

EASTER SERMON

HUEMOZ CHAPEL 2006

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1 CORINTHIANS

I. Introduction 1:1-9

II. Paul Responds to Reports 1:10-6:20

III. Paul Responds to the Corinthian Letter 7:1-16:12

<Remain as you are>

i) 7:1-7:40 Sexual Relations in Marriage, Unmarried/Married, Married Believers to Unbelievers, Central Argument, Virgins, Marriage

- a) 7:1-24 3 parts vs. 1-7; 8-16; 17-24
- b) 7:25-40 3 parts vs. 25-28; 29-35; 36-40

ii) 8:1-11:1 Freedom and Food Sacrificed to Idols

- a) 8:1-13 3 parts vs. 1-3; 4-6; 7-13
- b) 9:1-27 4 parts vs. 1-14; 15-18; 19-23; 24-27
- c) 10:1-22 3 parts vs. 1-5; 6-13; 14-22
- d) 10:23-11:1

iii) 11:2-11:34 Worship in the Community and the Lord's Supper

- a) 11:2-11:16 3 parts vs. 2-6; 7-12; 13-16
- b) 11:17-11:34 4 parts vs. 17-22; 23-26; 27-32; 33-34

iv) 12:1-14:40 Spiritual Gifts, The Spirit, the Community, Love, Prophecy and Tongues, Order in Worship

- a) 12:1-31 4 parts vs. 1-3; 4-11; 12-26; 27-31
- b) 13:1-13 3 parts vs. 1-3; 4-7; 8-13
- c) 14:1-25 4 parts vs. 1-5; 6-12; 13-19; 20-25
- d) 14:26-40 4 parts vs. 26-28; 29-33; 34-35; 36-40

v) 15:1-58 *The Resurrection: Christ; The Dead; The Body*

a) 15:1-11 2 parts vs. 1-8; 9-11

b) 15:12-34 3 parts vs. 12-19; 20-28; 29-34

c) 15:35-58 3 parts vs. 35-44; 45-49; 50-58

vi) 16:1-12 The Collection, and Apollos

a) 16:1-12 3 parts vs. 1-4; 5-11; 12

IV. Conclusion 16:13-24

i) 16:13-14 Exhortations

ii) 16:15-18 Commendation of leaders

iii) 16:19-24 Final personal greeting

Questions

How do you understand the gospel? What do you think it is and why? Have you received and taken your stand on the same gospel that Paul preached to the Corinthians?

What difference does Christ's historical bodily resurrection make when it comes to making truth claims? How should, could the resurrection affect your community with God, and the way you communicate this?

Does Christ's resurrection play a role in your daily life? If so, how? If not, why not? Where, if at all, are there integration points between Christ being raised and you living a life of faith?

What, if anything, does the *kingdom (rule) of God* have to do with the resurrection of Christ? Does *Christ's resurrection* and your being a Christian have a context? If so, what is it? If not, would you see the resurrection or your faith as standing on its own? What context, if there is one, might offer us the possibility of seeing the kingdom of God, the resurrection, and our following Christ as related, yet distinct?

III. Paul Responds to the Corinthian letter 7:1-16:12

v) The Resurrection.

i) 15: 1-58

While it is impossible to cover all the wonderful detail in this chapter this morning, I want to present its general direction. Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15. In chapter 15, Paul will turn to the central issue of the resurrection. The question of what it means to be spiritual people, to be followers of Christ, remains pertinent for this chapter. The most helpful way of approaching this text is to break it down into smaller units. There are three major sections: first, verses 1-11; second, verses 12-34; and third, verses 35-58. Within these sections, there are also some smaller units which I will point out as we go along.

A major question that captures our attention here is the resurrection. How had some of the Corinthians begun to assume and act as if there was no resurrection of the dead as verse 12 points out? How had some drifted into such a fundamental misunderstanding of what had been so central to their faith?

In the first place, it must be acknowledged that it was and is very easy to slip into misunderstandings. As this is the case, it seems important to remind ourselves of the context, to the degree that this is possible, of the Corinthians' situation. The relevance of this for us is that hopefully we might avoid a repetition of similar problems when it comes to our own contexts and actions. This is not to say that we won't also have problems or to be able to altogether avoid misunderstandings. On the contrary, we will have our tendencies to fall or rush headfirst into misunderstanding. There is always a need to read the text again, to be addressed again—to have a greater sensitivity to the word of God, and to re-examine our positions with a spirit of humility. It is very easy to go astray, and may unfortunately be even easier to stay that way.

It seems to me, however, that we cannot wait to resolve all mystery (as this would be a fundamental misunderstanding of Christianity and an implicit embracing of modern or postmodern framings), before getting involved—there are no perfect theologies—although there are better and worse ones. Has God given us anything? Has God given us enough? Is there a way out of the vicious circle of the self that culminates in death? Yes, the whole Bible points in this direction. The claim of the text that we will look at must be configured in a context much wider than itself. Things that are written here are dependent on other texts that affirm its place in God's doing and speaking. For example, God is there. His word is truth. He sent His son to save people from sin and evil as affirmed in other OT and NT contexts.

We shall now try to discern, at least in some measure, why the Corinthians were where they were. We can recall that some had a pretty high view of their own spirituality, that some had a low view of the body, and that there was a number of conflicts with the apostle concerning wisdom, knowledge, sexuality, and rights or freedoms. Furthermore, chapters 12-14 have shown an overemphasis on certain spiritual gifts that were less capable of building up the other. Taking all these factors into consideration, perhaps we might surmise that some in the Corinthian church thought they had already entered a sort of higher spiritual existence. In their view, reception of the Spirit and the gift of tongues, combined with these other factors, led some to believe that the spiritual was the be all and end all of the Christian life.

This, in turn, may have led to a de-emphasis on the body, seeing it as something that would eventually be destroyed. Life in the Spirit may have meant getting rid of the body—not because it was evil, but because it was inferior. A corporeal, bodily resurrection of the dead may have seemed detestable.

It is likely that in Corinth there was a mixture of false theology and false spirituality which led the Corinthians astray with regard to the value and significance of the body and the resurrection of the dead. They may have seen themselves as having already arrived—full of wisdom, knowledge, and spiritual gifts. They weren't clinging to the apostolic truth and preaching concerning Christ, and weren't living that delicate tension of the "already" and "not yet" concerning the reign of God.

The problems and questions that arose in Corinth have given us a great treasure. Even if we are unable to reconstruct with absolute certainty the precise views of the Corinthians, we can make out with greater clarity Paul's own position on the resurrection of the dead. While there is something of a mystery here and a seeing partially, it is clear that for Paul the resurrection is central to Christian faith and action.

As we go on to look at this chapter in a bit more detail, we should remember that Paul is not only concerned with the resurrection, but also with the actions of those who are Christians.

In our first section of verses 1-11, he sets out to remind his readers of their common position. The believers in Corinth again are a witness or a testimony to the apostle's preaching as well as to their own reception of and standing upon it.

Paul establishes what he had received and had passed on to them. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—that he was buried—dead—objectively not merely spiritually; that he was raised according to the Scriptures—the verb here is worth noting: it's perfect passive—Christ has been raised and still lives, and that he appeared to others. The emphasis here is on the objective reality of the resurrection. Christ was raised and seen. Paul includes himself in this group of those who saw Christ risen. What he preached and what they believed were common ground for Christian faith and action. Any move away from this leads believers into danger—perhaps they have believed in vain.

Our second section comprises verses 12-34. There are three sub-units here: verses 12-19, 20-28, and 29-34. In verses 12-19, Paul assumes their position. Some argue there is no resurrection of the dead. Raising corpses may have seemed not only unlikely, but polluted and perverse to spiritual people. If they are right that there is no resurrection of the dead, then a number of consequences must be drawn. Christ was not raised; Paul's preaching and their faith are for nothing—he and they cease to exist as believers; Paul's and the Corinthians' witness and actions are false ones, because God really has not raised Christ; they are still in their sins; those who sleep in Christ are destroyed, and they and Paul are to be pitied more than all.

We have seen in this section, more clearly, the position of some of the Corinthians (verse 12b). "Some say there is no resurrection of the dead." Paul exposes the consequences of such a perspective by bringing out how it affects the previous section of verses 1-11.

He then goes on to refute this point of view in verses 20-28. The apostle has assumed the Corinthian position in verses 12-19: "if Christ is not raised" and now in verses 20-28, he deliberately counters this with "Christ is raised." He argues that a whole new era has begun with resurrection of Christ from the dead. Christ is the first fruits of the harvest consisting of those in Christ and those who are Christ's at his coming. Christ as God's first fruits is God's own pledge that there will be a full harvest to follow. Verse 20 is aiming to say, by way of metaphor in referring to Christ as first fruits, that the resurrection of the believing dead is inevitable.

In verses 21-22, the apostle now explains with two “for” clauses the metaphorical verse 20 and its implications concerning the resurrection of the believing dead. The first “for” explains “since through a man death, so also through a man the resurrection of the dead.” The second “for” explains how so “just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. It is clear here, in my opinion, that Paul is not concerned with a general resurrection of the dead. The context militates against such a view. In the immediate context, these two verses relate back to verse 20 and perhaps even back further to verses 17-19 aiming to show even there it is referring to the resurrection of believers. The “all” here most likely concerns those who have fallen asleep in Christ and those who are Christ’s. The point of the Adam/Christ analogy is to show that Christ stands at the beginning of a new humanity. The process of death in Adam is now being reversed in Christ. It is those who are “in Christ” who have entered a new humanity, who will be made alive.

After referring to this order of resurrection, Paul states in verse 24 the end or goal (telos) has been reached. This refers to two things: the resurrection of the dead meaning that Christ has destroyed every authority and power; the final enemy itself is death and with the destruction of death all things are subjected to Christ so that he might turn over the reign to God the Father.

This is more clear if we look at verses 27-28 in the following manner. For He (God) has subjected or put everything under his (Christ's) feet. Now when it (Scripture) says "everything," it is clear that this does not include God Himself who subjected everything to Christ. But, when all things are subjected to him (Christ), then even the Son will be subjected to Him (God), so that God may be all in all. This final sentence ties together what has preceded: it expands Paul's quote from Psalm 8:6, while also further explaining verse 24. This last sentence, from my perspective, is not to be understood metaphysically, but rather salvifically with regard to the final salvation of God being then completed and God alone ruling over all.

Verses 29-34 again make clear that a denial of the resurrection is very serious. Paul poses several rhetorical questions giving his own responses, then drawing out a conclusion. He argues both their actions and his are absurd if the dead are not raised. What is meant by baptizing for the dead in this context remains something of a mystery that we do not have space to deal with here. The strong appeal in verses 33-34 to stop sinning and come back to their senses suggests a connection between false theology/spirituality and their actions.

This last section shows the importance of how the future should affect present actions. We who are followers of the crucified and risen One should be those who have confidence in Christ's final victory over death and that, in turn, should cause us to carefully review our actions in light of this tremendous event. Christ delivers people from the bondage of sin and insures their future with him where neither sin nor death have any power.

It must be said, and said sadly, that in today's church many who claim to believe end up denying what for the apostle Paul was essential—this denial of the resurrection is equal to denying the Christian faith itself. Paul, however, is not out to prove Christ's resurrection here, but rather on the basis of verses 1-11, he is wanting to communicate that the resurrection took place objectively. A denial of this objective reality is to have believed in vain.

The third and final major section is verses 35-57. Paul's concern here is not so much with the reality of the dead being raised as with the question and place of the body in the resurrection. The resurrection is to be a bodily one not merely a spiritual one. It is a real whole person resurrection which it is claimed takes place really.

The apostle's concern here can be discerned by noting that the word "dead" appears eleven times in verses 1-34 but only three times in verses 35-57 (35, 42, 52). The key word of this section is "body" which appears ten times here but not at all in verses 1-34. The difficulties in Corinth certainly included this question of the body. And Paul wants to affirm that Christ's resurrection was not the resuscitation of a corpse, but the transformation of a physical perishable body, into an imperishable spiritual body. There is both relation and distinction between these bodies. The body is the same yet not the same.

This section is in three parts: verses 35-44, 45-49, and 50-57. In the first section, Paul opens up the possibility of a spiritual, glorified body. He uses two sets of analogies in something of a poetic discourse: seeds and bodies. The aim seems to be to reframe the known with the unknown. We have seeds/bodies of different kinds. In verses 42-44, both analogies are applied to the resurrection of the dead. There is a natural body and a spiritual body.

Our second section is verses 45-49, which gives a further illustration of bodies sown one way, but raised another. Paul returns to the Adam/Christ analogy from verses 21-22. As believers share the earthly body of the first man, Adam, so too will they share, in the sense of having an imperishable body, the heavenly body of the second man. This section continues to argue against the Corinthians false theology and spirituality. They must await the resurrection/transformation of their bodies before their spirituality is complete. In verse 45, we see a significant contrast between the first Adam in the Gen 2:7 quote and the last Adam. The first Adam receives life: the last Adam gives it; in the sense that he who has a transformed body at his resurrection became the representative and source of spiritual life for all who bear his image.

In verse 49, Paul points out we have borne and still bear the image of the earthly man and, therefore are destined to die, but in Christ's resurrection, those "in him" have begun to bear the image of the man from heaven. What a marvel. Indeed, amazing grace. Those of us who follow the crucified and risen One are going to image him.

In part three, the conclusion, we have verses 50-57. The apostle stresses the necessity of reframing the Corinthians' views. Transformation is to be embodied, yet not the status quo. When this takes place, death will not only be defeated but swallowed up in victory.

In the exhortation of verse 58, Paul concludes the chapter where he began in verses 1-2. There he was concerned because of a denial of the resurrection by some as to whether his labor had been in vain. Now after the strong evidence for the resurrection, he concludes with verse 58.

We too who are in Christ do not labor in vain. Christ has triumphed over death which inevitably means we, who are his, will also triumph. Victory begins now in the light of Christ's resurrection. We too can proclaim, "Death, where is your victory; Death, where is your sting?"

HAPPY EASTER - CHRIST IS RISEN