

## **Introduction**

It is always good if you have no skeletons in your closet, nothing bad that you are hiding, no haunting lies, no dark deeds. I was once asked in an interview whether I had any skeletons in my closet. I didn't know how to answer. Had I done something in my past that would come crashing down on me and possibly harm my prospective employer? No, but had I done things that are shameful in the eyes of God? Absolutely. In that sense we all have skeletons in the closet.

But there are no skeleton's in God's closet. First, he is holy. He is pure. He is the standard of righteousness. But second, and just as importantly and the occasion for our great celebration today is the fact that Jesus bodily rose from the dead. He was crucified. He breathed his last. His heart stopped. It was finished. Into the hands of the father did he commit his spirit. The soldier thrust a spear into his side. He was taken down. He was hurriedly prepared for burial. Joseph placed him in a tomb and the heavy tombstone was rolled in place. But early Sunday morning God raised him up. He revived. He arose. All he left behind were grave cloths. His body was transformed. No skeleton was left. Life swallowed up death. The stone was not rolled away so he could get out. The stone was rolled away so that people could see he was no longer there.

This historical event is essential to Christian faith. It is essential to the Christian faith because it is an integral part of the plan of God for the ages. That is what we are going to see this morning.

[Read Text and Pray]

Some in the church in Corinth were disputing that believers would be bodily raised from the dead. Paul was writing to correct that mistaken notion. Not only were they wrong, they were discounting a central feature of God's plan for the ages and destroying the hope of the gospel. Paul replied by asserting the fact of the resurrection, the fruit of the resurrection, the reign

of the resurrection, and the fulfillment of the resurrection. And I want us to grasp these four points together this morning.

## **I. The FACT of the Resurrection (20a)**

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.”

Paul’s main point here in this chapter is not to prove the resurrection of Christ. Rather, it is to prove the resurrection from the dead of those who die in Christ. However, the section begins with a reiteration of the resurrection of Christ as a fact. It is a given both for him and for those to whom he was writing. It is what he preached and it is what they believed according to verse 11. In verses 12 - 19 he pointed to the inconsistency of believing Christ is raised but his followers are not. If there is no resurrection then Christ is not raised and if he is not raised then all hope is gone; we are still in our sins. In order to resolve the hypothetical argument in 12-19, he asserts that Christ’s resurrection is indeed a fact.

Paul knew Christ was risen from the dead. He had seen him face-to-face. In fact many had seen the resurrected Jesus. Paul mentions right here that he appeared to Cephas, the Twelve, more than 500 brothers at one time, to James, to all the apostles, and finally to Paul himself. This massive movement that was sweeping across the world was founded upon the certainty that Christ had risen bodily from death. Here is a mass of people who were living to proclaim that Jesus is alive, and they were willing to suffer and willing even to die for the cause.

The idea that they contrived the resurrection is not believable. They were not promoting a lie. Our experience demonstrates that when people contrive a story, the lies get exposed. Conrad Mbewe tells the story of three young men who were ill-prepared for their final exam. So they skipped the exam and concocted a story. They told the professor they had been away for the weekend at a friend’s wedding. On the way home their car had broken down and that is why they were unable to make the exam. Would the professor please allow them to make it up? He would. And at the appointed time they came to take the exam. The prof positioned the students separately in the far corners of the room and gave them their exams. There were only three questions. 1. What time was the wedding?

2. What color was the groom's tie? 3. What was the make of the car that broke down?

I submit to you that if 3 guys are unable to preserve a concocted story, it is even inconceivable for more than 500. That many people cannot withstand cross examination and substantiate a lie.

Furthermore, individuals do not suffer for lies, much less die for them. The cost is too high. But people do die for convictions; they do die when truth and eternal life are at stake. For Paul the resurrection was not a fairy tale but a fact.

A report came out last week that of those in Britain who identify as Christians, 25% do not believe Jesus factually rose from the dead. Let me repeat 25% of self-identified Christians in Britain said they do not believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus. Only in these days would there be people who claim to follow a way of life founded on what they are willing to admit was a lie. These are not true Christians. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then what is the use? If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then he is not worth following. Without the resurrection, Jesus offers nothing better than Buddha. Paul said if Christ was not raised then we are of all people most to be pitied.

But the resurrection of Jesus is a fact. If you do not believe God raised Jesus from the dead, you do not follow him. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a part of the gospel message that is so integrated to it that if you deny it, you are left without a gospel. Paul presents it this way in the first part of 1 Corinthians 15. The gospel he preached to the Corinthians, in which they stand, and by which they are saved if they hold fast to it is this: Christ died for our sins; he was buried; and he was raised on the third day. Paul says in Romans 4:25: "He was delivered up for our transgressions and raised for our justification." Dying was not enough. Resurrection is essential. Herein is victory over death. We preach Christ crucified, crucified for our sins, wounded for our transgressions. But we do not preach a defeated savior. He was not defeated for us. He endured the cross, indeed, but he is a victorious savior. He has sat down at the right hand of God the Father far above all rule and authority and power and

dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come (Eph 1:21).

It is helpful to be reminded that following Christ and hoping in Christ are not based upon imaginary fantasies. But rather the gospel is rooted and grounded in historical facts. And that they are rendered indisputable by many elements of evidence. We do well in the midst of a doubting world to keep this in perspective.

## **II. The Fruit of the Resurrection (20b-23)**

In these verses Paul is asserting his main point. Since Christ has been raised, everyone who belongs to him is raised as well.

To explain himself, Paul brings two images to our attention.

First, Paul speaks of firstfruits. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Fallen asleep is a euphemism for death much as we say "pass away." Christ is the firstfruits of those who have died. Back in verse 18 Paul had mentioned those who had "fallen asleep in Christ." He reasoned that if Christ has not been raised then they have perished. But Christ in fact has been raised, and he is the firstfruits. The first fruit is the initial harvest, the first produce of the season to emerge. It is the first part of the greater whole. What comes first is the promise of what is yet to come. And that is what Christ is in his resurrection. His resurrection is a part of the whole resurrection that is God's harvest. The resurrection of Christ is incomplete without the resurrection of those who belong to him.

I have delighted in the last couple weeks to see that the tips of buds have been turning green and the jonquils and irises in our yard have peeked up from the dirt, even that "sticker bush" I mentioned last year is starting to show signs of life. All I see makes me look forward to the fullness of summer when the yard is abundant with plant life, when the roses are blooming, the coneflowers are 3 feet tall, the hydrangeas are full and the hostas luxuriant. That is what Paul is saying about the resurrection of Jesus. It is the first fruits, the initial budding, the promise of so much more to come. For a harvest of resurrection is coming.

Second, Paul points us to the one-man impact. He has said Christ is the firstfruits. Now he is proving it. He points out that death came upon humanity through Adam by virtue of humanity's connection with him. Death is inevitable for all humans because all humans are connected with Adam in his sin. Now, resurrection, which is the undoing of death, is also inevitable for those who are connected with Christ.

All associated with Adam's sin are under the death because of sin. And all who are associated with Christ are beneficiaries of his resurrection. They are raised with him. They are part of the harvest of which he is the first fruit. Those who belong to Christ will be resurrected at his return.

All humans are associated with Adam. If you are conceived as a human being you are a sinner and subject to death. Not all humans are associated with Christ. Those who belong to him are those who are born of God. They repent of sin and trust in Christ. These are the one who deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Jesus.

### **III. The Reign of the Resurrected Christ (24-26)**

There is a second proof that Christians will be resurrected. It is the reign of Christ. Look at verses 24-25. "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."

We are given a very clear message here. Resurrection—namely the resurrection of Christ—defeats death. Christ is raised from the dead and in the course of time, he will bring destruction to all his enemies, every rule and every authority and power. That is every power-wielding entity opposed to him will be destroyed—nations, kings, demons, Satan, and sinners. God is at work to bring all these enemies into subjection under Christ. Everyone and everything which stands opposed to God and his purpose will be brought low, will be rendered powerless, and of no effect—the world system, political machines, religion, man-centered theories, worldly pleasures, and people absorbed in these things.

Jesus has completed his sacrificial work. "after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hb 1:13). Nothing has been left outside his control (Hb 2:8).

Jesus has a position which is above every competing power. The Father has subjected it all to him. But he is waiting to the proper time to destroy all his enemies. Death is the last of God's enemies to be destroyed. But it will be destroyed. Death wields power now, but in due time it will be destroyed. I drove by a cemetery the other day. The sun was shining and the grass was green. The emerging life of spring was evident all around these tombstones, emblems of death. I thought, "such irony." But I also thought "such promise" because where death reigns it will be dethroned. All those stones which mark the graves of believers are not ultimately markers of death but of life. They will emerge when Jesus calls his people forth!

And what a day that will be! In writing to the Romans Paul expresses this crescendo of rejoicing in that day. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Paul describes the resurrection a little further down in 1 Corinthians 15. He writes, "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 shall 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 must put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death, is swallowed up in victory.' . . . Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

#### **IV. The Fulfillment of the Resurrection (27-28)**

Now I want you to see these intriguing couple of verses that bring this section to a close. "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."

Let's stop right there. Christ is enthroned over all rule and dominion, including over death. By Christ's death and resurrection, the Father has elevated the Son to a position of authority over all creation. He is exercising

sovereignty over it. And at last he will destroy all competing powers that stand in his way. God the Father himself is the one who has subjected all these things to the Son, but he himself is not subjected to the Son. Now on to verse 28.

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

The Son is never elevated above God the Father. With everything in creation subjected to him, He remains in subjection to the Father. In fact having gained victory, he turns it all over to God the Father. Why? That God may be all in all. Now what does this mean, “that God may be all in all”? We can best understand this statement in light of other culminating statements Paul has made.

Romans 11:36 is one. Paul concludes his great description of God’s glorious work of salvation through Christ by saying, “For from him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

Another is Philippians 2:11. God has bestowed on Jesus the name that is above every name so that at his name every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

God the Father’s being all in all means that he is exalted. He is glorified. He is the focus. He stands as the source and goal of all that is. All things are subject to him. He is the planner, the purpose, the apex, and the means. He is the One, the All. To him be glory.

But in Paul’s explanation to the Corinthians, that God may be all in all is a purpose statement. It is the ultimate purpose for which God is at work in creation. It is the heartbeat of God’s design in sending His Son into the midst of creation. This purpose statement ties together everything in the Bible. That “God may be all in all.”

Specifically in the context of 1 Corinthians 15, the centrality of God is the reason for Christ’s resurrection. Without his resurrection, death remains

alive and well. We think of death as our enemy. And it is. But Paul asserts here that death is God's enemy. Death is the enemy of God. Death is God's enemy because it stands between him and the fulfillment of his purpose from creation forward. Think. God's purpose in creation was to have a people to live forever in his presence, submitting to Him, worshiping Him in his glory. There in the midst of the Garden of Eden was the tree of life. Sadly, Adam ate instead from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And he died. And through him death has come upon all. Redemption through Christ's death has taken care of man's sin problem. And our death problem has been taken care of by Christ's resurrection. The resurrection of those who belong to Christ is put into effect by Christ's resurrection. And God's purpose to dwell in the midst of his people has been seen throughout history. It started in the garden. It was evidenced in the tabernacle, the promised land, the temple, the return from exile, and finally the arrival of Jesus. In each case, though, the people rejected God and died. But by the cross Jesus Christ has reconciled his sheep to God. And by the resurrection the consequence of sin, death, is destroyed so that we may enter the presence of God who is all in all.

## **Conclusion**

What Paul is arguing in 1 Corinthians 15 is that BECAUSE Jesus rose from the dead, it is a certainty that those who belong to him will also be resurrected when he comes. Resurrection of those who belong to Christ is at the heart of the plan of God to be all in all. It is his plan to have a unified experience of fellowship with humans made in his image, ransomed, redeemed, and resurrected to behold him, to be satisfied with him, and to worship him, to be loved by him, provided for by him, and protected by him. Death stands in the way, but by his resurrection Christ defeated death. This defeat will be complete when his people are resurrected with him in glory. Then God will be all in all. When death finally is dead, then God's rule over all will mean justice for those who refused Christ's offer of life. They will be cast into the outer darkness. But God himself will lovingly govern his redeemed and they will behold their all in all.

This reality is much more than something for us to look forward. Soak it in. Today especially. He is risen! But if you are in Christ, you are as good as risen as well. And you should rejoice and live and obey in the light of it.

If you are not a disciple of Jesus, you do not belong to him, then the fact of resurrection ought to put before you the urgency of denying yourself and taking up your cross to follow him.