

Resurrection and the End of Death

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1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Will you take your Bibles and turn with me this morning to 1 Corinthians chapter 15? As we all know, given that which we have heard thus far in this service and what we have sung, this is resurrection Sunday, a day that we set aside to celebrate the most amazing event in human history, the resurrection of our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus went to great lengths to care for the Lord's body using over 100 pounds of spices and linen wrappings to preserve him and care for him. Moreover the Jewish elite went to great lengths to guard the tomb by seeking the help of the Romans for fear of what Jesus had said earlier might come true. Jesus had predicted, "just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,"¹ Matthew 12:40.

In Matthew 27 we read how Pilate heard what the Jews asked him to do and he said in verse 64, "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first."² You see, even a hint of a resurrection could set off a brush fire of insurrection. So they wanted to prevent this and in verse 65:

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.³

So with all of the force of Rome they said, "Keep away, stay away."

But, dear friends, today we approach the tomb and we see that the stone has been rolled away. Despite all of the efforts of man, today we hear the angel summon the two Marys and say in Matthew 28 verse five:

Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.⁴

And, dear friends, with those early saints we stand in amazement as we stare into an empty tomb. Suddenly the reality of what occurred staggers our imaginations. Goose bumps of exhilarating joy envelope our whole body. Our mourning turns to joy. There is no more a rotting corpse in some royal bed chamber. He is risen. Only the linen wrappings that covered the Lamb of God now lie upon the cold stone, a vivid reminder of what we will all some day wear.

¹ Matthew 12:40.

² Matthew 27:64.

³ Matthew 27:65-66.

⁴ Matthew 28:5-6.

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The sacred sepulcher is empty proving that the debt of sin was paid in full. It could not hold the one who had power over death. And because he lives, so, too, will all who have been united to him by grace through faith.

And I want you to remember that as Christians we do not stand and gaze at some giant pyramid that attempts to immortalize and glorify a mere mortal whose body has long since decayed and whose soul is now imprisoned in the eternal horrors of hell; nor do we look upon the royal mausoleum of some great king that has long since departed and been forgotten. But, rather, we look upon a simple rock tomb that once held the lover of our souls, but only briefly. For he has risen from the dead as he promised he would.

No wonder this was the theme of Peter's first sermon on the birthday of the Church at Pentecost where he declared in Acts chapter two verse 24, "God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."⁵

This morning I want to examine the implications of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for believers as it is described in a few verses here in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 beginning in verse 20 through 28. Let me read them to you. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, a chapter that is dedicated to helping us understand the resurrection of Christ. And, again, I want to focus primarily on verses 20 through 28.

The apostle Paul writing here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.⁶

Before we examine this text a bit more closely, I would like to review a few important theological truths pertaining to the resurrection.

Jesus made it clear that there will one day be a "resurrection of the righteous." There will also be what he calls a "resurrection of life" and it is also called "the first resurrection."

⁵ Acts 2:24.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

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We read in 2 Corinthians chapter five and verse one where the apostle Paul tells us, “For we know that if the earthly tent,”⁷ referring to our body, “which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house,”⁸ referring, again, to our present body:

... we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.⁹

Certainly we all long to be clothed in immortality. And the older I get the more I long for it. And that will happen because of the resurrection as we will see.

But Jesus also made it clear that there is a second resurrection called the “resurrection of judgment” for the unrighteous from John 5:29. In fact, in his defense before Felix, the apostle Paul said in Acts 24:15, “That there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”¹⁰

Now think with me for a moment what the resurrection means to those of us who know and love Christ. You see, if Jesus were still in the grave he would have died in vain. Our faith in Christ as Savior would be absolutely ludicrous. We would have no faith, we would have no hope and we would die in our sins because the wages of sin is spiritual death¹¹ we are told and, therefore, we would never experience the free gift of God which is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Instead we would remain spiritually dead and subject to eternal punishment.

Paul summarized this in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 16 through 18 where he says:

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.¹²

But, dear friends, we rejoice that Christ did, indeed, conquer death and we serve a risen Lord and his resurrection guarantees ours.

A Baptist minister captured the essence of these magnificent truths in the lyrics that he wrote back in 1864, the lyrics of a hymn that we have sung from time to time entitled “Low in the Grave He Lay.”

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:1.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:1-2.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:2-4.

¹⁰ Acts 24:15.

¹¹ See Romans 6:23.

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:16-19.

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We also know that God commanded his covenant people in the Old Testament, the people of Israel, to bring a representative sample of their harvest to the priest. We read about this in Leviticus 23. And there they would give these representative samples called the “first fruits” to the Lord. And, of course, they symbolized the consecration of the whole harvest to God. They were a pledge, you might say, of the whole harvest to come. In fact, in Romans eight and verse 23 believers are called “the first fruits of the Spirit”¹⁴ indicating that the fruit that the Spirit produces in our lives right now provides hope of more to come. Aren’t you thankful for that, that he is not finished with us? There is more to come until one day we will be completely conformed to the image of Christ. So we as believers are the “first fruits of the Spirit.”

So the idea here is that Christ is the *first fruit of the resurrection harvest* that provides the certain hope of more to come, namely, “those who are asleep” he says, referring to the dead in Christ whose spirits are presently with the Lord in glory, but whose bodies long since have deteriorated.

In fact, later in verses 36 through 38 he will explain that our body is like a seed that is planted in the ground. When we take a seed and put it in the ground it must die. It must decompose in order for it to come back to life in its final and glorious form. And when Jesus died his earthly body ceased to exist in its present form, but it was raised in its glorified state radically different, no longer bound by time or by space or by any kind of material substance.

So his resurrection makes sure that ours will follow in the same way, like a seed with only one microscopic piece of our DNA which is the unique genetic instructions for every person that has ever lived. God will take that and raise up our bodies by his infinite creative power and recreate us into his image and our bodies will be like his glorified body, radically different than they are today, thank God. And we will no longer be limited by time or space or matter.

So, Paul says, Christ is the “first fruits.” He is the prototype. He is the example, the same of what will follow. But he continues to explain in verse 21, “For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.”

Here Paul emphasizes the Lord’s humanness. Though the Lord was fully God, he was also fully man, a *theanthropon* (thee-an’-thro-pon). He had to be fully God in order to pay for sin as the perfect Lamb of God, pay for the sins of all of the elect. But also he had to be man in order to die for men. Likewise, the same must be raised from the dead. A man had to die. A man had to be raised from the dead to be the first fruits of the redeemed, of other mankind that would follow in the harvest.

And in verse 22 he says, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.”¹⁵ Here we understand that in some inscrutable way, in some inscrutable sense all men—save Jesus of Nazareth—actually sinned in Adam. We all took part in Adam’s sin

¹⁴ Romans 8:23.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:22.

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and his sin was imputed to us and, therefore, we all inherited his sin nature. And, thus, every human being stands guilty before a holy God, condemned, in need of a Savior. And so because of his sin Adam was the progenitor of all who die. In fact, In Romans 5:12 we read that sin entered the world through one man and death through sin and in this way death came to all men.¹⁶

But will you also notice what Paul says, not only as in Adam all die, but he continues saying, “So also in Christ all shall be made alive.”¹⁷ What he is saying here is: Even as Adam was the progenitor of all who die, Christ is also the progenitor of all who will be resurrected to everlasting life.

But notice there is a sequence in verse 23. “But each in his own order.”¹⁸ And here we learn that the harvest will not appear all that same time. And, as we examine other passages of Scripture, we begin to see that there are basically three different stages of this sequence that involve three different groups of believers. The first stage we see here in verse 23. He says, “After that those who are Christ’s at His coming.”¹⁹

Well, who are these? These, I believe, are the saints who have been saved between Pentecost and the rapture. This is when we, dear friends, will see our loved ones. We will be reunited with them and we will see our Lord face to face.

The apostle Paul speaks of this in 1 Thessalonians chapter four verse 13.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.²⁰

A very important distinction that you must understand: In the rapture of the Church we see that he comes *for* his saints and in his Second Coming he comes *with* his saints.

Paul describes this further in 1 Corinthians 15 in verses 51 through 53. He says, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep.”²¹ In other words, referring to those that will experience the rapture, they will not die, “but we will all be changed.”²² In other words,

¹⁶ See Romans 5:12.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:22.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:23.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 15:51.

²² Ibid.

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whether it be by natural death or by being “caught up” like Enoch and like Elijah or like those saints at the rapture, we are all going to be changed.

Then he goes on to say how it is going to happen.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.²³

Speaking of this time, Jesus said in John 14 verse three, “I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”²⁴ So the first stage would be saints that have been saved between Pentecost and the rapture.

The second stage of the order would be that of the saints saved during the tribulation as well as the Old Testament saints. We learn more of this in Revelation chapter 20. There the Holy Spirit of God describes the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennial reign and in verse four here is what we read, “Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years,”²⁵ clearly a description of those who will be martyred through the exterminations of the antichrist during the tribulation.

And he went on to say in verse five—a parenthesis there—he says, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed,”²⁶ referring to bodies of unbelievers down through history that will not be resurrected until the end of the millennial reign at the great white throne judgment as we read in verses 12 through 13 of Revelation 20.

But then the Spirit of God speaking through the apostle John goes on in Revelation 20 and verse five. He says, “This is the first resurrection,”²⁷ once again, a reference to the resurrection of the righteous in contrast to the second resurrection which will be of the unrighteous. And he goes on to say, “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power.”²⁸ That is a reference to the lake of fire or eternal hell as we read in verse 14. And he goes on to say, “But they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”²⁹

²³ 1 Corinthians 15:52-53.

²⁴ John 14:3.

²⁵ Revelation 20:4.

²⁶ Revelation 20:5.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Revelation 20:6.

²⁹ Ibid.

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So here we see, apparently, that the Old Testament saints whose souls have been with the Lord will also be raised at the end of the tribulation, the end of Daniel's 70th week, thus, that particular judgment upon Israel and the Old Testament saints will be finished and the long promised kingdom with the Messiah will reign. In fact, the prophet Isaiah describes the glories of the millennium for the redeemed remnant of Israel in chapter 26. And in that context he says this, beginning in verse 19. "Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew is as the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits."³⁰

We also read from the prophet Daniel in Daniel 12:2 that, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life."³¹ As I reflect upon that I find it to be a magnificent promise, one given to the Old Testament saints, a promise that they will be resurrected, they will be given a glorified body with which to serve as priests of God along with the glorified Church during the millennial reign of Christ. And there, together, we will rule over the believing remnant of ethnic Israel that has survived the tribulation, that has been restored to the land that God promised them through Abraham, a time when the new covenant will be mediated by Israel's theocratic kingdom to the Gentiles, the Gentile nations, especially as it relates to the millennial temple.

So in verse 23 we have this order. "But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits."³² And then this three stage sequence according to three different groups of believers. The first stage, again, verse 23, "After that those who are Christ's at His coming,"³³ referring to saints saved between the Pentecost and the rapture. There, again, the dead in Christ shall rise first and then they will be joined by living saints to meet the Lord in the air and ascend into glory.³⁴ But then the second stage of the order would be saints that are saved during the tribulation as well as the Old Testament saints. And then, finally, it would appear a third stage of the order will, by necessity, involve the saints who die during the millennium.

It would seem, though Scripture does not tell us, so we can't be dogmatic here, but it would seem that they will instantly receive their resurrected body at the moment of death and experience an immediate transformation even as we did spiritually when we were born again. In fact, the only funerals and the only graves during the millennial kingdom will be of those who have rebelled against the Messiah.

Now, some might ask, "Well, what about unbelievers? What about them?" Well, they will be resurrected at the end of the millennial kingdom. They will be raised to eternal death. Daniel 12:2 says that they will awake "to disgrace and everlasting contempt."³⁵ And Jesus described it in John 5:29 as the "resurrection of judgment."³⁶ And at that point

³⁰ Isaiah 26:19.

³¹ Daniel 12:2.

³² 1 Corinthians 15:23.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

³⁵ Daniel 12:2.

³⁶ John 5:29.

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they will be fitted with a body suited for the torments of hell and they will appear before the great white throne judgment as we read about in Revelation 20.

And in verse 14 we read:

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.³⁷

You see, dear friends, the first death is only physical. And because of Christ's sacrifice and his resurrection, believers will never experience the second death which is spiritual and eternal. We read in Revelation 21 verse eight. "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."³⁸ And, dear friends, what was just described in that verse was me. It was you. Were it not for God's grace we would still be in that same bondage.

Back to 1 Corinthians 15:24. "Then comes the end."³⁹ "Then" could be translated "after this." And, of course, we ask, "Well, after what?" Well, after the order of the resurrections: "Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,"⁴⁰ namely, after all the saints who have been resurrected at the rapture, all the saints that have been resurrected at the end of the tribulation and the Old Testament saints as well and then those during the millennium.

After this, Paul says, "Then comes the end."⁴¹ The end. In Greek, *telos* (tel'-os). It is a term that refers to that which is ultimately and finally completed, that which is fulfilled, that which has been consummated. Well, what is that? "When He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power."⁴²

Now this introduces another part of Paul's reasoning here to help us understand the effects of the resurrection, especially as it relates to believers and the restoration of the glorious kingdom on earth.

So now we look, secondly, at *the glory of the kingdom*. You see, during the millennial age, as we study Scripture, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ will take back the earth from the usurper Satan that has so long held it, as well as take it back from all who follow him. Notice here in verse 24 at the end he says, "He will abolish all rule and all authority and power."⁴³ Think about that. Never again will Satan and sin deceive and corrupt.

³⁷ Revelation 20:14.

³⁸ Revelation 21:8.

³⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:24.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:23.

⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 15:24.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See 1 Corinthians 15:24.

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And in verse 25, “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.”⁴⁴ This was a concept that the people of those days would have been familiar with. Subjects of ancient kings would always approach a king who would be on an elevated throne. They would always have to look up at him and typically see the soles of his feet. And very often a victorious king would place his foot upon the neck of some vanquished foe, of a vanquished king, a conquered king to symbolize his absolute, total power over him. This is the idea here.

Now although Satan will be bound during this time, the time of the millennium, sinful men will still refuse to submit to the Lord. They will still reject him. And, according to Revelation 19:15 the Lord will rule them with a rod of iron. But then we learn from Scripture that at the end of the millennial age, Satan will be released, once again, to amass the ancient enemies of Israel for one last assault, one last assault against the king and the kingdom in Jerusalem. And in Revelation 20 verse eight we read about this.

The number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone.⁴⁵

What a magnificent and glorious end. By now the curse is removed, a recreation will occur. A new heaven and a new earth will emerge and finally “the kingdom will be delivered to the God and Father.” That is what Paul was talking about here, a kingdom of the redeemed from all ages all because of—and here is his point—the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the very heart of his argument.

And in verse 26 he says, “The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”⁴⁶

As I reflected upon this concept I found my mind traveling through my life just examining the different ways in which death has been my enemy as well as yours. We must understand, dear friends, that death is not natural. It is not rooted in the nature of the universe. It is not simply an expression of the way things are because God did not create us to die, but to live.

You see, death is unnatural. It was brought on mankind by an earth shattering event that shook the material universe, one that so profoundly impacted creation as to affect and warp human nature and to affect the experience of every person ever born. We must understand that death came as a result of sin, sin first committed in the garden of paradise. Because of Adam’s sin we know that Adam and Eve lost their innocence and replaced that innocence with the experience of guilt and of shame. And at that point death became their enemy and ours.

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:25.

⁴⁵ Revelation 20:8-10.

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:26.

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And as I think about it, death is so alien to our world. It is an intruder that destroys families. It destroys friendships. It leaves orphans to fend for themselves. It is a terror that stalks every man.

As we think about death we know that God has created us so that our soul loves our body and, therefore, we will do all we can to preserve that precious union. But death is this dreadful thing that comes along and rips it apart. It transforms the ones that we love in such a way as to cause us to look upon the vile corruption of sin as the loved one begins to decay and causes us to cry out, "Oh, please, take my loved one from me and bury him."

This is the enemy of death, dear friends. Death is the enemy of all men. It is a stealth that can creep up upon us in the middle of the night as we sleep. It can, in its fury, take us on the battle field. It can, in its wrath, defeat us during a storm, as we saw down in Murfreesboro this week with a dear lady and her child. In its minuteness it can poison our food and enter the cells of our body and destroy us.

Without mercy, it overpowers both the weak and the strong. It is no respecter of persons. Death is the enemy of the infant as well as the elderly. Whether on land or sea death takes whoever it wills. Indeed, it is our enemy and yet we know that is appointed unto man once to die and then the judgment.⁴⁷

You ask, "Well, why must the Christian die?" Well, certainly it is not because of the punishment of sin. For there is now what? "No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."⁴⁸ And, certainly, we know that it is the result of living in a fallen world and it will continue to occur until the curse is removed. But, dear friends, there is another reason. Please understand this. *We must die so that we can be changed.* Like the seed that must first decompose in order to bring forth the glory of its true self, so, too, we must die.

For this reason Paul goes on to say in verse 50 that "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."⁴⁹

Beloved, please grasp this. *Death gives way to life.* That is why Paul said in verse 51 that we must all be changed, you see. Oh, dear friends in Christ, for this reason you must understand that the tomb is merely a door. It is not a prison. What a magnificent truth. We can all rejoice knowing that our last enemy of death will one day finally be abolished.

Next in verse 27 Paul says, "For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET."⁵⁰ And then he adds some clarification here. He says, "But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all

⁴⁷ See Hebrews 9:27.

⁴⁸ Romans 8:1.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:50.

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:27.

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things in subjection to Him.”⁵¹ In other words, God the Father is the obvious exception here. He will not be put under subjection to the Son because it was the Son who came to do the will of the Father. That is what Paul is saying.

And he goes on in verse 28 and says, “And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.”⁵² In other words, after the millennial reign the Lord Jesus Christ will continue to reign in trinitarian glory in the eternal kingdom. And, beloved, you must understand that the fulcrum that raises these glorious truths into the exhilarating heights of the kingdom, is the resurrection of Christ. That is Paul’s argument.

Oh, child of God, in the resurrection we find ourselves caught up with a living hope, a sense of excitement and anticipation, a confident anticipation. Even as Job said in Job 19 verse 25:

I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on
the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see
God.⁵³

Please hear me. Those of you who are united to Christ in faith and have lost loved ones who likewise have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, you are going to see them someday. You can rejoice in that. In fact, Jesus said in John 11:25, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.”⁵⁴ And in chapter 14 verse 19 he says, “And because I live, you also shall live.”⁵⁵

What incredible news this is. And think about it. Because of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we rejoice not only in the anticipation of being reunited with our loved ones, but also we rejoice in the glories of our inheritance that is going to come. That is why Peter declared that ours is a living hope.⁵⁶ He went on to say, “Through the resurrection,”⁵⁷ 1 Peter 1:3.

We have:

...a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead “To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”⁵⁸

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² 1 Corinthians 15:28.

⁵³ Job 19:25-26.

⁵⁴ John 11:25.

⁵⁵ See John 14:29.

⁵⁶ See 1 Peter 1:3.

⁵⁷ 1 Peter 1:3.

⁵⁸ 1 Peter 1:3-5.

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In other words, it is just waiting for us. God is protecting it. It is there, our inheritance. It is as safe as you could possibly imagine. And in this he says, “You greatly rejoice even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.”⁵⁹

Dear friends, the greatest joy of our inheritance will not just be seeing our loved ones—as wonderful as that will be—to enjoy that great reunion. It will not just be the incredible joys of heaven with respect to our glorified body. Dear friends, you must understand this. And I am about to say something that I am incapable of fully expressing because we can only see it by faith and we only have glimpses of it now in this life and in what we see in the Word. But, dear friends, *our greatest joy will be in seeing the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoying his presence for evermore.*

That is why the psalmist said in Psalm 27 verse four, “One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to meditate in His temple.”⁶⁰ You see, that was kind of a foretaste of coming attractions. And don’t we experience that when we come together and we worship the Lord and we sing and we immerse ourselves in his Word and as we fellowship together. We get a glimpse of what it will be like to be with the Lord. But it is only a glimpse.

But the psalmist shows in Psalm 16:11, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”⁶¹ And David said in Psalm 16:5, “The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup.”⁶² And in Psalm 42:1 we read:

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear
before God?⁶³ [he asks]

And Paul said in Philippians 1:23, “[I] desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.”⁶⁴ And he knew that because he had already been there.

Beloved, I wouldn’t want to go to heaven if Christ was not there. There is no greater delight than the Lord. He is the delight of our soul. The supreme joy of heaven will be Christ himself. For this reason Paul said in Philippians 3:8, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”⁶⁵ And then in 2 Corinthians 5:8 he says, “I... prefer... to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”⁶⁶

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 3:6.

⁶⁰ Psalm 27:4.

⁶¹ Psalm 16:11.

⁶² Psalm 16:5.

⁶³ Psalm 42:1.

⁶⁴ Philippians 1:23.

⁶⁵ Philippians 3:8.

⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:8.

Resurrection and the End of Death

14

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Well, I pray that each of you within the sound of my voice will be part of the resurrection of the righteous some day and not the resurrection of the unrighteous. May we all together, this day especially, glory in the cross, glory in the underserved mercy and grace that is offered to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ and may we celebrate the unimaginable joys of heaven that have been guaranteed to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Will you pray with me?

Father, we rejoice in these eternal truths. They humble us. They cause us to bow before you in praise and in reverence and in adoration. Lord, we just worship you and we long to see you face to face. Thank you for all that you have done for us and we rejoice especially this day in the resurrection. How we long for that to be a part of our experience. And we know because of faith and because of your Word that that will one day happen for all of us who have been saved by your grace. We pray all of these things in your precious name. Amen.

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