

## **The Triumph of the Resurrection**

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

1287

This morning we want to focus our attention, our thoughts, our worship on the theme of the resurrection and with that in mind I'd like to draw your attention to 1 Corinthians 15 and I want to read in the midst of this wonderful chapter on the resurrection just verses 19 through 26. 1 Corinthians 15:19-26. Beginning in verse 19 Paul writes, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable. But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order. Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming, then the end. When he shall have delivered up the kingdom of God even the father when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

Before we look specifically at this text, let me just if I might introduce our thinking to the monumental reality of the resurrection by painting a little historic scenario. Time and the history of the world has been marked by world changing events. In the daily ebb and flow of life things may seem rather routine, but here and there rather colossal events occur and they become the turning places in the road of destiny and as you look back in history you can see the peaks of human history, the crisis points, the turning points, the events, the times, the places, the people, the seasons that marked new ways of thinking, new ways of doing things. Events that had a rather triumphant effect, they triumph over all of the other events of history.

And as I thought about the tremendous peak of human history that is the resurrection, as I thought about the fact that the resurrection rises above every other event in human history, I thought that perhaps it would help us to see the monumental nature of the resurrection if we perhaps looked at a few of the lesser peaks, and as I began to let my mind run back through history and think what might be the great turning points of human history there were so many that I decided it perhaps would be best to concentrate on our own culture and our own day since the time of Christ. And as I surveyed that sweep of history from our Lord's Day to the present there were several things that stood out in my mind as turning points in human history.

First of all was the council at Jerusalem. In the 50's of the first century the apostles met together with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, all of them had come out of Judaism; their heritage was that you reach God by keeping the law. You gain salvation by obeying work's righteousness standards, but the Council of Jerusalem determined that salvation was by grace, not law. It was by faith, not works, and that was a monumental turning point in history. It was the death of legalism and so the great triumph of the Council of Jerusalem was the triumph of grace over legalism and that was a dawning of a new day. The birth of the church and the understanding of God's free redemptive grace which has since been the world changing Gospel.

The next great event in human history as we perceive it from our culture was the rise of Constantine in the 300's. It was important for two reasons; first of all it was a time of the establishing of Christian doctrine. There had been a running controversy about whether Jesus Christ was really God and in 325 at the Council of Nicaea that controversy was settled, Jesus was God, God the very God and the essence of the divine nature of Jesus Christ affirmed. So that was an important time in human history because it was an affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ and of other very essential Christian doctrines.

It was also important for a second reason. Up to that time Christianity had been persecuted. Christians had been murdered, but in the time of Constantine, around 300, Christianity became legal, Christianity became acceptable. In fact Constantine even made it the religion of the Holy Roman Empire and everybody in the empire signed up to be a Christian and Christianity ceased to be a personal relationship with the living Christ and became an add mixture of church and state having nothing to do with personal faith.

The church was absorbed into the state. You say "Was that impactful?" Yes, because immediately the church lost the cutting edge, the church lost its prophetic voice, it was swallowed up in the system, it became a weak political hireling. It became a way to captivate men's minds and hearts for political usage and out of that absorption of the church into the state grew Romanism, Roman Catholicism that engulfed the world in centuries and centuries and centuries of darkness when individual people were not permitted to read the Bible. When church services were conducted in language Latin that no one understood. When God only was concerned with popes and cardinals and bishops and priests and not individuals, and the world went into the horror of the Dark Ages.

If the Council at Jerusalem was the triumph of grace over legalism, the coming of Constantine spelled the triumph of dead religion over true religion. The triumph of ritualism over true Christianity and it stayed that way for centuries until the next great event, a Reformation. And the wonder of the Reformation is basically found in the simple statement in Scripture, "The just shall live by faith." And God used a man named Martin Luther to say "The system does not save. Personal faith in Jesus Christ alone can save. It isn't enough to have the sacraments. It isn't enough to have the mass. It isn't enough to go through the routine. It isn't enough to belong to the 'Holy State', there must be personal faith."

And the Reformation became the triumph of individualism. The triumph of personal salvation, the birth again of salvation by grace through faith, and people realized that God loved them like he loved the priests. That a man had as much value as a priest did even if he was a shoemaker or even if he was a farmer who plowed a field or even if he was a servant. He had dignity. He had value. He was made in the image of God. He could know God as personally and as intimately and as uniquely and as wonderfully as any hierarchical individual in the church.

And so men personally begin to find salvation in Jesus Christ. Men begin to realize that they had value and they had dignity and they had worth and out of this came tremendous economic changes in the world. Capitalism, for example, was born in the Reformation. Free enterprise was born in the Reformation. Man said I have value, I have dignity, I have worth. I have freedom to act under God, to be myself, to chart my course, to glorify God with my shoemaking, to glorify God with my plowing of the field. And free enterprise was born and capitalism was born and a middle class was born where there had been none and the great puritans who followed were a middle class people, a proprietor

type people with their own businesses who were revealing that God wanted individuals to manifest their value and their dignity and their creation in his image. It was a triumph then of individualism. It was a triumph of the dignity of man in that he could have a personal relationship with the living God and he didn't have to be subjugated to the confusion and darkness and chaos of an institutional church.

And from the Reformation came the view of a new world. Spawned the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution and all of the tremendous history of man where he began to invent, where he began to create, where he began to become educated. Where education reached the common man, where the printing press took the Bible to everybody, where people began to read, where they began to learn, where they began to think independently and all of the wonder of that gave rise to the fact that people said the world is going to get better. There were advances in science and medicine. Inventions were made. People were becoming aware of the world around them. As you move toward the 20th century, communications increased and men had the euphoria, the feeling that everything was going to get better, that man was grappling with his problems, and man would solve his problems.

And then came the next cataclysmic event, World War I, and World War I was the triumph of pessimism. World War I conversely was the death of optimism. World War I said man with all that he has done, with all of his creativity, with all of the art that shows the gentleness of his soul, with all of the wisdom in education and science and all of these things, is a beast at heart. The whole world was at war and the euphoria ended and pessimism was born and the world became cynical. And the world became somewhat fatalistic. And the world sort of gave up on man and that's why you had immediately following World War I the incredible hedonism of the 20's which has never died out but only increased until this day.

Man wasn't good. With all that he knew he was bad and he would sooner hate than love and so World War I was the triumph of pessimism and out of it came the birth of selfishness where man said I'm not going to get anything from my fellow man so I'm going to get it for myself. And out of it came the birth of existentialism, live for the moment. Grab all you can grab. Don't try to better the human race; the human race isn't going to get any better. There was a futility. There was a sense of hopelessness, that man was evil, hopelessly evil. Murderous and self seeking and they lost the sense of the goodness of man. The triumph of pessimism.

Not many years later came the next great event, and would you please notice that they're happening much faster now as the world comes to a conclusion. The next great event was the acquiring of the atomic bomb. That was the full triumph of fatalism. Now the world said we are always on the brink of doom, and that accelerated existentialism. That accelerated cynicism and pessimism. That accelerated grab the moment and get all you can get out of it, ring it dry because there may not be a tomorrow. Some little man somewhere that we don't know will push a button and blow us all to bits.

For the first time in man's history, the individual man could not feel control of his destiny. It used to be that if you could just stay out of the range of the guy with the bow and arrow, you'd be okay. Or if you could stay away from the guy with the gun you'd be alright, but now we don't know how we can stay away because somebody might push a button and blow us all to bits and when the atomic bomb came it started the age of fatalism and it accelerated all the cynicism of human thinking. Fortunately the United States of America was the nation that had the bomb and America was known around the world as just and caring, a defender of the oppressed, a bulwark of integrity, benevolent. And the

world was glad that if there had to be an A-bomb we had it, but it didn't end there.

Other nations got it, nations who are aggressively evil and since that time the world has lived on the brink of dooms day. There is a pall, a fear. There is a sense of cosmic annihilation impending and we live in a time when there has been a triumph for fatalism and that's why people have so little hope for the future. So little hope in mankind and existentialism has gone berserk, everybody living for his own thing, grabbing his own thing, doing his own thing to get out of life whatever there may be there before it all blows up.

The feelings of security are gone. The feelings of a hope in the future are gone. People don't want to have kids anymore because they don't know if there'll be a world for them to grow up in; all apart of the arrival of the atomic bomb.

There's one other event in history that I think is a peak in our scenario and that is the Vietnam War, and I don't know if you've even thought about it in the way that I think about it, but I believe the Vietnam War put up for the whole world the fact that morality had died. It is the death of morality. America was always known as the offender of the oppressed. The nation that had justice, that knew right from wrong, good from evil. But all of the sudden in that whole milieu of Vietnam we didn't know anymore. We didn't know whether you were supposed to win or lose. We didn't know whether you were supposed to defend the innocent anymore. We didn't know whether it mattered that millions of Vietnamese would be slaughtered by the encroachment of Communism. We didn't know what was right or wrong and we lost that worldwide perspective of unity and pride and dignity and justice and even at home we were burning up flags and bombing buildings and killing leaders, we were infiltrated by the socialist, communist kind of thinking, by the leftist kind of perspectives. We were disgraced in many ways before the whole world. We abandoned millions of Southeast Asian people to the mental, physical massacres of the powers that wanted them oppressed. We demonstrated lack of leadership, we succumbed to internal pressures, we had revolution going on all in our midst. We were unable to stand strong against the super power Russia and we fell in the sense that we no longer knew what was right or wrong and with it came drugs and disillusionment and suicide and youth without a commitment and for a while they tried to have a standard, they tried to have a cause. I remember the group at Harvard that put an ad in a magazine, we have a group that would like to protest, do you know of a good cause? And there were people who wanted to make it right and they tried to make it right, but they didn't know what right was, and all that Vietnam said for the whole world and for all of history was we don't know what right is anymore. We don't know what right is. And out of that same era came abortion and all the chaos of immorality that's in our society today.

And so as you look back on the flow of human history you see the church is born and it's born in grace. Its doctrine is defined, but it's absorbed by the world and it loses its cutting edge. It loses its prophetic voice and then after centuries of being hidden in the darkness of the Roman system, it bursts out and when it bursts out in all of the wonder of its light, it creates a world of encouragement and increasing productivity, but we find that man untouched by the Gospel doesn't get any better and the world goes from pessimism to fatalism to amoralism. And have you noticed that the last three great events have happened in this century?

There's an accelerating move to the end. Would you notice the passage that we read and would you notice verse 24, "Then the end." Where does it end? Where is human history going? We know the slide is greased and we know in our society today that people live in a fatalistic world and they look ahead at death and they wonder whether there's anything beyond it and then if there's nothing

beyond it, what meaning does life have? What's next? What is the next great event? I don't know. But I do know how it will end because it says right here, then the end. And what is the end? It is when Jesus Christ delivers the kingdom to God and verse 25, "When he reigns." That's where human history ends.

You say, "Well what does this have to do with the Resurrection?" Look at verse 20, "Now is Christ risen." Why is he risen? Verse 25, "For he must," what? "He must reign." Now I don't know if you've ever thought of the Resurrection that way but I think it's the way you must think of the Resurrection. Jesus rose to reign. Did you get that? He rose to reign. That's what Paul is saying here. He rose to be the climax to human history and the next cataclysmic turning point in human history could be the end. It could be the return of Jesus Christ to reign.

All the signs are there you know? All of them. You think about political life. We've seen the awakening of the Orient and the Bible says in the return of Christ there will be a great army in the east marching, an army of 200 million. We know that Red China has that many now. We've seen the return of the Jews to Palestine. We've seen the general political world fermentation that can lead to the rule of Anti-Christ.

We've even seen the signs in economic life. The Bible tells us in the book of James that in the end time there will be tension between the rich and the poor and if ever there was a time of that it is now. We've seen things in technical life. In order for the devastation and destruction described in Revelation to occur we would have to have nuclear weapons. How else could we massacre one fourth of the world, turn right around and kill one third of the world. Certainly not with bows and arrows, it could be done in three and a half years as Revelations says it will be done.

We've seen things happen in religious life. We've seen a move toward the world church. We've seen things happen in nature, earthquakes, etcetera, etcetera. So many things point to the fact that Jesus could come very soon.

Most people do not realize that this is the goal of the resurrection. Jesus had to rise because Jesus must reign and the ultimate triumph of the Resurrection is the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

Now let's look at our passage and I want to share with you three great triumphs in the Resurrection that in this passage that lead to the final one. First of all the Resurrection is a triumph over despair. Now I've been trying to point out in our little scenario to begin with this morning that the world is in despair. Basically the world has lost its confidence in itself. We don't trust our leaders, we don't trust our laws, we don't trust authority. We are cynical, fatalistic, hopelessly selfish. We don't know who to turn to. We mock the only system we have.

Yesterday I had the privilege to present the Gospel of the Resurrection to the Dodgers baseball team prior to their game and it was a privilege and there was an excellent response and I went out to sit there for the opening of the game and they introduced a man who is a legislator who had come to present an award and when they introduced the man's name and then said that he was a legislator from Sacramento, the entire place boo'd him. I was amazed. Cynical. As if he represented all of the utter incompetency of man to solve man's problems. That's despair. That poor man was a symbol of man's inability to deal with his dilemmas. Man lives in despair. Pessimistic, fatalistic, amoral, and he looks ahead and he can't see anything to change that. And so he grabs all he can grab in the

moment and that's what existential means, he just lives for the moment or he drinks or he takes drugs or he kills himself because you see, if he stops and thinks about it, life without a future is really a horrible practical joke. If there is some cosmic power that just created man to go out of existence at the grave, that is an absolutely devastating practical joke. If man has no value but to die and become dust, then all of his life is meaningless, utterly meaningless, pointless. And even more so if more so if he can't make anything out of the world he's got to live in until he becomes nothing. Despair, fatalism, and then never knowing who might push the button and blow him away leaves him utterly hopeless.

And even Christians. Even those of us who go to church and worship God, if there's nothing for us after death, then we're to be pitied more than the rest because if this life is all there is then man, they're right, we gotta grab it while it's here.

Verse 19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men the most to be pitied." I mean if we're being very religious and very circumspect and very circumscribed in our life and we're putting all of this confidence and trust in Christ and it all ends in a annihilation at the grave then we should be pitied above everybody; we are the most confused. There's no hope, only despair if the grave is the end.

You know when you can't see any light at the end of the tunnel, it's a terrifying feeling. In Lamentations 1:16 we find a description of this. The prophet says "For these things I weep. Mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water because the comforter who should relieve my soul is far from me, my children are desolate because the enemy prevailed." He just couldn't see any hope. It's like Psalm 44:19 which says "You have covered us with the shadow of death."

There's got to be hope. Man can't live without hope. He can't live without a sense that there's more than just the grave, that he has value, that he is a person who is worth something beyond just dust. The only way that there can be triumph over despair is in Resurrection and that brings us to verse 20, "But," that's wonderful, that little adversative word, "But now is Christ risen from the dead?" Now what does that say? That says that the grave is not the end. Now is Christ risen? I mean death is not the end. Beyond that and become the firstfruits, the guarantor, the guarantee, the pledge, the promise of them that slept. What does that mean? Jesus not only conquered death for himself but he conquered death for everyone else.

What a marvelous statement. If Jesus stays in the grave you have a reason to be despairing. You have a reason to be cynical, pessimistic and fatalistic and amoral. But if Jesus came out of the other side of the grave and there is an eternal kingdom and there is a heaven and there is a hell, and you do have ultimate value and you can be restored to the original intention to be created fully and in every way in the image of God. If there is that hope for eternal life and that human potential could reach that kind of level, then life here has new meaning, and I must live here that I might dwell forever in that glorious eternal heaven. That makes every difference in the world.

So you see the resurrection is the triumph over despair. You know you think about it from the standpoint of the disciples, when Jesus died they went into instant despair, they moped around, they were scattered, they were confused. Their hope was gone. Jesus came to them and even when he appeared to them Mark 16:14 says he had to scold them for their unbelief and hardness of heart in refusing to believe that he was alive even when people told them he was. They were in such despair. Two of the on the road to Emmaus, total despair until Jesus revealed himself to them. See man can't

survive without that hope. Our leader is alive. There is hope. There is a better world. There is a heaven. There will be a kingdom. Jesus is coming, he must reign and he's going to gather his saints into his kingdom and that is the ultimate meaning of the resurrection and so there's no reason to despair. No matter how bad this world gets, God's going to make it new, right? No matter how troublesome it seems, no matter how insoluble man's dilemmas, God is going to make it right when the king comes, and it may be the next event. The signs are ready.

And so we do not despair. We do not live as those who have no hope. All of the injustice will be made just. All of the inequity will be made equitable. All of the wrong will be made right. All of the pain will be turned into bliss. All of the sorrow will be joy. There is another life beyond the grave in Christ.

Secondly the Resurrection is not only the triumph over despair but the triumph over depravity. Depravity is another word for sin, and if Christ is going to make of this world what it ought to be and if he is going to make of man what he ought to be he has to overcome man's biggest problem which is what? Sin. Christ must conquer sin and the Resurrection did that. Verse 21, "For since by man came death, by man came also the Resurrection of the dead." Now verse 22 explains verse 21, "The man by whom death came was Adam." For when Adam sinned, how many men died? All men. The principal of sin and death passed to all men. Even so in Christ another man by whom comes Resurrection shall all be made alive and so Paul is saying as the death or rather the sin of one man brought death so the life of one man brings life. Jesus overturned the Adamic Curse, that's what its saying. His one act conquered sin and death.

Now sin causes death, right? The wages of sin is death. Jesus dying on the cross felt the full impact of sin, the full fury of sin was poured on him. Think of it this way, every sin ever committed in the history of the world was placed on Christ. Imagine the weight of sin. Sin literally spent itself killing him. Every sin ever committed by every human being who ever lived on this earth. Every sin was put on Christ. Sin's fury spent itself and it killed him, but three days later he came out of the grave and in that act he conquered sin. He took its full force; bore its killing power at an extent that we couldn't even imagine. Just think about the sin of your own life would be enough to kill Jesus Christ, multiply that by the billions and billions of people who've lived on the face of the earth, and he bore it all.

And when sin had spent its entire fury on him, he came out of the grave alive. Adam took us into death; Jesus took us through death into life. That's the meaning of the Resurrection. It is the triumph over depravity. If there's going to be a better world and if the Lord is going to create a new heaven and a new earth, if he's going to give man all the fullness and potential that man was originally was created to have then he has to conquer man's debilitation which is sin. And so we read at the end of 1 Corinthians 15 this marvelous statement, "Death is swallowed up in victory. Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh death, where is thy victory?" the sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ in dying conquered sin and death for us. And so it says in 2 Timothy 1:10, "Now he is made manifest by the appearing of our savior Jesus Christ who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." What a great realization. We don't fear death, Jesus conquered it.

Someone wrote "the king must lay aside his crown, step down from his throne, and lie down beside the beggar in the clods of the valley. The minister must pronounce his final benediction, close his Bible, and surrender his flock to the great shepherd of the sheep. The judge must change his judicial robe for garments of the grave. The lawyer must write his last brief and finish his final legation. The

author his last column, the poet his final verse, the athlete play his last game, the musician his final note. The actor must play his last scene and leave the stage forever. The laborer must leave his plow in the field, his axe in the woodland and give his brawny stalwart frame to the grave. The soldier must march for the last time and pay the supreme price for liberty and the grim ordeal of war. The mother must leave her chair tenantless and her helpless baby alone, and the innocent playful child must drop his toys and with his tiny arms grapple with death." Comes to ever man, every woman, but it has no fear. Paul says, "Oh death where is thy," what? Sting. Why? Because in the resurrection of Jesus Christ there's a triumph over death, triumph over sin. That is our hope.

Finally, and this is the ultimate triumph of the resurrection and the one we don't think about. The triumph over destiny, and we've talked this morning about how man through the flow of history has descended into the pit of pessimism, fatalism, and immoralism and we ask where is he going? Can anything change the destiny of man? Can anything overrule the inevitability of man's drift into hell? And the resurrection becomes the answer.

Verse 23, "Every man in his own order shall be made alive. Christ the firstfruits and afterward they that are Christ's," these three words are the key, "at His coming. Then the end when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God even the father, when he shall have put down all rule, all authority and power for He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Jesus rose to reign, that's the whole point. He rose to return to reign. This is the great climax of history. It may be the next event. He rose to return to reign. If you read the Book of Revelation you see how often He is seen as the one who rose to return. For example nearly 30 times in Revelation he is called the Lamb and whenever he is called the Lamb it emphasizes his death, but the fact that he is the living Lamb emphasizes his resurrection. And tied in with that is not only that he died and rose, but that he returns to reign. Over and over again in the book, but just this note from chapter one: "Jesus Christ," verse 5, "who is the faithful witness and the first begotten of the dead." And then it says in verse 7, "behold he cometh with clouds." He is the first begotten of the dead that he might return to reign.

Now listen, Adam's death caused all men to die. Christ's life will cause all men to live. You say what about the unsaved? They'll be raised from the dead too. That's right all men will live. John 5, "Some to the resurrection of damnation, some to the resurrection of life." John 5. When Jesus comes the graves of the world will be emptied and all men and women who've ever lived will be called before him for final disposition. To those who did not embrace the Lord Jesus Christ they will be cast into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels where they will burn with unquenchable fire forever. For those who have acknowledged Jesus Christ and received him as Lord, they will enter into his glorious kingdom and know the fulfillment of all that God ever intended for man. He rose to return to reign and he will establish his kingdom and gather into it all of his own and send out those that do not belong. That's how history ends, and I believe it's very near. Very near.

We've all focused a lot on the country of Iran these years, but there's an interesting historical note about that nation that you probably haven't heard of. In 1072 a man died in Iran by the name of Sultan Muhammad ibn Daud. He was a great leader. He ruled Iran and an extended contiguous area from the Oxus to the Tigris River. He was thought of as a great leader. He extended the frontiers of the Iranian territory. His people looked at him as a hero.



He told them that when he died he would come back from the grave and he would return to lead them on to greater conquests. That was 1072. Needless to say he hasn't showed up yet. They could use him in the fight with Iraq, but he hasn't come back. But you know what's fascinating? His tomb is in the Mosque of Kuchan in the province of Khorasan at this very day standing outside that tomb is a saddled white horse and there's been one there since 1072, and they're waiting, but he won't show. His tomb is occupied, but there is a tomb that is empty and there is a white horse in heaven that is ready and that horse will not be disappointed for Jesus will return in glory to set up his kingdom. I trust you'll be a part of it.

Let's bow in prayer. I want you to just keep your heart sensitive to what the spirit of God has said in this time together. I want you to look into your heart in these last moments and ask yourself one question: if Jesus were to return today would he take you into his kingdom or would he cast you into hell? That's the question. If the answer is hell or you don't know, then Jesus offers to you his salvation. You don't need to live in fatalism, pessimism, cynicism, existentialism. You don't need to live amorally, fulfilling your selfish desires because there's nothing else. Because there is something else, there is a hell forever to pay. But bless God beyond that there is a heaven forever to enjoy and you need to see God in your heart, confess Jesus Christ as Lord, bow the knee as the women did, touch his feet, and worship him who died and rose for you. That's your only hope to triumph over despair, to triumph over depravity, to triumph over destiny.

Let's stand for the benediction. Gracious father we come to the close of this wonderful hour together to express our thanks to you for the risen Christ and the thanks that He is the firstfruits of all them that slept because he lives we live too. We thank you that even though the physical body may die and fall away, the real person lives forever and he that believeth in the Resurrection shall never die, but enter into life eternal. We know too that the one who does not believe shall forever die and yet never die knowing only the pain of death without its relief. And so we pray that you'll work a work in every heart. Those who love you may we be thankful. Those who don't may this be the dawning of that day. Bring to the prayer room those that you desire to come and be glorified in all our hearts. Bring us together again tonight to celebrate the new life in these whose testimonies we shall hear, who speak of your great power and grace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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