

Why Jesus' Resurrection Guarantees Our Resurrection

(1 Cor. 15:20-26)

Last week a friend of mine told me the sad story of his 29 year old nephew who was recently checked into Stanford Medical Center where the doctors took one look at him and immediately put on a heart and lung machine. After several days of exams, the doctors told my friend's nephew that there was nothing they could do for him and that once they took him off the machine, he would die – which took him completely by surprise. He knew he didn't feel well but he never anticipated not leaving the hospital. Three days later, he had said his goodbyes and asked the doctors to take him off the machine. In spite of his family's protests, he said he was an adult and this was his decision. He left behind a wife, two small children and his grieving extended family. I told my friend I didn't know how people could handle that tragedy without the hope of the resurrection; that because Jesus rose, all who believe in Him will also rise. Without the hope that death isn't the end and that we'll see our loved ones again, I don't know how people face death. All of our other problems pale to insignificance when compared with the big problem all of us have. We're all going to die. We're good at distracting ourselves from the fact that nobody gets out of here alive, but all it takes is an unusual pain or an abnormal test result or a crime on our street or the death of someone we know to remind us that death waits for each of us in the not too far distant future. Yet only 1 out of 10 Americans believe that death is the end. I've never attended a funeral where anyone said, "Well, Fred's gone. We've lost him forever. He's in the grave and is no more; just like we'll be sooner than we think." No, regardless of people's religious faith or lack thereof, people say things like, "Fred's up there partying with his buddies," or "Fred's having the time of his life" or "We'll see Fred again." We can't accept the awful finality of death; that we'll never see those we love again; that they no longer exist and soon, neither will we; which kind of makes the few years we spend on earth a joke. If everybody dies and there's no one to remember us or care about us; what difference does it make if I'm a good person or a bad person? We all end up as worm food anyway. 9 out of 10 Americans believe that death is not the end – but is there any reason to believe that? Aren't we just whistling in the dark; hoping against hope that in some form or another we will continue to exist? That's what I want to talk to you about this Easter; how you can know for certain that there is life after death. One man came back from the dead to show us that death does not win in the end and that's what we celebrate on Easter: the resurrection of Jesus. This morning I want to talk about why Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection. And to see why Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection, I want to spend some time in the 15th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

The letter to the Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul to the church he started in the Greek city of Corinth. Several years have passed and Paul hears from some of his friends in Corinth that there are problems in the church and people have lots of questions. So Paul writes this letter to address those problems and to answer those questions and one of the questions was about what happens to us after we die. The Corinthians had grown up immersed in Greek philosophy which assumed that the physical body was evil and the spirit was good. So eternal life for the Greek was release from the prison of his body and the Corinthian Christians brought this cultural assumption into the faith with them. They didn't deny eternal life - they just denied that eternal life was physical. But Jesus taught the resurrection of the dead. Now to have a resurrection, something that was dead has come back to life and in this case, what was dead is our physical body. When we die, we don't cease to be human. We don't become eternal ghosts or angels. We don't cease to be conscious individuals who are absorbed into a great spirit, like a drop of water falling into the sea. According to the Bible, we will live forever as resurrected humans with a physical body just like Jesus. Paul's whole point in this chapter is that the resurrection of Christ not only proves that there is life after death but guarantees the death of death. Let's start at vs 20. *"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death."* (1 Cor. 15:20-26) This paragraph is a great summary of the entire story of the Bible. The Bible consists of 66 books written by 40 different authors over a period of 1600 years; and yet it tells one great story; how God rescues people from death through His Son; and how all that was lost by one man in the Garden of Eden was regained by Jesus. And this paragraph gives us three reasons the resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection. 1. Death is

an enemy. 2. Death is a defeated enemy. 3. Death is a temporary enemy.

The first thing we learn about death from the story of the Bible is that death is an enemy; our enemy and God's enemy. Death is not God's ally or God's servant or even God's creation. Death is not from God. Death is anti-God; the absence of God. When Jesus' good friend, Lazurus dies, and Jesus goes to see Lazurus' two sisters, the first thing sister Martha says when she sees Jesus is, – "Lord, if You had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." And that's often *our* first reaction when someone we love dies; we immediately blame God for taking our loved one away. We act like God created death; just to remind us that we're not in charge, He is and that He can take our life any time He chooses. But what I want you to see here is that according to the story of the Bible; death is not from God. Death was never part of His plan for His creation. Look at what Paul writes in vs. 20 *"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep."* The key word in that verse is first fruits: the beginning of the harvest: the first wheat of the season harvested, the first grapes, the first lambs born in a flock. The first fruits are the guarantee of the rest of the harvest. Christ's resurrection was not a unique, one time only event. It wasn't just Jesus' best trick. It was the first of many resurrections; first fruits of those who are asleep, meaning those who have died. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection. How does Christ's resurrection guarantee ours? Paul explains. *"For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead."* God did not create death; death originated with man. How? Paul writes in Romans 5:12 *"Therefore through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin..."* In the story of the Bible, God made the world perfect without death, decay or disease. But when Adam rebelled against God, he became the door through which sin entered the world and along with sin came death. You may remember that God only gave Adam and Eve one "Don't:" Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die." When God gave that command, Adam and Eve aren't perfect, they're innocent; naïve, and unformed. They need to learn to trust God and obey Him; and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is lesson one in learning to trust and obey. But Adam and Eve disobey, choosing to be their own god; and as God warned, in separating themselves from God, they separate themselves from their source of life; and die spiritually and begin to die physically. In the story of the Bible, God creates people in His image with freedom to choose; and when they choose to rebel against God, sin enters the perfect world God created and death through sin, because when Adam sinned, the entire creation was affected. Pain, disease, decay and sorrow spoiled the perfect creation God had made. Now not only was the creation affected by Adam's sin, all of Adam's descendents were affected as well. Why do people whom God created to live forever die? Because when Adam sinned, we all died. Physical death is the penalty for Adam's sin. That's why Paul says "by a man came death." That doesn't seem fair, does it? Why should I be punished for Adam's sin? In a minute, I want to show you why it is actually to our great advantage that God implicated us in Adam's sin. What I want you to see now is that death is not from God. Death was not part of God's plan for His creation. Death is separation from God, the absence of God; an enemy, an intruder, anti-God, anti-life, and anti-creation. That is why Jesus weeps at Lazurus' funeral, even though He knows that in a few moments He is going to raise Lazurus from the dead to restore him to his family. He weeps over the tragedy of death, the sorrow, the loss we all experience because we live in a fallen world. When we grieve over the death of a loved one, God grieves with us; because death is not part of the natural order of things. Death is an enemy, an intruder, and unnatural plague upon the perfect world God intended. Death is the absence of God. Adam and through Adam all humanity were separated from God and that is why we die. We don't die because God kills us. We die because we are disconnected from the source of life. It's like drowning. It's not the water that kills you – it's the lack of oxygen. Humans are separated by sin from Him upon whom life depends. Does that mean that God is powerless over death, that death will always reign over the sons and daughters of men?

No and that brings us to the second thing we learn about death from the story of the Bible and why Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection. Death is a defeated enemy. *"For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."* Why is the resurrection of Jesus the guarantee of our resurrection? Why is Christ's resurrection the first fruits of those who are dead? Paul explains that just as death came through Adam so also the resurrection of the dead comes through Jesus. At His resurrection, Jesus defeats death in our behalf. What one man lost, another man has regained. The monster the first man let into creation is defeated by the second. The story of the Bible is about how Jesus becomes a man to restore us and the rest of the creation to what God had intended when He created us. *"For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in*

Christ all will be made alive." That's the story of the Bible in a single verse. In order to save us from death, God sent His Son to suffer death in our place. I'm not saved because of who I am or because of what I do. I'm saved by who He is and because of what He has done. That's what Paul means by, "*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.*" At first glance, being held guilty for Adam's sin doesn't seem fair. It's not my fault that he blew it. And I suppose that God could have created every one of Adam's descendants as innocent as Adam was when he was created and God could have given each of us the same choice Adam had; obey and live in harmony with God or sin and die separated from Him. I suspect, however, that given the same opportunity, we would probably have done what our daddy did. But if we did follow Adam's example and separate ourselves from God, there would be no hope for us - unless each of us could find another righteous person willing to die in our place. But in the wisdom of God, He chose to deal with people corporately rather than individually. That way, just as everything that was true of Adam became true of us, so also everything that is true of Jesus becomes true of us. One man's sin condemned me to death, one man's obedience and resurrection gives me eternal life. That's Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 and why Christ's resurrection guarantees our resurrection. Because Jesus defeated death, we will defeat death. Because Jesus rose bodily from the grave, we will rise bodily from the grave. Death is an enemy but death is a defeated enemy. Even though Jesus defeated death, we still die. This world is still full of pain, decay and death. Life still isn't what God created it to be.

This brings us to the third thing we learn about death from the story of the Bible. Death is temporary. "*But each (will be made alive) in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.*" The Bible consists of 66 books by 40 different authors written over a span of 1600 years - yet it tells a single story. It is a rescue story, about how God rescues people and the rest of His creation from death. Jesus is the hero of the story. He is promised in the Old Testament and revealed in the New. And His resurrection begins the process of restoring creation back to what God originally intended it to be. His resurrection is the first fruits, the beginning of the harvest of the resurrection of the dead. The next act in the drama happens when Christ returns to earth as the conquering king and raises from the dead the bodies of all those who have put their faith in Him and our new, incorruptible resurrection bodies are joined to our spirits which have been waiting in heaven. Physical death is only temporary. Our soul lasts forever and we won't spend forever as ghosts or angels floating in the clouds but in pain-free, disease-free, ageless bodies like the body Jesus rose in on a new, recreated earth where Jesus reigns and death is no more. I've already put in my order for a much taller body with better hair. The world as we know it will be changed when Jesus rules here; no pain, no disease, no corruption because there will be no death. That's what Paul means when he says that Jesus must reign until He has put all His enemies - everything and everyone which rules over us other than Jesus under His feet. All our problems began when Adam stepped out from under God's authority and all our problems will be solved when we live once again under that authority. And the final enemy of Jesus to be abolished will be death. Death is not eternal, it is only temporary. Death did not exist prior to Adam's sin, it was defeated at Christ's resurrection and it will cease to exist when Christ reigns as Messiah and King over all the earth. That's why the resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection. How do I know I will live forever? How do I know I will see my family again? How do I know that death is not the end but only the beginning - because Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead.

And because death is only temporary, not only those who believe in Jesus will live again; those who do not believe in Jesus will live again as well. In John 5:28-29, Jesus says, "*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, (who will hear Christ's voice? All the dead) and will come forth; those who did the good {deeds} to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil {deeds} to a resurrection of judgment.*" Paul says in Acts 24:14-15, "*But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.*" God created people to live forever and that is why all people will be resurrected when death is no more. Those who chose to come to God in this life will spend eternity in His presence. Those who chose to avoid God in this life will spend eternity away from His presence. Death is not the end. Death is not permanent annihilation. Death is temporary. C.S. Lewis put it this way. "Christianity asserts that we are going to go on forever and that must either be true or false. Now there are a great many things that wouldn't be worth

bothering about if I was only going to live eighty years or so, but I had better bother about if I am going to go on living forever. Perhaps my bad temper or my jealousy is getting worse so gradually that the increase in my lifetime will not be very noticeable but it might be absolute hell in a million years. In fact, if Christianity is true, hell is precisely the correct technical term for it. Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others, but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or to even enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on and on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God 'sending us' to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE Hell unless it is nipped in the bud." If the Bible is right and we are eternal creatures who will live either in either eternal fellowship with God or in eternal separation from God; then Christ's resurrection is of ultimate importance. We all know people who are addicted to something or to someone. The more they get, the more they need and the more they need, the more miserable they become. Yet they can't leave their addiction. Imagine spending eternity like that. The flames and agony of hell are probably metaphorical. The reality is far worse – spending eternity with yourself; with everything in you that you despise and hate becoming greater and greater. Instead of just being afraid, you are paralyzed with fear. Instead of just getting angry, you are bitter. Instead of just lusting, you are consumed with unquenchable desire. That's living with your sin for eternity. Lewis says, "In the long run, the answer to those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question, 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out all sins and at all cost to give them a fresh start? He did this at Calvary. To forgive them even when they don't ask forgiveness? To leave them alone? That is what hell is. (Being left alone with our sin by God) ... the doors of hell are locked from the inside." That's why Lewis concluded that there are ultimately two kinds of people; those who say to God, "Thy will be done." And those to whom God says, "Thy will be done." The point is, because death is only temporary, we will not be dead forever and that makes the decisions we make in this life of eternal importance.

That's the story of the Bible. It begins in a perfect Garden and ends in a perfect city and Christ's resurrection is the crucial event that ties the whole story together. Taken alone, the resurrection of Jesus is just an unusual event. It is only when we see it as part of the larger story of the Bible that it becomes significant. For centuries, the Jews waited for a promised Savior who would do for them what they could not do for themselves. In fact, the OT contains hundreds of promises and prophecies of a coming King and Savior who would be God in human flesh, coming to save His people from sin and from death. Jesus arrives at the exact time the prophecies said He would arrive in the exact place and to the exact family. He grows up and does things no one had ever done before; healing the lame, the blind, the deaf and the diseased, delivering the oppressed and raising the dead. He spoke as no man had ever spoke, revealing who God really is and what He requires. He does everything the Messiah was predicted to do; but He is still rejected by the very people He came to save – just as had been written of Him in the OT; and in the darkest part of the story, God watches His own Son be tortured and crucified. But then, the greatest surprise of all - God snatches victory from the jaws of defeat, raising His Son from the dead and in so doing, defeats evil and death and ushers in a new age, beginning the process of making all things new; first people, and eventually His entire creation. That's where Christ's resurrection fits in the story of the Bible. The resurrection is the climax, the turning point, the surprise victory. However, the resurrection of Jesus is more than a literary device to create a happy ending to this story. It is an actual historical event and can be investigated like any historical event. And if Jesus really did rise from the dead, the story of the Bible isn't just another creation myth or a collection of ancient folklore; it is the actual story of the world. If Jesus rose from the dead, the story of the Bible is true – and is not only Israel's story but humanity's story and our story as well. That's why the gospel isn't good advice or rules to live by, it is good news. Jesus is the hero of the Bible, the Savior whom God promised to send since the days of Eden and He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. He becomes our champion. He lives the life we failed to live so that God can credit everyone who trusts Him with His perfect record of obedience. He dies the death we deserve, bearing the punishment for our sins on the cross so that we can be forgiven. He rises from the dead in our behalf so that as one man's sin lost immortality for all, so one man's resurrection gained immortality for all; and we rise because He rose. And when we believe the story and embrace Jesus as our Savior, He comes into our life and frees us from the things which enslave us and begins making us like Himself. That's why the story never gets old. I came to know Christ 48 years ago and I am as excited about Him now as I have ever been. Because He rose and lives today, my relationship with Him is the one point of stability and certainty I have; He satisfies me and guides me and protects me and blesses me; because He is not a dead savior but a living Lord. That's why we say that Christianity is not a religion but a relationship. Jesus says in Rev.

3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into Him." He promises in John 6:37 that "Anyone who comes to Me I will not cast out." If Jesus is alive today, He can make good on those promises. Opening the door means believing the story of the Bible; that He has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves and offers amnesty, forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe in Him as Lord and asking Him to come into your life, forgive your sins and make you the person He wants you to be.

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