

It is time to wake up!

- 1 Corinthians 15:12,20, 29-34
- Last week we read Paul's magnificent description of the last day, when Jesus returns, conquers and puts every enemy away forever, the last enemy being death, raises his people from the dead, and delivers the kingdom to God the Father. Now Paul goes back, as he often does when he has interrupted himself, to the previous argument for the resurrection of the dead that he had begun in verse 12. In this text today, I want you to see three things: A strange practice, a constant danger, and a strong warning.
- **A strange practice (vs. 29)**
- JB Phillips translates this verse, "...if there is to be no resurrection what is the point of some of you being baptized for the dead by proxy? Why should you be baptized for *dead bodies*?" This seems to be a strange practice to us, and Simon Kistemaker writes that there is "no evidence that churches in the apostolic era ever practiced baptism for the dead." But there were apparently some people who did, perhaps in the cases of people who had become Christians on their deathbed or had come to Christ during a famine or a plague and died before they could be baptized. Fearful that this meant those believers would not be saved, their Christian friends would undergo baptism on their behalf. One characteristic of cults today is that they emphasize obscure portions of Scripture, and this verse is used by the Mormons to support their regular practice of baptism for the dead. We know that baptism is important and commanded in Scripture, but we also know that it is neither necessary nor sufficient for salvation. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works, including the work of baptism. Who do we know is in paradise right now but was never baptized? The thief on the cross next to Jesus: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," the man said. Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)
- Paul's point in this is not to condone the practice but to use the practice as a logical proof for the resurrection of the dead. Why would anyone do this who knew that there is no resurrection of the dead on the last day? There would be no point. That brings us to the second point:
- **A constant danger (vs. 30-32)**
- Again, JB Phillips writes these verses this way: "And why should we live a life of hourly danger? I assure you, by the proud certainty which we share in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I face death every day of my life! And if, to use the popular expression, I have 'fought with wild beasts' here in Ephesus, what is the good of an ordeal like that if there is no life after this one? Let us rather eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"
- In this letter and in his second letter to Corinth, Paul makes quite a list of the things that he alone had suffered for the sake of the Gospel. Chapter 4: hunger, thirst, exposure to the elements, physical attacks, verbal abuse, slander, persecution. In his second letter, chapter 11, he lists imprisonments, countless beatings, being stoned and left for dead, being shipwrecked three times, and more, including this last sentence: "And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." How was Paul able to suffer so much for Christ? He sums it up in our text: "I die every day!"
- This is what Jesus meant when he said in Luke 9:23, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." It means that we start each

day with a renewed surrender, a renewed resolve to die to ourselves and to live for Christ. Paul said in Romans 12:1 that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship. The world tells us to preserve and protect our lives, but in Christ we are called to lay down our lives for the sake of the Gospel. Here is an irony. The world promises through self-centered living what we can only have through cross-centered living: the power to live life and enjoy life fully and without fear. That is why Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." He wrote that in his journal as a young 20-something and then gave his life at 27 trying to reach the Auca Indians in Ecuador. He lived a fearless life.

- I think there are two camps of Christians who struggle to live a fearless life, and we find these two camps present in every church. In the one camp are the believers who love God and believe in Jesus, but they are exhausted. They live wide open with every activity they can cram into their schedules and they are almost daily grumbling that something needs to change. But they get up the next day and try to do it all, again! They have very little energy for pursuing Christ or for persistent and consistent training of their children, or for intentional body-life in the church, or for pursuing their lost friends with the Gospel. Whatever ounces of energy they have left they use in one of two ways: the introverts may give that energy to reading and studying and praying and staying home whenever they can while the rest of the family goes to church. The extroverts may give that leftover energy to fellowship with other believers but have a really hard time being consistent with disciplines in the word and prayer. I know this is a broad brush I am using here, so only wear the shoe if it fits.
- The other camp who struggle to live a fearless life are people who believe every good thing about God, but don't feel like they deserve any of it. They are silently suffering from shame and dealing with disappointment about past sins, and they watch life pass them by for the most part because they would feel like a hypocrite if they tried to use their spiritual gift or if they were more intentional about attending Bible Studies or women's fellowships or men's retreats. Cindy and I were talking the other day about this and we agreed that every single person at Antioch, including me and her, are hypocrites. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We have all been liars and at the same time taught our children not to lie. May I remind you again of that wonderful promise in Psalm 103? "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." That reminds me of the child who heard that verse in family devotions, that we are all made of dust. He went to his room and happened to look under his bed. He yelled downstairs, "Mom, there's somebody under my bed and I can't tell if he's coming or going!" Ok, sorry for the dad joke. But the point is this: we are dust, and God loves every little dust ball he created. So, my brothers and my sisters, would you listen to the Word of the Lord and give up the fearful life, once and for all? I understand you can't snap your fingers and it all goes away. But you can take the first step. That is what Paul was saying to Timothy when he reminded him of who he was in Christ, told him to fan into flame the gift he had been given by God, and admonished Timothy with this truth: "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." Yes! Meditate on that! This leads us to the final point Paul makes here...

- **A strong warning (vs. 33-34)**
- Again, Paul has made these arguments, the unwarranted practice of baptism for the dead and the ongoing suffering we experience as believers as proof that there IS a resurrection of the dead, and this life is NOT all there is. But he does more than that. He confronts us in our own lethargy and sleepy living. He admonishes us for our own addiction to living life on our own terms, even while professing that we stand with Paul when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)
- Here is the pivot of the passage. "Do not be deceived." It was the same pivot he used in chapter 6 when he chided them for going to court against one another and he pointed out that they were deceived by adopting the lifestyles of the immoral culture around them. Here he tells them they are deceived by the ungodly belief of those who say there is no resurrection. First Paul addresses the mind, the heart, because we act on what we believe. He quotes from a Greek poet and playwright of their day who said, "Bad company ruins good morals." We know this is true. You become like those you spend time with. It shows up first in our speech, and then in our other behaviors and habits. I would encourage all of us to examine our speech and actions, our words and deeds, and see if we can connect those that are unhealthy, even ungodly, back to what we think or what we believe. "Do not be deceived" is a command that calls for action, not complacency. Is there an area of your life where you have possibly been deceived? One way to examine that is to look at the companions you consider your closest friends and ask, "Does my friendship with this person draw me closer to Christ or push me farther away? Does this friend challenge me in my faith or encourage me in my selfishness?"
- Paul then takes it one step further: "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning." We know this is figurative language, just as fighting with beasts at Ephesus is in verse 32. Paul is not suggesting that the believers in Corinth were literally drunk, and again JB Phillips has a helpful translation: "Come back to your right senses, and stop sinning like this!" A drunk person is not in his right mind, and neither is a Christian who is not thinking clearly about the implications of the resurrection of the dead. Stephen Um writes, "Many who have an intellectual knowledge of the resurrection lack a transformational knowledge." Or to put it another way, they are functional atheists, living without resurrection hope, living as if this life is all there is, living as though we need to be mostly concerned about self-preservation, self-protection, and self-fulfillment, and much less about the Gospel, the lost, and the life we are called to live as the body of Christ. Paul says that some have no knowledge of God, and he says this to their shame. Those who deny the resurrection have no saving knowledge of God. They need to repent and believe in the Lord. Those who live like they don't believe in the resurrection, and this world is all there is, need to repent and turn back to the Lord. Wake up, church! Paul said it like this to the Romans 13:11, "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."
- It is later than it has ever been.
- As we close, let me ask you a few questions. Do you struggle living a fearless life? If so, can you identify the reason it is a struggle for you? And do you acknowledge that you

have been given the spirit of power, love, and self-control? What will you do about your struggle?

- Prayer