

1 Corinthians 15:12-28

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[0 : 00] We've looked at man as ruler, man as ruined, we've looked at the proper man, Jesus Christ.! This morning we looked at man as renewed, and this evening we're going to look at man as resurrected.

Death, whatever you think or feel about it, you cannot ignore its statistics. One out of one people die. Yet despite its statistics, it's the most avoided subject in our society. Death is taboo. Nobody wants to talk about it.

Yet the fact is, you can't hide from it, and if you try, it will find you. As the late Christopher Hitchens said, you don't have to get out of bed for death. Wherever you happen to be, they bring it to you, free.

Death is the all-conquering dictator, which is served by wars, terrorism, murder, its loyal servants are AIDS, cancer, disease, infection.

Nothing and no one escapes its dominion. Death is the ruthless tyrant who comes uninvited into our lives and steals our loved ones, never to return them to us.

[1 : 23] The gaping hole in our lives, the unused cot, the empty space at the dinner table, the bed not slept in, are all reminders of its unwelcome visit.

I read last year that for the memorial of those 77 victims of Anders Breivik, they're going to cut a hole right across that little island in Norway.

What a poignant reminder of death's deadly work. So what then are we to do with this unconquerable enemy called death?

C.S. Lewis said there are only three things you can do with death. Desire it, fear it, or ignore it. Some people's approach is to ignore the reality of death and view it simply as a doorway into nothingness.

So Bertland Russell, the British atheistic philosopher, was once asked what he believed would happen to him when he died. He replied, I believe that when I die, I shall rot.

[2 : 38] Richard Dawkins in *The God's Illusion* writes, Being dead will be no different from being unborn. I shall be just as I was in the time of William the Conqueror, or the dinosaurs, or the trilobites.

There's nothing to fear in that. In other words, according to Dawkins and Bertland Russell, When we die, we will return to the prior state of nothingness, of non-being, just like all the other potential non-being people who were never born.

Others remain agnostic about death. Sam Harris, one of the new atheist clans, says, He doesn't know what he believes about death. Quote, I'm not pretending to know that you get a dial tone after death, he says.

I don't know what happens after the physical brain dies. End quote. The Christian approach to death is neither pessimistic or agnostic.

The Christian approach to death is optimistic. Because while death may be an enemy to the human race, it is a wounded enemy.

[3 : 45] And one day, it will die. Death will surrender its dead. Jackie and I traveled to Germany a number of years ago, and we went to the city of Wittenberg.

And we walked down the cobbled streets from the church where Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the door. And we went to the church where Luther preached regularly.

It wasn't actually the church where he nailed the Theses to the door. It was St. Mary's down the other end of Wittenberg. And I wanted to go to this church not just to see the building and the pulpit in which Luther preached, but I wanted to go for another reason.

And I walked to the front of the pulpit and then moved round to the right, and there was the thing that I wanted to see. A headstone to Magdalena Luther.

Luther lost his daughter when she was 14 years old. He spent the final hours with her by her bedside. He told her that she was about to go and be with God.

[4 : 52] And then when she finally died, it is reported that Luther broke down with inconsolable sobbing. And as they placed his daughter's body in that coffin, Luther stood on the other side of the door.

And as he heard the nails being driven into the coffin, he shouted to the undertaker, She will rise at the last day.

And then by her grave later that day, he said, There is a resurrection of the body. How can a man like Luther have such confidence?

Is this blind faith, as the atheists tell us? Has his reason lost, left him? She was dead. And yet he shouts from the other side of the door, She will rise at the last day.

How could Luther have such courage in the face of this great enemy called death? Well, the answer lies in our passage this evening.

[5 : 59] In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is writing to a church that no longer believed in the future resurrection of the dead. Teaching had infiltrated this church that there was just a true spiritual state that could be achieved this side of death.

An angelic existence, which meant that the body was unnecessary and unwanted. And if you could reach this true spiritual state in this life, then who cared whether there was a resurrection of the dead or not?

And so Paul addresses this question head on in 1 Corinthians 15, 12 to 28. Will there be a future resurrection of the dead?

Now it's important to note what the Corinthians were not denying. They were not denying the resurrection of Jesus. They were denying the resurrection of the dead.

Their problem was not with the first resurrection. Their problem was with the future resurrection.

And Paul answers their question over whether or not there will be a future resurrection by doing two things.

[7 : 06] He first of all plays along with the hypothetical scenario that the dead are not raised. That's the first thing he does. He plays along with the hypothetical scenario that the dead are not raised.

That's verses 13 to 19. And then in verses 20 to 28, he argues for the real scenario, the true scenario, that the dead will be raised.

So let's look at the first scenario, the hypothetical scenario. What if there is no resurrection from the dead? Verses 13 to 19. And in this scenario, Paul basically says, okay, for the sake of argument, let's say the dead are not raised.

Let's say the dead are not raised. And then he makes two points. First, if we are not raised from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised from the dead.

If we are not raised from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised from the dead. Verses 13, 15, and 16. His second point is this.

[8 : 13] If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we're in big trouble. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we're in big trouble. Verses 14 and 15 and 17 to 19.

And Paul, in verses 13 to 19, he swings back and forth between these two points. So in verse 13, he makes the first point. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Then in verses 14 to 15, he makes the second point. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. 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.

And then he switches back to the first point. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And then he returns to the second point, verse 17.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[9 : 35] So those are Paul's two points in this hypothetical scenario. If we are not raised from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised from the dead. And if Christ has not been raised from

the dead, then we're in big trouble.

Let's look at both of these points. If we are not raised from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised from the dead. Did you notice the back-to-front logic in Paul's argument?

He does not say, if Christ is not raised, then the dead are not raised. He doesn't say that. He says it back-to-front. He says, if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ is raised.

He's working backwards, not forwards. This is because, remember, the Corinthians, they're not denying Christ's resurrection, the first resurrection. They're denying the Christian's resurrection, the future resurrection.

That's why he argues back-to-front. But the back-to-front logic reveals a key assumption of Paul's, and it's this, that there are not two resurrections.

[10:47] There's only one resurrection, with two distinct but inseparable moments. Paul is teaching us that the resurrection is like a coin.

Imagine I had a coin on me this evening, and I rolled it on this table. Let's say the head side of the coin was on the left, and the tail side was on the right, and I rolled the coin, and it fell to the left, to the head side.

What happens to the tail side? Well, it falls with it. And what happens if I rolled that coin, and it fell to the tail side, to the right? What happens to the head side?

Well, it falls with it. Why? Because there's only one coin, with two sides. Two distinct sides, but they are inseparably connected.

And that is what Paul is teaching us here, in his logic. There are not two resurrections. There's only one resurrection, with two distinct, but inseparable moments.

[11:51] You cannot separate the two sides of a coin, without creating two separate coins. And Paul is saying is, you cannot separate Christ's resurrection, and the Christian's resurrection, without creating two entirely different kinds of resurrection.

Paul is saying, that because Christ has been raised, we will be raised. And if we're not going to be raised, then Christ himself was not even raised.

To deny one of these resurrection episodes, is to deny the other. To negate one, is to negate the other. To nullify one, is to nullify the other.

To deny the resurrection of the dead, is to keep Jesus in the grave. The one who makes all resurrections possible.

That is Paul's first point in this hypothetical scenario. If we are not raised from the dead, then Jesus Christ was never raised from the dead. Let's go to the second point in that hypothetical scenario.

[12:59] If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we are in big trouble. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we are in big trouble. Paul gave six consequences, if Christ has not been raised from the dead.

Just glance down these verses with me. Verse 14, Paul's preaching is useless in vain. Verse 14, Our faith is useless.

Verse 15, Paul is a false witness about God. Verse 17, Our faith is futile, and we are still in our sin. Verse 18, Christian believers who have died are lost forever.

They perish. Verse 19, We are the most pitiable people on earth. So those are the six consequences. Two for gospel ministers, your preaching is pointless, and you're a liar.

Four for believers, our faith is futile, we're still in our sin. Those who are already dead are lost eternally, and of all people on earth, we are the most to be pitied.

[14:05] And you can just hear Richard Dawkins and co. giving a loud amen to Paul's hypothetical argument, can't you? And they would be right, wouldn't they? If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we are in big trouble.

But there's a catch. And I wonder if you've spotted it. Someone has said that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the nail upon which the painting of Christianity hangs.

You know at home you have a painting or a photograph on the wall. What is it that keeps that on the wall? Well, it's the nail in the wall on which it hangs. And someone has said that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is like that nail in the wall.

Take it out. What happens to the painting? Falls to the ground. But that's the catch. It falls to the ground. And what do you have around you?

A smashed painting with glass around your feet. The painting, when you pull the nail out of the wall, doesn't disappear into thin air. And Paul's argument is if Christ has not been raised from the dead, if

you take the nail out of the wall for the sake of argument, Paul's point is you've still got a problem. [15:26] Look at verse 15. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then there is still a God. We have misrepresented God.

God. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, verse 17, we are still sinners. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, verse 18, there's still a hell.

Do you see that? If you disprove the resurrection, God doesn't go and disappear into thin air. If you disprove the resurrection, your sin doesn't evaporate.

If you disprove the resurrection, hell doesn't all of a sudden disappear. Do you see Paul's point? If Christ has not been raised from the dead, you are still in big trouble.

Though Paul plays along with the hypothetical scenario, he doesn't get rid of his theistic, moralistic, life-after-death worldview. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, you are not free to do as you choose.

[16:29] To do as you choose. You're still in trouble. Pull the nail out of the wall. The painting doesn't evaporate. It falls to the ground and you've got broken glass that you need to tidy up.

So next time you're talking to a non-Christian friend and they say they don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, maybe catch them by surprise and play along with them. Okay.

Yeah. Okay, let's say Jesus isn't risen from the dead. What are you going to do about your sin?

Okay, let's say that Jesus isn't risen from the dead.

How are you going to escape hell? Because just because you prove that he's not risen from the dead doesn't mean you've disproved hell or disproved the existence of God or disproved your sin.

It's a surprising but powerful apologetic, isn't it? Well, that's the hypothetical scenario. In Paul 9, verses 20 to 20, it turns to the real scenario.

[17:34] The real scenario. There is a resurrection from the dead. And in this real scenario, like in the hypothetical scenario, Paul makes two arguments.

Number one, But Christ has in fact been raised from the dead. And so we also will be raised from the dead. But Christ has in fact been raised from the dead.

And so we also will be raised from the dead. Verses 20 to 22. Paul states the point emphatically.

But in fact, indeed, Christ has been raised from the dead.

And then he gives two analogies. The first is agricultural. The second is anthropological. Or the first is agricultural.

And the second is Adam versus Christ. The agricultural analogy is in verse 20. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

[18:38] Now the first fruits were not merely a sample from the whole crop, but a symbol of the whole crop. They were the first ripened fruit picked from the crop as an indication that the rest of the crop was to follow.

So at harvest time, a farmer would walk down into his field, into his vineyard, and he'd look at his grapevines. And on them, he would look for the first signs of a deep purple-colored grape on a bunch.

And when he saw such a grape, he would pluck it and taste it. And when he knew that that grape tasted just right, he knew that the rest of the harvest was coming.

That was the first fruit. And what did that first fruit symbolize? Not a sample of the harvest, but the whole harvest that was coming.

If these first plucked grapes were ready, then the rest of the bunch would soon be ready. Why?

Because the first fruits belong to the same crop.

[19:43] There was an inseparable connection between the first fruit and the crop. That's the key to this analogy. The first fruits represented the whole harvest of that crop.

The farmer didn't pick the grape, taste it and say, there's the first fruit, it's ready, and then walk two miles down the road into another field and start harvesting another crop.

That first fruit was inseparably connected to that crop in that field. And that's the field that was going to be harvested.

And that is what this analogy is for. Christ's resurrection is representative of our resurrection because there is this inseparable connection between them.

We're back to the coin. One coin, two sides. One resurrection, two moments of the resurrection.

Christ's resurrection, the first fruit, and then our resurrection.

[20 : 45] As our minister in Cambridge put it so well, he said, after Christ's resurrection, it's as if he ran into God's presence, into his Father's presence, and said, I'm here, and the others are coming.

We're back to that idea of two, not two resurrections, one resurrection with two episodes. And in order to underline the certainty of the link between Christ's resurrection and our resurrection, Paul makes another analogy.

This time, it's anthropological. In other words, this time, it's about two men, Adam and Christ. Verse 21. And as I read this, note the little word for that keeps coming up.

Verse 21. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For, as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

For, as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Now, if we're going to understand these two verses, boys and girls, we need to go back to that picture that I gave you this morning in Sunday school and also in church, of the two giants.

[22 : 07] Remember? You've got these two giants. Their feet would fill this building. So they are big, big giants. And they've got a belt around their waist.

And they've got little hooks on that belt. And there are people hanging on those hooks. The first giant is Adam. The second giant is Jesus Christ.

And when one of those giants goes for a walk, what happens to everyone attached to their belt?

They go with them. If one of those giants trips and falls to the ground, what happens to those who are attached to the giant?

They fall to the ground. And what if the second giant is walking and he goes somewhere? What happens to the people on his belt? Well, they go with him.

And what happens if he trips and falls to the ground? Well, the people on his belt fall to the ground.

But what happens if he gets up after he's fallen?

[23 : 12] What happens to those people? They get up with him because they're attached to his belt. And that is the picture that Paul gives us here.

It's a picture of effectiveness, of inevitable effectiveness. As in Adam, all died. As all those attached to Adam's belt fell with Adam, so in Christ all those attached to his belt will be made alive.

Adam and Jesus are the two great giants of human history. What Adam does affects those united to him. And what Jesus does affects those united to him.

And this is an analogy, a comparison of effectiveness. And what Paul is saying, if Adam's fall into sin was so effective to bring death to all those united to him, how much more effective will Christ's resurrection be for all those united to him?

It can't but not affect them. In verse 22, Paul explains how each giant can be so effective. for as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

[24 : 41] It is an analogy of effectiveness. It's as if someone has said to Paul, Paul, will there be a resurrection from the dead? And Paul said, sheesh, did Adam, do all in Adam die?

Will there be a resurrection from the dead? Did all die in Adam? Yes. Well then, of course, there's going to be a resurrection of the dead. Why?

Because all those united to Christ will be raised. That's Paul's logic. Just as Adam was effective in bringing death to all, so Christ will be effective in bringing the resurrection of the dead to all united to him.

over the years I have listened to various talks on singleness. I married when I was 30 years old and in my 20s I would keep hearing these talks on singleness and I was always fascinated that Jesus was upheld as this single man, an example to me as a single man as I went through my single years.

The problem is that in 1 Corinthians 7 when Paul deals with singleness he never talks about Jesus Christ as the example of singleness.

[26 : 04] Who does he use? Himself. Why does Paul not use Jesus as an example of a single man? Because he wasn't a single man.

He was a betrothed man. Jesus died as an engaged man and he walked out of the tomb with his bride on his arm.

Just like the first Adam fell into a deep sleep and from his riven side came his bride, so the second and last Adam fell into a deep sleep and from his riven side came his bride.

Jesus didn't die as a single man. He died as a betrothed man. He died with us united to him. and he rose from the dead with us united to him.

That is why there are not two resurrections. There's only one with one episode in Christ's resurrection and another episode with our resurrection.

[27 : 12] So that's the first point that Paul makes in this real scenario. Christ has in fact been raised from the dead and so we also will be raised from the dead.

And then his second point. When we are raised from the dead the end will come and God will be all in all. When we are raised from the dead the end will come and God will be all in all.

Verses 23 to 28. Paul has shown us that there are two episodes of one resurrection and that those two episodes are inseparable.

But now what he shows us is that those two inseparable episodes are distinct and they are separated with a time gap.

Look at verse 23 and 24. But each in his own order. Christ the first fruits then at his coming. Do you see the time gap?

[28 : 12] The time delay? Then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom of God to the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

And what is Jesus doing in the time gap between his resurrection and our resurrection? He's ruling verse 24. He is destroying every rule and authority and power.

Verse 25. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

So Christ's reign now at the Father's right hand is real but it is not yet completely realized. Christ's reign is current but is not yet complete.

he has all authority over all things in heaven and on earth but that does not mean that all opposition has been removed including death itself. Death still has some power in between these two episodes of the resurrection.

[29 : 28] I think the best way to illustrate this is to take you back to the Iraq war. Do you remember when the USA toppled, went into Baghdad, took control of Baghdad and then they finally had conquered the city of Baghdad and they went in and they found that statue of Saddam Hussein.

Do you remember standing with a raised fist? And they put a big chain around his head and they dragged it with a digger and that big statue toppled to the ground.

And in that place they raised the American flag. There was a new regime in Iraq. There was a new power had come into rule.

It was the United States of America. But did that mean that all of Saddam Hussein's men and all the opposition just evaporated? No.

They just changed their strategy. They went into guerrilla warfare and insurgency combat. And there was years of fighting even though a new regime had been established.

[30 : 33] And it's the same with Christ. In being raised from the dead God put Christ in charge of a new world order that we saw this morning. But death still rages against that new world order.

And Paul singles out death as one of those powers that still serves Satan. Death is still fighting. Death is still deadly.

It's why it is called here the last enemy. death. Jesus is conquering his enemies and the last one to be defeated is death.

Christ's resurrection dealt a death blow to death. It is wounded but it is still walking around taking people with it.

There is a reaper whose name is death and with his sickle keen he reaps the bearded grain of the wheat and the flowers that grow between. And what Paul presents us with here is the tension, the now not yet tension between Christ's resurrection and our resurrection.

[31 : 48] And we must respect the tension. I think so much damage has been done at funerals because pastors have not respected the delay between these two resurrection episodes.

I have heard at funerals that Christ has swallowed up death in his resurrection. That there is no longer a sting with death. And I look at the mother with tears rolling down her cheeks and I think I thought the sting had been taken out of death.

When Paul speaks it later in this chapter of death being swallowed up and the sting of death being conquered, he's talking about the when and then of the final trumpet of the last day of our resurrection.

And until then, death still stings. And it is more than okay to cry about it because death is an enemy.

