

THE CERTAINTY OF CHRIST'S BODILY RESURRECTION

SERIES: SPIRITUAL REALITIES IN THE CHURCH

By Doug Goins

The passage we're studying begins with a ringing affirmation of resurrection life. First Corinthians 15:20: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead." Someone has written a great statement of that reality:

"The present age is Easter time. It begins with the resurrection of the Redeemer, and ends with the resurrection of the redeemed. Between lies the spiritual resurrection of those called into life through Christ. So we live between two Easters, and in the power of the first Easter, we go to meet the last Easter."

That last Easter is the bodily resurrection of all believers in Christ.

In the last two messages ([Discovery Papers 4535-6](#)), we've been exploring the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the watershed event of human history in 1 Corinthians 15. When the man Jesus Christ shattered the barrier of death, he transformed the existence of everyone who believes in him, surrenders to him, and follows him in loyalty. In verses 1-11 Paul placed the resurrection at the very center of the gospel. Our faith is grounded in the resurrection. Paul supported its veracity with eyewitness testimony of some of the people who had seen Jesus after his crucifixion and resurrection. In verses 12-19 he surveyed some of the horrible consequences there would be if the resurrection of Jesus Christ had not happened.

Now in verses 20-34 Paul continues to reflect on the absolute certainty of Christ's bodily resurrection on that first Easter morning, and he shows how the future resurrection of believers is the logical outcome of Christ's past resurrection. He also strengthens his case by pointing out that both his own lifestyle and the actions of the Corinthian believers themselves demonstrated a confident certainty in the resurrection.

This section is organized around three amazing affirmations concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verses 20-22 affirm the inclusive nature of Christ's resurrection. We have been folded into that resurrection reality. Verses 23-28 affirm the forceful purpose of Christ's resurrection. There is a point to it that we can anticipate as ultimate reality. And verses 29-34 affirm the motivating power of Christ's resurrection. Because of the resurrection, we make choices as Christians to live our lives differently.

TWO WAYS OUR RESURRECTION IS TIED TO CHRIST'S

The first affirmation speaks of how closely our own resurrection is tied to Christ's. Look at verses 20-22:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

Paul uses two Old-Testament images to show that our inclusion in this tremendous hope of the resurrection is guaranteed. The first image is that of the first fruits in verse 20, and the second that of the analogy of Adam and Christ in verses 21-22.

The image of first fruits comes out of Leviticus 23. The law required that every Israelite farmer, before he began to harvest his grain crop every year, bring a representative sample to the temple and give it to the priest to be offered up to the Lord in anticipation of the full harvest offering. Paul is saying that Christ's

resurrection was the representative offering of our own resurrection from the dead, the first part of this great resurrection harvest offering that we will all be included in. Jesus offered himself up to the heavenly Father in his death and resurrection. He was both the offering and the offerer. The first-fruits not only preceded the harvest, but they were the first installment of the full harvest offering, the guarantee or the down payment of the rest of the harvest offering that was going to come. So the fact that Christ is the first fruits indicates that we will be resurrected, because Christ's resurrection must not exist in isolation from ours. We can count on that.

Paul goes on to argue the absolute certainty that this will happen by comparing the two men Adam and Christ. Just as the one man Adam brought death to the entire human race, including each of us, because every one of us is a son (or daughter) of Adam, in the same way, the one man Jesus Christ brought resurrection from the dead for those of us who believe in him. Both Adam and Christ were instruments of change. Adam disobeyed God, and he brought disaster, death, and destruction into the world. But Christ, in contrast, perfectly obeyed the Father, and he brought us deliverance, righteousness, and life. So we as mortal human beings are in Adam, and we're going to die; that's reality. But if we belong to Jesus Christ, we have the absolute conviction of resurrection life. Every one of us knows, if we're honest, that our physical bodies are deteriorating. Nobody is going to get out alive, that's absolutely certain. As you get older, you feel it more physically. But the corresponding reality is that we get more and more confident of the hope that we have of the resurrection. This is not the end of all things.

Kim Fenech, our Volunteer Coordinator in Discovery Publishing, was talking to me last week. She mentioned two of the volunteers, our dear brothers Woody Norman and Ron Thompson. For both of them, the outer man is fading because of serious physical problems that face them with their own mortality. Woody has terrible heart problems, and it's hard for him to get to church on occasion. Ron Thompson is losing lung capacity. Yet, Kim was saying, both of these men, the closer they come to the reality of their mortality, the more vibrant and alive and beautiful they are becoming spiritually. The inner man is being renewed; they are anticipating this absolute certainty of being forever with the Lord. That confidence is what gives them life and energizes them, even though it's more and more difficult to live physically.

RESURRECTION EVENTS LEADING TO GOD'S VICTORY

Let's look at the second affirmation concerning Jesus' resurrection in verses 23-28. Here Paul focuses on the eternal purpose of the resurrection. Christ's resurrection has, in a sense, set in motion an inexorable chain of events that absolutely determines our present circumstances and our future, and it's a future full of hope. His victory over death promises the ultimate victory of God in all things. When God raised Christ from the dead, he took sides for the truth and against lies, for love and against hate, for life and against death. Verses 23-24 summarize what Paul calls the order of events leading to the end. Let's read verse 22 again as well:

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

The expression in verse 23, "each in his own order," stresses the different times involved. Christ was made alive three days after his death. Those of us who die belonging to him will be made alive in our order, which will be when he comes back for us. First Thessalonians 4:16-17 says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." (And we won't have to worry about air sickness at all when that resurrection takes place!)

After that resurrection of Christians, Christ will defeat the powers of satanic evil in the world, and he will hand over the secured kingdom to his Father. That is the end that Paul mentions in verse 24, the ultimate purpose that began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That delivering up of the kingdom is the key event in the end times. Sin will no longer reign in the world. God will rule supremely. There will be no enemy,

no challenge to his authority in the world. There are many events detailed in Scripture that are part of this process of final conquest, but chronologies are not important to Paul here. What he really wants us to catch is the certainty of Christ's final conquest. That is central.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST'S FINAL CONQUEST

Paul goes on to amplify that centrality in verses 25-28, where the Son delivers the kingdom back to his Father. Look at verses 25-26. It's not focused just on the future but on the present; Christ is reigning right now, as hard as that may be for us to accept at times.

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

Notice that the reign of Christ doesn't begin after his enemies are subdued. He is reigning now, and he will continue to reign until all demonic opposition is finally defeated. That's absolutely central for us to grasp right here and now, because it will counter personal discouragement, a sense of defeat, and spiritual oppression. Jesus is in control now on the micro level in our personal lives, and on the macro level in all the forces swirling around us in the world at large. The death and resurrection of Jesus turned the tide of the battle. The final outcome is certain. Christ has been declared victorious over sin and death and hell, and that means when we look at the world around us and we see Christ's enemies, the evil rule and authority and power ravaging our world, we don't have to be afraid. We do need to be prayerfully active in working for the kingdom, of course.

Now, I'm certain there are many things we're afraid of. There's the mess that our country is in right now. I have read pundits who have said that in the moral vacuum right now, we will lose credibility as a world leader, and we will be marginalized in global affairs. There is concern about the economic forces that might lead us into recession. There is our president and the concern about his life. There is concern about unemployment amid much talk about what our valley faces in the near future. Perhaps the possibility of bankruptcy or even homelessness concerns you personally. There are the tribal allegiances and ethnic battles on this globe and the violence that flows from them. There is the religious fanaticism around the world. There are floods of refugees on so many continents on our globe. There is violence in Rwanda, Kosovo, Indonesia. Perhaps you are fearful of jihad in the Middle East and how that might even affect us in terms of terrorism in our own country or our own community. Some are very fearful about the effect of the Y2K crisis on us personally and culturally and socially.

But the point of this passage is that we don't have to be afraid because "...He [Jesus] must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." Although the battle continues, its outcome is absolutely certain: Christ is victor. Earlier in this chapter ([Discovery Paper 4535](#)) we talked about the fear of death that we all live with. At present, nobody can resist the touch of death. But death as well will ultimately be robbed of all its power. The promise of the resurrection is that in the end, after Christ has finally and completely triumphed, death will not be able to touch us.

THE CLIMAX: CHRIST HANDS THE KINGDOM OVER TO THE FATHER

Then Paul broadens the vision in verses 27-28. This is a beautiful picture of the Son, who has been given tremendous authority to reign and rule, handing all of the created order and all of redeemed humanity back to his heavenly Father.

For He has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.

What Paul is showing us here is how God is ultimately responsible for this whole chain of events that began with Christ's resurrection and that culminates in the destruction of death. God the Father has given Christ the Son unlimited sovereignty over all creation, and there is therefore no infringement on the Father's own authority.

The climax of this process of putting all things in subjection comes with the Son's being subject to the Father. Paul is not saying that the Son is inferior to the Father in his essential nature. He is speaking of the work that the Son accomplished and will accomplish. Christ has died for men. He has been raised. He will return again. He will continue to subdue all the enemies of God. The climax of his whole work will come when he offers up the kingdom to God, who is the source of everything and that includes us. We will be tenderly, gently delivered to the Father by the Son.

When we step back and look at verses 23-28, they call us to several things. They call us to the same submissive spirit that Jesus had. He was willing to serve the Father, and we are called to subjection to our heavenly Father and to the Lord Jesus. By nature none of us are submissive people. We don't like surrendering to anybody, yet Jesus is a powerful example of submission.

This passage also helps us lift our vision above our own immediate personal circumstances, the things that frighten us in our personal world or in the larger world around us. We are part of something cosmic. History is going somewhere. Now, there are things I struggle with. For example, we've got three children to put through college over the next eight or nine years. I can get very fearful about whether I can follow through on that responsibility, whether God is big enough. But whether I put my kids through college or not is in a sense irrelevant. What is relevant is that God is absolutely in control of circumstances in my life and in all of our lives collectively, and we are in a process that he is taking us through. And we can be absolutely convinced that the outcome, when all things finally fit together the way they're supposed to, will be good.

MOTIVATED TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS

Those first two affirmations were doctrinal, but the third is very personal. Paul lays out how he views life. He says that if we're convinced of the resurrection, it ought to drastically change how we live. Verse 29 focuses on the issue of evangelism. If we're convinced of the resurrection, it ought to be an incentive for us to share the good news with other people out of concern for their salvation.

Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?

Now, what does this verse mean? Let me say up front that I don't know-nobody really does. I read that there are forty different interpretive approaches to this verse (without even including that of the Mormons, who do practice baptism for the dead). The problem is that there is nothing in the Bible except this one verse about being baptized for the dead. There is also nothing mentioned in first-century extra-Biblical history about this practice. Apparently it refers to some kind of proxy baptism or vicarious baptism by a living person on behalf of a dead person to secure the supposed benefits of baptism for them.

But look carefully at the personal pronouns in verse 29. Paul doesn't include himself in this practice. He also doesn't condone it. He doesn't say, "we who are baptized for the dead," or "you who are baptized for the dead." It was a practice that some people were engaging in, and he knew the church there would know about it. It was a misguided practice, one that was misinformed about the nature of salvation. Those who followed it didn't understand that we are saved by faith alone and nothing else. But these people were concerned enough about the salvation of their dead family members to do something about it.

Paul is not evaluating this practice of being baptized for the dead; he only mentions it in passing. His point is that the hope of the resurrection and concern for the salvation of loved ones moved people to drastic action. His burden here is for our believing in the resurrection to have a profound effect on us, to change our lives, to motivate us to do things we wouldn't otherwise do out of concern for the salvation of other people.

I read a wonderful story in the *Mount Hermon Log* (1) of a mother who came to Christ because of a letter from her teenage daughter. She found the letter on her pillow as she was packing for her first Mount Hermon weekend women's conference. It was a beautiful letter about her daughter's love for her and how much she needed to know the love of Christ to forgive her sins. The mother shared at the conference how God broke her heart through that witness of her daughter, and how she came to faith that weekend at Mount Hermon. That's the kind of extraordinary effort that ought to be normal for us. That's Paul's challenge: What are we willing to do for the sake of the salvation of people we love and care about?

HOPE IN DANGER

Paul goes on in verses 30-32 to argue that it's absurd for him to undergo the dangers that he does for the sake of the gospel if there's no hope of the resurrection.

Why are we also in danger every hour? I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Eugene Peterson's paraphrase *The Message* makes these verses much more vivid:

"And why do you think I keep risking my neck in this dangerous work? I look death in the face practically every day I live. Do you think I'd do this if I wasn't convinced of your resurrection and mine as guaranteed by the resurrected Messiah Jesus? Do you think I was just trying to act heroic when I fought the wild beasts at Ephesus, hoping it wouldn't be the end of me? Not on your life! It's resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live. If there's no resurrection, 'We eat, we drink, the next day we die,' and that's all there is to it." (2)

Paul has written openly in his letters about persecution for preaching the gospel. We don't really know what events he is referring to here. Perhaps he did fight wild beasts at some point. There is no other mention of it, so we don't know if he is speaking metaphorically or if it really happened. But the point that Paul is making is that our belief in a God who raises the dead is tremendously motivating when we are suffering or deprived or in danger, whether we're being affected physically or emotionally or spiritually. Whatever Paul went through, even fighting beasts in the arena, the hope of the resurrection strengthened him.

About a year ago Craig Duncan and I went to Pakistan with Ron Ritchie to do a pastors' conference in Lahore. During the day we were in the safe confines of the church meeting with other pastors. But every evening there was an outdoor evangelistic crusade in an amphitheater. Five to eight thousand people came each night. The host knew that there would be Muslims there, some of whom were investigating the gospel, but some of whom were spying out what the Christians were doing. They told us up front that there was an element of danger in the whole thing. We sat on the platform each night. The one who was really in danger was Ron Ritchie, who stood in the center spotlight and preached the gospel each night of that crusade. On about the third day, the host got a telephone call, and he told us that they had been threatened with violent disruption of the crusade that night. He said, "Brothers, it's your call. Do you want to go through with this or not?"

We prayed with the brothers who were hosting us. We ended up saying in essence, "What's the worst thing that could happen? We could get killed. But God is in charge of that. And we believe in the resurrection." So Ron stood up that night and preached the gospel. People were saved. Nobody got killed, at least none of us or anybody else that I knew of. But if we hadn't had that hope, we would not have had the courage or the confidence to walk into that arena so that Ron could preach the gospel.

MOTIVATION FOR A HOLY LIFESTYLE

In the last two verses Paul makes a strong appeal in a series of commands. In essence he says, "If you believe in the resurrection, then you will live a holy life. You will be sold out absolutely to Jesus Christ in all your values and priorities."

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

Paul is quoting a line from a comedy in Greek literature. But who is the bad company he is concerned about who might corrupt the morals of these Corinthian Christians? From whom should they separate themselves? The answer is in verse 34: "...Some have no knowledge of God." Back in 15:12 Paul wrote, "...How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" The "some" who were corrupting them were those who questioned the resurrection, and their corrupting influence wasn't just about doctrine. What you believe about the resurrection, Paul says, controls how you live your life, how you spend your money and use your time, how you invest yourself. People who think wrongly invariably behave wrongly. So just as hoping in the resurrection is an incentive for obedience and holiness, so denying the resurrection is an incentive for disobedience and immorality. As Paul says in verse 32, "We might as well eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. If death is the end, then what difference does it make how we live our lives?" We could paraphrase this appeal in verse 34 this way: "Those of you who do believe in the resurrection know better, and you should be leading those who do not believe in the resurrection into a true knowledge of God, rather than allowing their heresy and immorality to mislead and corrupt you."

I wrestled with this last week in terms of how it challenges us. It's a tragedy when we Christians, the people of the resurrection, end up being influenced by the nonbelievers around us who have embraced a material philosophy that denies resurrection life. Now, few of our materialist friends are going to advocate a life of sheer gluttony or drunkenness or wantonness. But they tempt us with "the good life"-cultivating the fine arts of dining and music and theater, even treasured friendships. Ultimately all of that is self-centered, since it isn't concerned with any continuing existence beyond the grave. Self-interest can even express itself in humanitarianism, although in the final analysis it produces nothing permanently satisfying if this life is all that exists.

As Christians, we must have a radically different mindset. We must recognize that a far better life awaits us than anything we can experience here. So we can risk our lives, our well-being, our resources for the sake of the gospel. We can do it in ways that our material friends wouldn't even consider. In our ethical framework, physical death cannot be the greatest tragedy or the most powerful determinant of correct human behavior. Instead, we must always be asking the question, "What is likely to have the greatest spiritual advantage for the most number of people?" We want to think like the apostle Paul.

I read a quote this week by Gordon Snyder:

"The resurrection addresses those who insist on protection and security of the individual, of institutions, and of the country. Such persons set up mechanisms of defense along economic lines, racial lines, and national lines. In sharp contrast, the life of the Spirit with its hope in the resurrection does not, indeed cannot, dwell on preservation of the flesh, of personhood or institutions or nations. Rather, the corporate life of the Christian becomes one of risk. A Christian can risk his or her life because a Christian knows this life is not the end." (3)

If we believe that Christ has now been raised from the dead, we will stand out in the world around us. Are you convinced that because of Christ's resurrection, your future is totally secure and you have been included in the hope of the resurrection? Can you live fearlessly in the midst of all the swirling currents and forces at work in the world around you? Are your eyes set on the goal, which is for God to ultimately reign? Finally, and practically, is the way you make choices about your budget, discretionary time, resources, and energy driven by passion for the resurrection and the difference it makes?

Notes:

1. *Mount Hermon Log*, Volume 54, Number 3, August, 1998. P. 2.
2. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, © 1993, 1994 by Eugene H. Peterson. NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO. P. 364.
3. Gordon F. Snyder, *First Corinthians: A Faith Community Commentary*, © 1992 by Mercer, Macon, GA. P. 211.

Catalog No. 4537
1 Corinthians 15:20-34
30th Message
Doug Goins
September 13, 1998

The Scripture quotations in this message are all taken from New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

- [Doug Goins Home Page](#)
- [Peninsula Bible Church Home Page](#)
- [Discovery Publishing: Books, sermons, tapes.](#)

Copyright (C) 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.