

1 Corinthians 15:12-34
Isaiah 22
Psalm 8

“Why the Resurrection Matters”

September 28, 2014

Have you ever had a peg break?

If you hang something that is too heavy on a peg,
it will all come crashing down!

Isaiah 22 is speaking of the coming judgment –
the LORD God of hosts has a day when he will bring judgment on Jerusalem.

And when the day of judgment comes, the LORD God of hosts calls for weeping and mourning –
but instead, there was joy and gladness –
“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul cites this.

Quite frankly, if there is no resurrection –
then why bother with weeping and mourning?
If there is no resurrection, then why not live it up?!
If this life is all there is,
then hey, go for it!
Have fun.

Who cares?

Isaiah then turns to Shebna, the steward of the house of David,
and he says that God is going to destroy him.
As the one over the household, Shebna was probably the ringleader of those who said,
“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

And Isaiah says that God will send Shebna into exile – where he will die.
And in that day, God will raise up Eliakim, son of Hilkiah –
who will carry the key of the house of David.
And at first all will go well:
he shall open and none shall shut – and he shall shut and none shall open.

But Eliakim cannot hold the weight of the house of David.
He is a strong peg,
but he was not designed to be the Messiah!
He is not the deliverer.
ONLY GOD CAN SAVE!!
Even the best of men is still mortal.
He may be a good and wise steward,
but he is not the Son of David.

In Psalm 8, it speaks of how God has put all things under the feet of the son of man.

In one sense, this is talking about creation –
 how God gave dominion over the creatures to Adam.
But of course, God did not give dominion to the *son of man* –
 he gave dominion to *man* (Adam).
Adam was *not* the *son* of man!
He was Man.

So we also need to sing Psalm 8 as speaking of how God put all things
 under the feet of the Davidic king – the son of David.

Certainly Jesus brings both aspects together.
 Jesus is the second Adam and the Son of David –
 the only peg that can hold the weight of the world.

After all, he is the one through whom God made the world!

Sing Psalm 8
Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

Last time we looked at "The Gospel of the Resurrection" –
 the good news that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day.
This time we are looking at "Why the Resurrection Matters."

In 1 Corinthians 15:12-34, Paul works through three basic questions:

- 1) Why is the resurrection *necessary* (both as a historical event, and as a preached message)?
- 2) What is the *purpose* of the resurrection (for Christ, for us, and for all things)?
- 3) How should you approach life in the light of the resurrection?

1. "Christ Is Risen" – The Necessity of the Resurrection (v12-19)

Gregory was the bishop of Tours at the end of the 6th century.

In his "History of the Franks"

 he shows us that skepticism about the resurrection is not new.

Around the year 590, Gregory reports that one of his priests doubted the resurrection,
 saying that while he could believe that *Jesus* rose from the dead,
 he couldn't imagine how God would raise the bodies of others
 (especially those who were burned by fire, or devoured by wild animals)
 [History of the Franks, X.13]

Paul deals with the same claim.

 Some people in the first century seemed okay with the resurrection of Jesus,
 but objected to the resurrection of everyone else.

 The resurrection was a controversial doctrine – both for Jews and for Greeks.

 The Sadducees were a Jewish group that denied the resurrection of the body.

 And most Greeks thought that the resurrection was absurd –

 the body is the source and occasion for most of the pain and suffering we endure,
 so why would you want your body back?

Paul replies that if there is no resurrection of the dead,
then not even Christ has been raised.

If you understand who Christ is
then *his* resurrection becomes the paradigm for everyone else.

And that is why Paul begins with “preaching and history”:

a. Preaching and History – the Resurrection and Christ (v12-13)

¹² *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.*

Paul had set forth in verses 1-11 those things that are “of first importance” –
the gospel – the good news – is that Jesus died and was buried,
and that Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to over 500 people.
And he concluded in 15:11,
“Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

Our preaching is not just a matter of opinion or philosophy.
We preach a message about something that happened *in history*.
And such is the connection between the resurrection of Jesus *in the middle of history*
and the resurrection of the dead *at the end of history*,
that if you reject the one, you also lose the other!

What is that connection?
Keep reading!
Because 1 Corinthians 15 is one of Paul’s most carefully reasoned arguments.

b. Preaching and Faith – Christ’s Resurrection and Our Faith (v14-17)

¹⁴ *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*

Paul now adds *faith* into the mix.
History, preaching, and faith are all bound up together.
If the resurrection of Jesus did not happen,
then our preaching is “in vain” – it is empty.

(Since I’ve just finished a series on Ecclesiastes,
I should point out that this is *not* the word translated ‘vanity’ in Ecclesiastes.
“Vanity” is the word meaning ‘ephemeral’ or ‘vapor.’
Paul is not saying that his preaching would be ‘ephemeral’
without the resurrection of Christ,
rather, he is saying that his preaching would be *empty* –
lacking in substance.
If Christ is not raised, then I have nothing to say –

and your faith has nothing to it.)

In verse 15, Paul pushes even harder:

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.*

Paul had said in chapter 14 that the apostles are ‘first’ in the church.

Every Christian needs to submit to the apostolic teaching.

And the apostles *all* have testified that God raised Christ.

If the dead are not raised, then they are false witnesses!

If there is no resurrection – then Paul and the rest of the apostles have lied about God!

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.*

Remember the basic gospel message of verses 3-4 –

“that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...”

That is a single message.

If you remove the resurrection – if Christ has not been raised –
then your faith is futile (the word means “useless”).

If Christ has not been raised from the dead
then believing in him will not do any good.

At this point, Paul is simply making an assertion.

He is setting up the problem.

He will give the evidence for this in verses 20-28.

But his basic thesis is that

if our message is that Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead,
then if Christ was not raised from the dead –
the result is obvious – you are still in your sins!

With the result that not only is faith obliterated – but hope as well:

c. Preaching and Hope – the Pitiful State of This Life (v18-19)

¹⁸ *Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* ¹⁹ *If in Christ we have hope^[b]
in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

After all, Paul – and the rest of the apostles – have been preaching the hope of the resurrection.

If there is no resurrection, then Christianity makes no sense.

So verses 12-19 lay out a series of assertions

connecting the historical resurrection of Christ,
the preaching of the apostles,
and the faith of the church –
with the result that if our hope in Christ is only about *this life*,
then we are of all people most to be pitied.

If you look forward into verses 20-34, you'll see how Paul fleshes this out.
Verses 20-28 provide the argument for the purpose of the resurrection –
and why Christ's resurrection *must* result in *our* resurrection;
and then verses 29-34 explain why we would be most pitiable
if we only hope in Christ for this life.

2. “Christ the Firstfruits” – the Purpose of the Resurrection (v20-28)

In verses 20-28, Paul lays out three things that the resurrection of Christ does:

first, to bring life (v20-22) –
as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive;
second, to establish the kingdom (v23-25) –
Christ is the firstfruits of the whole of humanity;
and third, to destroy death (v26-28)
bringing all things into subjection under him.

a. To Make Alive – Adam and Christ (v20-22)

²⁰ *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

²¹ *For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* ²² *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*

It's worth saying that Paul uses the definite article with both Adam and Christ.
For as in *the Adam* all die, so also in *the Christ* shall all be made alive.

Now, that's *terrible* English.
We never use the definite article with a person's name.
If I said that my wife is “the Ginger” -
you would look at me funny!

But in Greek, you *can* use the article with a proper name for emphasis.

Which Adam are we talking about?
Which Christ?
The Adam.
The Christ.

Now it's true that “Christ” is not the name of Jesus –
Christ is his title – “Messiah” (anointed one).

But Paul frequently uses “Christ” as his personal name (as have Christians ever since).

Here, the article serves to highlight the absolute uniqueness of these two men.

There is “the Adam” and “the Christ.”

All other human beings find their identity and meaning in one (or both) of these men.

You are either *in Adam* or *in Christ*.

In Adam all die.

You haven’t died yet.

But you will.

By a man came death.

And there is no way to escape the consequences of Adam’s sin.

The wages of sin is death.

And because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God –
therefore all die.

But that’s not the end of the story!

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

Christ has come in order to repair Adam’s fault.

We have seen already (in 1 Cor 8:6) that Paul sees Jesus
as the one Lord of the OT.

Paul echoed the language of Deuteronomy 6 when he said:

“yet for us there is one God, the Father,
from whom are all things and for whom we exist,
and one Lord, Jesus Christ,
through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”

In Jesus, God has come and put on our humanity.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes this very well:

Q16: Why must He be a true and righteous man?

A16: He must be a true man because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin; he must be a righteous man because one who is himself a sinner cannot pay for others.

Q17: Why must He also be true God?

A17: He must be true God so that by the power of His Godhead He might bear in His manhood the burden of God’s wrath, and so obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

John Calvin has a beautiful way of explaining this:

“His task was so to restore us to God’s grace as to make of the children of men, children of God;
of the heirs of Gehenna, heirs of the heavenly kingdom.

Who could have done this had not the selfsame Son of God become the Son of man,

and had not so taken what was ours as to impart what was his to us,
and to make what was his by nature ours by grace?...
It was his task to swallow up death.
Who but the Life could do this?
It was his task to conquer sin.
Who but very Righteousness could do this?
It was his task to rout the powers of world and air.
Who but a power higher than world and air could do this?
Now where does life or righteousness or lordship and authority of heaven lie
but with God alone?
Therefore our most merciful God, when he willed that we be redeemed,
made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son.” (Inst. II.xii.2)

It must be a son of Adam who would repair Adam’s fault.
But no son of Adam could survive the wrath and curse of God.

We see this in Isaiah 59.
Adam’s sin brought God’s wrath and curse upon all humanity
God’s purpose with Israel was to focus his curse upon one nation
(remember that Moses prophesied Israel’s failure in Deuteronomy)
so that through that one nation he could bring blessing to the nations.

In Isaiah 59:1-15, Isaiah goes into great detail to describe how far short Israel has fallen.
then in verse 15 Isaiah says:
*The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.
He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede;
then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him
He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head*

So that “a Redeemer will come to Zion,
to those in Jacob who turn away from transgression.” (59:20)

God narrows his curse from all humanity in Adam, to Israel, and finally to one man, Jesus
So that in that one man, Jesus,
the blessing of God might now extend to the new humanity.

And that’s the second purpose of the resurrection of Christ:
to establish the kingdom!

b. To Establish the Kingdom – Christ the King (v23-25)

²³ *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

You might say, Pastor, this is taking too long!
Do not be discouraged.
Our God is a God of order.

At the end of chapter 14, we heard every Presbyterian's favorite verse:
"all things should be done decently and in order"!
Here Paul uses the same word to say that *God himself*
is doing things decently and *in order*.
There is a proper order to the resurrection:
Christ the firstfruits –
then at his coming those who belong to Christ.
As firstfruits, Christ is the *first one* to be raised.

Now, someone might say, "wait, what about Lazarus?"
Elijah and Elisha *both* raised people from the dead!

True, but those were not full-fledged resurrections.
Those people were certainly raised from the dead –
but that was only a temporary resurrection.
Lazarus died again.

A temporary resurrection is a good thing – it shows that death will not win in the end!
But Lazarus wound up dead and buried.
And he is still dead – and buried!

But Jesus rose from the dead – never to die again!
His resurrection burst the gates of hell –
he arose from the dead by the power of an everlasting life!
He now sits at the right hand of the Father *in his glorified body*!
There is an embodied man –
sitting at the right hand of the Father.
(We'll talk next week about what kind of body that is!)

So Christ is the firstfruits –
the first *one* to be raised –
but also, as *firstfruits*, the point is that *the rest of humanity*
will also be raised up when he comes.

And verses 24-25 describe what he will do when he comes:

²⁴ *Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.* ²⁵ *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*

What is Jesus doing now?

He is destroying every rule and every authority and power.
The word translated "destroy" is the same word used in chapter 13
when Paul said that *knowledge* and *prophecy* will be brought to an end.

Destroy is probably not the best translation of this.

Paul is not saying that rule, authority, and power will be destroyed –
in the sense of *obliterated*.

Rather, Paul is saying that every rule, every authority and power will be destroyed
in the sense of rendered ineffective – brought to nothing – nullified.

What does this mean?

Well, let's not forget the Adam/Christ parallel!

God had created man, and given him dominion over the works of his hands
(we sang about that in Psalm 8).

Rule, authority, and power had been given to Adam.

But when Adam sinned, rule, authority, and power was handed over to the usurper, the devil.

Indeed, one could even say that *death* ruled humanity,
as we were governed by the fear of death!

What is Jesus doing now?

Jesus is rendering ineffective all rule, all authority and power.
Everything is being put in subjection under his feet.

He is bringing to nothing every power that has opposed him.

Now, you might say that he's not doing a very good job.

After all, 2000 years later, the wicked still have considerable rule, authority, and power!

But *how* does Christ rule?

How does he render ineffective every rule, every authority and power?

It is not by the weapons of this age!

Neither the sword nor the ballot box can establish the kingdom of Jesus!

The kingdom of Jesus is established through the preaching of the cross.

In one sense, I am thankful for 1500 years of Christian rulers in Europe
who wanted their people to believe in Jesus.

But too often we lost sight of whose kingdom was our focus!

But through it all, Jesus continued to bring to nothing every rule, every authority and power!

Every kingdom that opposes Jesus – every power that withstands his reign –
is being nullified.

Think about our liberal, secular world:

what is it that drives them?

They want to see love, peace, joy – human flourishing.

They want to put an end to suffering and oppression and evil.

Those are all very noble ends.

In one sense, you could say that what they seek is the Kingdom of Jesus!

They just don't know where to find it!

The attempt to establish the Kingdom of Jesus by force – or by popular election –
will inevitably fail,
because it attempts to use rule, authority and power
rather than the foolishness of preaching.

But this is the fun part of being a student of history!

In every age it appears to the faithful as though the gospel was perishing.
In every age, those who love Jesus mourn at the folly of this age!
And in every age, the gospel continues to advance to the ends of the earth –
in spite of the foolishness (or, should I say *because* of the foolishness)
of those who preach the message!

But they're not doing it right!
That's not "decently and in order"!!

No, it's not.

Since when did that stop Jesus from putting an end to all rule and all authority and power?
We should still heed the apostles!
Paul said, "do all things decently and in order" –
and he expected the Corinthians to listen and to do what he said!
But as we do our best to follow the apostles' teaching,
remember that Jesus is still King!

c. To Destroy Death – that God May Be All in All (v26-28)

²⁶ *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* ²⁷ For "God^[c] has put all things in subjection under his feet."

Paul cites Psalm 8 in verse 27.
(He had hinted at this in verse 25).

God has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet.
After all, in the resurrection of Jesus, death has already been defeated.
But death has not yet been "brought to nothing."
That will only happen when believers are raised from the dead.
In my experience, death still has *some* power.
I will die.
But because of the resurrection of Christ –
that power of death is only a fleeting and transient power!

Death no longer has the last word!

And Christ has come in order to destroy death – in order to nullify death!

As Paul goes on to say in verses 27-28:

But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, 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.

When Adam’s error has been fully rectified.
When death has finally been brought to nothing,
and all the corruptions of Adamic rule and authority and power are ended,
then the Son will hand over the Kingdom to the Father,
in order that that God may be all in all.

This phrase “that God may be all in all” could be translated
that God may be everything to everyone –
or that God may be everything in every situation.

While the exact nuance may be hard to state in English,
the point is not complicated!

The point is that the Father and the Son are in such perfect harmony
that when all things are finally subjected to the Son,
then all things will finally be subjected to the Father!

3. “Dying Daily” – How the Resurrection Challenges Our Daily Life (v29-34)

And, in a small way, that begins even now in the church!

Verses 29-34 speak of how the resurrection challenges our daily life even now.

All three scenarios focus on putting flesh on verse 19 –
“If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

First, in verse 29, we have the strangest verse in the chapter:

a. Baptism for the Dead (v29)

²⁹ *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?*

I cannot tell you with any certainty what Paul means by “being baptized on behalf of the dead.”

I wish I could – but after reviewing the 40 different proposals for what it means,

I am no closer to understanding it than I was before!

I take comfort in the fact that as early as the 2nd century,
people professed to be puzzled by this!

I *can* tell you one thing that it does *not* mean!

This passage does not support the Mormon practice of baptizing living people
in the place of the dead –

so that the dead are considered ‘converted’ after the fact.

Both Tertullian and John Chrysostom reject this practice as heretical and absurd –

and it is plainly contrary to apostolic teaching and practice.

(There is a simple rule of biblical interpretation –
that if a passage admits of several possible interpretations,
if one of those interpretations is inconsistent with the rest of biblical teaching,
then you can generally rule that interpretation out.
In this case, there are at least 30 orthodox interpretations of the passage,
so there is no reason to go with a heretical one!)

The phrase is literally translated,
“Otherwise, what will they do, the ones who are baptized on behalf of the dead?”
(some have rendered it, ‘what do they think they are doing’?)

Anthony Thiselton suggests that the idea may be that some people were getting baptized
in the hope of being reunited with those who had died. (p1248)

That makes as much sense as any view.

In that view, Paul is saying that if the dead are not raised,
then why are people getting baptized for the sake of seeing their departed friends?

Second, if there is no resurrection:

b. How Do You Approach Life in Light of the Resurrection? (v30-32)

³⁰ *Why are we in danger every hour?* ³¹ *I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!* ³² *What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”*

Paul has endured all sorts of physical trials.
Why subject his body to this sort of beating –
if there is no resurrection of the body?
If the dead are not raised,
Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!

Paul cites Isaiah 22:13.
If there is no resurrection, then why do we put ourselves through all this?
Why not just enjoy ourselves?
Why court death?
Why put ourselves at risk every hour?

Thiselton says it nicely:
“Here is a succinct pastoral theology
of the *risks, fragility, and dearest, deepest concerns*
of a pastor who is willing to sacrifice all for the gospel
in the light of the gathering together of all at the resurrection.” (p1251)

And this gets applied to the congregation in verses 33-34:

c. “Stop It” – What Is Getting in the Way? (v33-34)

³³ *Do not be deceived:*

or perhaps better, *stop being deceived!*

“Bad company ruins good morals.”^[d] ³⁴ Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

The problem is that *some* have no knowledge of God.

Think about what Paul is saying.

If you know God, then you will not seek to run with a bad crowd.

“Bad company ruins good morals” –

is a line from a Greek play,

but it had become a common saying.

Psalm 1 lays this out clearly.

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,

or stand in the way of sinners,

or sit in the seat of scoffers”

Wake up from your drunken stupor – as is right –

and do not go on sinning.

Sometimes, you struggle with trying to understand “why do I struggle with this sin?”

You think through the questions, “what lie am I believing?”

“Is there something I love more than God?”

“What do you hope for? What do you fear?”

All these questions...

Paul says:

Stop it!

Yeah, I know.

But my parents...

No, *stop it!*

Right, I will.

But sometimes it's okay...

No, *stop it!*

But what if...

No.

If Jesus Christ is risen from the dead,
then stop it!