

Title: The Morning that Death Died

Text: 1 Corinthians 15.51

Theme: Resurrection means Change!

Occasion: Easter Sunday 2005

Prop Stmt. For the Believer, the resurrection-based change is more certain than death.

We joke at times – life is short, play hard! Or life is uncertain – eat dessert first!

Sometimes the uncertainty of life is seen in how short it really is.

On Monday, Jeff Weis? Killed his grandfather and girlfriend, took his grandfather's guns and drove to his high school in Red Lake, MN, drove the squad car into the front door, shot the security guard and then began to look for students and teachers that he could shoot. For many of us, the tragedy of the event is underscored by the fear that something like this could happen to us. We have children, grandchildren, or we are students in school. Easter Break for that community is replaced with funeral vigils and services, surgeries, hospital visits and life-long sorrows and scars. Our nation has received a fresh wound confronting us with the cheapened value that some people have placed on their own life and the lives of others. But this tragedy is not the only source of sorrow.

But this is without a doubt the very reason why Resurrection Day is the Day of Days for the church. We clearly acknowledge along with our world how short life can be. But our great hope is not found in trying to get all that we can out the limited days that we have. We all know about the brevity of life. But what I want you to understand today is not the brevity of life but the brevity of death!

All of mankind lived under the tyranny of sin and death. But the resurrection of Christ demonstrated that now, the reign of sin and death is under the authority of the reign of Christ, because His resurrection demonstrated that He has absolute power of what was previously viewed as the absolute power. Just as the death of Christ fundamentally changed our relationship with sin, so too, the resurrection of Christ fundamentally changed our relationship with death. Because of the death of Christ, we know longer have to fear sin's penalty, the resurrection of Christ shows that we know longer have to fear sin's power.

Now, for those of you who are guests today, we have been studying the book of 1 Corinthians on Sunday mornings. In our study we are in chapter 2. In about 3 years (or so) we should get to chapter 15. Chapter 15 to the book of 1 Corinthians is what chapter 8 is to the book of Romans. This chapter is clearly one of the mountain peaks of Scripture that towers over life, breaks through clouds and gives us a view of the glory beyond. It stands as the final theological argument for the unity of the church, the ministry of the church and the future of the church.

He begins in verses 1-11 by reaffirming what these believers held dear. In this prologue or introduction to this subject he demonstrates that the victory of sin and death is short-lived. In verse 12-19 he deals with what the consequences would be if the resurrection was not true and in verses 20-28 the implications of the truthfulness of the resurrection.

In verses 29-34 he goes back again and deals with what the consequences would be if the resurrection of the dead were not true, setting up this masterful discussion on the character of the resurrection in verses 35-49.

The big idea is this: God has demonstrated through creation that He can give any kind of body that He wants to His creation. He has given different bodies to birds than he has humans. He has given different bodies to fish than He has humans and birds. God can give whatever it is that He wants to give to whomever He chooses to give it. But, while He can do anything that He wants to do, what He does is always consistent with His plan and purposes. Everything that God always fits together, even though we do not always see how it is going to fit together before the fact.

Here is what I want you to understand this morning. When Christ was raised again from the dead, God ripped back the curtain of stage number 2 and revealed the basis or the foundation for His new reality. Life before was dominated by death. But the resurrection has changed all of that. Now, death has died, and when death died, for the follower of Christ, death no longer holds court. Death no longer walks with a swagger. The threats of death ring hollow. The cries of death have been drowned out by the sound of the resurrection trumpet. The Resurrection of Christ brought about a colossal change that has affected everything that we are and everything that we do.

All of this is summarized by verse 50. Verse 50 is basically a collection of this chapter which sets the stage for the next statement. In verse 51 Paul turns the corner to the future and tells us what is going to happen. In v. 50 he answers “So What”. In verse 51 he answers “What.” Then in verse 58 he answers “Now What.” Here is the sermon – So What, What and Now What. (repeat that)

1Cor. 15.50-51, 58

Let’s look at the first point which answers the question “So What.” Why is the resurrection of Christ so important?

1. Why is the Resurrection of Christ so important? (15.50)

The very wording that Paul uses makes it very clear that this extremely important! “I declare to you brothers.” But I mean this! And then Paul reminds us of a problem.

A. Because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

I remind you that the church at Corinth suffered from a Platonic hangover. You may remember from the 2nd message in this series, that I told you about the influence of Gnosticism. That may sound like a high-falutin word but, think of it this way. What is an agnostic? An agnostic is one who does not know. The term is usually applied to a person who does not know whether or not there is a God. Literally the word means, “one who does not know.” What do you have when you get rid of the “a” in agnostic? You have a Gnostic. The “a” is a negative prefix. So, if you get rid of it, instead of having,

“one who does not know, you have one who does know. But, this word is not used of people who know that there is a God, but of people who think they know the mysteries or the secret truths to life. The “knowing or enlightened ones” tried to give the impression that they possessed secrets that common people did not have.

They often talked about the polarity of the spiritual realm and the physical realm. In other words, they portrayed reality as having a huge gap between earthy things and heavenly things. Part of their view certainly had a measure of truth to it. But here is the problem. They thought of the earth, and material things and the body as being common, vulgar, crude, base, and tainted. To them the spiritual realm was pure, lofty, holy, clean, and ethereal. Is part of that true? Yes! But because some of the people perceived themselves as the “knowing ones” (Gnostics) they thought that their superior and uncommon knowledge of the secret mysteries would bridge the gap for them between the earthy stuff and the heavenly stuff. That is why I call it a Platonic hangover, because this was the stuff that Plato had taught. The body is the prison house of the soul. At death, the soul sheds the prison house and is set free to soar. The heavenly realms are pure and therefore, have no place for physical bodies. Some of their thinking about the future was influenced more by Plato than by Christ, that is why Paul says what he says.

You are right, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Why? Because our flesh and blood carries with it the residual affects of our sinful nature. It is as if we have internal tastebuds in our heart that have a hankering for sin. You know what a hankerin’ is don’t you? A hankering is what happens at 10 pm when your body says, “Feed me ice cream.” Due to the fact that we were born with a sinful nature, our bodies carry with them the affects and the consequences of sin. We have perishable bodies. Our bodies are prone to breaking down. We only appear to get better until a certain age, then some go into a holding pattern and others go into a tailspin. Our bodies are not suitable for the kingdom of heaven because...

B. Because the perishable does not inherit the imperishable.

The Bible calls us perishable. We are perishable goods. Sort of makes you feel like a can of beans doesn’t it? You half expect to look on the bottom of your foot to see if you have an expiration date, or at least a disclaimer that says, “best if used by May, 2006.”

How can that which is perishable suddenly become imperishable? It can’t. That is why something has to change. If that which was perishable went to heaven, then that which is subject to decay would be introduced into heaven – and that cannot happen. That is why a change has to take place. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can affect the change that is necessary to make a body imperishable. That is why change is the affect and the goal of the gospel.

How does this change take place? When you are born into this world, you are born with an internal nature that is hard wired to sin. You are born with a hankering to do wrong. The presence of indwelling sin has affected everything about you and me. God has to punish sin in a manner that is consistent with his character. That is why our problem is

so incredibly serious. We cannot compensate an infinitely holy God for the spiritual debt that we have incurred. God knew that. God knew that only He could solve the problem that we had created. He sent His Son, the 2nd person in the Godhead, God the Son and the Son of God came to this earth and did the unthinkable. God, without changing His Godness, added humanity to His nature. The Son of God also became the Son of Man. He was and is the God-Man. He lived a perfectly righteous life, which enabled Him to die on the cross as the full and final payment for your sins. When you (if you) place your faith alone in Christ alone, Christ is credited with your sins, and you are credited with his righteousness. When you come to faith in Christ, (saved, justified) the Spirit of God unites you to Christ. To be credited with his righteousness means that you are treated by the Father as if you had lived a perfectly righteous life, and as if you had paid the full and complete penalty for your sin. This is your new position in Christ. This is the “already” part of your salvation that you are enjoying. The “not yet” part of your salvation is the part that you have not received yet, but because you are united with Christ by the Spirit, it is guaranteed. What is that part? That is the full and complete change that takes place in our persons – called glorification. That is when we are finally and completely saved from the presence of sin in our lives and the only hankering that we have is for God. That is when we our character is conformed perfectly to the image of Christ.

I love how Tod Bolsinger describes this. In his book entitled, “It takes a church to raise a Christian” he writes, “Like all parents, I pray that my daughter will have a long, happy life. I trust that I will someday precede her into eternity, and I dream of the day when the word will come to me that my daughter has also approached the pearly gates. I will rush to meet her, and as I approach I will see two resplendent figures standing together. I will squint to recognize her, because she will have been so transformed into the image of Jesus by the love and nurture of our community that I will be unable to tell them apart. Finally, I dream that I have to ask, “Please tell me, which one of you is my daughter, and which one of you is my Lord?”

Tod is describing what the goal of progressive sanctification is. He is describing what it means to be changed into the image of Jesus Christ. But that change of character is not the only change that takes place. In fact, in this passage, Paul is not focusing on the change that takes place internally as much as he is the full and complete change that will take place in our physical bodies – called the resurrection.

You will not receive the benefits of Christ’s resurrection unless you are united with Christ by means of faith. That is why Paul uses the word “brothers” (sisters is implied) in v. 50 That is why this truth is a big So What! Now the what.

2. **What is going to happen?** (15.51)

What happens at funeral for a believer? We go to a cemetery and there we have what is traditionally called a “committal” service. We are committing the body back to the ground (because it was from the dust of the earth that God formed the first human), and we are recognizing that the person’s soul has gone to meet God to be welcomed home. Now, right now, the mortal remains are in the ground, the soul is with God. To be absent

from the body is to be present with the Lord. (My guess is that God gives each soul a temporary body.) So, even though the soul is in heaven and the change of sanctification has been completed – called glorification, there is still some unfinished business – isn't there? What about the body? Right now, the saints in heaven have more of the “already” than we do, but there is still a little bit of the “not yet” that they are waiting on. That is what we call the resurrection. I personally believe that the resurrection of the bodies of the NT saints takes place at the rapture. But I don't have time to get into that aspect of it today. This point is clear. At the resurrection, there is another change that takes place and that is the change of the mortal to immortality and the perishable to imperishable. How do we know that? Because that is what happened to Jesus – that's why! He was credited with our sin and was treated as if he had sinned – that is why he died. His body became mortal because He took our sin upon Him. But, his same body was raised immortal. And when you receive Christ as your Savior, you receive the Holy Spirit who is God's deposit guaranteeing an inheritance that involves the conformity of your person to the image of Christ and the resurrection of your body into being a perfect body.

Do you see this now? When you die and you are with Christ – your person and character is made perfect. But your body is left behind waiting on the resurrection day. Resurrection Day is what the old spiritual called, “That great gettin'-up mornin'”

Now, look again at v.51. I love it how Paul says it here? It sounds to me like he is saying to those “knowing ones” who thought that they knew some of the secrets of life, “Hey you want to talk about mysteries, I'll give you a mystery. Here is something that only God could do. Here is what God has had in mind all along but has just now revealed.

A. **Not all of us will die** – We will not all sleep

Paul, what are you saying? He is saying that there will be believers on the earth on the resurrection day. And for them, the day of glorification and the day of resurrection is the same day. Do you know what that means? Some of you may never have to die. Now, if you die – that is gain! But we who are still alive when the Lord himself comes down from heaven with a loud command and a trumpet call, the dead in Christ will rise first (that is the bodies of the NT believers will be resurrected) and then we (those who are alive) will be caught up, snatched up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Resurrection Day is the day that the dead in Christ are reunited with their now glorified bodies. It is when our bodies are glorified. It is when we are reunited with the believers who died before us. It is when we are all together with the Lord.

B. **All will be changed** – We will all be changed

Most of the people in the history of the church, who are followers of Christ will die. But not all of us will die. Not all of us will die, but all of us will be changed. Since we do not know when that resurrection day will be, we live with hope, even in sorrow we live in hope. That is why Change is the Hope of the church. Do you see how the goal of the gospel and the hope of the church is rooted in the resurrection? That is the “what.”

3. Now What Do We Do About it? (15.58)

A. Stand Firm

Did something discourage you this week? Did you hear something that made you feel like quitting? Those things will come and go, but this is guaranteed. So, stand firm!

B. Leave it on the Floor – give yourself fully to the work of the Lord

What gets your passion? What owns you? What drives you? What controls you? Who or what do you serve? One of the tragedies of living with such a materialistic view is that we give our passions to such cheap and silly things. What has occupied your attention this week? The Lord? The cross? Resurrection day? Or perhaps it is dinner, a car, a truck, a title, a degree, your NCAA picks, a team, a trophy, a snowmobile, a golf score, a job, a girl, a guy, a basement?

I said basement because for the last 3 months I have been trying to finish off my basement. Mind you this would take most people a couple of weeks, but I like to test my patience by doing things backwards, upside down, or by purchasing the wrong things so that I can be known on a first name basis at the return counter of Lowes and Home Depot. It is not going to win any awards, it is clearly a do-it-yourself project that is done on a budget. But it has taken a lot of time. Which is fine, but I was standing in the basement on Tuesday night, looking at and appreciating the fact that I can now see the light at the end of tunnel, and yet realizing that my basement could flood and a great deal of work could be ruined. When you put time into something, you invest a part of yourself into that. Do you have a guarantee that you will receive a benefit from that? When you give yourself fully to the work of the Lord – you do.

C. Live with Hope

That is why we live with hope. When you work on your car – it may still break down or get stolen. When you work on your job, you may still not get from it what you want. When you work on your basement or your lawn, it may still get weeds or have problems. All of these things we give ourselves to because we are stewards of what God has given to us, but we do not live for lawns, jobs, cars or basements. Give yourself fully to the work of the Lord – it is not always easy – but your labor in the Lord will far outweigh your basement.