

“Resurrection Guarantee” (part 2)

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Let's turn once again in our Bibles to the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. It is a wonderful chapter that deals with the doctrine of the resurrection, which is a doctrine that is fundamental to Christianity. It was a truth that was being attacked by some in Corinth who denied the resurrection of the body because it was unpopular with the leading Greek philosophy of the day. It led to confusion in the church over the subject, and so the apostle Paul makes his case for the resurrection in this chapter, which is the fullest and most important treatment on the subject found anywhere in the New Testament. Belief in the resurrection is necessary for salvation. Romans 10:9 says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. It is this truth of resurrection that gives us confidence in a world of death, chaos, and sheer hopelessness.

Kaiser Foundation, “The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Abuse” (2-10-21)—*“The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic recession have negatively affected many people’s mental health and created new barriers for people already suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders. During the pandemic, about 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, a share that has been largely consistent, up from one in ten adults who reported these symptoms from January to June 2019. A KFF Health Tracking Poll from July 2020 also found that many adults are reporting specific negative impacts on their mental health and well-being, such as difficulty sleeping (36%) or eating (32%), increases in alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic conditions (12%), due to worry and stress over the coronavirus. As the pandemic wears on, ongoing and necessary public health measures expose many people to*

experiencing situations linked to poor mental health outcomes, such as isolation and job loss.”

Tim Keller, in his latest book “Hope in Times of Fear,” has made this observation:

“Even before the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, the Western world had been experiencing a growing crisis of hope. For at least two centuries, Western cultures had been animated by a powerful hope that history was progressive, that the human race was moving inevitably toward creating a world of greater and greater safety, prosperity, and freedom. In short, there was a strong belief that overall every generation of human beings would experience a better world than the previous generation.”

He says then the twentieth century happened and much of that way of thinking changed. Surveys even show that pessimism about the future for our children and society has only deepened. There is a growing divide that reveals a culture in which there is a vacated center, a loss of any shared idea of common public good. It has left us with a profound loss of social trust that appears to be undermining the institutions that have held our society together.

Someone says, “Is there any hope in difficult times? And if so, where can it be found?” The Bible answers that for us:

1 Peter 1:3—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

This is what Paul wants these Corinthians to know as he writes here in chapter 15. The future resurrection of the believer is guaranteed. I have already pointed out from verses 20-22 a theological argument that he makes for the resurrection. Because Christ has been raised, there will be a future resurrection for those who are in Christ. There is an important distinction being made between those who

are in Adam and those who are in Christ. It is the truth of federal headship. He says in verse 22, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Death is a reality in man's fallen world and is a direct consequence of Adam's disobedience. Adam plunged the entire human race into sin and death. The dominion that God gave to Adam was forfeited, and his nature has been passed down to his descendants. (Experience, Extent, Effects)

Through His own death and resurrection, Jesus has come to rescue the fallen members of Adam's race. Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus. The man or woman who comes to faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is united by faith to Christ, who is the federal head of a new race made up of all those who are now in Him. And in Him, all shall be made alive. (Natural birth, Spiritual re-birth)

That's the theological argument that is made. Next, notice:

2—The CHRONOLOGICAL sequence (15:23-27)

"But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For 'God has put all things in subjection under His feet.' But when it says, 'all things are put in subjection,' it is plain that He is excepted who put all things in subjection under Him."

The doctrine of the resurrection involves a specific order or chronology of necessary events. That is the point that Paul is making in these verses. What he is describing here is the redemptive plan of God taken all the way to its future consummation and how critical the resurrection is to it all. Through the work of Jesus Christ, God has redeemed a people for Himself, and all that has been lost in Adam will be restored through Christ. And it involves a process.

Notice the word 'order' that is used in verse 23.

“Order”—*something orderly in its arrangement; a word that described the orderliness of a military troop; lineup*

It means there is a divine order as far as the resurrection is concerned. Nothing that our God does is chaotic. He is not the author of confusion. He is a God of order. He does nothing by chance or by accident. And so when it comes to the resurrection and restoration of all things, it doesn't take place at once. Instead, there is a sequence. What is His order for the resurrection? To begin with, it involves:

The resurrection of Christ

The first important event is the resurrection of Jesus. In His death, the Lord Jesus paid the penalty for sin. In His resurrection, He has reversed the effects of sin. Again, we know that the consequence of Adam's sin is death for Adam's race. In Adam all die. But the result of Christ's obedience is endless life for those who are united to Him in faith. In Christ shall all be made alive! So His resurrection is of primary importance. Without it, death would be final and the grave absolute. It is Christ's own resurrection that guarantees the resurrection of those who are united to Him in faith. The key word in the passage is 'firstfruits' which is repeated twice, once in verse 20 and then also in verse 23. Paul is using the word to refer to a yearly observance that was specific to the nation of Israel outlined in Leviticus 23. The firstfruits were the very first elements of a crop to be harvested. It served as a sign of a sure harvest to come.

There were seven annual feasts that God gave to the Jews according to the Old Testament. The number 'seven' is very important. There are seven feasts, and three of them are in the seventh month. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. Pentecost was seven weeks after firstfruits. The feast of unleavened bread and the feast of tabernacles each lasted seven days. There is a pattern

and an order to it. The Hebrew word for 'seven' comes from a root word that means to be full or to be satisfied. It is closely related to a word that means to swear or make an oath. Wiersbe says that whenever God 'sevens' something, you had better pay close attention to it because He is reminding His people that what He says and what He does is complete and dependable.

The seven feasts on Israel's yearly calendar were these:

- **Passover**—Christ died for our sins

This was the annual feast of deliverance that the Jews are instructed to commemorate in Exodus 12. There was an innocent lamb that died in the place of the firstborn. The blood of the lamb was applied to the doorposts by faith and a house was spared judgment where the blood was seen.

- **Unleavened Bread**—Separation from sin

For seven days following the Passover, the Jews were to eat only unleavened bread. They were told to remove all leaven from their homes, because leaven is a picture of sin. The putting away of leaven illustrated the cleansing of one's life after he has been saved through faith in the death of a substitutionary sacrifice.

- **Firstfruits**—Christ is raised from the dead

The day after the Sabbath that followed Passover was the first day of the week. Since it was spring of the year, the priest took the first sheaf of barley from the field and waved it as an offering before the Lord. It was a token that the first and best belonged to God, and it was done before the people reaped the harvest for themselves.

- **Pentecost**—The church is born

It was also known as the 'feast of weeks' because it was celebrated seven full weeks after the firstfruits had been offered. Like firstfruits, it was also on the first

day of the week. Instead of the priest waving a sheaf of barley before the Lord, he waved two loaves of baked bread with leaven. In order to have loaves, the grain had to be ground into flour and the flour baked into loaves.

- **Trumpets**—God's people are gathered

Following the feast of weeks, there was a four month gap on God's calendar before the next important feast. The next three feasts were all observed in the seventh month of the year, which would have been in early fall (Sept/Oct). It was held on the first day of the seventh month. Trumpets were blown by the priests to call the people together, and it marked a new beginning because it ushered in the new civil year (Rosh Hashanah).

- **Day of Atonement**—National forgiveness

Nine days after the feast of trumpets, on the tenth day of the seven month, the people were to fast and afflict their souls and confess their sins. On the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, the high priest went into the holy of holies to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. He acted as a representative on behalf of the people as atonement was made.

- **Tabernacles**—The joy of the Lord with His people

The day of atonement was the most solemn of the feasts, and the feast of tabernacles was the most joyful. Suffering always precedes joy, and one day the suffering of God's people will be turned into joy. The feast of tabernacles was to be a reminder to Israel of God's faithfulness in the past. He had led them out of bondage, provided for them in the wilderness, and had brought them into the land. They had lived in tents in the past, but they would live in permanent dwellings once they were in the land.

Each of these seven feasts foreshadowed some important aspect of Christ's redemptive work. Passover points to His death on the cross for sinners.

Unleavened Bread points to His righteousness credited to the believers.
Firstfruits points to His resurrection life.

William Barclay—*“When the barley was cut it was brought to the Temple...and it is significant to note that not until after that was done could the new barley be bought and sold in the shops and bread be made from the new flour. The firstfruits were a sign of the harvest to come; and the Resurrection of Jesus was a sign of the resurrection of all believers which was to come.”*

When you consider the chronology of events in the death and resurrection of Jesus, you will remember that He was crucified on Passover, laid in the tomb as the Feast of Unleavened Bread began, and He was resurrected on the first day of the week—the very morning that the firstfruits were being presented by the priest in the Temple. And so Paul’s argument here in the text is that the resurrection of Jesus is literally the firstfruits of a coming harvest in which all of those who are in Christ will also be resurrected. He is the firstborn from the dead according to Colossians 1:18, which means He has been the first to receive a glorified, resurrected body over which death has no power. Jesus used this same imagery of harvest when He said:

John 12:23-24—**“...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”**

Through His death and burial, Jesus was a like a kernel of golden grain planted in the earth. When something is planted, it soon bursts forth in new life that bears the seed bearing fruit of that new life. Through His resurrection, Jesus Christ is the firstfruits of a future harvest. But what about us? When will we receive our glorified bodies? Look at what Paul goes on to say in verse 23:

The return of Christ

“But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ.”

Christ is the firstfruits. That is, He is the first to receive a glorified resurrection body. When will believers receive theirs? The answer to that question is right there in the verse—at the second coming of Jesus. When He comes again, those who are His will be given a body just like His.

1 John 3:2—“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”

After His bodily resurrection, the Scriptures say that Jesus appeared to His disciples over a period of forty days, after which He ascended to heaven. Luke tells us in Acts 1:

Acts 1:10-11—“And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.’”

The disciples were told that Jesus would come back the very same way that He left. When Jesus comes again, the second chronological event will include the dead in Christ who rise to receive their own resurrection bodies. There is a generation of believers who will be alive at the coming of the Lord. They will be raptured and will also receive their glorified, resurrected bodies.

Again, go back to the feasts of the Old Testament. Seven weeks after firstfruits, there was Pentecost. It points to His church that is now indwelt by the Spirit. According to Acts 2, it was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came to live within believers. What started very small, as a grain of wheat planted in the ground, began to sprout forth and bear fruit. The church is still being built.

There is a gap of time between the spring and the fall. The next thing on God's calendar? Trumpets! The feast of trumpets points to His return and our being gathered to Him. The Day of Atonement points to His forgiveness of national Israel as they repent and turn to Him one day in faith. I believe that is going to happen at the end of the Tribulation period. And the last annual feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, it points to the joy of His future kingdom on earth where we will rule and reign with Him. Paul mentions that next. What happens when Jesus comes again? What will He come to do?

The reign of Christ

Chronologically, here is the sequence that Paul describes in the text. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, and that means there will be a future resurrection for us that will take place when Christ returns. And when Jesus returns, He will come not to take sides...but to take over. That's what Paul explains in verse 24:

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet."

It is this truth of the kingdom of God that runs through the pages of the Bible. The kingdom is the rule of God over every square inch of the universe. When God created Adam and placed him there in the garden, He gave him a kingdom mandate.

Genesis 1:27-28—“God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

What Adam forfeited through sin and disobedience, Jesus has recovered through His death and resurrection. As the Son of Man, He will exercise dominion over the earth, the dominion that God intended for Adam to have but was lost.

Daniel 7:13-14—“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and He came to Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

Earlier in Daniel, that same truth was conveyed through the dream that was given to King Nebuchadnezzar. He saw an image made up of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. But remarkably, a stone was cut out and struck the image on its feet and smashed it to pieces. Daniel tells the king that the ‘stone’ represents the kingdom that God will set up, one that will never be destroyed. It speaks of:

- the supernatural origin of the kingdom

Daniel says that the stone in the dream was cut out from a mountain ‘by no human hand.’ Verse 34 says, “A stone was cut out by no human hand.” Verse 45 says the same thing, “Just as you saw that a stone was cut out from a mountain by no human hand.” I don’t know if you have ever been to a quarry, but I am sure you are familiar with what is involved. If you go up above Mount Airy, there is a massive granite quarry that is the largest in the world. For 120 years, it has been mined and has sent out some of the finest white granite in the world. Many of the buildings and monuments in the nation’s capitol are made with granite that was cut out from there.

Every piece of rock that has ever come out that quarry was cut by human hands in some way. In the king's dream, the stone he saw was cut out of a mountain, but it was not by human hands. That simply means that it did not originate with man but with God Himself.

- the subtle beginning of the kingdom

It begins with a stone that picks up momentum and speed as it barrels forward. The stone eventually becomes a mountain that fills the earth. It is illustrative of how the kingdom of God begins in a subtle way, but will culminate in a shocking display of His power when the King returns to claim what is His.

While man was busy expanding his little kingdoms, the kingdom of God broke into the world in an inconspicuous way as the Son of God came quietly as a baby born in an obscure village named Bethlehem. When Jesus began His ministry, He declared:

Mark 1:15—“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Luke 17:20-21—“Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.’”

This is speaking of the entrance of the kingdom of God into the world, not the kingdom in all its fullness what will come when Jesus returns in power and glory. What will it be like when He comes?

- the sudden impact of the kingdom

It will initially fly under the radar, but it won't stay that way because notice how it is set on a collision course with the image. There will come a point when the stone strikes the image at its feet and will destroy it at the moment of impact.

In a spiritual sense, Jesus established His kingdom in a small and subtle way in His first coming. He came to fulfill the Father's plan, to suffer and die to make atonement for sin, and to be raised to life again. After His resurrection, He commissioned His disciples and ascended to heaven. However, this wasn't fully understood by the disciples. Acts 1:6 says that they had a question that involved the future kingdom:

"Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

It was a legitimate question that reflected an understanding of Jesus being crowned as King who would rule and reign over all. After all, the promise of God to David involved one of his descendants seated on an eternal throne. They all were aware of the promises of the kingdom that were made by God through the prophets. The disciples were correct in their understanding, but they were incorrect in their focus. They were curious about the time it would happen. And so Jesus doesn't rebuke them for their question. Rather, He redirects them in their focus. In verse 7-8 He says:

"He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority.'"

Instead of being distracted with the future, He wants them to be diligent in the present. Instead of being preoccupied with the future, He wants them to be engaged in a mission:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

That’s the mission of the church. It is a kingdom mission as believers are saved and sent out with the message of the gospel. The church is not the kingdom, but is a vehicle of the kingdom. That’s why we must have a kingdom focus in everything that we do because the church exists for the kingdom. We’re to announce the news of the kingdom.

Matthew 6:9-10—“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Matthew 6:33—“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”

In a kingdom, life is to be lived under the rule and authority of the king. That’s what we’re talking about when we refer to the kingdom of God. It is the righteous rule of God in our hearts and lives as His people. The kingdom rule of His Son is established in the hearts of believers. And the time is coming when it will be established in a physical throne and a physical, tangible kingdom upon the earth when Jesus comes again. When He comes, notice in verse 24 that Paul says, “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.”

“End” —*the Greek word is ‘telos’ and speaks of a goal or an purposeful outcome*

The Father has determined to give the kingdom to the Son, who secures that kingdom through His redemptive work. He in turn will deliver that kingdom to God the Father and thereby fulfill His eternal purposes.

3—The COSMOLOGICAL result (15:28)

“When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things in subjection under Him, that God may be all in all.”

So when it is all said and done, the cosmological result of Christ’s redemptive work will be a renewed creation and cosmos that is free from any trace of rebellion, sin, and death. That is the ‘telos’ or goal that God has in mind for the universe. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is what guarantees that it is true and is coming to pass. And so if I had one closing point of application for us this morning, it would be this—these verses provide us with wonderful encouragement, especially when we question if there is any victory over our present circumstances, or any joy in spite of our present afflictions. There is hope!

Revelation 21:3-5—“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also He said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Death shall be no more! He is making all things new.

After nine months in the familiarity of the womb, a baby girl makes her entrance into this world crying at the top of her lungs which have just inhaled their very first breaths. I’m glad that God in His grace has allowed that none of us can remember that moment because it would be traumatizing. But life makes its passage through the birth canal and into a brand new world full of light and color.

So it is for the child of God who has experienced the new birth and must travel the passageway of death. It not something to be feared, but something that has already been defeated!

C.S. Lewis wrote about this in his final book in his Narnia series, "The Last Battle." The children are involved in a terrible train wreck and are immediately transported to Narnia. They fear that they will be sent back to earth, but Aslan assures them that they've finally come home.

"There was a real railway accident,' said Aslan softly. 'Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The dream is ended, and this is the morning.' And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful and I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever and ever, in which every chapter is better than the one before."

If our brief time on earth is only the cover and title page of our eternal existence, it only makes sense that we would want to know what comes after the title page. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"