

10/10/10

## Living Between Two Easters -- 1 Corinthians 15:20-49

- would you agree with me this morning that many Americans would do practically anything to delay the aging process...or as some have even famously advertised...to cheat death?...
- there's a surprising number of examples...
- that phrase "cheat death" comes from the advertising campaign for "POM Wonderful 100% Pomegranate Juice"...
- **[pic #1 of a bottle of POM]**
- one of the owners of the company, Lynda Resnick, appeared on the Martha Stewart show and claimed that men should drink 8 ounces of her product every day to ward off prostate cancer...
- Resnick and her husband Stewart also claim that – "New research offers further proof of the health-healthy benefits of POM Wonderful Juice" including the fact that it leads to a "30% decrease in arterial plaque and 17% improved blood flow."
- those are pretty significant statistics for a little bottle of pomegranate juice...
- but according to these folks **[show pic #2 -- cheat death ad]**...if you use this product, you can cheat death...
- they also claim it's like being on **Life Support [pic #3]**, will keep you **Forever Young [pic #4]**, is like a **Survival Kit [pic #5]**, **Heart Therapy [pic #6]**—see, you can **Cheat Death [pic #7 -- 2<sup>nd</sup> time]**
- by the way, you may have heard about this company, because they were just sued by the Federal Trade Commission for making "false and unsubstantiated claims" about treating or preventing heart disease, prostate cancer, and a few other conditions I won't get into this morning...
- the company's response was that the government's allegations were "completely unwarranted" and that the FCC was "wasting taxpayer resources to persecute the pomegranate."
- but why would a product like this, which by the way, sells for \$3.99 for a 16 ounce bottle...why would it even see the light of day?...because many people will do practically anything to delay the aging process...as long as it doesn't involve diet and exercise...men and women want to cheat death...
- but it doesn't stop there...there's this product – The Facemaster [price -- \$228.95]
- **[pic #8]**
- here's their claim – that the Facemaster tightens your skin and reduces the appearance of wrinkles by sending electrical currents through your facial muscles using electrodes on the ends of wands attached by wires to a power supply.
- here's the problem...Devices like this can cause broken capillaries. You might even experience serious muscle pain.
- now, if the electrical aspect of that product concerns you...you can try the Face Trainer...[price—\$199]
- **[pic #9]**
- The claim: The Face Trainer is a mask that provides resistance while you perform a 10-minute facial exercise series. Toning the muscles of your face with the mask is said to decrease sagging and wrinkles as well as improve skin tone and color.

- The problem -- There are plenty of facial exercises that don't require gadgets. Not surprisingly, one of the tips here suggests reducing your calorie intake in order to reduce face fat.
- now, we could keep going, but I think that's enough to prove the premise... that many Americans would do practically anything to delay the aging process...
- but we all learn this lesson every time we look in the mirror...we're getting older...and there's nothing we can do about it...
  - but here's what God's Word would want us to know...this isn't the end of the story...and there actually is a way to reverse the process, and keep it reversed...
  - with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Cor. 15...page 138 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- we're coming down to the end of our study of the book of 1 Corinthians...**Taking the Next Step...with Joy**
  - right now we're in the middle of what is the last major section of this book...the great resurrection chapter in the Bible...1 Corinthians chapter 15...
- so far Paul has talked about reasons to believe in the resurrection...- there's the testimony of the church, and the testimony of the Scripture, and the testimony of the eyewitnesses, and the testimony of Christ Himself...
- then in verses 12-19, he challenged anyone who thought that perhaps there was no such thing as a resurrection, of anyone, at any time...
  - that was contrary to dominant cultural philosophy of the day...and some in the church didn't want to risk rejection by the world...so they tried to embrace Christianity on one hand and Greek dualism on the other...
  - well, that's not possible...and Paul tried to help them not paint themselves in a theological corner by helping them think about all the consequences of not believing in the resurrection and the corresponding blessings and benefits we receive because the resurrection occurred...
- now in the next verses, Paul is going to give us additional truth about this topic...
- you can almost picture what he's doing like this...
- some time ago I visited a friend whose son had just purchased a really nice fishing boat...he was getting into the charter fishing business and has since become a very successful captain...
  - so he was going to take us out fishing off the coast of New Jersey...
  - so anyway, we got down to the dock that day and I had never seen anyone tie a boat off like he had done...
  - I'm used to maybe one or two ropes tied from the front and back of the boat off the pier...
  - not this guy – his boat looked like it was in the middle of a spider web...
  - he had ropes going all over the place...even to the props of the motors and all the essential equipment...
    - and he explained that they often had significant storms on the coast and he didn't want his boat to be damaged if at all possible...
- that's essentially what Paul is doing in this chapter...he is tethering our faith in the resurrection to all sorts of biblical ideas...so when we face some sort of challenge or difficulty in life – we're going to remain firm...because of everything we know about the resurrection...with that in mind – let's read our text – **read 1 Cor. 15:20-49**...

- we're going to organize our thoughts this morning around this idea...**Living Between Two Easters**...that title comes from a quote by theologian Eric Sauer -- "**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 in Christ. So we live between two Easters, and in the power of the first Easter we go to meet the last Easter**" (Eric Sauer).
- with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 results of believing in the resurrection.**

## I. We Should Be Encouraged by the Order of the Resurrection – vv. 20-23

- Paul said that...

### A. Our Lord's resurrection was the "first fruits."

- **1 Corinthians 15:20 - But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.**

- now, that image would have made perfect sense to his first century readers...it may not to people like you and me...

- first of all...those who are asleep was referring to "those who had already died in Christ..."

- Paul is going to say later in this chapter that for a Christian the sting of death is removed and so dying is like falling asleep...

- but what is this "Jesus is the first fruits of that" idea?

#### 1. The meaning – Leviticus 23:9-14

- Before a Jewish man could harvest his crops, he was required to bring a representative sample to the priests as an offering
- this was a very joyful offering, where the person thanked God for the crop He had provided, and the harvest that was yet to come.
- so the meaning was, it always preceded the harvest – "first in order"
- but more importantly, it was always the first installment - more was expected to follow
- that Jewish farmer was trusting God by giving of the very first of what He received...not the leftovers after he had a full knowledge of how well the harvest had gone...no, he did what he did in advance..first...by faith that God would keep His promise to provide...

- but why did Paul use that metaphor to describe the resurrection of Christ?...

#### 2. The significance

- **His resurrection guarantees ours** - He's the first fruits of an entire body of believers who will be resurrected afterwards.

#### 3. How was Jesus first?

- if you're tracking with this, you might say – but weren't there other people in the Bible who were resurrected before Christ?...that would be a very fair question...

**a. Widow at Zarephath's son - I Kings 17:21**

**b. Shunamite woman's son - II Kings 4:34-36**

**c. Unnamed man - II Kings 13:21**

**d. Widow of Nain's son - Luke 7:15**

**e. Lazarus - John 11:44**

- so it's true that others had been raised from the dead...

- but our Lord's was still first - Because He was the first person in all of human history who was raised from the dead and never died again.

- see, you don't want Lazarus' resurrection to be the one you're following...

- **The point -- Our Lord's resurrection is a permanent resurrection. His was the first of its kind**

- now, the next verses tell us this...

**B. You can be part of that event if you are "in Christ."**

- now you might say – well, what does “in Christ” mean?...

- as we were reading, I’m sure you saw that Paul is developing a contrast between what it means to be born "In Adam" and to be born "In Christ"

- **[Table on the power-point]**

**1. In Adam.**

**a. born in him**

**b. through Him we inherit a sinful nature**

- Rom. 5:19- **For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners.**

**c. progenitor (forefather) of everyone who dies**

- Rom. 5:12 - **Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.**

**d. experience physical death**

- vs. 21 - **For as in Adam all die.**

**e. experience spiritual death**

- Paul wants us to stop and think about the negative effects of being a human.

- think about our creaturely weakness, the weakness of the flesh...

- and what a terrible thing it would be if this is all there is...

- you can drink all the pomegranate juice you want and it won't change or reverse this process...

- The Corinthians needed to hear that

- there was so much pride about human wisdom and human ways of doing things.

- In fact, I think we could say that many of the problems they were facing in this book is because they were living in the flesh.

- they were relying on human wisdom and that didn't seem to bother them.

- Paul says - think for a minute on what it exactly means to be born in Adam.

- but the contrast of that are those "In Christ"

**2. In Christ**

**a. born again "In Him"**

**b. through Him we receive His righteousness**

**2 Corinthians 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

**c. progenitor of everyone who lives**

- John 8:25 - **"...he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."**

**d. physical life**

- vs. 21 - **even so in Christ shall all be made alive**

**e. spiritual life**

- point is - Paul is trying to encourage us by the order of the resurrection.

- our Lord is the "first fruits" and because we are "in Him," His resurrection guarantees our own.

- so yes, we're going to get older in this life, and our bodies are going to break down, and we will face profound sadness and failure...

- but that is not the end of the story...and sometimes, friends, we act like it is...

- for example...some of us struggle with sinful anger...

- Why is it that some believers get so upset when things don't go their way?

1) "I deserved that promotion and I'm going to stomp and snort till I get it."

2) "She's not going to treat me that way and I'm going to lash out when I'm not treated the way want to be treated"

- see, isn't this true - some of us can really "go off" when things don't go our way today

- what's wrong with that?

- it's a failure to recognize that "there's more to life than this."

- in light of eternity, some of these things we get so upset about aren't going to matter much.

- Paul would say - Be encouraged by the first fruits...because Jesus was resurrected--you too will be raised

- Let that truth temper the way you respond to difficulties today

- let the doctrine of the 1<sup>st</sup> fruits tether you to a firm belief and appreciation that you're in line too...

- He went first so you'd eventually be next...

## II. We Ought To Stand In Awe Of The Climax Of The Resurrection – vv. 24-28.

- Paul fast forwards the story to what happens as a result of the final resurrection...

- he says...**1 Corinthians 15:24 - then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.**

- you might say – what does that mean?...this is one of the most important concepts in the entire Bible...Christ turning over the restored world to God the Father, who sent Him to redeem and recover it.

### A. The Kingdom will be delivered back to the Father.

- think about the progression

1) God created our world and all the beauty of it.

2) He then made man in his own image and likeness so men and women could subdue their world,

- and exercise dominion in submission to his rule and reign.

- but he also gave man a free will, because he wanted that submission to be voluntary in response to His goodness.

3) But man sinned and rebelled against God's authority.

- Adam and Eve said the same thing that people would later say about Christ Himself – we do not want this person to be our King...

4) This rebellion was so bad that God's commentary on the condition of mankind in Genesis 6 was that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually."

- 5) Even after the flood, man turned around and displayed his pride and rebellion again by building a tower to reach to the heaven.
- 6) So God in his patience began making covenants to man (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph).
  - he promised to give them a land, and seed, and blessing.
- 7) But even after God's patience and love, men and women violated their side of the covenants--and went after other gods.
- 8) But then you see a clear progression in the covenants...where it becomes apparent that God will send a Messiah who will be in lineage of King David who will redeem people and then transform them from the inside out...that is the only way that human beings will ever want to follow the reign of God in His kingdom...
- 9) That is why it was so significant when finally God said in Jeremiah 31 -- I will make a new covenant, where I'll write my law on your inward parts.
- 10) Of course that's what our Lord was alluding to when He said in the upper room - "This cup is the new covenant in my blood"
- 11) This kingdom was offered to the Jewish nation at the beginning of Christ's public ministry, but it was formally rejected in Matthew chapter 12...
- 12) Ever since the Jews formally rejected the Messiah, Christ has been building his church.
  - people who's sins have been paid for
  - people, who out of love for him, want to obey, and want to serve - and want to live under his authority
  - people who are being remade in his image.
- 13) The day is coming, when the church will be raptured, and according to Rev. 5, Jesus Christ will take the title deed to this earth, and begin the Tribulation judgments.
- 14) Afterwards, he will establish His millennial kingdom on this earth, where He will rule and reign on the throne of David in complete fulfillment of all of the OT prophecies of a coming kingdom.
  - the subjects of that kingdom will be his glorified saints -- you and me -- who have been resurrected, and glorified, prepared to live for Him and serve Him.
  - at the end, that kingdom will be presented to the Father, where our Lord turns over the restored world to His Father, who sent Him to recover it.
  - Paul wants us to stand in awe of that
  - just like Peter, James, and John stood in awe at the transfiguration.
  - after Peter stopped talking, the passage says "the disciples fell on their face, and were very much afraid.

Paul says:

**B. All enemies will be subdued**

## **1 Corinthians 15:25 - For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.**

- just like a general or a king would humiliate his beaten enemy by putting his boot over the conquered enemy's neck
- our Savior will triumph and He will deliver his kingdom to the Father.

### **III. We Ought To Be Challenged By The Implications – vv. 29-49**

#### **A. If you're not a follower of Christ, trust Him as Lord and Savior today!**

- this passage contains a very unusual phrase "being baptized for the dead."
- now of course the Mormons and perhaps some others teach that a person here on earth can be baptized in the place of a person who has already died.
- kind of like a surrogate baptism.
- we know that can't be what Paul is talking about.
  - 1) No one is saved by being baptized, even if they're being baptized by themselves.
  - 2) We can't make decisions on behalf of others-there's never an example of that anywhere in Scripture.
- the writer of Hebrews said, "**It is appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment.**" (Heb. 9:27)
- It is probably best to understand the word "for" as "in the place of." (that's a very natural meaning of that preposition)
- so Paul's argument would be - "If there's no resurrection, why should we be so busy trying to get new people saved and baptized and brought in the church to fill the places left by those believers who have already died?"
- that's a great question - The answer would be - there isn't any reason.
- but just like we did last week - because we know there IS a resurrection -- we have to turn that idea around.
- point would be this - Since the resurrection of Christ is absolutely sure
- and since the resurrection of people is clearly linked to the resurrection of our Lord
- if you haven't yet trusted Christ--do so today!

#### **B. Believe that any danger/hardship associated with living for Christ is worth it.**

- Paul says in **vs. 30 - Why should we stand in jeopardy every hour?**
- **vs. 31 - Why should I die daily?**
- **vs. 32 - Why should I fight wild beasts...**
  - if there's no resurrection.
- the answer is - you shouldn't
- a person would be crazy to subject themselves to any hardship whatsoever in the name of Christ if the Savior's not alive.

- but the Savior is alive - and that means that any danger/hardship associated with living for Christ is worth it.
- Please think with me about that idea for a minute
- what hardships might you associate with being a believer in Christ.
- any one you could name - Paul would want us to write over it - "It's worth it - Our Savior's alive-and one day we will be resurrected as well."
  
- People at school make fun of me - It's worth it.
- It makes me go against my feelings - It's worth it.
- It makes me have to think more carefully about life - It's worth it.
- I can't be the Big man on campus - it's worth it.
- It means I don't have as much discretionary income - it's worth it.
- It means I can't cheat and steal and get away with things I used to - It's worth it.
  
- see, whatever hardship you can possibly imagine that's associated with being a Christian
  - it's worth it - because our Savior is alive
  
- Paul says:

### **C. Believe that holiness has a purpose**

**1 Corinthians 15:32 - ...If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.**

- Paul quotes some of the philosophers of the day at the end of verse 32 when he says - If there's no resurrection, then why are we trying to grow in holiness?
- we might as well eat, drink, and be merry.
  
- that's exactly right.
- listen, if there was no resurrection - I'd change some habits of behavior starting tonight
  - The first thing I'd do - I'm going to Mountain Jacks and I'm going to have about a dozen slices of mud pie.
  - because if there's no resurrection, I'm going to start treating this body the way I want to.
  - no more of this stewardship business.
  
  - then I'm going to go buy a pipe - cuz I've always liked the smell of that stuff -- and if this is my body again--I'll do with it what I please regardless of the effect.
  
  - and we could go on and on and fill out that picture with some things a lot worse than the ones I've just mentioned. -- because Paul's exactly right – If there's no resurrection, there's surely no reason to try to grow in holiness.
  
- but of course there is a resurrection
  - and therefore we want to do what Paul said in verse 34:
    - awake to righteousness and stop sinning
    - holiness and growth are given purpose and meaning because of the resurrection.

### **D. Guard you companions**



**- vs. 33 - evil company corrupts good morals.**

- we talk a lot about this verse and rightly so.

- but it's good to factor it in to the context.

- some believers choose their friends as if the impact their friends is going to have on them really doesn't matter.

- As if their Savior isn't alive or doesn't care.

- but the Savior is alive and He does care.

- I need to be friendly to everybody but I need to make my closest companions and friends people who love God and can stimulate me to love and good works.

- Because I'm going to be resurrected some day - and I want to be able to give a good account.

**E. Be Appalled that some don't know about our resurrected Lord.**

**1 Corinthians 15:34 - ...stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.**