

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION (2)

("For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.")

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Key Verse: 15:22

"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

In verses 1-11 we learned the contents of the gospel: first, Jesus Christ died for our sins; second, Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. We learned that this gospel is good news of great joy to all people. In verses 12-34 Paul teaches about the power of the Risen Christ. In these verses we learn: first, why the resurrection of Christ is necessary (12-19); second, what the Risen Christ's power is like (20-28); and third, a warning, "Do not be misled" (29-34).

I. The necessity of the resurrection (12-19)

In this part Paul writes very logically, step by step, to explain why the resurrection of Christ is necessary. At that time, in most Christians' hearts there was a question: "Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ necessary?" They were Christians, but they were still earthbound, and they were realists. If they did not get an immediate profit in whatever they did, they would say, "This is not necessary." They did not know that the ultimate necessity was in their faith. Once they had been very zealous Christians, and spiritual. But now they were lukewarm Christians, inclined to be unspiritual.

Look at verse 12. "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" This verse indicates that among the Christians in Corinth there were those who believed in Jesus, but whose faith was not rooted in the resurrection. They attended church and enjoyed Christian fellowship. But whenever they heard the words, "the resurrection of Christ," they drew the line in their minds and thought, "No way. That is not necessary. Never!" They thought the resurrection was not practical, and that resurrection faith did not add any practical benefits to their welfare. So some of the Corinthians were saying, "There is no resurrection," even though it had been preached to them that Christ rose from the dead. Their faith in Jesus was more concerned with their present situation than with man's salvation from sin and eternal life

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through the death and resurrection of Christ. Admittedly, their lives in the cold reality of the present world were hard enough. Living in this hard world, they did not think about what they were doing or what they were believing. They were habitual. But it was a mistake for them to deny one pillar, the resurrection of Christ, of the two pillars of the Christian faith: the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. Their faith which ignored the resurrection could not be called true Christian faith. How can someone call himself a Christian if he denies the very essence of Christianity? That's like saying, "Sure, I'm a communist because I live in Russia," even though he knows nothing about the Communist Manifesto. He can be a Russian, but he cannot be a communist. Likewise, Paul was amazed at such an absurdity, that many claimed to be Christians even though they did not put their faith in the resurrection of Christ. In the next 7 verses Paul explains why the resurrection is necessary.

First, if there is no resurrection, the world is under the power of death. Look at verse 13. "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." If there is no such thing as being raised from the dead, then "not even Christ" has been raised. What does Paul mean by "not even Christ"? Amidst all the names and faces of people who have died, only Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. In a vast field of death, Jesus Christ is the only seed of eternal life, through his resurrection. When they claimed that there is no resurrection, they denied the resurrection of Christ--the only firstfruits of eternal life for mankind.

Paul wrote this part of his letter in the subjunctive mood to help them think about what the contents of the world would be if Jesus Christ had not been raised. If Jesus Christ has not been raised, then there is "never" "any" resurrection. If Jesus Christ has not been raised, then the world in its contents is nothing but death, a sea of death. The world is full of graveyards and graves and dying people and ghosts and evil people and evil spirits. In this world, all the activities of all people end in death. Mark Twain wrote beautiful stories about life. So everyone thought he was full of life. But he died reluctantly with the last words, "It might have been!" Someone said that these last words, "It might have been," are the most sorrowful words a man can utter. Even Mark Twain

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was a slave of the thought of death. Taking a nice swim in a calm and warm sea is very refreshing. But swimming day and night in the cold and dark sea of death is unbearable punishment. Those who have no faith in the resurrection of Christ are the living dead, who do not know how to cope with the thought of death. Life to them has become a hollow mockery and a sham; life has lost its purpose and meaning. These people are bored and fed up; they have no zest for living. If Jesus Christ has not been raised, then the world is full of dead things and elements of death.

Second, if there is no resurrection, faith would be in vain. Look at verse 14. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." Christian faith rests on the death and resurrection of Christ. We Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God; but he died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day and gave us a living hope in the kingdom of God. It is good news of great joy to all people. We Christians believe this and proclaim it to the whole world. The greatest news mortal ears have ever heard is the news that Jesus Christ rose from the dead as he promised. The resurrection of Christ is the chief proof of the Christian faith. In the resurrection of Christ we have the answer to the great question of the ages, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14) The Bible teaches that because Jesus Christ lives, we also shall live (Jn 14:19). If we don't believe in the resurrection of Christ, we are just a bunch of hypocrites and plastic smile-makers. Because we believe in the resurrection of Christ we can live victorious lives. Because we believe in the resurrection of Christ we become victors over the power of evil and death. Because we believe in the resurrection of Christ we invest our lives in the work of the gospel and make daily sacrifices. Because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures, our faith is not in vain.

Third, if there is no resurrection, we deny the almighty power of God. Look at verse 15a. "More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God..." The Bible says that after Jesus Christ had been in the tomb three days God raised him from the dead. This means that God is the Almighty Creator God. Our God is the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth by the word of his mouth. Our God is the Almighty God who made Aaron's dry rod bud. Our God is the Almighty

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God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This power of Almighty God is the only clout we have. If Jesus Christ had not been raised from the dead, our God is not the Almighty God. Moreover, we are found to be false witnesses. Throughout history there have been many kinds of witnesses, but most of them turned out to be false witnesses. Recent history attests that during the 70 years from 1917-1987 there have been scores of false witnesses of communism. But through the witnesses of the resurrection of Christ, the course of history has been changed many times over, because the witness of the resurrection of Christ is God's truth. The Bible says in Acts 2:23,24, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

Fourth, if there is no resurrection, we cannot solve our sin problem. Look at verse 17. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." As we have studied, sin is spiritual sickness. Sin makes man spiritually sick and unhappy. Sin finally leads man to the second death--eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, he did not conquer the power of sin and death. If Jesus Christ did not conquer the power of sin and death, all human beings are still under the power of sin and death. But Jesus Christ was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures. Through his resurrection God solved our sin problem (Jn 1:29).

Fifth, if there is no resurrection, Christians are to be pitied. Look at verse 19. "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Christians are people who walk the narrow way. We carry the cross of mission and are called to live sacrificial lives. We are called to expand the territory of the kingdom of God. In doing so, we are despised and rejected by worldly people, simply because we want to be like Jesus, not like "one of them" in the world. We keep the faith and fight the good fight because we believe that the Risen Christ is our inheritance.

Look at verse 18. "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost." "Those who have fallen asleep" refers to the faithful servants

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of God down through history who died in God, like Moses and Elijah. They denied luxuries and comfort and suffered endlessly during their lifetimes for the sake of the Lord God Almighty. If they had only died, just like everyone else, then their lives were foolish and pitiful. If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, then nihilism, the mentality of seeking fleeting pleasures, the pessimistic view of man, "Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"--this might be the best lifestyle for mankind (32b). If there is no resurrection, then those who participate in the remaining sufferings of Christ are the most pitiful people. But Jesus Christ was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and Christians are not pitiful people; they are the most glorious people in the glorious resurrection of Christ.

II. The power of the Risen Christ (20-28)

In this second part Paul explains how great the power of the resurrection is. He begins with the words, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead." When Paul said, "indeed," he meant that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just a theory or supposition, but a fact. He did not just postulate that Jesus Christ could have been raised by God's power; he states the fact that Jesus Christ was actually raised by God's power. The resurrection of Christ is not a concoction of abstract theories; it is the demonstration of the power of Almighty God. In verses 20-28 Paul gives us three facts about this power of the resurrection of Christ.

First, the Risen Christ has the power to change one's inner man. Those who met the Risen Christ were all changed into new men and women. Mary Magdalene had a sorrowful past. Her life problem was a sorrowful mind. While she was under the wings of Jesus' grace, she was happy. But after Jesus' crucifixion, she became even more sorrowful. Mary Magdalene and several other women were weeping at the graveyard. The Risen Christ, whose appearance was like lightning and whose clothes were as white as snow, appeared to them. When they met the Risen Christ, the sorrow in their hearts was gone, and new hope and new joy smeared into their hearts. They were overjoyed in the hope that they could be with beautiful Jesus for ever and evermore (Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:10-18).

That same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus,

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about 7 miles from Jerusalem. These two men must have been two of his disciples. They had hoped Jesus was the one who would redeem Israel. But when Jesus was crucified, they lost their hope and despaired. In deep despair and fear they were going down to Emmaus, where they could escape from the eyes of the temple police and spend the remainder of their lives in seclusion. When they arrived at the village and sat at the table, their eyes were opened to see the Risen Christ who appeared to them. After meeting the Risen Christ, there was no more fear or despair in their hearts. Instead their hearts were burning with the spirit of boldness and victory. They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem to participate in the remaining sufferings of Christ (Lk 24:13-33a).

Second, the Risen Christ has the power to give a man new life. Look at verse 20. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Down through history everyone has had to bow down to the power of death. Even though Mohammed was wise enough to make many people follow his teachings, he himself knelt down before the power of death. He died June 8, 632 A.D. Buddha also knelt down before the power of death, instead of going to Nirvana through his right thinking and right living.

Why do all men have to live under this power of sin and death? Look at verse 21a. "For since death came through a man..." In this verse, "a man" refers to Adam. Adam was the ancestor of the human race. He yielded to the temptation of the devil and disobeyed God's absolute word of command. Because of his disobedience, sin came into the world. When men became sinsick, they began to see God relatively. They also began to see other human beings and the world with relativism, not with the absolute truth of God. In their relativistic thinking, if they need God, they say there is a God; if they don't need God, they say there is no God. In this way, sin reigned in mankind and in all their offspring. Sin began with Adam's disobedience, and the consequence of sin was death for everyone (Ro 5:12). Many great humanist thinkers have struggled with this problem of man's tendency to sin and with the problem of death. They tried hard to get rid of sin and death with many kinds of positive thinking. But all their struggles failed. Most of them finally admitted that there is no way to solve the problem of sin and death.

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So Paul said in verse 22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and made him the firstfruits of eternal life. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). The Risen Christ has life-giving power. So when Paul spoke of the dead, he did not call them "dead"; he spoke of them as "those who have fallen asleep" (18,20,51), because in the Risen Christ there is no death. To God's people, death is like a cat-nap. Look at verse 22b. "...so in Christ all will be made alive." Whoever believes in Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, will live forever (Ro 5:17b).

Third, the Risen Christ has the power to restore the kingdom of God (24,25,27,28). Look at verse 24. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." In the course of restoring the kingdom of God, the Risen Christ will first destroy all evil and unrighteousness. No matter how good many things of the world may seem, we know that underneath, the world is full of evil. Where there is evil and unrighteousness, there is always fear and sorrow (Isa 7:2; 8:22). Fear and sorrow make man miserable. Political systems are necessary. But ultimately, they all make some people rulers and most people slaves. So they are called a "necessary evil." Even democracy, perhaps the most ideal form of government, has hatched capitalism and imperialism over the poor and over those from inferior nations. The utopian dreams of democracy have produced effects as evil as those of communism, which uses any available means to achieve its ends. This world is full of evil people. There are also "necessary evil people." But when the time comes, the Risen Christ will destroy all evil dominion, authority and power (24b).

Next, the Risen Christ will destroy death. Look at verse 26. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Death is the fruit of sin. There are two kinds of death--first, physical death and then spiritual death--called "the second death" or eternal condemnation. Death is the last enemy of man. Death has in it a sting. During their lives, those who sin against God get many injuries and wounds both in body and spirit by the sting of death. And after death they can't just die; they have to live forever in the midst of the sting of death in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Look at verse 26 again. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." The power

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of death is imbedded in man and in the world beyond remedy. But the Risen Christ, the one and only Son of God, will destroy this last enemy of mankind, death, with his resurrection power.

Finally the Risen Christ will restore creation order. Read verse 24. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." Read verse 28. "When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all." Originally, there was one kingdom--the kingdom of God. But because of Adam's disobedience, another kingdom came into the world--the kingdom of Satan. Satan was originally an angel of God. But in his vanity he abandoned God's mission and became Satan, and he has ruled the darkness of the world ever since Adam's fall. This Satan has been roaming around, capturing all unbelieving, wicked people and locking them in the dungeon of his kingdom. But when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, he assured the complete destruction of the kingdom of Satan, and at the same time the complete restoration of the kingdom of God. Here we learn that the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come," means the destruction of the kingdom of Satan, and at the same time the complete restoration of the kingdom of God. In the Risen Christ, God will once again be regarded as the Center of the universe. Here we also learn that the power of the Risen Christ is the power of the Almighty Creator God. For example, man's ability is greatly limited. So, in restoring the roads of Chicago, road workers make countless bumpy patches on the roads. They don't get rid of the old asphalt completely and construct a new road. We can't say that patching is restoration. But the Risen Christ has the power to restore the kingdom of God. The restoration of the kingdom of God does not mean mending it, for the kingdom of God was never damaged. Rather, it means that man again obtains the privilege of entering the kingdom of God--whoever believes in the Risen Christ. Man lost the kingdom of God because of his sins. But the Risen Christ opened the doors of the kingdom of God through his resurrection. We don't have to worry about living in the dungeon of Satan anymore; we can expect the happiness, love and peace of the kingdom of God for ever and ever (Isa 11:1-9; Rev 21:1-4).

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III. Do not be misled (29-34)

Look at verse 29. Through baptism for the dead, the Corinthians hoped that the dead could live again. But Paul said that without resurrection faith, this ritualistic baptism had no meaning. Paul knew that some of the Corinthians were sincere, even amidst the ritualistic church activities and the ridicule and disapproval of the general public. But they had come to their human limitation in keeping up their lives of faith. Paul knew that they had become shaky in their lives of faith because they had not taken deep root in resurrection faith. So Paul explained why he and his co-workers struggled to live a victorious life. It was because he and his co-workers believed that Christ is risen. So they lived like good soldiers of Christ. Look at verses 30-32. "And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"

Paul gave them some final advice. Look at verse 33. "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" Who are bad company? They are those who live without resurrection faith. When they don't have resurrection faith, their hard and diligent effort can be their source of strength. But sooner or later they feel that they don't know why they have to work so hard to eat three meals a day. In other words, they do not find the meaning of life. When they don't have the meaning of life they gradually become wild, and sooner or later sink into deep fatalism. The meaning of their life existence can make them strong and wise. But when one has no meaning of his life existence, he loses his strength and wisdom and he becomes a vegetable man or animal man. As a result, such people live in the world like dead fish. They put all their attention into what the world has to offer. The things of the world are glittering and desirable, but they are all temporal. What is more, such people live in sin only. Paul said in verse 34a, "Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning." Paul said, "Stop sinning..." It meant that those who say, "I am a Christian," but who do not have resurrection faith are sinning, because they are living double

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lives. May God help us to believe in the resurrection of Christ and to live by the power of the resurrection.