

# The Hope of Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12-20, 35-58

The resurrection of Jesus crowns the gospel. By His death He atoned for our sins, defeated our enemies, humiliated the principalities and powers, and defeated death itself. By His resurrection from the dead He ushered new life into this world which will culminate in our resurrection. We live in this hope.

## Summary of the Text

Modern mainline churches aren't the first to deny the physical resurrection even as they preach it (v. 12). Paul says you can't truly preach Jesus' resurrection but deny your own (v. 13). If you won't rise, neither did He, and if He didn't, the gospel is empty and so is your faith (v. 14). This would make the apostles false witnesses, since the dead not rising would mean Jesus didn't either (vv. 15-16). If He didn't, then your faith is futile, you're still in your sins, and the dead in Christ have perished (vv. 17-18). If Christ is our only hope, we are most to be pitied (v. 19). *But* He has risen, the firstfruits of the dead (v. 20). You can tell Paul has been teaching this and getting questions. Someone will ask how this works and what body comes out of the grave (v. 35). Foolish one, the seed has to die in order to be made alive, and the thing sown like wheat or grain doesn't have the body it will have when it comes up (vv. 35-37). God designs each seed grow up into a particular body (v. 38). He makes all kinds of different flesh for people, animals, fish, and birds, as well as diverse heavenly and earthly bodies, each with different glories (vv. 39-41). Our bodies are like seeds which are sown in corruption and dishonor but raised in incorruption and glory; sown in weakness, raised in power (vv. 42-43). Our natural body will be raised a spiritual one (v. 44). The first Adam received the breath of life, but the last Adam became a life-giving spirit (v. 45). This refers to the kind of body Jesus has. The natural comes first, then spiritual; the man from dust and then the man from heaven whom we follow and whose image we will bear completely (vv. 46-49). The old humanity can't inherit God's kingdom, corruption receiving incorruption, so at the resurrection the quick and the dead will be changed at the last trumpet (vv. 50-52). Mortality will put on immortality and death will be swallowed up in victory (v. 53-54). Death will have no sting because sin will be destroyed (vv. 55-56). Thanks be to God who gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 57). Therefore, beloved, stay the course unmoved and always abound in the Lord's work because nothing you do in Him is in vain (v. 58).

## The Central Importance of the Resurrection

The resurrection is not just another Christian doctrine. To deny it puts you outside of Christ, and to be ignorant of it means you don't know what time it is. Two thirds of American Christians do not believe they will have bodies in the resurrection, which is like believing you won't be wet when swimming in the Pacific Ocean. These believers are like the brethren in Corinth before reading chapter 15, a discourse on the most important thing (v. 3). If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, there's no good outcome—you are still in your sins (v. 17). This is because Jesus could not have defeated death and *not risen*. Death is the separation of the soul from the body which results from breaking covenant with God, the author of life. When Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he died spiritually in rebellion against God and physical death followed (Gen. 2:17). Sin-led death is dehumanizing and comes from our rejection of God. As the second Adam, our new covenant head, Jesus resisted sin during His life but died anyway, taking our place, suffering the wrath of God on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21). But because He was sinless, death couldn't hold Him. When He uttered, "It is finished!" on the cross, the atonement for the sins of all His people was complete. He "descended into Hades," as the Creed says, the place of the dead, to announce His victory (1 Pet. 3:19), and on the third day He rose according to the Scriptures. Had He remained dead, it would have proven that He didn't defeat sin and really wasn't the Son of God. But He rose and "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). Enjoy Paul's blunt and logical honesty: no

# The Hope of Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:12-20, 35-58

resurrection means no defeat of sin and the Christian faith is as hollow as a jug (v. 13). “If the dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’” (v. 32). The resurrection is not the idea of second chances, memories of sweet times with Jesus, or the vague desire for enduring hope. Understanding Jesus’ resurrection is difficult for carnal mind, including on the first Easter morning. This is why Jesus appeared for 40 days to so many people (1 Cor. 15:3-8), not weeks or months after He died, but beginning on the third day after He died, on the first day of the week. Had the chief priests or Romans produced Jesus’ dead body, the Church would have ceased to exist.

## Sowing & Reaping

Jesus’ resurrection is not a one-off, but the beginning (v. 20). We have risen with Him in that fact that He represents us, our sins are forgiven, and He has ascended and poured out the Holy Spirit. But we have not physically resurrected yet as individuals. So why does the resurrection matter now and how are we going to be raised? The apostle is direct: “Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies” (v. 36). There is continuity and discontinuity between the seed and the tree. The seed has all the genetic material to make the tree, but it needs to go into the ground and “die” in order to grow. God demonstrates little transformations in creation everywhere so that we would understand something about the great one to come, the Spring of the world. Look at the trees in your yard, the magic happening inside an egg, and the fruitfulness that comes from daily sacrifice—little deaths (v. 31). Paul reasons from the lesser to the greater: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power” (vv. 42-43). Your life and your body are a seed, a seed that bears both the marks of the original pre-fall Adam and the scars of a fallen image-bearer, both with dignity and corruption. Christ came in the form of a fallen man but resisted every temptation to sin so that you would live and die in Him, bearing the image of the heavenly man (v. 49). This is a time of sowing, which is to say a time of dying: dying to self, dying to sin, dying out of love for God and others. This is death in life knowing that greater life is coming. The early Christians wrote *Resurgam* on their grave stones, “I will rise.” Your body will go in the ground where it will one day rise in victory.

## Sure Victory

Not everyone will be dead at the last trumpet but everyone will be changed (vv. 51-52). Notice the direction of the change: corruption puts on incorruption, mortality puts on immortality. Elsewhere he says he desires not to be unclothed but further clothed when mortality will be swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5:4). In C.S. Lewis’ book *The Great Divorce*, the spirits that visit heaven are too ghostly and therefore injured by the hardness and realness of the new creation. We are looking for a new heavens and new earth, the beginning of which Christ has inaugurated by His resurrection from the dead. Because this entire place will become new, the labor you do now in the Lord is not in vain. It’s this place just as your body now will be your glorified body then. Earlier Paul said if Christ didn’t rise our faith is in vain, now he concludes by saying because He rose our work is not in vain. We take dominion over the earth, transforming it from a wilderness into garden city. We preach the gospel to transform our corrupt cities into just and beautiful ones. Jesus Christ rose here and therefore owns the place. He will come back again and until He does, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.