

A Sermon  
Rev. W. Kevin Holder  
Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
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## **Certain Hope**

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Uncertainty. Though it's always with us, more people seem to be talking about it right now. Uncertainty in the economic outlook. Uncertainty about employment and job status. Uncertainty about global affairs. Uncertainty about the future of our country. Uncertainty about what's ahead for the next generation. Uncertainty about the future of society's institutions, including the church. If there's one thing we seem to be very certain of, it's uncertainty.

In a White House press conference earlier this week, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent addressed the economic uncertainty upending global financial markets, primarily because of tariff announcements and trade negotiations. He told reporters, "President Trump creates what I would call strategic uncertainty in the negotiations." He also noted, "Certainty is not necessarily a good thing in negotiating." And then, to those with further questions about all the uncertainty in markets, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt added, "I would say, trust in President Trump."<sup>1</sup>

Whether you trust in President Trump's trade and economic policies or not, there's no doubt that his approach has generated lots of disruption and uncertainty. Time will tell how much "strategic uncertainty" can be used to improve the economic lives of Americans. Though it may be a helpful tool in the negotiating process, uncertainty definitely weighs upon people's outlook and attitudes.

Just over a year ago, a journalist wrote about why Americans were feeling so down on the economy. He said,

Interviews with Americans across the country—some affluent, some just scraping by; some with advanced degrees and others with blue-collar jobs; some Republican, some Democrat—show they are weighed down by fears of an unpredictable world in which no one in government or business is competent to steer the nation through precarious times.<sup>2</sup>

"Fears of an unpredictable world." Those kinds of fears haven't changed much in recent months. In fact, they've probably only intensified.

In the midst of uncertainty, we need some solid ground on which to stand. For Paul, there is no more solid ground than the gospel. In today's text, he summarizes it this way: "That 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" (vv. 3-4). Paul then goes on to emphasize Jesus' resurrection appearances as well, including one to himself. This is the essential story that Paul proclaims and practices. It's not something he came up with on his own. He received it from others and has passed it on to the Corinthians. It's the reason they've experienced what they've experienced. It's the reason their congregation exists.

But based on what Paul says in the passage immediately following today's text, some in their church are uncertain about the "resurrection of the dead" part (v. 12). Perhaps

they're more than uncertain. They're actually opposed to the idea. Note that more than likely, they're not disputing that Christ was raised from the dead, at least as a one-time miraculous act of God. Apparently, they don't dispute that Christ was raised. But they do dispute that believers will also be raised from the dead.

It's hard to tell exactly who these folks are and why they object. Maybe they're influenced by popular philosophical views that the immortal soul is just trapped in the prison of the body, from which the soul will escape at death in order to attain to the realm of the gods. Maybe they're shaped by certain wisdom traditions that lead them to believe the resurrection has already occurred, and therefore spiritually speaking, they've already arrived. Maybe they've come from more intellectually sophisticated backgrounds and find the idea of a bodily resurrection distasteful. These are just some of the possibilities.

Whatever their uncertainties and objections, Paul counters their views by restating the original, core message that by the power of God, the crucified and buried body of Jesus had been restored to life and made imperishable. And inseparable from this is the conviction that believers will likewise be bodily raised from the dead. In fact, the power of Christ's resurrection life is already at work in those who believe, and in the coming consummation, the new creation, which is partially available now, this power will be brought to full fruition.

Pastor Tim Keller captured it well when he wrote, "In the resurrection, we have the presence of the future. The power by which God will destroy all suffering, evil, deformity and death at the end of time has broken into history now and is available—partially and substantially—now."<sup>3</sup> This is the Christian hope that we have to offer to the world. The hope of a new humanity in a new creation under the reign of God, who will fill this new and remade world with his glory.

Two months ago, an article appeared highlighting the fact that for the past five years, one of the most searched terms on Google has been "hope." This kind of data could indicate that people are feeling more hopeful or that they're looking for hope, searching for meaning and purpose. The article stated:

The past few years haven't exactly been a breeding ground for unbridled optimism. If anything, they've felt like a slow-motion apocalypse set to a TikTok soundtrack. Climate anxiety? Check. Economic uncertainty? Check. Social media-fueled existential dread? Triple check. And yet, through it all, people have consistently typed "hope" into a search bar like it was a lifeline.

After noting that online searches for spiritual concepts like "prayer" or "faith" tend to spike in moments of crisis, the article emphasized that this current pattern may be different: "The ongoing years-long trend of searching for hope suggests something different. This isn't just a reaction to one specific disaster. It's a constant, underlying hum of uncertainty—a long-term condition rather than a momentary outcry."<sup>4</sup>

An "underlying hum of uncertainty." In an atmosphere where the most that many experts, commentators, reporters, pundits, and political leaders can tell us is, "We're uncertain," "We're not sure," "We don't know," or "We can't predict," all those who have preceded us in the faith have given us this to announce: "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (v. 20). That declaration doesn't immediately solve everything, but it does infuse us with the hope that we act upon in order to make the redeeming, reconciling love of God visible in the world.

In 1950 the town of Flaggstaff, Maine was physically abandoned and dismantled, so that it could be flooded as part of the creation of a large lake for which a dam was being built.

One man who talked about his experiences in Flaggstaff described how in the months before it was to be flooded, all repairs and improvements in the little town were stopped. As he put it, What was the use of painting a house if it were to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So, week by week, the whole town became more and more bedraggled, more gone to seed, more woebegone. Then the man added by way of explanation: "Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."<sup>5</sup>

The good news on which we stand, to which we hold firmly, is that God, the creator of the world, has not abandoned it, but redeemed it and given it a future. In Christ, God has redeemed what he has made, including the bodies he has given us. And with these bodies that God has promised to raise up, we preach and practice resurrection. In the midst of so much life-negating uncertainty, we announce and exhibit the life-giving certainty of what God has promised through Jesus Christ.

This doesn't mean that we're free of all uncertainty. Though our faith is in God, we're still part of a fallen world. Our longing for certainty is part of the human condition. And sometimes, in the midst of our uncertainty, we turn to other gods to deliver us from it. We turn to things or people or institutions or programs or projects that we think can give us power and control in a world that seems so unpredictable. These could be things like technology, or a political agenda, or a charismatic individual and their vision of remaking the world. In and of themselves, these may be good and worthwhile things, worthy of our time, gifts, and effort. But if we place our ultimate confidence in them to tame life's chaos and master the future, then we're not holding firmly to the gospel that has been entrusted to us.

According to this gospel, Christ crucified and risen is what gives us a sure and certain hope, some solid ground on which to stand. Only when our lives are woven into this old story can we experience the certainty that we crave. In our text, Paul describes how his own personal story, and the story of all those to whom Christ appeared, has now been inseparably linked to the most important story of all. If the Corinthians look at what has happened in his life and in theirs, they'll see that this could only have happened by God's powerful presence. God's grace to Paul, and to them, has not been "without effect" (v. 10).

Biblical scholar Richard Hays says that "the gospel is a word of radical grace, for resurrection is one thing that we can neither produce nor control nor manipulate: our hope is exclusively in God's hands."<sup>6</sup> As Hays indicates, the resurrection creates its own kind of disruption and uncertainty in our lives, because it's so out of our control. If God took the dead and buried Jesus, and raised him up into a transformed kind of bodily existence that previews for us the life of the kingdom of God, the life of all those who believe and whose hope is in him, then we're clearly in the presence of something beyond our grasp and explanation. And yet something that grasps and explains us. Something that doesn't make sense to us, yet makes sense of us.

A few years ago, as Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, journalist Eleanor Margolis, who describes herself as agnostic, talked about how she had become "a devout follower of one true religion of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: uncertainty. Those of us without traditional religion are left to make our peace with uncertainty."<sup>7</sup> For us, religion doesn't get any more traditional than this: Christ crucified, buried, and risen. And with this good news comes a kind of humble confidence, a life-giving certainty that sustains us and enables us to live faithfully as a witness to the world and a sign of hope.

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<sup>1</sup> "WATCH: Bessent defends Trump's 'strategic uncertainty,' says certainty 'not necessarily a good thing in negotiating.'" PBS News. April 29, 2025. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-bessent-defends-trumps-strategic-uncertainty-says-certainty-not-necessarily-a-good-thing-in-negotiating> (April 30, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Aaron Zitner, "Why Are Americans Feeling So Down on the Economy." *The Wall Street Journal* (February 7, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter* (New York: Penguin, 2021) 31.

<sup>4</sup> Annie Eisner, "Hope's Google Spike: Are We Desperate or Devout?" *Relevant Magazine* (March 3, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Halford E. Luccock, *Unfinished Business*.

<sup>6</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 1997) n.p.

<sup>7</sup> Eleanor Margolis, "I'm agnostic, but news about the Ukraine war is so scary right now that I've considered becoming a nun." *INews* (March 14, 2022).