

Stingless Death
1 Corinthians 15:51-56

Only four years after Paul's initial visit to Corinth, the church is steeped in relational conflict and doctrinal error. To help, Paul sends three letters, one of which is missing from history and two of which are in the Bible.

Every chapter deals with a different problem except 12-14 which all address the abuse of spiritual gifts.

In this chapter, Paul refutes those who say there is no resurrection.

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, [that's more than a motto for the nursery] ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

*⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?"*

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Every chapter deals with a different problem except 12-14 which all address the abuse of spiritual gifts. What is the problem in this chapter?

First: The Problem. 12

Some Corinthians claimed that death is the end of life and that there is no resurrection.

This was a common problem in the early church.

Some of the Jews denied the resurrection altogether. Others believed in a general and universal resurrection at the end of time, but even they had no place in their thinking for a personal, individual resurrection.

a) Thomas

We often think the disciples were unlearned, easily duped men but they did not foresee Jesus's resurrection and had a hard time believing it when it happened.

John 20:25 – (Thomas) - Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

b) The Thessalonian Church

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

We ought to all understand when our friends have trouble with the resurrection. From their experience, humanity is batting zero. They've attended funerals but have never seen anyone come back to life.

Second: The Pictures

The Sadducees denied the resurrection because they only followed the Torah and didn't believe it was taught in the first five books of the OT.

a) **Jesus's Correction**

Matthew 22:29, 31 - But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God....And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God:

That statement begs the question, "What had God said about the resurrection?"

All through the OT, God hints at the resurrection –

b) Isaiah and Creation

Isaiah 26:19 - Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Pay attention to Isaiah's metaphor: heaven giving daily birth to the world. He has also placed it in the seasons. How can we not think of the seasons – Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, as God's globally visible metaphor for the resurrection.

Genesis 8:21-22 - I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have

done. ²² While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

Why? The seasons provide life – Spring to plant, summer to harvest, fall to cover, winter to rest – but they also provide a visible witness to God’s overarching redemptive plan,

“The whole world is a theatre for the display of the divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power, but the Church is the orchestra, as it were—the most conspicuous part of it; and the nearer the approaches are that God makes to us, the more intimate and condescending the communication of his benefits, the more attentively are we called to consider them.”

— John Calvin, Commentary on Psalms - Volume 5

Third: The Prophets

Gabriel provided hope for Daniel’s unrealized dreams and visions

Daniel 12:2 - And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

We should not be like the religious leaders of Israel, blind to what God is doing in the world

c) David believed in his own resurrection and that of the Messiah

Psalms 49:10 – For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish

Psalms 49:15 – But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.

This resurrection is a present hope in the midst of all our sorrows

Psalms 71:20 - You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again.

Psalms 16:10 - For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one (Messianic title) see corruption

“Abandon” = leaving someone behind (see Job 39:14). David is not just talking about escaping physical danger. He wants to overcome death and envisions his resurrection.

Isaiah 53:10 - Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days

How can he “see his offspring” unless he is resurrected?

“Prolong” = everlasting (resurrected) life (Psalm 23:6; 91:16).

Fourth: Other Types of OT Resurrections

In our world, death demonstrates its power in lots of ways; famine, disease, barrenness, and exile. But throughout the OT, God also provides resurrection hope in the midst of those reminders that the world is a fallen place.

- a) Ezekiel's dry bones – Ezekiel 37
- b) Sarah's barrenness –

Genesis 18:9-12 - They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent."¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"

Paul references this as a type of death -

Romans 4:19 - He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

Repeatedly, God rescues his people from certain death: Noah from the flood, Joseph from the pit, Israel from Egypt and Babylon, Daniel from the lion's den, his three friends from the fiery furnace and Jonah from the great fish – to demonstrate his resurrecting power.

This is not an over-reach. Even Jesus used Jonah's entombment as a model for his resurrection -

Matthew 12:40 - For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Hosea 6:1-2 - Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

If the Sadducees had looked closely. If the Corinthians had read their OT's, they would have seen the resurrection as a recurring theme throughout the Bible.

Fifth: The Old Testament Promises

- a) *Many OT promises concerning Canaan require a resurrection*

Genesis 13:17 - Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.

Hebrews 11:13 - These all died in faith, not having received the things promised

And yet... - Romans 4:13 - For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

Only by raising Abraham from the dead can God fulfil his promise –

b) Many of God's promises to us require a resurrection

2 Corinthians 4:16 - So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

- To what end are we being renewed day by day?
- “Our outer self is wasting way” is the “light momentary affliction.”
- This means, “our inner self is being renewed day by day...for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

Kingdom truth: As your physical body tires and dies, your inner person invigorates and lives. That's a great promise. That's a great truth to hold onto as you get older.

Sixth: Our Challenge

John 3:10 - Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?”

The Sadducees didn't.

IMP: Remember Isaiah?

Isaiah 26:19 - Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

God has placed the resurrection into the rhythm of the world. Every night, God anoints it with a life-giving dew that the grass, trees, and animals drink in the morning to resurrect their sleeping bodies.

Resurrection hope is like dew that gives life to dead seeds in the hardened ground.

Every morning and every season cries, “Resurrection!”

Think about Paul's indictment of the unbeliever –

Romans 1:19-20 - *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

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In this light, we should not be afraid, but exercise the same hope in death that we do in life.

Listen to what Jesus taught us –

John 12:24 - *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

Of course, he's speaking about himself, but if he's the "grain of wheat" then, what is the "much fruit?" Paul says that what is true of Jesus in death and resurrection, is also true of us –

1 Corinthians 15:20 - *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

In other words, just like Jesus said in John 12:24, he will not abide alone but will bear much fruit.

Conclusion:

The resurrection of Jesus was not an isolated event in Scripture. It had been prophesied throughout the Old Testament.

a) Jesus affirmed it

Luke 24:45-46 - *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,*

b) Paul simply echoed it

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 - *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,*

This is my point: The resurrection is not just something particular to Jesus or to the NT. God has promised and pictured both Jesus's and our resurrection all through the Bible. It's as natural to the Bible as breathing is to your body. Just like you breathe, God has promised to resurrect you.

And he's resurrected Jesus as proof of his commitment to himself, his word, his Son and you.

We can help our friends, and ourselves, believe in and rest in the resurrection as we see it, not just at the Garden tomb as an isolated event, but an essential part of God's redemption that is spoken about throughout the Bible.

PS – There are 57 verses of teaching in this chapter and only one verse of application –

58 - 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.

What you do now, makes all the difference forever.

So how does verse 58 challenge us? Do now well, because it affects your forever.

Community Groups:

- 1 – What do you know about Corinth's problems?
- 2 – What problem does Paul address in chapter 15?
- 3 – Why is it so hard to believe in a resurrection?
- 4 – Read Matthew 22:29,31. What is Jesus's source for a resurrection?
- 5 – Review some of the OT references to a resurrection that are mentioned in the sermon –
Isaiah 26:29, Daniel 12:2; Psalm 49:15; Psalm 71:20; Psalm 16:10
- 6 – How might Psalm 16:10 and Isaiah 53:10 show a resurrection of the Messiah?
- 7 – Read Genesis 18:9-12 and Romans 4:19? How does Paul use Abraham and Sarah as a type of resurrection?
- 8 – Read Genesis 8:21-22; How does creation demonstrate resurrection?
- 9 – Read Matthew 12:40; Hosea 6:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. On what does Paul base the resurrection?
- 10 – How can the thought of the resurrection encourage you right now?
- 11 – What is Paul's application for the resurrection? Read verse 58.