

Series: Life's Defining Moments

VBC

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1 Corinthians 15

“The Resurrection Matters—Really Matters!”

This past Monday night, my father died

-after a few days in the hospital and a weekend in hospice care—his life on this earth ended

-facing death feels like a journey into the dark—into the mystery

-what happens next is suddenly more poignant

-I found myself talking more candidly with dad

-talking about the next chapter—something we had not talked much about

WHAT DOES ONE SAY?

-dad was pretty private about these things?

-what was clear was that he was ready to be released from machines and medications—
and his worn-out body!

- a) if we were a HINDU family—our hope would be that there was a rigorous outworking of karma—and dad would return in a different existence to pursue his next stage in the next cycle of life
- b) if we were an ORTHODOX JEWISH family—we would trust that our pedigree and our commitment to Torah would lead to eternal life
- c) if we were BUDDHISTS—our assumption would be that dad would be absorbed into the formless beyond
- d) and if we were SECULARISTS—with no real conviction of a God—we would have no real hope
-we are just an episode between two oblivions
-I would probably tell dad—let's explore every medical procedure to extend life—for that is all there is

-there is a better answer, and we celebrate it on Easter

-if there is no Easter—there is no better answer

-but the message of Easter reminds us that there is hope beyond death—THERE IS RESURRECTION

-and resurrection is for real—proven by the resurrection of Jesus—this is Scripture's clear declaration—read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

-Paul's point is that Christ's resurrection is not some strange idea invented by imaginative minds

-nor some symbol of the flowers coming up every spring

-it's a core belief verified by history—confirmed by a gallery of credible witnesses
-Christ's resurrection is God's irrefutable statement that Jesus is the Messiah (that He alone has all authority)

-but it is more—the message of Easter confirms that when we die—we too will one day rise

-for Jesus is the prototype for all of us—read verse 20

-He points the way to our resurrection

-the same Spirit who raised Jesus will raise us

-but this was something the church at Corinth found hard to believe—*perhaps like some of you*

-so Paul writes this chapter—not to provide some emotional catharsis for those facing death

-but to confront wrongheaded thinking!

-*take away Jesus' resurrection—and you destroy the mainframe of our faith*

-more—you negate the hope of our own resurrection

-there would be no life beyond the grave—read verses 17-18

-it would be like coming to Good Friday service and calling it a weekend

-like investing all of your capital in Kodak

-picking the Chargers to win the Super Bowl

-denying the resurrection is to deny HOPE

-my last words to dad might have been—“death wins”

-you might as well order some hard liquor from the nurse

-this is what Paul says—read verse 32b

-you may as well have partied like there is no tomorrow—for there is no tomorrow

-you might as well have gorged yourself on Paula Deen's Butter Bacon Burgers

-gone on one long binge—for that is all there is

-but hope in the resurrection changes everything!

-it impacts how we go through life—and how we go through death

-but “resurrection” is a confusing term—what does it actually mean for us?

-Paul seems to anticipate a number of questions

-these are ones my dad had—most of us have...

1. WHAT HAPPENS IN RESURRECTION?

-are we talking a mere upgrade, makeover?

-does it involve resuscitation or transformation?

-in verses 35-44—Paul uses a metaphor from botany to explain

-think of death and resurrection as like a seed that must be buried in the ground in order to be transformed into a plant

-meaning—there is a radical change—such that

- A. our bodies will no longer face corruption—read verse 42
-there will be no more decay—no more death
-my dad's future body will no longer be subject to diabetes, congestive heart failure, and severe vertigo
-no more pills—Lipitor, Claritin, Vicodin, Rogaine
-no more frailty, emergency procedures, life support systems
-hospitals and hospices—they are all out of business!

B. our bodies will experience a certain glory—verse 43

C. we will be filled and animated by the Spirit—verse 44

D. we will bear the image of Jesus—verse 49

-radical change—and yet—there will be a continuity—just as between a seed and a plant

-we will continue to be us—only in a heightened way

-what we were made to be in the first place

2. WHEN WILL THE RESURRECTION TAKE PLACE?

-most people assume we die and go to heaven and have our new bodies

-it's the language we have been taught—it has been hard wired into us

-I am certain it was my dad's expectation

-but Paul tells us we will not experience resurrection until somewhere out into the future when Christ returns—read verse 23

-think of it as an "order"—a line we have to get in—first Christ (which has happened); then those who have died; next those who are still living; finally the earth and the heavens will be "resurrected"—read verses 51-53

-knowing this raises a third resurrection question—

3. WHERE ARE WE UNTIL THE RESURRECTION?

-what happens when I die?

A. some suggest we are in a state of soul sleep

-waiting for the Lord to return—it would work with dad—he was very tired near the end of life

B. some imagine that we wander like restless souls

-making an occasional appearance on earth to shake things up

C. some see this interim as a period we live in something akin to a transit hotel—this is most biblical—illustration—Amman

1) for those on the "heaven track"—for those who have chosen to follow Christ—they are in the "paradise" wing

-this is what Jesus promised the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43)

-Paul received a glimpse of it when he was transported to the third heaven and heard inexpressible words he was not permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:4)

(I like to think of it as Oahu X one million)

- 2) for those on the "hell track"—who have rejected Jesus
 - they are in the dead wing—a holding cell of sort
 - a place for those under punishment—2 Peter 2:9
- 3) some believe there is a "remedial track"
 - a wing known as purgatory—for those who need a little "soul work", some purification to be made fit for heaven
 - a half-way house of sorts to work off debts (I could see dad here—for he did accumulate a lot of debt)
 - but it is hard to build a biblical argument for purgatory
 - what we know for sure—whatever its length—the intermediate state is temporary*
- 4) WHAT WILL IT BE LIKE IN A RESURRECTED WORLD?
 - again—Paul does not speak to this directly in chapter 15
 - but there are hints of what life in a resurrected body in a new heaven and new earth looks like—
 - A. it will be a world absent of corruption, dishonor, weakness—verses 42-44
 - think of it as a world without the marks of sin—without any evidence of decay
 - a world of forests w/o disease; streams w/o litter; air w/o smog, gardens w/o weeds, cities without decadence*
 - a world absent of strip mines and strip malls and strip joints*
 - a world where predators on this present earth become companions in the next*
 - a world where creation no longer groans—Romans 8

 - a world that so eclipses the present that the first creation will not be remembered—(Isaiah 65:17)
 - the resurrection corrects our thinking—it is not us going to heaven but heaven coming to us*
 - B. it will be a world under one rule—God's—read verses 24-25
 - it will be dominated by one city—the city of God
 - where God lives and rules and allows us perfect access
 - like being with the most fascinating person in the world—someone you can't get enough of—a lover you can't spend enough time with
 - C. it will be a world without death—read verse 26
 - this enemy death has been assaulted and defeated
 - Paul goes out of his way to make this clear—verses 54-57
 - D. a world where there is no emptiness—God has filled everything—LIFE WINS! —verse 28

E. a world that requires resurrected bodies

-for we will need bodies clothed with immortality to live imperishable lives on a resurrected earth—verse 54

-but everything in this chapter is pointing to the last question—if this is what is next—what about now?

5) WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH OUR REMAINING MOMENTS ON THIS EARTH?

-should we just relax—after all, God has a great future?

-I Corinthians 15 has a clear answer—read verse 58

-God gives a call to action—STAND FIRM!

-don't waffle when it comes to your conviction regarding Christ's resurrection—and your own

-Paul knows something we might miss—that holding to the resurrection puts you at war with the powers of darkness—whose primary weapon is death

-but it is more—MAKE YOUR LIFE COUNT!

-don't drift—squander the days—merely exist

-whatever decisions you have left—make them in light of eternity

-whatever time remains—don't waste the present

-give yourself to speaking truth, calling for justice, creating beauty, living the gospel, sharing the gospel

-for what we do in this life—the choices we make—will follow us into eternity

-present decisions not only determine destiny—(do you know Christ?)

-they have implications for life on the other side—even shape the resurrected body

-like Moses—we must pray—make permanent the works of my hands!