

The resurrection & reward

Corinthians Explained

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 15:29-58

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Congregation, the text for this morning hour's sermon is from 1 Corinthians 15:29-58. It's a long piece with three main verses and three main thoughts. It is about the resurrection and reward, that's the theme, the resurrection and reward. In the first place, more proof of the resurrection, look at verse 29, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" That's a verse proving the resurrection, a difficult verse, we hope to say something about it. Secondly, the very nature of the resurrection, think of verse 35, "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body," what body, "do they come?" In the third place, the victory through resurrection, verse 57, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." So again the theme is the resurrection and reward. Three thoughts: more proof of the resurrection, verse 29; the very nature of resurrection, verse 35; and the victory through resurrection, verse 57.

Congregation, this is a difficult chapter, difficult piece for the young people so let me begin with a short Bible story connecting to this chapter, you'll see what the sense of it is. It is about Moses, children, Moses. He was born in Egypt. His parents Amram and Jochebed were trying to hide him, right, because Pharaoh was after all those children, all those babies, boys had to be killed because the Pharaoh was afraid that the Jewish people and the Hebrews would take over the country so they all had to be killed. And the parents of that little Moses had faith and they did not accept that, and they were hiding that baby in a, let me say, bassinet in the reeds, in the grass next to the Nile River. She's hiding it, especially when the soldiers were getting close, they were hiding the baby. So we see that little Moses in that bassinet, in that basket in the reeds, and they see some ladies coming, royalty, the daughter of Pharaoh with a few of her helpers, a princess herself. And they were wading in the water and they tried to wash themselves a little bit, and then they see that bassinet, "What is that?" And the daughter of the Pharaoh says to her maidens, "What is that?" And they go and they open it, was there a lid on it, and they see that baby, that beloved dear child, and they are touched in their hearts. And the daughter of the Pharaoh says, "This child is found by me. It's my child from now on."

But how do you feed that child? There was no formula or something, no bottles. So there was a little girl standing there also, Miriam, actually the sister of Moses, and she said, "I have an idea. I know someone who could nurse this baby." "Oh, who is that?" "My mom

can do that." And they referred to Jochebed and Jochebed had the joy to yet feed that baby for I don't know how long, a year or two?

So, so far the Lord had spared that child. There became a time that Jochebed had to give that baby to the daughter of the Pharaoh and she raised it. She took it. She officially adopted the child as her son. So Moses was a prince of Egypt and I read in the Bible and the child grew and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son, and she called his name Moses at that time, and she said, "Because I drew him out of the water." So Moses grew up, four-years-old, 10-years-old, 15-years-old, and a teenager and his life was just so rich, he was so spoiled. I'm sure, I don't want to make things of it, I'm sure he had his own horses, his own chariots, maybe more than that, maybe he had his own boat on the Nile, a yacht. He was so extremely rich, those people in those days, it was [unintelligible]. He had everything. We would say he had flashy cars and he had Rolls Royce's and he was so wealthy. But Moses grew older and they told him that he was not Egyptian by nature, that he actually belonged to those slaves, to those Hebrews, to that Jewish people, and he started thinking and the Lord worked in his heart, and he began to repent of his sins.

"By faith," Hebrews 11, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." He said, "I don't want to be. I don't want to be the son of the Egyptian princess. I refuse that. I have no need of all the wealth. It doesn't tell me anything." It's in the light of eternity worthless, right? In the light of eternity it's worthless. "

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." The pleasures of sin for a season. So was he involved in sin there? Did he go to parties and stuff? And did he drink? What did he do? Like some young people do today sadly still and drink too much and hang out with the wrong crowd? For a season refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction. He said, "No, I'd rather belong to that Jewish people."

"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches," reward, "great riches than the treasures in Egypt." So the affliction, the reproach of Christ is better than the treasures of Egypt, "for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." He was thinking of the recompense of the Lord rewarding his people. He thought, "You know, if I stay in Egypt and have all the pleasure of sin, it's only for the time being and when I die it's all over. But if I belong to that afflicted people and I may have the riches of Christ, then I may keep it for eternity, that great reward."

So he said, "I'm not a fool. I'm not staying here. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." So Moses wanted a reward. Is that wrong? Is he serving the Lord to get better from it? Is he serving the Lord for selfish reasons? Just to be happy in eternity, serving the Lord for heaven? Yes. "But that's wrong. You may not serve the Lord for heaven." Well, that depends, it depends what you would like to do in heaven. If you like being in heaven just for yourself and be with yourself and your friends, but if you have a desire to be with God, to have

fellowship with him, if that will be your reward, the Lord is so honored by that. He's honored if he is your reward. He's honored when you would like to be with him. Right, that's also in marriage, right? We don't marry someone just for selfish reasons but you like to marry her, don't you? You love it, and if you won't love it, you had better not and she would not be honored by that.

So that's the background of this chapter as well. This chapter is about the great reward, right, the reward of resurrection and the Apostle Paul is talking about that extensively in this chapter and he's proving it, he's proving there is a resurrection, there must be a resurrection. And if not, it doesn't make sense else he's reasoning, you know the Apostle Paul, right, when he's saying words like "therefore and why and else." He's a reasoner. He's logical. Verse 29, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" One of the difficult texts in the Bible. Let me just tell you what it does not mean. It does not mean like the Mormons say that God's people can be baptized again for someone that died already. So someone is in hell and someone was baptized before can be baptized again to get that person out of hell, to be baptized for the dead. That's not what it means and let me try to explain that.

In the first place, from the whole rest of the Bible you know that, right? If you have died, can't change anymore. You're saved, you're saved. If you're not saved, you cannot be saved anymore. That time is over and it is appointed unto men once to die and after that judgment. There's no second chance. There's no possibility anymore. It's over. So stating that someone who is in hell can be saved by the baptism of someone else on earth is nonsense.

What does it mean, then? Well, as you know, we always have to read a text in context, right, and that's kind of easy here. There are four questions, four main questions. This is one question, right: why be baptized then for the dead? So this parallels with three other ones. Why then stand in jeopardy every hour, verse 30. And verse 31, why then dying daily? And verse 32, and why then fighting with the beasts in Ephesus? So those four: why being baptize for the dead, why being in jeopardy all the time, why die daily, why fighting the beasts? If there was no resurrection, I would not want to be in jeopardy all the time. If there's no reward, I don't die daily. If there is no resurrection, I don't want to fight with the beasts in Ephesus. I want the reward. There is no reward, that's what Paul says, then I don't die daily.

In jeopardy every hour, the Apostle Paul died every day, was every day in danger. Every day he felt the hot breath of death on his neck. He constantly felt in danger here or there or I don't know from where it comes, but he was always alert, always thinking of death. "I die daily." He lived close to death and he realized it, he realized, "I'm going to die. I'm going to die. Maybe today I'm going to die. Who knows, maybe today." And what a life is that? A life with constantly experiencing your mortality. I'd like to recommend that life. I recommend the life of dying daily, of daily realizing this might be the last one, and being vigilant and faithful and realizing now I still can do it, maybe tomorrow not anymore. To live close to death. To count your days. To become wise, right?

So in that context, the Apostle Paul says, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" Baptizing for the dead must mean something similar to the three next verses. Being baptized for the dead must mean suffering. It must be. Why do I suffer? Why are they then baptized for the dead? Do you see the context? You say, "Well, but how would you translate that? What has baptism to do with affliction? Because it just simply says baptized for the dead, should we not take it literally then?" Well, there are texts in the Bible about that, that baptism means suffering. It's in the Bible. Read it, Mark 10, "They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Do you see that? Do you think you can be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? What else can that mean than suffering? Or Luke 12, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

The Lord Jesus spoke about baptism as being baptized in suffering but you say maybe in the original it says baptized for the dead. The "for" is huper or hyper, and can mean many different things. It can also mean in or unto. So, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead." So a people are suffering unto death. Suffering unto death. If there's no resurrection, "Else what shall they which are baptized to the death do if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then suffering unto death?" Like martyrs, right? Martyrs are suffering unto death on the stake. They are killed. So why would martyrs be martyrs? Why do people want to die on the stake if there's no resurrection? That's in the context.

So the application of that is would you be willing to suffer persecution? Would you just leave the church then or would you still continue and say, "I would rather be afflicted with the people of God than for a while, a time the treasures of Egypt and sin for a season"? Would you fall away if persecution broke out or would the resurrection be your reward? You say, "I'm rather baptized for the dead. I'm rather in jeopardy every day. I'm rather dying daily. I am rather be for the wild beasts because I look upon the recompense of the reward." Are we seeking the city without foundations? Are we pilgrims on earth? Do we keep in mind that we have no abiding city, right?

So proof of the resurrection in the sense of reasoning, there must be resurrection else it would not make sense to be a martyr. Let's go to the second thought, the very nature of the resurrection. Let me start at verse 43, "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." What is it about? It is about a funeral, right? When there's a funeral and a viewing for them, and also a viewing in the foyer, and you begin to realize what that means and then you feel, you see the dishonor and it's not an honorable thing, right, to be in your casket. We honor the person but that's not an honor you do to someone, just laying down, eyes closed, no heartbeat, no color, no bloodstream. That's dishonor, weakness. It's absolute weakness. And that is what the Apostle Paul is talking about, when people are buried, they're buried in dishonor, buried in weakness, there's no power, it's over.

And now some in the congregation of Corinth said, "It's over. When someone has died, then there is no example of some being raised from the dead. It can't be. People are returning to dust and there's no way back." And the Apostle Paul refers to that and begins to explain that and he begins to say, verse 36, "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." So some people say when you've died, you can't live again. The Apostle Paul says, "Yes, you can. I will give you an example of nature." When you sow a seed of corn in the ground and you bury it, or some grass seed, or a carrot, or a beet, or another seed, you know, whatever you're using, and you put that seed, it's very small or a little bigger, put your finger in the ground or a tool and you just put it in the ground and just cover it again with soil. You have buried that seed, right? And you would say, "It's over. I can't see the seed anymore. It's buried, it will just die there. It has died. It has no meaning." No, because in the dark with a little bit of moisture, a little bit of warmth, in the soil something begins to develop, that seed germinates and that seed disappears and I see a little plant coming, and I see that there is corn or there is grass or another flower or a beet coming. It's amazing. Amazing.

So the Apostle Paul says, see that it is possible. We are very weak, very brittle, and yet it is guaranteed that all people will rise from the dead, and then people will be people. Do we realize that we are so fragile, "As for man, his days are as grass." As grass, grass is not much. "As a flower in the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more." Mortality. Or Isaiah 40, "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field." Or Job 14, "He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."

The Apostle Paul is now explaining not only that people will rise but also that people will rise in a very special way. It is the body God's people will get back, it is their body, right? Their body, not someone else's. Not a strange body, their body, their own body. You will get your own body back but it will be different. It's yours yet different. And the apostle is using five different words for that, lines for that. Corruption will become incorruption. Natural will become spiritual. Earthly becomes heavenly. Mortal becomes immortal. And weak becomes powerful. Those five. So God's people after the resurrection will receive their body back but it will be incorruptible, invincible, nothing wrong with that, perfect, a perfect body back. There was a natural body, now there is even though a body is their body but it is a spiritual body, a spiritual body like the body of the Lord Jesus was a spiritual body. He could eat. He did not have to eat. The faculties of that body were yet different. It was his spiritual body. No, no, no, in heaven is no spiritual body. In heaven is only the soul of God's people. What is soul? And they see with their soul's eyes. But after the resurrection, we will have a spiritual body. A body, a spiritual body. Instead of earthly they will be heavenly, heavenly oriented. There's overlap between all those words. They receive a heavenly body when the resurrection comes. They will have an immortal body. They cannot die anymore. And they will have a powerful body, strength will be there and no weakness at all.

Why is the Apostle Paul talking about that? He talks about that incentive. He talks about that recompense of the reward. He wants people to realize that they will lose everything

when they die unconverted, and they will inherit all things when they are saved by Christ. So that's why I used that example of Moses, right? Moses looked upon the recompense of the reward and he thought, "I am not a fool. I'm not going to waste my time, my life here below, and then miss out on the most important thing." I read in Job 19, "And though after my skin worms destroy this body," that's horrible to think about, "yet in my flesh shall I see God." Not in my soul but my flesh I shall see God.

So if you're one of his, you may say, "My body is going to be buried but will rise, it will rise incorruptible, spiritual, heavenly, immortal, powerful with strength." That's a great reward and you don't need to be ashamed of seeking that if you seek it to glorify God with your body. Daniel 12, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Do you know stars have their own body and the sun and the moon and the birds and the fowls and the beasts, and so God's people. Matthew 13, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The righteous shine as the sun. Would you like to shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father? Philippians 3, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Oh, that glorious body. Or Revelation 21, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Therefore what are you seeking? Congregation, what are you seeking? What do you live for? Do you live for the pleasure of sin for a season? Or are you focused on the future? And do you realize that here on earth it's all earthy, corruptible, earthly and mortal, but that the reward is for God's people afterwards. Seek him and live. It brings us to the last thought: the victory of the resurrection.

Congregation, the word victory occurs three times at the last part of this chapter. Three times victory, victory, victory. Verse 54, "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." And verse 55, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" And also in the last verse, in verse 57 rather, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So what is that victory about? The victory is about the Lord Jesus returning and conquering death because death has not been conquered yet. Not. No. God's people, many of God's people are still in the grave, right? So death has not been conquered. Death is still in charge. Death is still there and the Lord Jesus when he comes back, he will take death captive, he will capture death and take death out and there will be no death anymore. He will have the victory over death.

So let me think of the text, the last enemy of the church is death. We often think of a deathbed, right, and let me say that's the last enemy, death. That's not what that refers to.

The last enemy being death is at the last day then death will be conquered and then death is swallowed up in victory, swallowed up like a bird is taking a seed and just gobbling it up, devouring it. It's gone like a crocodile just gets a prey and just swallows it whole. And so death will be swallowed up in victory. It is gone. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus guarantees the resurrection of God's people and death will be gone. It will be swallowed up.

And more, death will have no sting anymore, "O death, where is thy sting?" Some insects have a sting. A scorpion has a sting and when he stings you that is quite painful. But if you are able to cut off his stinger, that scorpion is absolutely harmless. And I think that is also true for most bees, or at least for a number of types of bees. There are thousands of different types of bees, right? Thousands, yes, creation, but many of those bees when they sting you, they let the stinger go and the stinger remains in your skin and they fly off without the stinger and they are harmless little insects. And so the Lord takes that sting out of death so that the death of God's people is different and that sting will be taken out especially at the last day. In a way it is out already but then the victory.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." So the law convinces of sin and sin convinces of guilt, and that's kind of a sting that will all be over. No sin anymore. "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, the Apostle Paul has this hope. He is persecuted and has experienced so much hardship but he says, "I have hope. Don't pity me. I'm doing well."

I talked not too long ago to someone who was really shaking. I thought she had Parkinson's but apparently it was not Parkinson's. And I asked her, "How do you feel about that?" And she said, "People pity me and feel sorry for me, but I don't feel sorry for myself. It brings me closer to Jesus." Now if that is true, you see, then the sting is out of it and that's what the Apostle Paul is talking about, you know, don't pity him.

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore," there's one of the key words of Paul, right, remember, "Therefore." You don't see a therefore in the letters of the Apostle Peter and John but Paul, yes. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast," be steadfast, "unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Not in vain is not for nothing, there's a reward, not in vain.

So be faithful. Do your work. Don't feel paralyzed. Do what's right. Keep going. Be steadfast. Don't panic. Don't be moved too quickly. Always abounding in the work of the Lord in holiness, in sanctification. Abound in it. Do your best for it. Live holier than before. Get closer to the Lord. Walk in his ways. Be faithful. Unmovable. Always not just a little bit, always abounding, abounding in the work of the Lord as mothers, as fathers, as single people, older people, younger people, in school, wherever although we know that this life will end someday, just be faithful, continue, abound in your works, seek the Lord. But of course, you know that we need to be saved for that, right? We need a new

heart for that. We need to repent for that. We need to believe for that, to choose for that. But that's what I lay before you, to seek the Lord.

We're going to close with Colossians 1:23, that's kind of close to that last verse of 1 Corinthians 15, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister," therefore continue, continue in being steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Amen.