

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-28

INTRODUCTION

A theologian has written this: "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 through Christ. So we live between two Easters and in the power of the first Easter we go to meet the last Easter."

The last Easter to which that theologian was talking about is the bodily resurrection of all true Christian people. There is also a resurrection of all who are not Christians which takes place at the same time but that is not Paul's subject in this section that we are looking at. It is important to remember this distinction and to remember that Paul is dealing with the bodily resurrection of Christian people here.

By Christian I mean those who have been born again, those who have repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus for salvation.

Paul has reminded the church at Corinth that because they believe in the resurrection of Jesus then they must also believe in their own resurrection and the resurrection of all true Christians. Paul has mentioned seven consequences (vs. 12-19) that would result if there were no resurrection. Now we are going to look at three aspects of the resurrection of Christian people that result from the fact that Christ is resurrected a truth that we are remembering on this Easter Sunday.

1. THE LINK BETWEEN JESUS AND HIS PEOPLE (vs. 20-22)

Paul affirms once again that Jesus has been raised from the dead, there is no doubt or dispute over that matter as far as the church at Corinth is concerned for the evidence is clear on the matter (v 20). Now what this means for Christian people is that Christ being raised from the dead made him the first fruits of all Christians for they would be raised as a result of Jesus resurrection.

Now let me explain what this idea of first fruits means. In the Old Testament when the harvest came the people of God were to bring a representative of the first crops as an offering to God. The full harvest could not be brought in until the first fruits were offered to God. Therefore to apply this to Paul's argument here means that Paul is saying that Christ's own resurrection was the first fruits of the resurrection harvest that will take place one day. In his death and resurrection Christ made an offering of himself to God for the sins of his people.

The significance of the first fruits however, was not only that they preceded the full harvest but they were the first instalment of the harvest. When you saw the first fruits you knew there was more to follow you knew that the harvest was on its way. Therefore to apply this to Jesus resurrection means that the fact that Jesus was the first fruits indicates that there is more to follow that the harvest of resurrection is on its way.

Christ resurrection was not a one off; his resurrection assures our resurrection because his resurrection was part of a larger resurrection that will one day take place. In fact Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection are seen as one event in the bible even though they do not take place at the same time.

But notice that it is Christians being raised that is being spoken of here for it is "those who have fallen asleep" (v 20) a way in the New Testament of talking about Christians who have died. Their

spirits have gone to be with the Lord to wait that great resurrection day when the soul and the resurrected body are united.

Now how can Christ's resurrection be part of a bigger resurrection, how can our resurrection depend on Jesus resurrection? It is the way that God has ordered it to be. When God created the world and created Adam as the first man, Adam was the representative of everyone who would be born after him. He was the head of the whole human race therefore we all are united to Adam.

All that Adam did affected everyone else. If Adam had of stayed perfect then all his descendants including ourselves would also have been perfect and would have lived in a perfect world forever. However that is not the case. We know that Adam sinned and was judged, and death both spiritual and physical was God just punishment upon him and us.

As a consequence all that were born after Adam are born spiritually dead and are in the process of physically dying. Well this principle is the same when it comes to Jesus resurrection. Because Christ came into our world as a man he was representing all that would trust in him for salvation and were therefore united to Him. Consequently because Jesus was raised to life, then all that trust in Him are also raised to life, both spiritual life and physical life (vs. 21-22).

Every one of us here tonight is linked to Adam therefore we all inherit a sinful nature and we are dead spiritually to God and we are in the process of dying physically. However although all of us are united to Adam not all of us are united to Christ and therefore everyone does not inherit eternal life. It is only those who are united to Christ through repentance and faith that receive eternal life.

Therefore it is important for the present and for the future that you make sure that you are linked to Christ through faith otherwise you will miss out on the eternal life that Jesus' resurrection assures to all who turn to Him and trust him for salvation.

This resurrection of all God's true people does not take place immediately after Christ's resurrection. The gap between the first fruits of harvest and the full harvest is unknown to us but not to God. We do not know when Jesus will come again as King to raise his people from the dead and to take them home. But although we do not know the time of this resurrection we do know the order of the resurrection.

Christ must be raised first we are told and then our resurrection will follow when he returns again (v 23). Now the question must be are we ready for that return? Will we be raised up to eternal life or to eternal damnation? It all depends as we have seen with our link to Jesus.

If we have come in faith and trusted in Jesus who has died for us and been raised so that we might be forgiven and justified then we will be raised from our graves. Our body and soul will be united in heaven for all of eternity in order to worship our glorious Lord and Saviour.

However if we are not linked to Jesus through faith if we have never repented of our sin and sought God's gift of forgiveness then we will be resurrected but not to eternal life but to eternal condemnation (John 5:29).

We know for sure that this will happen because Jesus resurrection is evidence of this fact. His resurrection is the first fruits; therefore as sure as he has been raised there will be a final resurrection when our Lord returns. The important question to ask ourselves is are we ready and prepared for that day. It is too late after we have died or when Jesus has come back. It is what we do now in this world that will decide what Christ will do with us after we leave this life. Will we be raised to eternal life or to eternal condemnation? Only you and ultimately God are able to answer

that question but I would urge you to make sure you are prepared and ready by trusting now in Jesus who died for our sins and was raised for our justification.

2. THE LINK BETWEEN JESUS AND HIS FATHER (VS. 24-28)

Paul's second argument is that Jesus' resurrection guarantees the resurrection of believers because the link between the Father and the Son demands it. By that I mean the reason why Jesus was sent into the world demands that all God's enemies be defeated and that includes the enemy of death and therefore resurrection must take place if Christ really did win the victory for his people.

Paul's teaching here is relatively straightforward for he makes three points. He says Christ has been commissioned by the Father to establish his kingdom. He is now ruling and reigning within that kingdom (v 25). He will continue to do so until he has subdued all God's enemies and as a consequence at some point in the future Jesus will hand the Kingdom over to his Father meaning his mission is complete and is successful (vs. 27-28). What Paul is doing is outlining God's plan to save a people for Himself. He sent Jesus into our world to redeem his people. To "redeem something" means to buy it back or to bring it back under its original ownership. This is what God is doing in his plan of redemption in saving sinners from their sin.

God is bringing all things back to the point at which human history began. If you remember before the first man Adam sinned, everything in the world was in perfect submission and in harmony to God but by one act of disobedience against God rebellion and sin entered our world.

As a result God put his plan of salvation into action, this plan existed even before Adam sinned but in putting it into action his intention was to bring everything back once again into that state of submission and harmony.

But you might ask how was this plan accomplished? Well we are told that God the Father commissioned his Son to come into the world in order to accomplish this redemption through his death and resurrection. In doing so he was setting up his kingdom. Now this kingdom is both an accomplished fact and an ongoing process. When Jesus died on the cross, he encountered the forces of evil but won a decisive victory over all his enemies. His kingdom was therefore established by his death on the cross and by his resurrection.

As a result Jesus now rules and reigns in the hearts of all his people, that is all those who have turned to him in repentance and faith and submit themselves to his authority. But even though the forces of evil have been decisively defeated, they continue their struggle against the Kingdom of Christ even to this very day.

The war has been won through Christ's death and resurrection but there continues to be a number of skirmishes. Now these skirmishes are not going to last forever and one day all the fruit of Jesus death and resurrection will be totally realised and enjoyed. Paul says a time is coming when Jesus will finally put all God's enemies in their proper place that is under his feet (v 25).

Then and only then will God's plan of redemption be complete and the goal of God's plan of redemption will be finally realised. When everything has been brought into subjection to Jesus all that will be left for him to do is to hand the Kingdom he has established over to his Father so that God (note not the Father) will be all in all. Everything that has been planned will then be completed.

Now in applying this it is worth noting that the kingdom of God has many enemies. There is sin in all its various manifestations. Then there is Satan and all the hosts of demons. But the final enemy to be conquered and defeated and disarmed will be death (v 26). On that day when Jesus returns

then that great enemy of death will be destroyed because the Second Coming of Jesus brings everything to an end.

Death is that final enemy that lurks over us all and none of us will escape it unless Jesus returns first. But on that glorious day of Jesus return, death will finally be done away with. All who are God's people will then enjoy the fruits of all that God has accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection.

Therefore the destruction of death tells us just how foolish the church at Corinth were for not believing in their own bodily resurrection. For if we do not rise from the dead then we are saying that death actually has the final say that death actually has the final victory. But that is not the case for even that great enemy of death is brought under subjection to Christ. Therefore all will be raised from the dead and all face God's judgement. Those who are trusting in Jesus will have soul and body united in heaven.

Jesus victory through his death and resurrection is a complete victory. Although we may not see all the results of his victory now, the victory has been won, that is what Easter is all about. If you today turn to Jesus and submit yourself to his authority through repentance and faith then you will know his rule and authority within your heart.

Then one day you will know all the fruit of his victory when Jesus returns and brings everything into subjection and brings everyone and everything under his feet. Then the victory and all its fruits will be seen by all. But it is only those who trust in Jesus that will benefit from his victory when body and soul are united to live in the new heaven and the new earth with Christ forever.

Are you looking forward to his return? I hope you are. Jesus' death and resurrection makes his return certain but if you are not a true Christian then his return cannot be looked forward too but it must be dreaded. But the wonderful news tonight is that Jesus has not yet returned. He has won the victory through his death and resurrection and you can receive the fruit of that victory both now and at his return. All you must do is to acknowledge your sinful and rebellious heart towards him, seek his mercy for forgiveness and his grace for eternal life.

If you do that then you can really receive the benefits of Easter and you will be able to look forward to that final day when everything will be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ.

So let me encourage you to turn to him and to seek his wonderful forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Amen