**THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION**

March 28, 2021

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Key Verse 15:22 “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

To deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to destroy the entire basis of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is not based primarily on the teachings of Jesus. It is not based on the life of Jesus. It is not based on the compassion of Jesus. It is not based on the miracles of Jesus. It is not even based on the death of Jesus. The Christian faith is based on all of those things culminating in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If you don’t have the resurrection, you have just destroyed all those other things. In this passage Paul gives a clear answer on why the resurrection is necessary, and explains what the power of the Risen Christ is like.

Look at verse 12. “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” Some people were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. Why would they be saying that? The resurrection is never easy to believe, because it is not something we ever see. But some of these Corinthians had a problem with it because, as Greeks, they didn’t believe that people’s bodies would be resurrected after death. They thought the afterlife is something that involves only the soul. Today many people think that the resurrection is not practical and that the resurrection faith does not add any practical benefits to their welfare. They attend church and enjoy Christian fellowship. Their main purpose in going to church is to have fellowship with others and obtain comfort and peace after hard work. So whenever they hear the words “the resurrection of Christ,” they draw the line in their minds and think, “No way. That is not necessary.” Their faith in Jesus is more concerned with their present situation than man’s salvation from sin and death. Their lives in the cold reality of the present world are hard enough. How many sermons about the resurrection and heaven have you heard? Probably not many.

Paul wrote this part of his letter in the subjunctive mood to help them think about what the contents of the world would be like if Jesus had not been raised. If Jesus has not been raised, then there was “never” “any” resurrection. If Jesus has not been raised, the world in its contents is nothing but death, a sea of death. The world is full of graveyards and dying people. Taking a nice swim in a calm and warm sea is very refreshing. But swimming in the cold and dark sea of death is unbearable punishment. Those who have no faith in the resurrection of Christ are the living dead, who do not know how to cope with the thought of death; life has lost its purpose and meaning. These people are bored and fed up; they have no passion for living. If Jesus has not been raised, then the world is full of dead things and elements of death. The world is under the power of death. The power of death makes us sorrowful, fearful, self-centered and hedonistic. Someone said, “Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, ‘It might have been.’” Before the power of death, everyone is full of regrets and kneel down grudgingly. On the other hand, Jesus said on the cross his last word, “It is finished.” He did not say, “I am finished.” He had no regret and no sorrow. He was victorious even on the cross because he believed that God would raise him from the dead.

Look at verses 14-15. “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.” If Jesus was not raised, he was an imposter because he promised that he would rise from the dead. All gospel messengers would all turn out to be liars. Look at verse 17. “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” If Jesus was not raised, his death is no different from any other martyr’s death. There has been many tragic death. At the time of Jesus, there were thousands who were crucified. But in raising Jesus from the dead, God testified to the fact that he was completely satisfied with the blood of Christ for our sins. The resurrection is the proof that God solved our sin problem. Jesus bore our sins in his own body. That is what killed him. So if he was not raised, then sin conquered Jesus. If he did not conquer sin, we are all condemned to eternal punishment due to our sins.

Look at verse 19. “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” Christians are people who walk the narrow way. We carry the cross of mission and are called to live sacrificial lives. We are called to expand the territory of the kingdom of God. In doing so, we are despised and rejected by worldly people, simply because we want to be like Jesus, not like “one of them” in the world. We keep the faith and fight the good fight because we believe that the Risen Christ is our inheritance. If Jesus was not raised, the nihilism, the mentality of seeking fleeting pleasures, and the pessimistic view of man, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” might be the best lifestyle for mankind. And if there is no resurrection, then those who participate in the remaining sufferings of Christ are the most pitiful people.

Look at verse 20. “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” When Paul said, “indeed,” it means that Christ’s resurrection is a fact, not a philosophical idea, and his resurrection has now changed everything. Now there is hope for the future, now there is a reason to believe, now there is a reason to preach, now there is forgiveness of sins, now there is a reason to follow Jesus and suffer for him. Now there is a reason to rejoice in all things, because Christ has been raised from the dead. Paul adds that Christ’s resurrection was “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” “The firstfruits” is a powerful image with deep spiritual meaning. In agriculture, the firstfruits are what is produced first, before the full harvest. The firstfruits may seem small, but they suggest the nature and the quality of the crop to come. When farmers see the firstfruits, they can take heart that all their hard work of planting and nurturing was not in vain, and they can wait patiently for what is surely about to happen. Likewise, we can think of the Risen Christ as the firstfruits of our own resurrection, and of all who believed in him down through history. In verses 20-28 Paul gives us three facts about the power of the Risen Christ.

**First**, the resurrection is a triumph over despair. Without resurrection hope, man lives in despair - pessimistic, fatalistic, amoral - and he looks ahead and he can’t see anything to change that, and so he grabs all he can grab in the moment. He just lives for the moment; or he drinks, or he takes drugs; Life without a future is really a horrible practical joke. If man has no value but to die and become dust, then all of his life is meaningless, utterly meaningless. The only way to triumph over despair is in resurrection. Look at verse 20 again. “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Christ is risen. Death is not the end. Jesus not only conquered death for himself, but he conquered death for everyone else. When Jesus died, his disciples went into instant despair. They were hiding in fear. They were confused. Their hope was gone. Even when the Risen Christ appeared to them, they would not believe. So the Risen Christ rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart in refusing to believe that he was alive. They were in such despair. Two of the disciples were on the road to Emmaus, in total despair until Jesus revealed himself to them. After meeting the Risen Christ, their hearts were burning with the spirit of boldness and victory. They went back to Jerusalem where the temple police was searching for them and boldly witnessed to Jesus’ resurrection.

**Second**, the Risen Christ has the power to give man new life. Look at verse 21. “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.” Because of Adam’s disobedience, sin came into the world. When men became sinsick, they began to see God relatively. They also began to see other human beings and the world with relativism, not with the absolute truth of God. In their relativistic thinking, if they need God, they say there is a God; if they don’t need God, they say there is no God. In this way, sin reigned in mankind and in all their offspring. Sin began with Adam’s disobedience, and the consequence of sin was death for everyone. Many humanist thinkers have struggled with this problem of man’s tendency to sin and with the problem of death. They tried hard to get rid of sin and death with many kinds of positive thinking. But all their struggles failed. So Paul said in verse 22, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” Through Adam we all inherited a sinful nature, we remain dead in our sins spiritually, and we all have to die physically. Sinful nature and death are like gravity. No one can defy gravity. If you throw a dead bird, it drops to the ground. But if you throw a live bird, it flies away. It can defy the gravity because it has life. Likewise, in Christ, we have life. We can defy the gravity of sin and death. We are free in Jesus Christ because he gave us life. Look at verse 22 again. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” All in Adam are in Adam by natural descent. We are the physical offspring of Adam, a nature that is fallen and sinful and dying. But with Christ, that chain is broken. Christ paid the penalty for our sin, conquers death on our behalf, and death is overpowered. All who put their trust in Christ are spiritually born again, belong to a new spiritual family and possess his resurrection life.

**Third**, the Risen Christ has the power to restore the kingdom of God. Look at verse 24. “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.” In the course of restoring the kingdom of God, the Risen Christ will first destroy all evil and unrighteousness. No matter how good many things of the world may seem, we know that underneath the world is full of evil. Where there is evil and unrighteousness, there is always fear and sorrow. Today people of Myanmar are suffering under the cruel military dictatorship. But when the time comes, the Risen Christ will destroy all evil dominion, authority and power. Next the Risen Christ will destroy death. Look at verse 26. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” Death is the fruit of sin. Death is the last enemy of man. Death has in it a sting. During their lives, those who sin against God get many injuries and wounds both in body and spirit by the sting of death. The power of death is imbedded in man and in the world beyond remedy. But the Risen Christ will destroy this last enemy, death, with his resurrection power. Actually, at the time of the resurrection of Jesus, the power of sin and death was destroyed. Satan’s head was crushed, but he has been wagging his tail. This wagging tail of Satan has frightened mankind until now. If we see the picture of an emergency room with someone in a ventilator, we are frightened. But we need to live by faith, not by sight. Death has been conquered. When Jesus comes again, sin and death, that is, Satan, will be completely destroyed and there will be no more Satan--the liars and murderers.

Look at verse 28. “When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.” Originally, there was one kingdom--the kingdom of God. But because of Adam’s disobedience, another kingdom came into the world--the kingdom of Satan. Satan has ruled the darkness of the world ever since Adam's fall. But when God raised Jesus from the dead, he assured the complete destruction of the kingdom of Satan, and at the same time the complete restoration of the kingdom of God. In the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come,” means the destruction of the kingdom of Satan, and at the same time the complete restoration of the kingdom of God.

Paul knew that they had become shaky in their lives of faith because they had not taken deep root in resurrection faith. So Paul explained why he and his co-workers struggled to live a victorious life. It was because he and his co-workers believed that Christ is risen. So they lived like good soldiers of Christ. Look at verses 30-32. “And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day...If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” We don’t know whether Paul really fought against lions like a gladiator in Coliseum. But the enemies of God in Ephesus were as ferocious as wild beasts to hinder the gospel work. He risked his life every day for the gospel. If there is no resurrection, what kind of life do people try to live? ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow die.’ We sometimes hear Christians say that even if this life were all, they would still be Christians. But Paul does not think so. If there were no resurrection, we would be better off to make the most of this life even by cheating and by living selfishly. Enjoying life to the maximum degree could be wise if there is no resurrection. But because of resurrection faith, Paul faced death every day without fear. To him to live was Christ, and to die was gain (Php 1:21).

Paul gave them some final advice. Look at verse 33. “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” Who are bad company? They are those who live without resurrection faith. They live in the world like dead fish. Such people put all their attention into what the world had to offer. The things of the world are glittering and desirable, but they are all temporal. Paul said in verse 34a, “Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning.” Paul said, “Stop sinning.” It meant that those who say, “I am a Christian,” but who do not have resurrection faith are sinning, because they are living double lives. May God help us to live by the power of the resurrection. May God help us to live by faith, not by sight.

Big Idea: The Risen Christ conquered death