

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 11, 2014
I Corinthians 15:20-26

In Christ Jesus, who is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep in Him, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

HOW DO SOME AMONG YOU SAY THAT THERE IS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD? No congregation is perfect in its understanding of the Scriptures or in its carrying out of God's will. We see that in our congregation, from pastor on down, and we also see it in the congregation in Corinth. However, one of the biggest problems that confronted Paul, the one that was the most dangerous and eternally disastrous, was the denial by some of the resurrection of the dead.

As we have heard the past few weeks Paul countered this doubt and denial with this marvelous 15th chapter of his letter to this congregation. He began the chapter by riveting the Corinthian's attention on facts that they had been taught and believed. Christ died for their sins. This was not a chance happening but a fulfillment of God's own promises recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. Christ was buried and raised again on the third day. This too, was not a chance happening, but the fulfillment of God's own promises recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. There also were eye-witnesses of this event. It was not a fairy tale, a figment of some wild imagination, a fabricated story made up by disappointed and despairing followers, it was not a revisionist spin on historical events. Christ's resurrection was and is an irrefutable fact. Paul stated that more than 500 believers saw Jesus alive at one time. Even he, Paul himself, saw the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus.

Therefore Paul has stated in this chapter that to deny the reality of the resurrection, flies in the face of all reliable, unalterable and undeniable evidence. Also, if Christ had not been raised from the dead, then we have no forgiveness, no justification. Then we have nothing to believe in. Our preaching and our faith is then empty and futile and we are liars. Then all who have fallen asleep in Christ will remain dead and lost forever and we are to be pitied above all people. Thank God that there is more to Christianity than just some hope for this life.

Paul ends this section and begins a whole new section with the same verse, verse 20: **BUT NOW CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND HAS BECOME THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP.**

Our theme for this third section of Paul's defense of Christ's resurrection is this:

ONE DOWN, TWO TO GO!

I: SIN IS CONQUERED; CHRIST IS ARISEN!

We read verses 21-23: **FOR SINCE BY MAN CAME DEATH, BY MAN ALSO CAME THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, EVEN SO IN CHRIST ALL SHALL BE MADE ALIVE. BUT EACH ONE IN HIS OWN ORDER: CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS, AFTERWARD THOSE WHO ARE CHRIST'S AT HIS COMING.**

No one can undo the historical evidence. Some might deny it; some might not believe it. But unbelief does not change the reality of it. Death was not a natural part of human life. Death came into this world through sin. Paul says, **FOR SINCE BY MAN CAME DEATH.** Death came through a man. We know the man, Adam. We know the place, the Garden of Eden. We know the story: **BUT OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL YOU SHALL NOT EAT, FOR IN THE DAY THAT YOU EAT OF IT YOU SHALL SURELY DIE...SO WHEN THE WOMAN SAW THAT THE TREE WAS GOOD FOR FOOD, THAT IT WAS PLEASANT TO THE EYES, AND A TREE DESIRABLE TO MAKE ONE WISE, SHE TOOK OF ITS FRUIT AND ATE. SHE ALSO GAVE TO HER HUSBAND WITH HER, AND HE ATE.**

Because of this sinful, disobedient act, a totally unnatural element from God's perfect creation--death, came into the world. In the next verse Paul restates this horrible truth: **FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE...** Sin doesn't just lead to a distant future punishment. Our inherited sinful nature brings all the corruption that comes with it. We are in a constant state of dying, of growing older, being

attacked by illnesses and diseases, of getting tired and weak, which continues until our bodies die. This is as sure and certain as any promise of God. Death came by Adam's sin, in Adam all will die. And 6,000 years later we see that everyone who has been born in the past has died (with only two exceptions that we know of), and those living now will someday also die if the world lasts long enough. The sure and certain assurance of the consequences of sin are all around us. Everyday in this world thousands of people die, because of sin. Some might deny this, but denial and unbelief cannot change the fact.

Yet, as sure and certain as death is, so sure and certain is the resurrection from the dead. Paul also writes: **BY MAN ALSO CAME THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.** Again we know the Man: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We know the place: the empty tomb. We know the story: **AND BEHOLD, THERE WAS A GREAT EARTHQUAKE; FOR AN ANGEL OF THE LORD DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN, AND CAME AND ROLLED BACK THE STONE FROM THE DOOR, AND SAT ON IT. HIS COUNTENANCE WAS LIKE LIGHTENING, AND HIS CLOTHING AS WHITE AS SNOW. AND THE GUARDS SHOOK FOR FEAR OF HIM, AND BECAME LIKE DEAD MEN. BUT THE ANGEL ANSWERED AND SAID TO THE WOMEN, DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I KNOW THAT YOU SEEK JESUS WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN, AS HE SAID. COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY.** Because of this act, also a totally unnatural act, a miracle of God's power---sin and death has been conquered. Yes, **THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH, BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD,** all because of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

In the next verse Paul restates this marvelous truth: **EVEN SO IN CHRIST ALL SHALL BE MADE ALIVE.** Even as all shall die, because of sin (that is a universal truth) so also is it universally true that in Christ all shall be made alive. God's promise is sure!

When will this happen? Paul says **BUT EACH ONE IN HIS OWN ORDER.** Christ first, then those who are His. Christ rose almost 2,000 years ago. We, and all those who have died in Christ shall rise on the last great day of Judgment when Christ comes again. Our bodies will leave the prison house of the grave, be reunited with our souls and greet our victorious Savior who has defeated sin and death for us! Our comfort and security lie in knowing that we are Christ's, we belong to Him.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. That is the second part of our theme: the **TWO TO GO!** One is down, the conquering of sin through Christ's resurrection from the dead. We have been justified, declared righteous in God's sight because of Christ. But there are two wondrous events yet to come.

II: THE ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL WILL BE DEFEATED
III: DEATH ITSELF WILL BE DESTROYED

We read verses 24-25: **THEN COMES THE END, WHEN HE DELIVERS THE KINGDOM TO GOD THE FATHER, WHEN HE PUTS AN END TO ALL RULE AND ALL AUTHORITY AND POWER. FOR HE MUST REIGN TILL HE HAS PUT ALL ENEMIES UNDER HIS FEET.** Then comes the end, that is, Christ's second coming. Not a millennial reign on this earth, or a rapture of the believers from off this earth, but a coming which will bring to an end all of the authority, power and dominion of all evil. All nations will come to an end. All the evils of our society will come to an end. Satan's prowling about to devour us will come to an end. At one moment, the judgment trumpet will sound, and the curtain will be brought down on this world's history. That will be the end of the godless, sinful rule of mankind over this planet. All of the evil forces and power that still cause trouble for us in our earthly life will come to an end. Christ will and **MUST** reign as the Scriptures declare. Then Christ will hand over His kingdom to His heavenly Father. The believers will live forever in heavenly glory as we hear our Savior's gracious invitation: **COME, YOU BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.**

At the same time all those who have rejected Christ as Lord and Savior will hear these fearful words, **DEPART FROM ME, YOU CURSED, INTO THE EVERLASTING FIRE PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.**

But there is one more event to take place. Paul writes: **THE LAST ENEMY THAT WILL BE DESTROYED IS DEATH.** As we heard, death is an enemy brought into this world by man's sin. For the believer in Jesus, death is not a punishment for sin, but death still happens as a consequence of sin. But death's rule over life will come to an end at the return of our Savior King. No more will any of Christ's own die. John tells us in Rev. 21:4 **AND GOD WILL WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES; THERE SHALL BE NO MORE DEATH, NOR SORROW, NOR CRYING; AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE PAIN, FOR THE FORMER THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY.**

All of this will and **MUST** happen because God has promised it in His Word, both the Old Testament and the New. **ONE DOWN, TWO TO GO!**

- 1) Sin has been conquered through Christ's resurrection.
- 2) Satan and all evil forces will be brought to an end on that last day of judgment and then death too will be destroyed in the end.

But for us believers in Christ, "the end" only marks the beginning--the beginning of real life, of joy, peace, blessedness and everlasting life with Christ. Praise God!

Amen.