

The Wreckage and the Fire Pt 23

Death Lost

The Resurrection and the Enemy That Could Not Hold

Series: Fire in the Wreckage / 1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NKJV) - *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*

1 Corinthians 15:20 (NKJV) - *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

1 Corinthians 15:55, 57 (NKJV) - *O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Introduction: I want to ask you a question that the comfortable church rarely asks out loud. **What if it is not true?**

What if the tomb was not empty? What if the disciples were shattered by grief and their minds produced what

their hearts could not survive without? What if the resurrection is the most beautiful story Christianity ever told - and nothing more than that?

Paul does not flinch from that question. He is the most intellectually rigorous man in the New Testament and he runs straight into it. He follows the logic with ruthless precision.

- **If there is no resurrection - Christ did not rise.**
- **If Christ did not rise - your faith is empty air.**
- **If your faith is empty - you are still in your sins.**
- **If you are still in your sins - everyone who died believing has simply ceased to exist.**

"We are of all people most to be pitied." (v.19)

Paul does not soften that. He lets the full weight of a Christianity without the resurrection press down on the room until the air is gone.

Then he turns. Verse twenty. And in three words he detonates everything:

BUT NOW CHRIST!

- Those three words are the hinge. The axis.
- The moment when the entire weight of human history shifts.

- This is not a chapter about death. It is a chapter about what death could not do - and what God did about it on the third day.

1. The Declaration of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (NKJV) - *I declare to you the gospel... For I delivered to you first of all **that which I also received**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present.*

- Paul opens with the oldest creed in the entire Christian canon. Earlier than any Gospel. Written approximately 55 AD. He signals its ancient authority with a single technical word:
- **Paralambano** - to receive authoritative tradition - the formal term for transmitting established testimony unchanged from one generation to the next
- This is not Paul's theology. This is eyewitness testimony.

Four verbs - The entire gospel in four movements:

- *Christ DIED - for our sins, not by accident*
- *He was BURIED - the death was real, the stone was sealed, guards were posted*
- *He was RAISED - on the third day, exactly as Scripture said*
- *He APPEARED - to Peter, to the Twelve, to over five hundred at one time*

"He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive." (v.6)

Paul is writing 25 years after the resurrection. He is not appealing to fading memory or ancient legend. He is producing witnesses. He is saying: if you doubt this, the witnesses are still breathing. Go find them. Ask them. This is courtroom language - and Paul knows it.

The resurrection is not a private spiritual experience. It is a publicly verifiable historical event with living witnesses Paul was willing to name by category and number.

Then the testimony turns personal:

- **ektroma** - untimely born, a miscarriage - Paul's own word for himself; born out of season, outside the normal order of apostolic calling
- "Last of all he appeared also to me." (v.8)
- Paul was not in the upper room. He did not walk with Jesus.
- He was on his way to arrest and imprison more believers when the risen Christ apprehended him on the Damascus road.

The resurrection did not just change history. It changed history's most violent opponent.

The most powerful evidence for the resurrection is not an empty tomb. It is a transformed enemy who could not explain himself any other way.

THIS IS NOT THEOLOGY. THIS IS TESTIMONY. AND TESTIMONY THAT COST EVERYTHING IS WORTH MORE THAN DOCTRINE THAT COSTS NOTHING.

N.T. Wright - The Resurrection of the Son of God, 2003

The early Christians did not believe in the resurrection because it explained something they could otherwise not explain. They believed in it because it happened. The empty tomb and the appearances are not theological

constructs. They are the data. Everything else is the church trying to understand what it means.

Tell your neighbor: *"This is not a story I inherited. This is a testimony I stand in. He is risen -- and I am the evidence."*

2. The Demonstration of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 (NKJV) - *But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive...*

The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

- Some in Corinth had absorbed Greek philosophy -- the body is a prison, the spirit alone matters, physical resurrection is beneath spiritual dignity.
- Paul does not debate them. He demonstrates the implications of their position and lets the conclusion undo them.

Then comes the pivot. "But now Christ is risen." Present tense. Ongoing reality. Not a past event sealed

in history -- a living fact with present consequences for every person in the room.

aparche - firstfruits - in Jewish agricultural law, the first portion of the harvest offered to God as a legal pledge that the full harvest is coming

- Christ is not just the first person to rise from the dead
- Christ is the firstfruits - **which means His resurrection is the legal guarantee of yours. In Jewish law, to offer the firstfruits was to consecrate the entire harvest**

His resurrection does not inspire yours - It secures it. He did not rise to show you it was possible. He rose to guarantee that you will.

Then Paul makes the declaration that should shake every funeral, comfort every grave, and silence every fear about what comes after.

katargeo - to render inoperative, to abolish completely

"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." (v.26)

- Not suppressed.
- Not managed.
- Not tolerated.
- Not survived.

- Abolished.

Death is an enemy with an abolition date already written in the decree of heaven.

Every funeral you have ever attended. Every grave you have ever stood over. Every name you carry that grief will not let go of. Paul says every single one of those represents the territory of a defeated enemy who has not yet received notice that the war is already over.

DEATH IS LOSING A BATTLE IT HAS ALREADY LOST. THE VERDICT WAS RENDERED ON THE THIRD MORNING. THE EXECUTION OF THAT VERDICT IS STILL COMING. BUT THE OUTCOME - THE OUTCOME IS NOT IN QUESTION.

Athanasius -- On the Incarnation, c. 318 A.D.

He became what we are so that we might become what He is. The resurrection is not a reversal of the incarnation - it is the completion of it. God entered human death so that human death could be entered by God and transformed from the inside into the portal through which resurrection comes.

PREACH THIS: *"Death lost. My grief is real and my loss is real - but death does not have the final word over anyone I have placed in God's hands."*

3. The Details of the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 51-57 (NKJV) - *But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"... What you sow is not made alive unless it dies... The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye... O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*

The Corinthians asked the practical question: how exactly does this work? Paul does not give them a diagram. He takes them to a garden.

- A seed buried in the ground looks nothing like what comes out of it
- The seed is not the plant -- it is the vehicle by which the plant enters the earth
- What goes in is raw material. What emerges is the full glory of what it was always meant to be.

The burial is not the end of the body. It is the planting of it.

Four contrasts -- what goes into the ground versus what God raises out of it:

- *Perishable goes in -- imperishable comes out*
- *Dishonored goes in -- glory comes out*
- *Weakness goes in -- power comes out*
- *Natural body goes in -- spiritual body comes out*

PREACH THIS: What death buries is a seed. What God raises is a harvest.

Then Paul turns to the living. He calls it a mystery.

- ***alasso*** - to change, to transform, to exchange for something entirely different
- ***atomos*** - indivisible - the smallest measurable unit; the origin of our word atom; a unit of time too brief to divide

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet"

- The transformation will be instantaneous - not gradual, not earned, not incremental
- What it took the universe billions of years to produce in natural terms - God will accomplish in less time than it takes to blink

Then Paul does what no grief counselor would prescribe. He does not comfort death. He taunts it.

- "O Death, where is your sting?" Paul is quoting Hosea 13:14.
- He is not weeping over death. He is mocking it.
- He is standing over a defeated enemy and laughing.
- "The sting of death is sin." (v.56) - sin gave death its power over us
- "The strength of sin is the law." (v.56) - the law exposed the debt sin accumulated
- "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory." (v.57) - past tense. Already done.

THE STING OF DEATH went into Jesus on the cross - and it did not come back out.

THE STING IS GONE. THE VICTORY IS WON. DEATH HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF EVERYTHING IT USED TO USE AGAINST YOU. WHAT IS LEFT IS AN ENEMY WITH NO WEAPON, STANDING OVER A TOMB THAT IS ALREADY EMPTY.

Jonathan Edwards -- History of Redemption, 1739 - *The resurrection of Christ is the foundation stone of the entire*

building of redemption. Remove it and everything collapses. It is the event upon which every other doctrine either stands or falls. The Christian life is nothing more and nothing less than living in the light of what happened on the third day.

PREACH IT: *"Death thought it had the last word. It was wrong. And I am standing on the proof."*

Conclusion:

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NKJV) - *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

Since He walked out of that tomb for you, will you walk through this life for Him?