

RESURRECTION QUESTIONS

The book of First Corinthians, which we have been reading and studying for the past couple of weeks, is an amazing and fascinating book. As I said last Lord's Day, I know it raises a lot of questions and I'm sure that all of those questions have not been answered. Someone mentioned that we could probably spend an entire year studying this book. We could and do so with great profit.

Well, when we get to the 15th chapter, we find yet another fascinating subject, and that is the resurrection of the dead. My guess is that Paul had received information about some false, or at least some strange teachings concerning this subject, and some of the brethren wanted to know how to understand and deal with those things. And so that is why Paul wrote what is found here in chapter 15. That's where we are this morning, and I'm glad you are here because there are few subjects that are as critical to our thinking and understanding as Christians as this one.

For the apostle Paul, the issue of the resurrection is at the very core of what he calls the gospel. Remember back in Romans 1:16, Paul said he was *not ashamed of the gospel for it was the power of God unto salvation?* There is no salvation apart from the gospel, and for Paul, there is no gospel, no good news apart from the resurrection of Christ. Because "the good news" is, if Christ has been raised from the dead, then so can we! We do not have to live with the bleak prospect of living in this world for fifty or seventy-five years and then we're gone. The grave is not going to be our eternal home. Life does not end in a graveyard somewhere. Life truly can be eternal! And that is why, for Paul, it is important that we get these resurrection questions answered correctly.

Paul begins this 15th chapter by explaining the connection of the resurrection of Christ to the gospel. He says,

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2) and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 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.

Now let me draw a quick observation about what we have just read. The gospel is not just the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. I wish I had a dollar for every time I've heard that, and I've read and heard it from many people I respect greatly, but I will say to them, "Get your head back in the book!"

Paul said he wants to remind them of the gospel which he had previously preached to them, which they had believed, by which they were saved—conditioned of course upon their holding fast to the Word. If they become unfaithful, then all bets were off, and Paul says their believing would have been in vain!

And then he reminds them of four truths that are essential to the gospel; to its truly being good news. Number one, Jesus died for our sins, and that had been prophesied. Number two, Jesus was buried which is what you do with dead people. Jesus had died, Jesus was buried. Number three, Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day, and that too had been prophesied.

Now please look at your Bibles, at the end of verse 4, do any of you see a period? No, you do not. I've looked at dozens of different versions and none of the ones I've looked at so far have a period there? You might be wondering, "So what?" Well, the "so what" is that a period is used when a writer completes a thought. A comma, or some other punctuation mark indicates that the writer is not through with that thought. And Paul was not through reminding them of the truths that are essential to the gospel. The death, yes! The burial, yes! The resurrection, yes! But there's one more: "he appeared." People, that's critical!

His appearance after the resurrection is a truth essential to the gospel, because if He had not appeared to anyone, how would they have known that he had in fact been raised from the dead? There are several possible explanations for an empty tomb, so appearances were critical. He appeared first to Peter, Paul says; then to the rest of the twelve. Then Paul says that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, which tells us that there were more disciples than just the 120 mentioned in Acts 1:15. Then he appeared to James, and last of all, Paul says, he appeared to me.

Skipping down to **verse 11**, Paul says, so "*Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*"

Going on into **verses 12-20**, Paul continues his teaching about the resurrection, beginning of course with the resurrection of Christ.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14) And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15) We are even found to be

misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16) For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17) And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19) If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20) But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

I think Paul's logic is pretty evident in this section.

Verse 12--He is saying, if the gospel is preached proclaiming the resurrection of Christ from the dead, how can a Christian say there is no resurrection of the dead? That would be glaring contradiction.

Verse 13--If there is no resurrection of the dead, then that means Christ is still dead.

Verse 14--If Christ is still dead, then our preaching, especially preaching that he was raised from the dead, is not true and therefore in vain. Not only is our preaching in vain, their faith has no foundation.

Verse 15--Furthermore, Paul says, the apostles, who are preaching the gospel are found to be misrepresenting God because they have been teaching that God raised Jesus from the dead. So if the dead are not raised, then Jesus is still dead, and they would be false teachers for saying that God raised him from the dead.

Verses 16, 17—Paul repeats for emphasis sake, if the dead are not raise, then Christ has not been raised, and your vain is in vain, and then he adds, "and you are still in your sins!"

Verse 18—if that is true, then those who have died, even those who quote, "died "in Christ," they have simply perished.

Verse 19—Paul then says something that flatly contradicts what I've heard a lot of Christians say, maybe some of you have said it—you had better pay attention to this: He says, if the only benefit we derive from Christ comes to us in this life, then we are of all men most to be pitied. I've heard many people say, "even if there wasn't a heaven to gain and a hell to avoid, I would still want to live my life as a Christian. It is the best life that anyone can live." Paul would not have agreed with you. He would have said, if there is not a resurrection, it makes no sense to be a Christian!

And then Paul says—**verse 20**, BUT!!!! *in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

Yes, the dead are going to be raised, and Christ has proven that. He is the first of all those who by faith in God are going to attain unto that resurrection of life. Now understand, there is a resurrection unto life, and there is a resurrection unto judgment and death—John 5:28,29. Jesus is the first fruits of those who will be raised to eternal life.

Then, beginning in **verse 21**, Paul elaborates a little further on the significance of Jesus being the firstfruits of those who will be raised from the dead.

Verse 21, in the first place death entered into the world through one man—a reference to the first man created and the one through which sin entered into the world. So, now through another man, a reference to Christ, comes the resurrection from the dead.

Verse 22, Just as the physical descendants of Adam must taste of death (Hebrews 9:27), those who are spiritual descendants of Christ will live.

Verse 23, Christ was raised, then, when he comes again, those that are his will be raised.

Verse 24, At that point, following the second coming of Christ, Paul says, the end comes; the end to life in this world as we know it. This is when Christ will deliver up the kingdom he came to establish, and of which most of us have been blessed to be a part of. In Philippians 3:20 Paul says, “our citizenship is in heaven,” referring in this case to the Kingdom of heaven. Christ will then deliver this kingdom over to God the Father, after subduing and destroying every rule and every authority and power.

Incidentally did you notice: the second coming of Christ is when Christ’s rule comes to an end, not when it begins? Those who believe in the millennialism believe that when Christ comes he will begin ruling over his kingdom. Paul says, no, that’s when he delivers over to God the kingdom He has been ruling over. The millennialists are mistaken and teaching error on that.

Verse 25, Until that time comes, however, God has given all authority to Christ, and he reigns and will continue to reign until he has put all of his enemies under his feet.

Verse 26. Paul says, “*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*”

In **verses 27 and 28**, Paul gives us a little insight into the Father/Son connection, and this is a little hard to grasp since it involves the ultimate enigma called the “Godhead.” But God the Father gave all authority to his Son, “*in heaven and on earth.*” So there is no power, no rule, no authority that is not under the Son, EXCEPT, Paul says, the One who put all things in subjection under him. In other words, God the Father is not in subject to the Son, but everyone and everything else is. When death is destroyed in that hour, and when every grave is opened, and Christ delivers the kingdom/church to the Father, Paul says, then “*the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*”

Now in **verse 29**, after explaining what Christ being the firstfruits means, Paul returns to his task of answering questions about the resurrection. And here in this verse, he says something very puzzling. He says, *“Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?”*

People want to know what this means? Were Christians in that time or that place baptizing people on behalf of others who had already died? To be fair, we don’t have a lot of information that is very helpful. In my opinion this was something that some people were doing and it was one of the things the Christians wanted Paul to talk about. What is clear is that Paul is not referring to something that he or the Corinthians were doing. He speaks about those who were doing this in the third person. Apparently some people were practicing that, but without endorsing their misguided practice, Paul simply raises the rhetorical question, why would people be baptized for the dead if the dead are not going to be raised? If there is no resurrection, as apparently some were teaching, then wouldn’t those who baptize on behalf of the dead would certainly be wasting their time?

Verses 30-34, Paul deals with yet another reason why they should not be questioning the resurrection of the dead. In so many words, he says, *“do you think we would be out here laying our lives on the line, suffering great hardship, if there is no resurrection of the dead?”* He says, *“If the dead are not raised,”* then *“let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”* He warns them about the dangers of associating with people who think like that. *“Bad company ruins good morals.”*

Then comes another question, **Verse 35**—*“How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”* And with that question, and continuing down, really through verse 42, Paul essentially discusses what we will be like when the resurrection takes place. Paul tells them to keep in mind, just like in planting corn. You might plant a kernel of corn, but what you get is a plant that hopefully contains multiple ears of corn.

In the natural world there are all kinds of bodies, and the same thing is true of heavenly bodies. He says, the glory of the heavenly bodies is different than the glory of an earthly body. What’s he saying? He’s saying that we may not know yet what the body will be like, but you can be sure they will be glorious. He might also be saying that in the same way that everyone on earth does not look alike, they might not all look alike in the resurrection.

Will we look like we look right now? Will we retain something of our identity? Paul doesn’t really address those questions, but he does say this—**verse 42**:

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43) It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in

weakness; it is raised in power. 44) It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.

Take those four words and tell me if this sounds like something you want to be a part of: “Imperishable! Glory! Power! Spiritual!”

Then as if to further motivate them even more to be looking forward to the resurrection, Paul uses a series of contrasts.

Verse 45, *“The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”* But Paul says—**verse 46**, the spiritual was not first, but the natural.

Verse 47, *“The first man was from the earth, the second man is from heaven.”* And he goes on to say in verse 48, descendants of that first man of the earth all share in the same earthly body. On the other hand spiritual descendants of the second man from heaven will all share in his heavenly body.

Verse 49, In the same way that we have borne a likeness to the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

In **verse 50**, Paul states a basic principle related to the resurrection. He says: *“flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,”* and the perishable will not inherit the imperishable.”

Well, if that is true...AND IT IS!...then how are we going to get there? We are made of flesh and blood. We are perishable. So how are we supposed to get into that kingdom of God?

Paul says, **verse 51**, *“it is a mystery.”* We do not know how everything is supposed to happen, but somehow, we are all going to be changed. It will happen very quickly, Paul says—**verse 52**; *“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. When the last trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised imperishable.”* He says it again, *“and we shall be changed.”* You do not have to worry about “how” you are going to be changed. God has that figured out. You just be ready!

Verse 53, the perishable will put on the imperishable; the mortal body will become immortal, and when that happens, **verse 54**, what was prophesied—referring to Hosea 13, and Isaiah 28—will take place. *“Death will be swallowed up in victory.”* Death will have lost its stinging power because sin and the law will have been trumped! And Paul says, **verse 57**, we can be thankful because Christ gives us that victory.

That being the case, Paul says, **verse 58**, let us be steadfast in our faith, unmoved in our hope, and always, always, always, abounding in the Lord’s work; because now that you know better, now that you understand this more, you can be sure of this: *“your work is not going to be in vain.”* Would you like to participate in that moment of victory?

Invitation

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