

The Cross and Christian Community

The Cross and Christian Resurrection

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THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15. It is good to be back from Asia. I got back last night from the last couple of weeks in China, Japan, and Korea. Francis Chan and I, who have partnered together in what we've called "Multiply" to promote disciple-making in the church (which, by the way, be sure November 8 is on your calendar – it's a Friday night where I hope all of our small groups will be able to gather together in homes for a simulcast from Austin, TX, somewhat similar to the simulcast Francis and I did here last year) - but he and I were teaching on disciple-making in Beijing and Tokyo and for the last week in Seoul, South Korea, in a church with about 70,000 members. And people call us a mega-church!

But this trip was incredible in so many ways, and in ways I didn't expect. As I traveled preaching to others throughout Asia, the Lord did a work in me that I did not see coming. He renewed some deep convictions in my own heart about how He is calling me (and calling us together) to make disciples and multiply churches. And these weren't new convictions.

You see, the Lord convicted me in these ways before; He put these things on my heart before, but for some reason -- actually, I think for a variety of reasons -- I didn't act on these convictions. In fact, I even wandered away from them. I think part of the reason I didn't act on them is because I let myself get distracted. I think part of the reason is that I knew acting on these convictions would be hard and difficult, not easy.

Ultimately, I think the primary reason I've not acted on these convictions is just plain fear, simple lack of courage in my life. Have you ever experienced this? Has the Lord ever brought conviction to your heart, maybe in a small way, or maybe in a really big way? Maybe it deals with some particular sin in your life, or maybe it's just something that you're convicted is not right about your life, or best for your life, or your marriage, or your family, or work, or even the church. And as you look at something, you know the Lord's telling you through His Word and His Spirit, "This is not right, or this is not best. This needs to change."

But for a variety of reasons, you put off that conviction. Maybe it's just for a day, and then another day, and then another day, and before long, you start to get distracted by other things. Or maybe it's just that you're not willing to pay the price to act on that conviction. Maybe you're afraid of what others might think, afraid that others might think you're getting a little extreme, a little too radical. Maybe you're afraid of what others might say, or maybe you're afraid of what that conviction might mean for your life, or your family.

I think about our worship gatherings two Sundays ago, when the Lord convicted many of you to stand up and say, "I believe God may be calling me or my family to move from Birmingham to take the gospel to the unreached in or beyond North America." And I have no doubt that since that Sunday, the adversary has done everything he can to try to distract you, to try to convince you that this is not wise, that it's a little too radical. The adversary has put fear in your heart about what this means for you and your family and your future.

And some of you, I know, have already faced resistance from other people. And you expected it from non-Christian friends or family, but I know some of you are experiencing resistance from Christian friends and family, and you don't know what to do with that.

C.T. Studd, who pioneered the spread of the gospel into parts of Asia and Africa, faced all kinds of resistance from Christian friends and family, and he said, "Had I cared for the comments of people, I should never have been a missionary." It is a battle to put convictions that the Lord burns onto your heart into practice in your life. And I say all of this to confess that I am just as vulnerable as you are in that battle. To confess that I have let distraction and fear keep me from doing some things that the Lord has put on my heart to do, and I don't want to do that anymore.

Now my goal in even saying all of this is not to launch right now into a full-on explanation of those convictions in my own heart. There will be a time and a place for that, but we have a text in front of us that is hugely helpful for all of us. Because at the same time I've been wrestling with conviction in my heart and lack of obedience in my life, I've been reading and studying this text written by the apostle Paul, who did some pretty radical things because of what the Lord had put on his heart to do.

In the middle of the text we're about to read, Paul says, "I live in danger every hour of my life. Literally, I'm risking my life every single day." And he talks about his fighting with beasts at Ephesus. You can't help but to think about Paul's explanation of his life over in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Turn over there real quick with me. Look at 2 Corinthians 11:23. Read this with me. Listen to what Paul says:

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Did you hear that? And Paul did all of this, unafraid of man, willing to lay down his life on a daily basis. Why? Because he knew the Lord had called him as an apostle, a missionary to the Gentiles, and as a result, he was going wherever Christ led him, doing whatever Christ called him to do, no matter how radical it might seem, no matter what sacrifices might be involved, and no matter what risks it might mean he would be taking. It's like what he said in Acts 20:22-24: "*Compelled by the Holy Spirit...*" That's the kind of obedience I want in my life. Compelled by the Holy Spirit, doing whatever the Spirit says to do, not knowing what will happen to me as a result, but only knowing that it won't be easy. I'm going to do whatever He puts in my heart to do. Why? Because my life is worth nothing to me if only I may complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.

Why should we follow Christ with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience?

So the question I'm asking this morning is, "Where do you get courage like that? How do you have laser focus like that? What is it that compels this kind of radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to Christ?" That's why I put this question at the top of your notes: "Why should we follow Christ with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience in this world?"

And I want to be careful here. I want to offer one caveat with this question, particularly in light of 1 Corinthians 13, which we studied a few weeks ago. Remember, Paul says that even if he offers his body to be burned as a Christian, to be martyred as a missionary, if he does it without love, it's meaningless. So I want to be clear: Radical, sacrificial, risk-taking Christianity is meaningless without love. But what I'm talking about here – and what I believe we see and hear in Paul's life – is a radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to Christ that is completely driven by love: Love for Christ, and love for people.

That's why he was traveling to Jerusalem in Acts 20, because he loved Christ, and he loved the church at Jerusalem. That's why he fought with beasts at Ephesus, because he loved Christ, and he wanted the people at Ephesus to know the love of Christ. That's why he obeyed wherever the Spirit of God led, no matter what it cost. And it's exactly what Jesus said to His disciples in John 15: "If you love me, you will obey my commands. If you love me, you will obey me, even when that means taking risks and making sacrifices in ways that seem pretty radical to the world around you", which is exactly what he talks about in the rest of John 15. "The world will hate you and resist you and persecute you, maybe even kill you. But love for me will mean obedience to me even in the face of all that."

So I'm asking you this morning, and I'm asking myself this morning: "Why should we follow Christ like this, with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience that's driven by love for Him and love for others?" And I want to show you the answer to that question this morning. I see three reasons in 1 Corinthians 15 as to why we should follow Christ like this.

So what I want to do is read the whole chapter – all 58 verses – and then I want to show you three reasons why we must follow Christ wherever and however He leads with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience. So as we read through this text, I want you to be thinking about little things, or big things, that the Lord by His Word and through His Spirit has put on your heart to do in your life, to change in your life. Things that would be costly, things that would not be easy, things that you may be afraid to do -- why should you do them? Here's why:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church

of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 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. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

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

Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a

spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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 shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

You see it there at the end – that last verse – this is what all this chapter is building toward. Paul is exhorting the Corinthian Christians to be steadfast, to hold fast in their faith. Immovable, unshakeable in your conviction and in your action, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labor (our lives) are not in vain. That's it, isn't it? That's what we want. That's what we all want. We all want to get to the end of our lives, look back, and say, "I didn't live in vain." No one wants to get to the end of their lives, look back and say, "It was all vain." No! None of us wants to waste our lives like that. None of us wants to get to the end of our lives, look back, and say, "Lord, you know all those things you put on my heart to do, all those things you told me to do, I didn't do them. I wasted my chance." Oh, I don't want to waste my chance with the work of the Lord. And I don't want you to waste your chance with the work of the Lord.

Because death is coming.

I want us to abound in it for three reasons. Number one: Because death is coming. I want to abound in the work of the Lord on this earth because I know I'm not here for very long. I don't have a lot of time. You don't have a lot of time. We don't have a lot of time. The Bible says we're only here for a little while. Life is a vapor; it's a mist. It is here one second, gone the next.

And death is coming to every one of us. This is the glaring reality of 1 Corinthians 15. Right in the middle of the chapter, in 1 Corinthians 15:21, it says, "*by a man came death...*" Then, in verse 22, "*in Adam all die.*" Every single one of us in Adam. In other words, every single one of us, born in the human race, we will die. Death is our destiny.

And death is our enemy. 1 Corinthians 15:26 makes clear that death is our enemy, our final enemy. And this is important to remember. We're going to talk in just a minute about the

joy of resurrection, but that does not mean that death in and of itself is to be celebrated. Remember why we die: Because we have sinned against God. Death was not the way it was supposed to be. God created man and woman in Genesis 2 to live. But death entered the world and will come to all of us as a tragic consequence of sin in our lives and sin in the world. So even as Christians, we don't love funerals. No, we're frustrated to live in a world filled with funeral homes and cemeteries.

And these things in this world should remind us that our death is coming. Your death is coming. My death is coming. It could be today. It could be tomorrow. It could be this week for any one of us in this room. Life is short. So do what the Lord has put in your heart to do while you still have time! You are not guaranteed tomorrow! So obey today!

And not just for your sake, but for others' sake, because others' death is coming. I think about all the unreached people that I was around in Japan and North Korea who are dying without the gospel. I think about people right around me in my life that I interact with on a daily basis, people right around us here in Birmingham who don't know Christ. Their death is coming. So act! Do something! In love, put radical, sacrificial, risk-taking conviction into practice. Share the gospel, no matter what it might mean for your reputation. Demonstrate the gospel, no matter what sacrifices it might mean for your life or your family or your budget or your future. Spread the gospel, no matter the resistance you might get. Feel the urgency of Christ saying to a man in Luke 9, "Don't even go back and bury your father; go and proclaim the kingdom of God now!" Why? Because others' death is coming! Life is short. Death is coming. Obey today. Follow Christ with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience because death is coming.

Because resurrection is real.

Second, follow Christ with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience because resurrection is real. So, with the reality of death in the backdrop, Paul starts the first eleven verses of this chapter with the gospel, the indescribably good news that Jesus, God in the flesh, has died on a cross for our sins, and He has risen from the dead in victory over sin and death, appearing to many witnesses, of whom Paul is one, before ascending into heaven.

Now, Paul is just laying a foundation here that, if we're not careful, can seem pretty elementary to us. Okay, Jesus rose from the dead, and we can almost read the first part of this chapter with a "ho-hum" sense of monotony. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know that." But think about that. There is nothing "ho-hum" about that. We're talking about a man who died, who died a violent death, the most violent death conceivable in that day. And then, after three days dead, He came to life and appeared to people. Can you imagine going to somebody's funeral, going to their burial, seeing their dead body placed in the ground, and then a week later, that person physically walking up to you and talking to you. This is crazy! And it's crazy good. It's the greatest news in all the world. Death has been defeated! May this never be "ho-hum" for us. May we never forget that the reason we gather on Sunday instead of some other day is purposeful. Throughout Christian history, Christians have gathered together on the first day of the week to remember that Jesus is risen from the dead. He is alive!

Now, this is obviously a fundamental part of the gospel, but there was a problem at Corinth. Many of the Christians there had grown up with a Greek worldview that believed in the immortality of the soul, but not the body. So when we die, according to a Greek worldview, that's the end of the story for our bodies. Our soul goes on, but never to fill a body again. And so, many of these Christians were denying that once they died, their bodies would ever be resurrected. Instead, only their souls would live on forever.

And so Paul writes this chapter to say, "Do you realize what you're saying? Do you realize the implications of what you're believing?" And in essence, Paul says in verses 12-13 as well as verse 16, "If you don't believe in physical resurrection of your body, then you are saying Jesus Himself didn't physically rise from the dead."

And then, right after that, he begins to talk about the implications of that. "What if Jesus didn't rise from the dead?" And I put in your notes four unavoidable conclusions, and really, tragic consequences. If Jesus wasn't raised from the dead -- in other words, hear this, Christian, hear this, member of The Church at Brook Hills -- if Jesus is still dead, then our faith is futile and we stand guilty before God. Your faith is in vain, according to verse 14. Your faith is futile, according to verse 17. It's pointless; it's worthless. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, you've staked your entire life (for eternity) on the decomposed corpse of a Jewish carpenter 2000 years ago. And even worse, verse 17, you are still in your sins.

You say, "Well, I thought it's Jesus' death on the cross that provides forgiveness for my sins." And indeed, the cross is where we see that He died for sin in the place of sinners, but the resurrection is where we see that His sacrifice has been accepted by God on behalf of sinners, and God has raised Him to life to show that all who trust in Him will have life forever with Him. Romans 4:25 puts it this way: "*Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins, and he was raised to life for our justification.*" And so, if His resurrection is not a reality, neither is our justification, and we stand guilty before God.

And then, keep following the implications here: If that's the case, then our message is false and our mission is destructive. What we preach is vain, Paul says in verse 14. It's not true. We're spreading lies. And that makes our mission destructive. Verse 15, "*We are even found to be misrepresenting God!*" That's huge. We're spreading falsehoods about God -- I've been spreading falsehoods about God all across China and Japan and Korea for the last two weeks -- defaming and dishonoring God Himself.

And as if that's not enough, it keeps going: If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then those who have died in Christ have been damned before God. Paul says in *verse 18*, "*Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished,*" and the word he uses there for "perish" is more than just physical death. Physical death is what Paul means when he says "*those who have fallen asleep in Christ.*"

And this makes sense when you put it together -- if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, then Christians who have died were not forgiven of their sins. They were guilty before God, and as a result, they're now experiencing eternal damnation, the everlasting punishment for their sin.

And then, Paul concludes, even for his own life, and for the lives of other followers of Christ, radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience is to be pitied in this world. Verse 19 -- "*If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*" He goes on to talk in verse 29 about baptism, which some believe is a reference to an practice that some of the Corinthian Christians were participating in, where someone would be baptized on behalf of someone else who is dead (which is obviously never taught in Scripture). And others believe this wording is actually a reference to simple believers' baptism, and the imagery is being baptized in a body that will die in hope that the body will be raised. But however you interpret that verse isn't as important as the point Paul's making: "Whatever practice this is doesn't make any sense if resurrection isn't real."

And then verse 30 is when Paul talks about the danger he experiences on a daily basis, and all the suffering he endures for the spread of the gospel, and he says, "If Jesus isn't risen

from the dead, then I am wasting my life." Paul says here and in other places all throughout the New Testament, "I'm embracing suffering here because I know reward is coming." But if there's no reward in eternity, then my life makes no sense on earth. If there's no resurrection, if this life is all there is, then eat, drink, and be merry (verse 32). And that makes sense. If this world is all there is, then live it up in this world and make the most of this world while you still have time. A self-indulgent lifestyle makes total sense if this life is all there is. And radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to a dead Jewish rabbi who deceived all his followers makes absolutely no sense.

Maybe you've heard people use Pascal's Wager before. Blaise Pascal's theory, simplified, was that it's better to be a Christian than a non-Christian in this world solely because of the chances. Pascal said, "If you live your life as a Christian on earth, and you later come to find out that Christianity is not true, then you won't have lost a lot because after all. You'll have lived a good moral life of serving and loving others. But," Pascal said "if you live your life as a non-Christian in this world, and in eternity you discover that Christianity is indeed true, then you'll have lost everything, and you'll spend all of eternity in hell. So when you play the chances, it's worth it. It's a lot wiser to be a Christian." So Pascal said.

But Paul couldn't disagree more. What Pascal said might be the case if all that was involved in Christianity was living a nice, decent life of loving and serving others, which is how the majority of Christians in Birmingham today view of their lives. And if that's Christianity, then what Pascal said makes sense. But that's because Birmingham Christianity falls so short of biblical Christianity. Because biblical Christianity is about laying down your life in radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to Christ. It's about spreading the gospel, embracing suffering, going to the hard places, going to the needy places, going to the dangerous places among dangerous people, forsaking possessions, sacrificing comforts, and taking risks in radical faith, and all of that only makes sense if Christianity is true. That kind of lifestyle only makes sense if Christ has risen from the dead.

It kind of begs the question, doesn't it? Christian in Birmingham, Alabama: Are you living your life in such a way that it only makes sense if Christ is risen from the dead? Or does your life virtually look just like the rest of the world, filled with the same possessions in this world, prioritizing the same comforts and securities of this world, and the only difference is you believe you'll go to heaven when you die? Paul says, "Pity the way I'm living, pity the risks I'm taking, pity the sacrifices I'm making, the suffering I'm enduring, feel sorry for me if Jesus is not risen from the dead." And the same commentary should be said about each of our lives.

But now follow this with me. I think it'd be helpful for us not just to think about the implications if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead. Let's turn each of these around and think about the implications that exist because Jesus was raised from the dead. So we've thought about the implications if the resurrection of Christ is false. But it's true! Paul says in verse 20: *"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead!"* That's one of the greatest "buts"/transitional sentences in all of the Bible. It's like Paul brought us to the point to consider the tragic consequences if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, and then he brings us right back up to say, "But thankfully that's not true." He is risen.

And because Jesus was raised from the dead, Christian, our faith is well-founded and we stand forgiven before God. Our faith is not futile; it is extremely well-founded. To every single person in this room, please hear this: Every single one of us in this room needs forgiveness before God, and every single one of us, deep down inside, even when we don't think about it, realize it, or admit, needs to be restored to God, the One who made us and formed us and created us.

This is the deepest longing of every single one of our hearts, and God has made a way for this restoration to be a reality. He has sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, and He has raised Him from the dead in victory over sin and death, and so I urge you, today, maybe for the first time, to trust in Jesus as the suffering Savior and risen Lord. There is no better, wiser, more secure, more eternally secure place to found your faith than in Jesus. And in Him, and only through faith in Him, you can stand forgiven before God. And Christian, you stand forgiven before God! Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification!

And in light of this -- oh, hear this! Our message is true and our mission is urgent. We have seen and we know the One who's conquered death. He has conquered death on behalf of sinners around the world, and those sinners around the world are dying. And you and I have only got a short time, so go! Our mission is urgent!

Go in the confidence that those who have died in Christ now dwell with God. That all who have gone before us and have trusted in Christ, though they have died, they now live! And this is the hope for which we now live. So give your life, even unto death, in radical, sacrificial obedience to whatever Christ tells you to do, knowing that obedience like this is not to be pitied in this world. No. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to Him is to be envied in this world.

When you know that Jesus is risen from the dead, then no matter where He leads and no matter what it costs, radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to Him is the most enviable life in this world. It is not in vain. Your life will not be in vain when you do what the risen Christ says to do. It will count. In fact, whatever the risen Christ says to do is the only thing that will count.

So Paul just keeps going, and it gets better and better from here. He says, "When Jesus returns to the earth..." Look at verse 23. Paul calls the resurrection of Jesus the "firstfruits". In other words, they're the first part of the harvest, and they're the promise of more harvest to come, more fruit to come. So Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits – the sign of what's to come – and when He returns – "*at his coming*" – those who belong to Christ shall be made alive. And at His return, verse 24, comes the end, when He will "*deliver the kingdom of God to the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power*". And verse 26 says, "*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*"

So when the risen Christ returns, He will fully destroy death. It's not that He hasn't already conquered it, in a sense, at His resurrection, but as we all know, death is still a reality in this world. As we've talked about, people die. But there's coming a day when death itself will be no more. The end of this chapter is so triumphant, where Paul writes in verse 51, "*Behold! I tell you a mystery.*" Not all are going to sleep, not all are going to die. Because one day, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, a trumpet is going to sound from the sky, and the dead in Christ will be raised to live with Him, and we who are alive in Christ will rise with them, and the saying shall come to pass, "Death has been swallowed up -- forever."

Think about it. No more dying of cancer or HIV. No more fatal car accidents. No more tsunamis. No more suicides. No more hunger and starvation. No more suffering. Death itself will no longer have any sting at all. For sin will have fully and finally been removed, and with it, disobedience to God's law and death itself for all who have put their hope in the victory that comes through Jesus Christ alone.

And on that day when He returns, Jesus will not only fully destroy death, but He will physically raise us to life. And so Paul writes to the Corinthians about the reality of their

resurrection. Not just the resurrection of their souls, but of their bodies. And this is so important. When we die, our bodies are obviously buried, but God's Word teaches that our souls persist. At the moment of death, the souls of believers immediately enter the presence of God. Talking about death, Paul says in Philippians 1, "*I desire to depart and be with Christ.*" He says in 2 Corinthians, "*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*"

So the picture we have in Scripture is the souls of believers, upon death, immediately entering into the presence of God, clearly conscious, continually interceding, constantly worshiping, and eagerly waiting for Christ to return. And they're waiting because the story is not over for them yet. They're waiting and longing for Christ to come, because when He does, their bodies will be physically raised to life with their souls. Verse 52 here is clear here that all who have died in Christ will be raised, and all who are alive in Christ when He comes will be changed. And together, we will experience the full and final physical resurrection of our bodies.

And it's this physical resurrection body that Paul is emphasizing here, because, like I mentioned, many of these Corinthian believers thought that only the soul was immortal. But as he's made clear, that wasn't the case with Christ. His body is risen. And it's not the case with Christians. Our bodies will be risen.

And this is so important even for how we think and talk about heaven. Sometimes people say when someone dies, "Well, I'll never have the opportunity to hug my husband or wife again." But that's not true – you will! You will physically hug your husband or wife again, if they died in Christ, because both of you will have resurrected bodies. People say, "I'll never see my son or daughter who died again." Not true. If they were in Christ, you will see them in more glorious ways than you ever saw them on this earth. Feel the hope here. And even when we think about where we will spend eternity, we don't need to think about that place merely in spiritual terms, but as a physical reality. The Bible describes a new heaven and a new earth, where we will have physical, resurrected bodies, in a real, physical world.

Now, that leads people to ask, "Then what will our bodies be like?" Paul references this question in verse 35, and then answers it in the verses that follow. According to verses 37-38, and really the overall description of our resurrected bodies in this chapter, our resurrection bodies will be similar, yet different. Paul starts talking about agriculture, and he uses the illustration of the seed of a plant that grows into something very different from that seed, but still similar to that seed.

So you plant a watermelon seed, and eventually out comes a watermelon, that was once that seed, but now is far, far greater and different. But not different in kind. It's still a watermelon seed. He uses illustrations of humans and fish and animals and stars and the sun and the moon, and he makes the point that we will have bodies in heaven as we have had bodies on earth. So there's similarity, but there's also differences. That's why Paul talks in verse 52 about even those who are alive in Christ when He returns will be "*changed,*" because there will be a fundamental transformation of our bodies for eternity.

You say, "Well, what are those differences?" And the Bible elaborates, saying that our resurrection bodies will be imperishable and immortal. They will never fade or waste away. Every adult knows the effects of this. As we age, our bodies deteriorate in differing capacities and differing ways, but this will not be the case with our resurrection bodies. They will be completely healthy and completely strong forever.

Our resurrection bodies will be beautiful and powerful. Verse 43 says they will be raised in glory and power. Now think about beauty here. I'm not talking (nor is Scripture talking) here about a vain beauty like so many seek in this world. We're talking about a real, deep beauty like the beauty that shone from Moses' face in Exodus 34, or what both Daniel and even Jesus described as shining like the sun or the brightness of the sky.

Just imagine the sinless beauty of the soul overflowing into the perfect beauty of the body. We won't have to try to look beautiful; we will be beautiful. And powerful. Now again, this doesn't mean that we're all going to be this body-builder type, but that our resurrection bodies will be strong, free from disease and weakness that we are so familiar with in this world. Charles Spurgeon described a conversation with his body as it aged, saying:

I said of this poor body, 'You have not yet been newly created. The venom of the old serpent still taints you. But you shall yet be delivered. You shall rise again if you die and are buried, or you shall be changed if the Lord should suddenly come today. You, poor body, which drags me down to the dust in pain and sorrow, even you shall rise and be remade in the redemption of the body.'

And then, Joni Erickson Tada, herself a quadrapalegic, writes:

I still can hardly believe it. I, with shriveled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees, and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body, light, bright, and clothed in righteousness—powerful and dazzling. Can you imagine the hope this gives someone with a spinal-cord injured like me? Or someone who is cerebral palsied, brain-injured, or who has multiple sclerosis? Imagine the hope this gives someone who is manic-depressive. No other religion, no other philosophy promises new bodies, hearts, and minds. Only in the Gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible hope.

Our resurrection bodies will be imperishable, immortal, beautiful, powerful, and our resurrection bodies will be perfectly Spirit-filled. And this is what Paul means when he emphasizes over and over again this spiritual body. He doesn't mean non-physical. He means perfectly filled with the Spirit, free from every hint of sin, robed in perfect righteousness, just as Jesus' body was perfectly filled with the Spirit.

Which leads to the last truth the Bible teaches here in 1 Corinthians 15: Our resurrection bodies will be permanently Christ-like. This will happen spiritually and physically. That's the whole point of what the Bible is saying here. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, so all who are in Christ will be resurrected to live. Just as Christ lives. Think about His body after He rose from the dead, and you have a good picture of what a resurrected body looks like. He ate and drank, spoke and laughed. People ask, "Will we even recognize one another's resurrection bodies in heaven?" And Scripture is absolutely clear that our resurrection bodies will be recognizable. This is based first and foremost on the fact that Jesus Himself was recognizable in His resurrection body.

Now, there's so much more we could talk about here, but don't miss the overall point Paul is making. And if you want to dive into this more, you can listen to "Secret Church" online from earlier this year where we talked all about heaven. But notice here that Paul is not just trying to satisfy our curiosity about what heaven's going to be like. Instead, he gives this explanation of the resurrection because he wants to strengthen the church to obey, to abound in the Lord's work, to do whatever He tells them to do. Why? Because resurrection is real. We are not just living for this world. There is so much more to come.

Because of where all history is headed.

Which leads to this last reason why we should follow Christ with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience: Because of where all history is headed. I want us to go back to verse 24, because I don't want us to miss the outline of history that the Bible gives us here. Paul is talking about the end, when Jesus returns, and he says Jesus will "*deliver the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*"

And I just want you to get the picture here, to get a biblical perspective on what is going on in the world right now, and what's going to happen in the world in the future. Follow this in your notes: At this moment, Jesus has dominion over all things. At this moment, Jesus is risen from the dead, and He is reigning over all things. Think about His words right at the beginning of the Great Commission that we say to one another every week: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*"

Now how did that happen? How (or why) was Jesus given all authority in heaven and on earth? How did Jesus become the victorious King with dominion over all? He became the victorious King through radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to God. He lived a radically sinless life, He died a sacrificial death, He took the ultimate risk by staring death in the face, and He rose from the dead in victory over it. And as a result, He now reigns. He now has dominion over all things.

And this is huge, because a lot of Christians have the idea at least in the back of our minds that when Christ returns, that's when He's going to reign over all the world. But that's not what the Bible's saying. The Bible's saying that Jesus Christ is reigning right now. In fact, the language in verse 25 is intentional here, because Paul says, "*He must reign until...*" And that word "*until*" implies that He's reigning now in view of something else that's to come in the future.

So at this moment, Jesus has dominion/reign over all things. Jesus is King over all kings and Lord over all lords. So yes, there's a sense in which the kingdom of Christ is coming, but there's also a sense in which His kingdom has come, because the King has come, and He has conquered and He is reigning now.

You say, "Well, what is Jesus doing as the sovereign King with dominion over all things?" And here's what He's doing: He is advancing His kingdom through radical, sacrificial, risk-taking children of God. When verse 25 uses that word "*until*," the Bible's saying that Christ is reigning, and gradually, one by one, He's putting the enemies of God under His feet. And the picture here, even the language here, takes us to Paul's language at the end of Ephesians, where he talks about a battle that is raging in the world for the souls of men and women. And it's a battle not of flesh and blood, but of rulers and authorities in this dark world and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places, and Christ's kingdom is advancing in this battle through children of God who are radically and sacrificially taking risks to spread the gospel of God to the ends of the earth. And every time a child of God takes a risk and steps out in faith to show and share the gospel, the enemies of God are being defeated. And every time a brother or sister in Christ leads another person to Christ, the enemies of God are being defeated. And every time an unreached people group is reached with the gospel, the enemies of God are being defeated. The King who conquered through radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to God is advancing His kingdom through radical, sacrificial, risk-taking children of God. That's what He's doing now in history, that's what you and I are a part of in history, and as a part of this plan, He's putting things on our hearts for us to do

for the spread of His gospel and the advancement of His kingdom. And one day soon (one day soon!), this mission is going to be complete!

One day soon, Jesus will deliver over all things. Verse 24 says "every rule and every authority and power" – including, verse 25, death itself. Jesus is going to overcome them all. All the enemies of God will finally be defeated. "This must happen," Paul says, in verse 25, which is another way of saying, "This will happen." How do we know this? Because the God of history has ordained this, and He has ordained this for His own glory.

Verse 28: "*When all things are subjected to him (him being Christ, the Son), 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.*" That is where all of history is headed. It's exactly what Philippians 2 says, "*Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...to the glory of God the Father.*" All of history is headed toward the day when God alone will be worshiped and praised by a people comprised of every tribe, tongue, and nation of the earth.

You want your life to count in this world? Live your life with that day in your mind. Live your life, lead your family with that purpose on your heart. Follow Christ with radical, sacrificial, risk-taking obedience to His Word, doing whatever he puts upon your heart to do, knowing that life is short, death is coming, resurrection is real, and all of history is headed toward the day when the enemies of God will be finally defeated, and the glory of God will forever be exalted. You will waste your life if you live for anything different than that. But if you live your life for that, you will not have lived your life in vain.

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