

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION (II)

(He Hands Over the Kingdom to God)

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Key Verse: 15:22

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

In the first Lecture, 15:3-4, we studied the gospel. We studied why Jesus' death and resurrection is good news of great joy. In the second Lecture, 15:12-34, we study the power of the resurrection. It is God's power that raised Jesus from the dead and made him the firstfruits of eternal life. The second Lecture has three parts: First, the necessity of the resurrection (12-19); second, the power of the resurrection (20-28); third, encouragement. (29-34)

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

The Christians in Corinth had studied the gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ, as the core of Christian faith. But some of them said that there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul rebuked them. 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?" Maybe the Christians in Corinth were so hard-pressed by the cold realities of the material world that they came to the point of endorsing ideas that man is only a body, not a soul. They were so engrossed by present realities that they had no time to think about themselves, much less believe in the resurrection of Christ Jesus, for resurrection faith didn't seem to give them any visible benefits. In the next seven verses Paul explains why the resurrection of Christ is absolutely necessary.

First, if Christ has not been raised, the contents of the world would be nothing but death. Look at verse 13. "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." Some denied the resurrection itself in order to deny the resurrection of Jesus. It was foolish. Down through history there have been many stories about many things. But there has never been a story about someone who died and was raised from the dead, except for the resurrection of Jesus. In a list of all the names

and faces of people who have died, only Jesus has been raised from the dead. In a vast field of death, Jesus is the only one who was raised from the dead. But if Christ has not been raised, then no one has been raised from the dead.

Here Paul wants us to think logically about what the contents of the world would be if Christ were not raised. If Christ has not been raised, then the world in its contents is full of dead men and dying men. If we walk the streets of Chicago, we can see that almost every block has its own grotesque funeral home. The future world will be funeral chapels and graveyards, and no more. Not only that, the world is already full of elements of death, such as sorrow, fear, the power of sin, devils, evil spirits and demons, the agents of Satan. The future world would be the darkness of death itself, and no more. The world is like a sea of death. Man's unique purpose may be to live in the hard world in order to die. If Christ has not been raised, there is no life and no life-giving power in the world, both at present and in the future. But one person Jesus' resurrection shines over the world of death.

Second, if Christ has not been raised, our faith is in vain. (14) Read verse 14. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." In the past there was no hope in the world because all men had to die in sin. But we received good news that Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead and gave us a living hope in the kingdom of God. Christians no more live in fear or with Satan's doubt. We live in Christ, and the life of faith always gives us victory. But if Christ has not been raised from the dead, our faith is in vain.

Third, if we claim that Christ has not been raised we deny God's existence. (15b) Look at verse 15a. "More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God..." We witnessed that our God is God Almighty, who created the heavens and earth by one word of his mouth. God is the Almighty God who made Aaron's dry rod bud. We also believe that we can do all things in God who gives us strength. This power of the Almighty God was the only clout of the Hebrew people. So it is with us. By the same token, suppose that God could not raise Jesus from the dead; then he cannot be God

who created the heavens and earth. Because God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, he proved himself to be the Almighty God. We believe this Almighty God. And we are witnesses of Almighty God who raised Jesus from the dead. We praise Almighty God. Amen. Peter proclaimed the Almighty God who raised Jesus from the dead 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 Christ has not been raised, we cannot solve our sin problem. (17) Read verse 17. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." As we studied in Lecture 1, sin is like leprosy. It disfigures the image of God in man until he looks like a man with leprosy. Sin is also like cancer. It spreads over one's whole body. It makes a man very sick until he dies. Sin also makes men sick with consuming fear and with Satan's doubt. Sin makes men like Cain, who killed his lovely younger brother when he was emotionally upset. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, we are still under the power of sin and are slaves of Satan.

Fifth, if Christ has not been raised, Christians are to be pitied. (19) Read verse 19. "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Christians are also human beings. So we want to live according to our emotional feelings. But we don't do that, because we live according to the word of God. We carry the cross of mission while others enjoy Florida vacations. We do this because we believe that the risen Christ is our inheritance. But if Christ has not been raised, we Christians are the most pitiful people. (32) If Christ has not been raised, those who have been faithful to Christ throughout their lifetimes and died are also pitiful people. (18) But Almighty God raised him from the dead and gave us a living hope.

II. The power of the resurrection (20-28)

Paul tells us not only about the absolute necessity of the resurrection. He begins this second part with the words, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead..." The fact that Christ died for our sins and rose again from the dead is not only a fact but the most important event in human history. The resurrection of Christ is the power of the Almighty God. Paul tells us three things about the power of the resurrection.

First, the resurrection of Christ has the power to give life. (22) Read verse 20. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Down through history there have been innumerable kings and heroes who demonstrated their power and glory. But before the power of death all of them were speechless and humbly knelt down without exception. All men became fatalistic about life before the power of death. This is the reason why many people who pretend to be happy learn how to make plastic smiles. Even though everyone has had to bow down to the power of death, Jesus is the only exception to this. Jesus destroyed the power of death through his resurrection. He was the first one who defeated the power of death and became our champion of life.

The key verse is verse 22. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." In Adam we all die. In Christ we are made alive. The words "in Adam all die," explain why all men are caught up in this power of death. Because one man, Adam, sinned by disobeying the absolute word of God, sin came into the world. Then sin began to reign over men. In history, many humanist thinkers struggled to get rid of sin and death with positive thinking. But their struggles were in vain and they found no solution. They finally gave up trying to solve man's sin problem and began to teach that man is not both body and spirit, but only body.

All men without exception want to forget about the reality of death in the future. Whenever they happen to come across the fact that they will die someday, they despair. They become fearful. Some people work hard so as to forget about the fact that they will die. Some people become so fearful that they don't want to get married, but just enjoy. Many think that enjoying sinful pleasures is the best remedy to forget about death. Some take drugs to forget about their overwhelming anxiety and restlessness even for a moment. Fear of death is in everybody. David was a king and a multi-millionaire. But whenever he thought about his death and that his body would see decay in the graveyard, he became sorrowful and then fearful.

Look at verse 22 again. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Through his resurrection, Jesus became the first seed of eternal life. The word "firstfruits" in verse 20 is important. It means the seed of eternal life is Christ. The risen Christ became the seed of eternal life. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). In Christ Jesus Christians never die. Whoever believes in Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again from the dead, is freed from the fear of death and can have a living hope in the kingdom of God.

Second, he will destroy all unrighteousness (24,25). Read verse 24. The power of the resurrection will 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. It is because man who is good and evil rules other men, who are good and evil. Where there is evil and unrighteousness, there is also sorrow and pain. (Isa 7:2; 8:22) Even democratic systems based on human freedom and human welfare are not perfect. These systems are nothing but necessary evils in light of God's righteousness. But when the time comes, the risen Christ will destroy all evils and unrighteousness, and, most importantly, he restores the kingdom of God. The risen Jesus rules with perfect justice and peace in his kingdom. (Isa 11:1-9) There will be no tears, death, sorrow or fear. (Rev 21:4) We all long for this perfect kingdom of Christ, re-established through his death and resurrection.

Third, he destroys the power of death. (26) Read verse 26. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." What is death? Death is the power of sin and Satan. There are many kinds of enemies in the world who annoy us. But the real enemy is death, the power of sin and Satan. Look at verse 26 again. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." The power of sin is firmly imbedded in the world and in man. But through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the last enemy, death, is destroyed. This enemy played Satan and made the world chaotic. But when this enemy death is destroyed, all the world will be restored in creation order. Then the Son himself will be made subject to God, so that God may be all in all. (Read verses 26-28.)

III. Do not be misled (29-34)

Look at verse 29. The Corinthians wanted to be saved from Satan through baptism. Paul showed them that without resurrection faith, this baptism would have no meaning. Look at verses 30,31. Paul himself encountered many dangers as he witnessed to Jesus' resurrection. (Acts 19:21-41) But the only thing that kept him going was the resurrection of Jesus. He confessed in verse 32, "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 himself could not but become a hedonist if he had not believed in the resurrection of Christ.

Look at verse 33. "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" What is bad company? It refers to those who live without resurrection faith. They do just what they enjoy doing, and put all their attention into what the world has to offer. The things of the world are glittering and desirable. So the Corinthians believed in Jesus, but they really liked the world. Those who say, "I am a Christian," but have no resurrection faith are really corrupted people. Those who say, "I am a Christian," but who have no idea about the resurrection are still committing unforgivable sin. So Paul said in verse 34a, "Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning." We must accept the resurrection of Jesus when we are young and live a life of mission throughout our lives and glorify God and enjoy real happiness. Look at verse 58. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." We must believe that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.