

Title: Living for Eternity – Now pt.1

Text: 1 Corinthians 15.35-49

Theme: Why the resurrection makes sense

Series: 1 Corinthians #92 (Living for Eternity 2007 – pt.1)

Prop Stmt. The resurrection of our bodies is a necessary step to completing our transformation to being glorified like Christ.

In the next few weeks, I am going to remind us of the importance and soul-liberating joy of living for eternity. Our study of I Corinthians 15 is a great text for this because it reminds us of what we are being prepared for. This is so important to wrestle with because, if you don't know where you came from and you don't know where you are going, you can't understand who you are right now!

Four Important Questions:

1. Where did I come from (origin) ... we'll look at this more tonight.
2. Where am I going?
3. What went wrong?
4. Who am I?

Before I go on with verses 35-49, I want to grab a loose end that I did not tie together like I could have from verses 20-28. As I was concentrating on verses 35-49, I realized that in our Western-Americanized version of Christianity we emphasize heaven so much that, while we believe in the resurrection of our bodies, it is not seen in its proper view. Paul understood the big picture, his audience did not – yet.

Read Text:

This entire chapter, devoted to recovering and explaining the resurrection brings up a very important issue for us. And that is: Who Really Cares about a Resurrection anyway? This is not something that we spend much time thinking about. When we think of eternity, we tend to think of Heaven. And when we talk about heaven, I don't think that we have been as precise and careful in our explanations and understanding. As a result, the way we live now is affected by our incomplete understanding of God's plan.

Heaven for many is the place of escape. We escape from physical pain, from emotional pain, from relational problems and from financial, environmental, and political problems on a local and world-wide scale. I can't wait for heaven, there will be no more wars, I won't have acne, and my neighbor's dog won't bark at squirrels at 6 am when I am trying to sleep in. Heaven to many of us, is that great place in the sky where God is going to do everything that I have ever wanted Him to do and where all my comforts and demands will be fulfilled. Frankly, our view of heaven can be rather self-centered. Now, it is true that in heaven, we will be in a perfect environment, but eternity is so much more than heaven. Did you realize that heaven is temporary? Heaven is not the end of the story.

When I was coming home from Russia, my flight went from Moscow to Frankfurt and then to Detroit. If you asked me in Russia, where I was going, I would tell you Detroit.

Frankfurt was the place where I was changing planes and was not my final destination. That is what heaven right now is for us. It is the immediate destination, but it is not the final destination.

Think about it. When we die, we go to be Christ in heaven – and according to the visions of John in the book of Revelation – heaven is incredible, but Christ does not stay there and neither do we. In Revelation 19, Christ leaves heaven and comes back to the earth. That is His 2nd Coming. That is the return of Christ to come back and take over the earth in order to establish His kingdom, right here. The truth is, when you survey the Bible you see that the focus of God’s attention is not on taking us to live with Him in heaven, but the emphasis is on God living with His people on the earth.

I remind you that the major theme of the Bible is the Kingdom of God. God made the Universe in order to Reign over it (we usually understand that) and to dwell with His people (that is the fascinating part) in the land that He made. God has made us in order to live with us and to be glorified through us as we enjoy Him. But, if He wanted to, God could have simply made Adam and Eve and put them in heaven. But He didn’t. He made Adam and Eve out of the material of the earth (dust of the ground), material, by the way, that He called “good.” God put them in the middle of a garden that He made for them and God related with Adam and Eve in the garden. God came down to them and when He did, He established the terms for their relationship. He was the King, they were His people living in His Kingdom and enjoying life and relationship with each other and with the King. Then came Genesis 3. Sin distorted everything. The original purpose and design was still there, but now it was hindered so badly. Now, in order for God to relate with His people, there had to be a sacrifice made, and even then, the relationship was marked by doubt and suspicion on the part of the people toward God. And yet, God, kept coming down. In Genesis 11, God came down (v.5) to see the city and the tower (of Babel) that was being built. In Genesis 18.1, God comes down to Abraham to talk with him and in v.21, God comes down to Sodom and Gomorrah to see their sin. In Exodus 3.8 God tells Moses, that I have come down to rescue the Israelites from Egypt and directly intervenes to accomplish that by being a pillar of fire that protects his people from the pursuing Egyptians. Later on in Exodus 19 God came down to the Mountain (Mt. Sinai) and Moses met God on the mountain, where God revealed to Moses, what He demanded from the people that He would reign over and live with. In Exodus 40 – God came to live in a tent (called the tabernacle). This tabernacle traveled with the people of Israel and was always set up in the middle of the camp because God’s plan is to be in the midst of His people. But, the tent/tabernacle was going to a specific place. That place was the land of Israel and eventually to the city of Jerusalem, (the original site of Abraham’s altar where Isaac was almost sacrificed, and where the High Priest Melchizedek had reigned and served). This new Jerusalem during David’s kingdom became the capital city for the nation and later on became the place where the tabernacle was abandoned for a temple that God chose to live in. At the dedication of the temple, (1 Kings 8.11) the priests could not even carry out their responsibilities because God came down in His glory cloud and filled the temple. God’s presence was in the midst of his people until, Ezekiel 11 when the glory of God departed.

Over and over we read in the Psalms that God is not only Sovereign and Transcendent and that He reigns over all, God is also here and present.

Psalm 18.9 – “He parted the heavens and came down.”

Psalm 144.5 “Part your heavens, O LORD, and come down.”

God’s original plan was to live in the midst of his people. For several hundred years, the temple had no Shekinah cloud. Now, there is no glory of God back in the land, or back among the people until In John 1, when “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.” This time, when God came down, He did not come in the form of a cloud, He came in the form of a man. He came to live with his people and to be their King/Savior/ and priest. The sacrifices of the temple were fulfilled in Him. The life and position of Melchizedek was fulfilled in Him. The land was made for this. The people were made for this. Christ came for this, but the people rebelled. Just like the garden, the people rebelled, but still the plan of God to live among His people does not stop. And after his death, burial and resurrection, when Christ ascended after accomplishing His mission, He sent His Spirit to complete the work that He began. And what is that work? That work was not to get a bunch of people to go to heaven when they die. That is not the point. The point is to prepare a people with whom He will live as their King in the land and in their midst. The book of Acts opens with Christ preaching to his disciples about the kingdom of God. When He goes up into heaven, two angels appeared to his disciples and in essence said, “What are staring at? Get moving! He is coming back and you have a job to do to prepare for His return. You have a message that needs to go to every people, tribe and language starting at Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the rest of the world – Christ is coming back to set up His kingdom.

In Revelation 19, heaven opens and there is a white horse upon which is sitting the rider called Faithful and True. His name is the Word of God and He comes back to the earth in order to take over and He does. Christ, according to Revelation 20, rules for a 1,000 years. We rule with Him on this earth. At the end of the 1,000 years, there is a final rebellion by Satan, at which time He is cast into the eternal Lake of Fire, and then God re-creates a New Heaven and New Earth which is the setting of Revelation 21 where we read, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and will be their God.” The New Jerusalem is the capital city of this new creation. Heaven as we know it now, is not described as having streets of gold and gates of pearl and walls of jasper. All of that is described in Revelation 21 as being the New Jerusalem. I know that I have just ruined a lot of songs for some of you, but I want to you to see the big picture. God made the universe as the arena in which to show His glory and He made the earth as the centerpiece of the action. Our time in heaven, after death, is temporary, even as we await the resurrection after which we will once again occupy the earth, but this time in a glorified body and in a reformed and perfect world. In Genesis one and two, God made the world as a place to dwell with His people. In Revelation 21-22, God remakes the world and dwells with His people.

So, while heaven is great, the real focus and flow of the Scriptures has always been on the Eternal Kingdom or State, where the New Jerusalem is not far away beyond the blue in the sweet bye and bye, but is here as the capital city of the New Earth and New Heaven. Heaven, in that sense then, is a place on earth. So, when we die, our bodies remain on this earth, while our souls go to be with God in heaven, and are giving some kind of a temporary covering while we await the resurrection of our bodies which prepares us for the coming fullness of the kingdom. That is Paul's point in I Corinthians 15.

This is important because:

1. **God has arranged the Resurrection of our bodies as the final step of our glorification.**

When we, who are genuine followers of Christ die now (before the resurrection) our souls are immediately in the presence of God in heaven, while our mortal remains, remain here. We will be sinless and separated from this world. But, our bodies will not yet experience the full results of redemption until the resurrection. At the resurrection, our bodies will be glorified, like the body that Christ has and will be reunited with our souls.

God has an eternal plan for your body. Body management must be resurrection and kingdom-minded. The Heaven only view has a Platonic ring to it. That is Paul's point back in 1 Corinthians 6 when he warns us about sexual immorality. In essence he is saying, do not misuse your body because God is going to raise your body up after death and re-create it for a permanent role. What you do with your body matters! What God does with our bodies is what God is going to do with the entire earth. With that end in view, we should take care of our bodies now as a picture of the kingdom of God that is coming. Taking care of our bodies now is a statement of faith in the resurrection of the body that is coming.

2. **Our Resurrection provides a greater understanding of our future.**

Many of you want to know, what is heaven going to be like. What are we going to do in heaven? Will there be dogs in heaven (maybe, but definitely not cats)? What are we going to do forever and ever? Won't that get boring? Do you think God will make another universe?

I remember going to a Swiss festival in Sugarcreek, Ohio many years ago. Three guys were swinging some Swiss tunes, one of which was titled, "In Heaven there'll be no beer." The words were profound. In heaven, there'll be no beer, that's why we drink it here, 'cause when we get up there, all our friends will be drinking down here." The guys were extremely sad and forlorn as they sang and pretended to cry on each other's shoulder especially at the thought of all their friends drinking beer together while they are up in heaven.

Now, you can see, that we were made from the earth to be part of this earth. This is the home that God made for us, and this is the place that God made in order to live with us. God is coming back here to live with us. Our sense of rootedness, our sense of connection with this created order is all part of God's plan. Yes, those who are followers of Christ are going to heaven when we die and that is wondrous beyond our ability to capture, but even that is not the end. We are coming back with the King for His Kingdom, for His Creation to be the people He made us to be. Then we will live on this earth, gaining infinite pleasure from our work, worship and relationships because they will all be done for the glory of God and before the face of God. Work as worship!

Understanding this means that we dare not be content with presenting a \$3 gospel that gives me the bare minimum to get into heaven, but allows me the ability to live as I want. A gospel that is designed to just help people make it into heaven by the skin of their teeth is not the gospel that Jesus preached, nor the gospel that the apostles proclaimed and robs people of a complete understanding of our whole lives and God's big picture.

3. Our Resurrection places proper emphasis on eternity.

We love stories. Why do we like stories? We were made as part of His story. God wrote the script, and your life has a part in that script. Your coming resurrection is an important part of the story. Knowing where you are going and knowing what you are going to be experiencing helps you understand whether or not something is important right now.

In the next several weeks I am going to be flushing this issue out as I usually do this time of year. Living for Eternity helps me understand that all of life's meaning and value is not based on nor derived from what I can experience right now. I am going to be challenging us in three related areas. As a follower of Christ, I am already part of His eternal kingdom. Eternity is already happening. How, does that influence the way I raise my children? Instead of thinking, "Oh, I just need to get my kid to pray a prayer to get saved, and then I don't care what happens to him." Which, but the way, is never how the gospel is presented in the Bible, I want to help you understand being a parent based on how to prepare my children for eternal life with Christ in His kingdom on this earth. How does this influence the way I view and do church? And finally, how does this influence the way I use my time, my money, and my abilities?

4. Our Resurrection gives proper value to life now.

Living now, with the goal in view enables me to see life now through the proper lens. The kingdom of God is the unifying theme for all of life. Instead of saying that my priorities in life are: 1) God 2) Family 3) Work 4) Church 5) Hobbies 6) School 7) Ohio State Football, or something like that. We start with God (church/kingdom) as the hub of the wheel, and all aspects of our lives reflect this fundamental truth. The reason that the Kingdom of God is the unifying theme for the Bible is because the eternal kingdom of God is the defining mode for all of life. If you are a follower of Christ, your body, one day will be resurrected in order to be a physical, spiritual, and complete part of His reign on this re-created earth in which you will live loving, worshiping and enjoying God and

every part that He has made. Your family is for Kingdom Living. Your work is for Kingdom Living. Your activities are for Kingdom Living. Your learning is for Kingdom Living.

All of life now, is to be seen and lived in anticipation to life then. Therefore, I do not want you to think of the gospel as the good news that just gets me into heaven when I die. I want you to understand and embrace the truth that Christ came down for you and lived for you and died for you and rose again for you ascended for you and is returning for you so that you will see that your entire life was made to know Him, and live with Him and worship Him and bring Him glory by enjoying Him forever. And then I want to help you begin to look at every day now as opportunities to put that on display. The way you raise your kids, the way you treat people who are wealthy and poor, strong or weak, nice or not-so-nice, the way you look at your neighborhood, and your co-workers, and the homeless and the addicted, are all opportunities for you to live as a sneak preview of the kingdom. I want you to see that every single thing that you do now, matters for eternity. Life matters. Your life matters. Your actions, your thoughts, your body matters. Your faith-driven, cross-centered, kingdom-focused obedience matters. Your values and priorities matter. We are a body that is called to help each other live this out now, and by God's grace we are going to do that. It is all part of his plan.

5. **Our Resurrection and the Return of the King to the Earth Pours High Octane Fuel into Our Worship Engines.**

God, come down! God, meet with us, live with us, dwell with us, make your presence known among us for which you created us. Lead us to respond to you now, as a people who are called out of darkness in your light. Help us worship you now as a taste of what life with you is going to be like. That is why His Resurrection and our resurrection matter.

He is King and He will reign on earth. Rejoice; He is King! Rejoice; He has conquered death. Rejoice that we will reign under Him and live with Him and that His resurrection guarantees our resurrection and His kingdom!