

## "Our Great Future Hope"

*1 Corinthians 15:20-34*

Last week we studied the first part of Paul's argument concerning belief in a bodily resurrection for followers of Jesus after their death. Strangely, some Corinthians believed Jesus resurrected from the dead, in a new glorified body yet did not believe we, His followers will receive similar resurrected bodies after we die. Paul adamantly argued that it is illogical to believe Jesus resurrected but his followers do not. Most likely their lack of understanding was rooted in Greek philosophy which most of them grew up with that stated there is no physical existence after we die.

In vv.12-19 Paul said, 'Okay. Let's play the 'If there's no resurrection game' and see who wins. Well, nobody wins. We all lose. Paul pointed out that if there is no bodily resurrection for Jesus' followers after we die then Jesus didn't really rise because that was the whole point. He defeated sin and sin's price is death. If sin is defeated then death is defeated and God's people will finally be what God intended all along since He created Adam and Eve, that God and people would dwell forever in a sinless perfect environment.

Paul also pointed out if we are not resurrected then we are if we share the gospel, people do not hope beyond this life and we are to be pitied because we wasted the little time we have in this physical life living for a lie.

However – and thanks be to God – "*Christ has indeed been raised from the dead*" and creates a whole other domino effect of great future blessings that we can look forward to and build our lives on. So, since Christ has been raised from the dead, Paul says these things are true:

First

### **Our Bodily Resurrection is Assured** **(15:20-22)**

<sup>20</sup> *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.* <sup>21</sup> *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.* <sup>22</sup> *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Paul earlier had pointed out that Jesus was our Passover Lamb. Now, he uses another Old Testament feast to point out that Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection. The Feast of First Fruits was held on the day after the Sabbath that immediately followed the Passover. Jesus rose on the Feast of First Fruits. At the Feast of First Fruits, each family head would cut a sheaf of the early grain harvest and present it to God as an offering before they used any for themselves. God promised to bless Israel's harvest when they did this. Give God your first and your best and He will provide the rest. God Himself gave His first and best and 50 days later a 'harvest of 3000 souls responded to the gospel on the Day of Pentecost, held 50 days from the Day of First Fruits. Pentecost was the Feast when you celebrated and thanked God for the harvest He provided.

When you give to God your best He will provide you with the rest. Jesus' resurrection was the first and His resurrection assures us of our future resurrection one day. If this doesn't happen God does not keep His Word.

Paul pointed out that just as death came through a man – the first man Adam, and therefore everyone else experiences death – so too does resurrection come through the man who defeated death because He was sinless. We all sin because sin came through Adam and Eve's sin. But Jesus became a man, lived a sinless life, died for our sins – not His own – and God raised Him from death and will do so for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. When. Our future resurrection is guaranteed to happen because of Jesus' resurrection. The next domino effect of the resurrection is

### **Christ's Return and Reign are Guaranteed** **(15:23-28)**

*<sup>23</sup> But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. <sup>24</sup> Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. <sup>28</sup> When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.*

Paul gives a generalized picture of end time events here because his goal here is to assure us we will be resurrected. But he does say there's an order. I believe the church receives her resurrected bodies at the rapture (1 Thes. 4:13-16) which precedes the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, or 7-year wrath of God judgment on the world. At the end of the 7 years when Jesus physically returns to the earth to establish His rule, Daniel 12:1-2 tells us the OT saints receive their resurrected bodies. Paul's focus here however is that when Jesus physically returns to the earth He will

#### ***Defeat all His enemies (vv.23-25)***

When Jesus returns according to Rev. 19:14-16 He will return with us and defeat those on earth who are intent on wiping out the nation of Israel (Zech 14; Dan. 11:40-45) and any followers of Christ at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. He will sit on David's throne just as Isaiah 9:6-7 predicted and Gabriel affirmed to Mary in Luke 1 to establish His reign for a millennium according to Rev. 20. While it will be a fantastic time on this earth, yet there will still be people who will not want to follow Him. And at the end of that time Satan (who has been locked up for 1000 years) will be released, try and lead these rebels against Jesus only to be defeated and tossed into the lake of fire once and for all.

At this time, unbelievers will be resurrected, judged and tossed forever into the lake of fire then, death itself. Death has been the enemy of man since sin entered the world. Paul assures us because Jesus rose

#### ***Death will finally be eradicated (v.26)***

*<sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

In the new Jerusalem God will

*Rev. 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

But before that happens Paul reminds us; everything must be made subject to Jesus. He quotes a prophecy from Ps. 8:6 in v.27, but reminds us it has not happened yet. Jesus will faithfully rule over God's prophesied kingdom, from David's throne in Jerusalem, establishing justice and righteousness around the world and defeating all opposing kingdoms on earth and beyond. Paul says something interesting here. At the end of that 1000 years Jesus hands over the kingdom to God. Why?

### ***So God can be glorified (vv.27-28)***

When Jesus was finishing up His ministry at His first coming, He said in John 17,

*"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. <sup>2</sup> For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup> Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.*

Not surprisingly, when Jesus completes the second phase of His prophesied work on the earth – ruling faithfully for 1000 years and filling the world with the knowledge of God's glory; He glorifies God by submitting it all back to Him. Why? Because for Jesus its all about the glory of God. God raised Jesus from the dead. God will subject Jesus' enemies under His feet. Jesus will thank God for all that He has done for Him. This takes nothing away from Jesus' deity or glory, He's acknowledging His role in God's plan.

Paul now turns to some other benefits of the resurrection by challenging those who doubted in our resurrection. The first one sounds strange:

*<sup>29</sup> Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?*

To help us understand what he is saying, let's establish what he is not saying. Paul is not saying we should baptize by proxy people who have died and weren't baptized. Baptism doesn't save you; faith does. Second, there is no evidence that the church ever practiced this. Some suggest it was a pagan practice that people of other religions did as part of their belief system. But again, there is no historical evidence to support this practice.

Whatever they were doing, Paul doesn't denounce it. In fact, he seems to say, 'Why do you do this if you don't believe you are physically resurrected?' The question is simpler than we realize. Let's remove the 'for the dead' for a second. "Now if there is no resurrection why are being baptized? If the dead are not raised as all, why are you being baptized?"

What does baptism depict? That you were born again by faith believing that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead, baptism picturing the death of Jesus and your death to sin and identifying with Jesus' baptism believing that you too will rise one day? That's the essence of the question.

It's possible that when Paul mentions baptism he's including salvation with it because the New Testament sometimes links these two as the same because they got baptized immediately at salvation. Listen to these passages,

*Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

<sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

When Ananias was sent by Jesus to Paul after the Damascus rode appearance, he said to Paul

*Acts 22:16* And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name

*1 Pet. 3:19* After being made alive, He went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— <sup>20</sup> to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Again, Peter's not saying baptism saves you but its symbolic of our salvation. So if Paul means salvation when he says baptism, he's saying

<sup>29</sup> Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are saved & baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people saved & baptized for them?

The 'for the dead' or 'for them' is a reference to deceased believers. I think what Paul is saying is if you don't believe in a physical resurrection, why did you accept Christ and get baptized so that you would see your dead family members and friends one day. If so, Paul is saying since the resurrection is true then

## **Getting Saved for 'Reunions' is Wise** **(15:29)**

Whatever Paul is saying here, he is pointing out that their actions of being saved and baptized show they were practically believing in resurrection even of they were claiming they did not.

Now he talks about his own willingness to be persecuted for declaring his faith in the resurrection, comforting fellow believers that since Christ has been resurrected and so will we, then

## **Suffering for Christ Has Future Rewards** **(15:30-32)**

<sup>30</sup> And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? <sup>31</sup> I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>32</sup> If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote this. He's recalling Acts 19, an earlier time when he was in Ephesus, the home of Artemis worship. Paul cast out demons and led people in sorcery to Christ. A riot in the city ensued when a fellow named Demetrius stood up in the public square and accused Paul of causing business to fall because all these people were getting saved and getting out of Artemis worship, especially proclaiming a message that said all these gods we worship are false. That was one of many instances where Paul proclaimed the message of the resurrected Christ and suffered for it. If it is not true Paul said, why suffer for it? But if it is true – and it is – we will be rewarded for telling the truth. We will be rewarded with resurrected perfect bodies and more one day.

If there is no resurrection then we might as well just eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die! Paul said, faith in something that is not true is a waste of time. But since it is, we can be confident that God will reward us in glory one day.

And now he issues a challenge since Christ has risen from the dead, assuring our own resurrection one day.

## **Live a Godly Life Knowing Our Future is Secure** **(15:33-34)**

*<sup>33</sup> Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” <sup>34</sup> Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.*

Some had doubted that we would rise physically one day. Wrong theology leads to wrong living. I think that’s Paul’s point of “bad company corrupts good character”. They were listening to the wrong people about what the future holds for believers. Do not listen to the world’s thoughts about now and the future; listen to Jesus’ thoughts. When you listen to the world, you will live like the world which eats and drinks because tomorrow they wrongly think we will cease to exist.

Paul says that is not true. God, Jesus and all Scripture say differently. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ you will one day receive a new physical body. Paul will tell us in 2 Cor. 5:17 we are a new creation in Christ. This is not knowledge we need about the future. Spiritual knowledge changes how we live now because our future is secure in Christ. But many will not. So we need to risk being hurt for the gospel so some can be saved. We need to live with godly character, prompting people to ask us why we do not live like the rest of this world.

The apostle Peter commands us to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. Paul tells them to stop sinning because they are ignorant – they lack knowledge. The reason Paul wants us to know we’ll be secure in the future with new bodies, is so we can live securely now in Christ, sharing the gospel, living a contrary to the world life because we know the rewards in the next life are far better than temporary pleasures here. And so many are unprepared for the rest of eternity. We must live now, dying daily, so that others may know the same hope we have in Christ.

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