

Sunday, April 4, 2021

1 Corinthians 15:1-23, 42-58 (The Good News of Bodily Resurrection)

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Intro

This morning we celebrate the resurrection. The greatest event in human history. Let's recap what happened in the days leading up to the resurrection.

On the Sunday before the resurrection, Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus rode in on a donkey, cloaks and palm branches were spread before him (Matt 21:1-11; John 12:12-18), and the crowds called out, "Hosanna in the highest" = "praise be to God." The following Thursday Jesus celebrated the Passover with the 12, instituting the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:17-29). The next day, Good Friday, Jesus was tried and condemned. The crowds demanded the release of Barabbas, a robber, an anarchist, and a murderer, while demanding that Jesus be crucified (Matt 27:15-23). Jesus was then scourged and crucified (Matt 27:24-27:61). Giving up his spirit, he cried out, "It is finished (John 19:30)." His work was done.

Then on the third day, Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead, triumphing over the grave (Matt 28:1-10).

This morning we consider the significance of the resurrection. This morning we ask:

CRUCIAL QUESTION: What does the Bible say about the resurrection of the dead?

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Some in Corinth evidently believed that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, but they didn't believe in a future resurrection of believers.

Jesus' resurrection = a perishable, deceased earthly body being raised to an imperishable body of a different quality.

READ 15:1-19

Point 1: The resurrection is a matter of first importance (15:1-19)

Explanation

"Now" (15:1) = moving on to a new subject. The problem is found in verse 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? – 15:12

Some were okay proclaiming Jesus rose from the dead, but they didn't believe that deceased believers would be resurrected. So Paul reminds them of the gospel he preached, they received (embraced, accepted), and they are presumably committed to.

Gospel = the good news of salvation in Christ. Good news of forgiveness of sins, good news of newness of life, good news of a kingdom where sin and suffering and death will cease.

Being saved after initial faith **by the gospel** = sanctification = becoming more holy... becoming more Christlike...the process of sinning less and forming godly character...salvation is past (initial belief and forgiveness of sins)...salvation is present (becoming more Christlike)...salvation is future (imperishable, sinless existence in the new heavens and new earth)

Forgiveness = confidence to approach God or mercy experienced encourages mercy to others

Newness of life = hope to overcome sin

Kingdom = perspective that this world's trials are temporary

“if you hold fast to the word I preached to you- unless you believed in vain.” = Paul holds out the possibility some of the Corinthians won't hold fast to the gospel because their belief was “in vain” (= **without result**) = belief that wasn't saving. They may have believed something other than the true gospel:

“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” – 15:14

Gospel basics: Jesus died for our sins (for OT fulfillment see Isaiah 53), Christ was physically buried as a dead man, and Christ was physically raised from the dead on the third day (for OT fulfillment see Ps 16:8-11 which, in Acts 2:25-28, Peter understands to reference Jesus).

Then Paul mentions witnesses of Jesus' resurrection: Cephas = Peter, the 12 apostles, 500 hundred disciples, James, all the apostles (= more than just the 12), and last Paul himself. Paul was unworthy given his past: he imprisoned believers, male and female (Acts 8:1-3). But Paul could say this:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. – 15:10

▪ The transformed Paul is a product of God's grace. His missionary efforts were a product of God's grace. Grace empowers mission. God's grace wasn't “in vain.”

15:11 = continuity with the apostles' message. The early church had a unified understanding of the resurrection.

15:12-19 focuses on the logical fallout if the dead in Christ are not raised. Paul believes both resurrections are logically connected. You can't have one without the other.

- 1) No resurrection of the dead (Corinthian belief) means Jesus wasn't raised from the dead (15:13, 16)
- 2) Jesus not resurrected means the apostolic gospel is without result (“in vain”), their faith was without result (see 15:2), and the apostles (we) are in fact liars (15:14-15)
- 3) Jesus not resurrected means the Corinthian's faith is worthless (“futile”) and the guilt that stems from their sins still remains (15:17)
- 4) Jesus not resurrected means that dead believers (“fallen asleep in Christ”) have perished = believer and unbeliever alike suffer eternal ruin (15:18)
- 5) Jesus not resurrected means believers only have hope in this life, but not in the life to come, so we should be pitied (15:19)

Application

Without the resurrection, the gospel is fruitless.

Without the resurrection, Christianity is a deception.

Without the resurrection, the guilt of our sins remains.

Without the resurrection, we will suffer eternal punishment.

Without the resurrection, we are a people to be pitied.

Without the resurrection, we are a people without hope.

Without the resurrection Christianity is just words...empty claims.

Without the resurrection Jesus is just an interesting teacher who died without effect (in vain!).

One thing that sets Christianity apart from all other religions is that Christianity is an authenticated religion. There's a reason to accept its claims. The God who eternally existed in three persons (Father, Son, and Spirit), the God who created the world, the God who is spirit (John 4:24), entered his creation physically when God the Son, Jesus Christ, took on human flesh and dwelt amongst us (John 1:14). Taking on human flesh subjected Jesus, in his human nature, to death. His divine nature could never die. Taking on human flesh, Jesus subjected himself to death on a cross for our sins. Before his death, Jesus claimed he would rise in three days. The Trinity substantiated Jesus' claims when the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, raised the Son from the grave.

This is one reason why people go to great lengths to deny the historicity of the resurrection. Other religions don't need to be discredited because they don't pose a threat. They don't make claims like the resurrection. If Jesus was raised from the dead, God's moral directives hold weight today, regardless of public opinion. If Jesus was raised from the dead, there are eternal consequences for our sin. If Jesus was raised from the dead, his promises are true! The resurrection grounds our hope.

Why do I believe?

- 1) God convicted me of sin and drew me to the goodness of Christ...the Spirit illumined my heart to receive God's Word
- 2) My inner life has changed...I am not who I was = gospel promises of inner transformation are happening today = a substantiated faith!
- 3) Intellectual study after conversion has substantiated my faith and discredited rival claims

Arguments for a historical resurrection

- 1) Extra-biblical sources confirm Jesus' existence
 - He's mentioned by Jewish historian and Roman citizen Josephus (37-100), the Roman historian Tacitus (55-120), and in a letter from Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan in 112.
 - These accounts confirm facts like Jesus was put to death by Pontius Pilate and Jesus was worshipped like a god
- 2) Eyewitness testimony
 - gospels were written by those with firsthand knowledge (how else could we know?)
 - manuscript evidence reveals the story never changed (early fragments and uniform manuscripts)
- 3) The normal procedure is to accept eyewitness accounts unless proven false
 - assumptions that miracles are not possible ≠ proven false (= evidence ruled out from the start)
- 4) The credibility of eyewitness accounts (the gospels)
 - presenting unfavorable details of early leaders like Peter suggests authenticity (deceivers don't present their faults)
 - in the gospels the same event is presented in diverse ways with each eyewitness adding their own details (a rehearsed conspiracy/lie wouldn't allow for as much diversity)
 - women are mentioned as witnesses at a time when the witness of women wasn't valued (this didn't help their cause if a deception was intended)
- 5) The empty tomb

- it's certain the Jewish authorities didn't possess Jesus' body...all they had to do was produce the body to crush resurrection claims
- if, as the Jewish authorities claimed, the disciples stole the body, why weren't the apostles arrested? (they were arrested for preaching about the resurrection weeks after it occurred)
- the Jewish leaders had knowledge of Jesus' claim that he would raise himself from the dead so they had motive to ensure a secure tomb (Matt 27:62-66 testifies to this)
- the Roman guards had motive to ensure a secure tomb because the punishment for failure to secure the tomb would be death
- the evidence suggests the disciples had no opportunity to steal, there was great motive to maintain the body, yet the Jewish leadership couldn't produce the body!
- why would disciples subject themselves to persecution, and even death, for something they knew to be false (early church tradition testifies that 11 of the 12 apostles were executed for their faith)
- if it were a hoax, wouldn't at least one disciple give up the secret upon threat of death?

6) The evidence points in one direction: Jesus rose from the dead

READ 15:20-23

Point 2: Bodily resurrection belongs to everyone in Christ (15:20-23)

Explanation

Jesus is the firstfruits "*of those who have fallen asleep.*" Firstfruits = the first portion of grain, fruit harvest, and flocks offered to God under the Mosaic Law. Here firstfruits = the first of a category. Jesus is the first of a group that will be resurrected to an imperishable body.

Jesus contrasts with Adam. By eating from the forbidden tree, Adam brought physical and spiritual death to the human race. After the fall, our bodies decay and die. And we became morally corrupt, by nature rebels against God. Adam brought death. Jesus brings resurrection of the dead.

15:22 in isolation might seem like Jesus achieved resurrection for everyone, but we need to follow Paul's argument. 15:23 clarifies that the people who will be resurrected are "*those who belong to Christ.*" In other words, those who have placed their faith in Christ alone and repented of their sins. Paul explains the order: Christ was raised first, then when he returns, those who believe in him will be resurrected also. We're resurrected when Jesus returns.

Application

When Jesus returns every human ever born will be resurrected (John 5:28-29). But everyone won't be resurrected in the same way. If we don't belong to Christ we remain in our sins. And we'll receive everlasting punishment. A place called hell that's described in terms like weeping and gnashing of teeth. An end to be avoided at all costs. The resurrection implies our need to belong to Christ, which comes through faith and repentance.

Let's look at what the future resurrection means for all who believe...

READ 15:42-49

Point 3: Resurrection is unto an imperishable body (15:42-49)

Explanation

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. – 15:42

15:42 answers Paul's question, "*How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?* (15:35)."

The earthly body is contrasted with the heavenly body:

- 1) Perishable vs. imperishable
- 2) Dishonor vs. glory
- 3) Weakness vs. power
- 4) Natural body vs. spiritual body

Jesus is again contrasted with Adam (both are patterns for humanity):

- 1) Living being vs. life-giving spirit (= through union with Christ [15:22-23] comes resurrection from the dead)
- 2) From dust vs. from heaven
- 3) Adam = natural vs. Jesus = spiritual
- 4) Natural comes first and spiritual comes second, or last

In 15:49 Paul reaches his conclusion:

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. – 15:49

- "shall also bear" = the imperishable, spiritual body is a future reality

READ 15:50-58

Point 4: Bodily resurrection is the defeat of death (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

Our present bodies are unsuitable for the kingdom of God

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. – 15:50

Our present bodies must be altered

Paul reveals a mystery (= hidden truth now revealed). At the last trumpet the dead in Christ will be raised to imperishable bodies and the believers alive at that time will be changed. Perishable, earthly bodies will give way to imperishable, spiritual bodies (15:51-53). Forever.

The resurrection of believers occurs when Jesus returns (see 15:23). At the last trumpet. Instantaneously ("twinkling of an eye" = the time it takes for a person to blink).

[2nd coming occurs at the last trumpet and the resurrection of believers occurs at this time]

The perishable will put on the imperishable (15:53-54) = this earthly body will be clothed with "*the image of the man of heaven* (15:49)." This physical body won't be replaced with a different form or composition. This physical body will remain in altered form. Transformation by addition, not subtraction. What should we expect?

- 1) Physical bodies like Jesus' resurrected body (Luke 24:39; 15:49)
- 2) Human appearance
- 3) Recognizable appearance (Luke 24:31)
- 4) Eating (Luke 24:42-43)
- 5) Drinking (Matt 26:29)
- 6) No wearing out, growing old, injury, sickness, or disease

7) A shining radiance (Matt 13:43; in the transfiguration [Matt 17:2] Jesus had a shining radiance; after ascending to the Father the Son had a shining radiance [see Rev 1:16])

Death will cease

When the resurrection of believers occurs, death will be defeated (“swallowed up”; 15:54-55). Death terminates at our resurrection. Death is defeated by bodily resurrection.

15:56

Because death came, we experience the pain of sin: inclination to do what’s harmful, separation from God, grief and guilt over our own wrongdoing, being sinned against by others.

Through God’s moral law we experience sin’s power: our inability to obey in word, thought, and deed, our guilt, and our need for a Savior.

Conclusion

How should we respond to the resurrection?

First, praise. Through faith in Jesus we have victory over death and sin. Jesus obeyed where Adam failed. And Jesus died as our substitute, taking the punishment our sins deserved. We’re pardoned and the kingdom awaits. Jesus’ resurrection secures our future resurrection. All the effects of Adam’s failure will be undone.

Non-Christians, hope is before you today. Hope of bodily resurrection. A credible hope. Hope secured by the resurrection of Jesus. Hope of a world to come where death will cease, where physical suffering will end, where we won’t be able to sin anymore, where we won’t be sinned against anymore. But our sins have separated us from God. We’re guilty and God holds us accountable. Unless we repent and believe. Trust in the one who rose from the dead. Trust in Jesus’ finished work on the cross, not yourselves, for pardon. Trusting Jesus, turn from your sins and follow him. And praise Jesus for rescuing you from your sins. Sin is something we should despise, give up, and battle, not something we should cherish!

Second, engage in gospel mission. Unwavering (steadfast) and in abundance (abounding).

Engage in gospel conversations, prayer, pressing on to maturity, serving needs in the local church, caring for one another, encouraging one another, challenging one another (work of the Lord). Your labor isn’t in vain (= not without result). The gospel is powerful to convert sinners. The gospel is saving us today.

The resurrection inspires praise. The resurrection inspires mission.