime, but not a single one of us has to be afraid, either of death or of judgment.**
 - c. Put your faith in Christ. Believe God's promise that all who put their faith in Him will be saved. Know that if we lived with Him in this life, we shall be raised to live with Him forever.

B. Admonitions for the Fearless Concerning the Greatest Comeback in the History of Ever

1. Be persuaded to prize it.—Forgiveness and fearlessness are privileges that

were purchased for you with the precious blood of Christ.

- a. O what a blessed privilege is this,—not only to be delivered from the second death, but also from the servile and enthralling fear of the first death!
- b. This is the benefit and blessing that the apostle Paul seems to be so much affected with. “Thanks be to God,” says he, “which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:57.)

2. Be persuaded to make the most of this privilege in your walk of faith.

- a. Be earnest with God, that he would apply to you this benefit of his Son’s death by his blessed Spirit.—O, beg of God, and that with all importunity, that “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus may set you free from” a tormenting fear of “death.” (Rom. 8:2.)
- b. Give all diligence to the attaining of a greater measure of faith, love, and hope.
- c. Resist the devil,” and withstand his temptations
- d. Rather than dismiss death, take the time to think deeply about death and what Christ has done for you. Thinking often of the reality of death will familiarize death to you; and if once death and you be familiar together, you will not be so much afraid of it.
- e. Reflect often on the resurrection, both of Jesus and your own promised comeback.
- f. Deal with sin in your life. Like a wasp in your shoe, the guilt of one known sin will put a sting into death, and make it very terrible to you, especially in your near approaches unto it.
- g. Order your life aright. When all is done, an upright and holy life is one of the best defenses against the dread of death.