



Abounding in Resurrection Certainty, Part 1

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

I'd like to invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians 15 in your Bibles, this magnificent chapter of scripture. Paul draws his instruction on the resurrection to a close with a very poignant, a very memorable exhortation to us as believers. That final verse there 1 Corinthians 15:58 says this, "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." We really need to hear that word, don't we? We need to know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. It is not *kenos*, futile, meaningless, empty.

Our labor in the Lord is not that. We need to hear that assurance from God's word, because sometimes we as even as believers, can be tempted to think that our labor in the Lord is not accomplishing anything in this modern and very perplexing world. It's not an overstatement to say that we are living in a time of incredible change in our country in our world, I think we all sense the changing winds and the changing tides of our

world. And what lies ahead of us seems overwhelming. Seems daunting has the sense of inevitability about it because the future is inevitable. It's going to come. Time marches on.

As Christians we must remember, that the only truly inevitable will, the only unstoppable power in this world, it's not the power of nations and governments and kings and political parties. It's the will and the power of the all wise and all powerful God. "Therefore my brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Those words were written to Christians who lived in the same kind of wicked generation as we do. They sensed the same kind of cultural and social sin and powerlessness in the culture that we do. They, too, were tempted to, to give up hope to be discouraged, to think that their labor in the Lord was empty or useless, or of no real significance or meaning. But all of that is a lie. The truth is here, the truth is in resurrection power. The truth is that our God wins. That's our hope. The doctrine of the resurrection is the inevitability of the will of God. The doctrine of the resurrection is the unstoppable power of his might.

Death cannot stop him. God has declared the end from the beginning. He's told us from ancient times, things that are still yet future to us. He says, "My counsel shall stand. I will accomplish all my purpose," and we find proof of that inevitable will and dominating power in the doctrine of the resurrection. So to show you this, I'd like to draw your attention to the very heart of the chapter there in 1 Corinthians 15:20 through 28. Look at it there and follow along as I read.

"But in fact," Paul says, "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits 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 first fruits, 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 accepted 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.”

That section in the middle and at the heart of Chapter 15 provides the doctrinal basis for the exhortation that comes at the end of the chapter. The doctrine of the resurrection is a solid and a firm and an utterly sufficient foundation to support us. It is a hope to motivate us to immovable steadfastness and to continuous productivity in the Lord. That's really a picture of Christian maturity. That sure foundation provides a platform from which he can build a fruitful and joyful Christian life. And that is what we hope to accomplish this morning is to grasp the significance of this word of encouragement, so that we, too, can live steadfast, stable, fruitful, Christian lives. So what I want to do is show you here at the beginning, two certainties from 1 Corinthians 15:20 to 28.

First certainty: You personally, you singular, will rise bodily. If you're in Christ, you will rise from the dead. Look back at verse 20. Paul begins with that statement of fact, he says, “But now,” or as it stands, “Christ has been raised from the dead.” That just sets the principle of bodily resurrection forward as a precedent that we might embrace it as a hope. It's an affirmation that follows after the nightmare scenario that he

painted for the Corinthians. He pictured for them a world in which the resurrection is not true. Why'd he do that? Why'd he want to trouble them? Because this, as incredible as it sounds, there were some within the church in Corinth who were actually doubting the doctrine of resurrection. The reason they doubt it is because the church was tolerating people in its midst who denied the concept of bodily resurrection.

Those people who were tolerated were turning around and teaching and influencing other people. Doesn't it seem obvious that that's going to undermine the stability of Christian hope. Especially knowing how false doctrine and, undercuts the entirety of the Christian hope, what benefit did people in this day find in spreading a lie that there is no resurrection of the dead? This starts from culture.

In that day philosophical dualism was the error embraced in the first century. Philosophical dualism sees the world of consisting of two realities, both a material reality and an immaterial reality, which is true. But it also teaches that the immaterial side, spiritual realities, are good. Matter, material realities are evil, so material realities like the human body, that's bad, they said. For them, the hope of bodily resurrection promised in the Christian Gospel, the resurrection of evil

matter. Why would you want to raise that? That doesn't sound to them like good news at all. Why would anybody want to spend eternity imprisoned in a physical body? Sounded absolutely absurd. That kind of error crept into the church and was spread around.

Still, they struggled with that cultural influence, but it wasn't just the cultural influence of Greek philosophy that made Corinthian susceptible to, really, what is a soul damning error. Many of them, as it says in verses 1 to 2, 1 Corinthians 15, many of them had embraced the principle of resurrection when they embraced the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When they believe that, they went against their culture; even if they didn't know all the implications of that. When they believed that and embrace that they rejected their culture. Working out the implications of that in their life.

Talking about the true believers, what would upset their confidence in the concept of resurrection? What would make them susceptible to a cultural prejudice against bodily resurrection? What would blind them to the undermining effect of believing that kind of error? I believe they became concerned about those who in verse 21 Paul calls them "those who have fallen asleep." These Corinthian believers, they're the first generation of

Christians. They're still living in the first century, and when they receive Paul's letter, it had been about 20 years since Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension. And like us, they knew the promise of the angels in Acts 1:11. "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, he's going to come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." So like us, they also were eager for his return, and they expected it very quickly.

But his return didn't happen right away. After his ascension, a year passed by and then two years and then five and then 10 and then 20. And during this time of waiting, during this time of expectant hope, some fellow Christians began to die off. Family members, friends, loved ones, and the Christians who remained began to wonder about the hope of bodily resurrection. Because the bodies of their loved ones, their dying loved ones, remained in the grave. Still, Christ hadn't returned. So this combination of sorrow on the one hand, personal grief, and immaturity made them susceptible to this cultural prejudice against bodily resurrection.

So Paul as a tender pastor, he needed to correct this error. He needed to demonstrate its destructiveness. He needed to reestablish them in their faith and so he repitched the gospel truth to them in verses 1 through 11. And then in verses

12 to 19, he painted a picture of a world without resurrection. Let's see what that looks like. Look at verse 13 to 19. He asks in verse 12 how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead and then he says this, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead," hold the phone because, "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," empty, meaningless, futile, nothing, of no account. Verse 15, "We're even found to be misrepresenting God."

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." It paints this miserable picture, right? All is lost. But after he helps them to imagine this dark and meaningless world without the doctrine of bodily resurrection. He calls them back, brings them back to reality. He gives them an emphatic affirmation in verse 20 and it really does come as a welcome relief. After that dark, ugly world, he says, "But in fact," or as it stands in reality, "Christ has been raised from the dead." And that fact is as firm and as stubborn and as irrefutable as the evidence of Christ's empty tomb, that's really good news.

Really good news because that fact is what gives us the certainty that we, too, will rise from the dead and our dead

loved ones as well. Gives us hope that our, our gospel preaching is not in vain, that it actually means something that actually is true. Take a look at verses 20 to 23 again. "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ also shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ."

He mentions the principle of the first fruits. And bolsters that principle with the principle of imputation. Then he returns to the order of resurrection according to that principle of the first fruit. So let's talk first about the first fruits, the principle of the first fruits. It demonstrates the organic connection between Christ and Christians. Such a beautiful picture of resurrection there, taken from an agricultural world, but also from the practice of Israel in the Old Testament by law. It gives us such great encouragement that we will indeed rise from the dead, just as the Bible proclaims.

Paul calls Christ the first fruits that takes us back to the first fruits offering that was described in Leviticus 23:9 to 21. God required, there, the Israelites to bring the first

portion of their harvest to the Lord at kind of like a thanksgiving offering for his provision, an acknowledgement that he is God. He is the giver of all good things. That first fruits offering could come from the harvest in its raw state like grains or fruits. Or it could come from prepared foods like wine, oil, flour, dough.

But here's how they basically did it at the time of the first fruits offering at the beginning of the barley harvest, all the inhabitants of the village would gather their offerings together in a cart and they would put them in the cart and some of the men would travel together as representatives of that village, making their way up in ascending the heights up to Jerusalem. When they were getting close to the city of Jerusalem, that party would send a messenger ahead to announce their arrival to the officiating priest, to let him know the offerings are coming. They would all enter into Jerusalem with singing, and once they entered into the temple, the priests would take some of those offerings and they would wave a representative sample before the Lord.

The whole field belonged to God, right? The whole crop belonged to God. The first fruits and the rest of the harvest represents there an organic connection. Because the first fruits

and the rest of the harvest are the same kind and the same substance, they're of the same quality. They come from the same field as the rest of the harvest. No doubt whatsoever that the rest of the harvest is going to be gathered, just as the first fruits were.

So if Christ is the first fruits of an offering unto God, what are we as believers? We're the harvest. Who's doing the harvesting? God himself. He brought Christ to himself. He's going to bring the rest of us as well. He's interested in that. It's an organic connection. We're of the same kind and substance as Christ. We're of the same quality of the same field. By God's will, and we're of the same seed were cultivated by the same Holy Spirit, which God watered and caused to grow. We're harvested when we were brought into maturity by the same God and brought into glory.

But the Holy Spirit deepens our assurance of our future resurrection because it's not here, just the organic connection that guarantees our future resurrection. Christ the first fruits organically connected to the rest of the harvest, us. If the one is harvested, so is the other. There's also here a legal connection that guarantees our resurrection. How do we know that we will share in his resurrection? What assurance do we have

that after the first fruits offering the rest of the harvest is actually going to happen? Because God considers it a matter of justice. Justice.

Look at verses 21 to 22 right there in the center, "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." That right there is the principle of imputation. It's the principle of a, a legal connection between Christ, the first fruits, and then the rest of the harvest. Our resurrection rests on this unshakable foundation established by the principle of divine justice.

Paul describes, Romans 5, he describes imputation in more detail there, but we find verses 18 and 19, "Therefore, as one trespass lead to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." By Adam's disobedience, his transgression of the clear command of God, he led the entire human race into sin. Resulting in all of us being made sinners resulting in our sinfulness, resulting in our condemnation. Adam was our representative head. He is our legal representative and he

failed. By a man came death. Death in principle, and all men die, not just in principle, but practically in reality.

The converse is true as well. By Christ's obedience, the many will be made righteous. They're justified by God, which is evident in the fact that they are being sanctified by God and those who have been justified who are being sanctified, they will one day be glorified by God. So Jesus Christ, the last Adam, the representative head of all those who believe, he is our legal representative and he obeyed God. He pleased God and he was rewarded by God. So by a man came the resurrection from the dead, by a man came the principle of life. And those who are in Christ will all be made alive in reality.

Adam and Christ, they stand as representative heads of two races of humanity. Two races, the race of humanity in Adam, will all follow its representative head into death. The race of humanity in Christ will follow its representative heading to resurrection and eternal life. So if you're in Christ, justified by God through faith, being sanctified by the spirit in the faith of obedience, you'll one day be glorified with Christ. This is an issue of legal connection. This is an issue of divine justice. So by organic connection, by legal connection, the principle of the first fruits and the principle of imputation,

Paul gives us absolute certainty of our connection to Christ in verses 20 to 22. That guarantees our bodily resurrection.

If you are in Christ, your resurrection will happen because he has risen, you too will rise. In Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order. The word order refers to a rank or a formation like the ranks of military troops. So just as you see, the ranks of troops marching together in formation, here's the formation: Christ, the first fruits at the head, all those who are, are there at his coming. Those who belong to Christ, they're in formation following him.

Well, that's the first certainty in this text. If you are in Christ, you will rise from the dead, bodily just like Christ did. And beloved, that fact that certainty, gives us great hope, doesn't it? We need to stop and just think about what that means for each of us individually. People are worried, anxious about their bodies, their sicknesses and diseases, the potential of sickness and disease. What happens when you get some kind of a feeling you're not familiar with? If you don't go to the doctor, you Google, right? You type and you say, what is this thing? Cancer. And you know, you don't know. People are worried.

As Christians, our hope is not found in beating sickness. It's not found in us having power over disease. It's not in

finding the fountain of youth. It's not in cryogenic freezing, putting our brain on ice until medical science catches up and fixes our bodies. Our hope is in bodily resurrection. And here we find a firm and certain hope, as Paul says in verse 42 to 44. I'm so thankful whatever is sown perishable. Uh, no, I am perishable. Are you not? "What is sown perishable, is raised imperishable. If it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, but it's raised in power. It's sown a natural body, but it's raised a spiritual body."

There in verse 49, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust," that's Adam, "we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven," who is Jesus Christ. Well, that's the first certainty. We will rise from the dead. We need to let that sink in. We need to let that hope just wash over our minds and transform the way we think. Not only the way we think, but the way we act.