

**1 Corinthians 15:20-58**  
**Be Steadfast, Immovable**

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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Last week we took a look at the Core of the Gospel – the apostle Paul boiled it all down to this: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He said if we get that wrong, if that didn't happen, then nothing else matters – the resurrection is that important.

But we have a lot of questions about it too, like who, when, and how will the resurrection occur. Well this morning, as we finish up Chapter 15 we'll get into some of the answers.

Let's start reading in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 16 in order to get a sense of what he said last week and that should help us bridge into where things are going today. Paul is talking here about the consequences of being wrong about the resurrection of Christ and what that would mean for all of us:

16 For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21 For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead.

Let's talk for a minute about this term "firstfruits." What does it mean? Well, it refers to the literal first fruits that grew each year in the crops or on the trees. Remember throughout all history, and even today in much of the world, you only get to eat certain fruits and vegetables when they're in season, you can't just run over to grocery store and find everything you want anytime you want. No, if you like blueberries you have to wait a whole year for the next crop to grow in. So when the first fruits appear, you're excited because the firstfruits are a promise that more is coming.

In a similar vein, right now even though it's not yet Thanksgiving we are seeing the first fruits of Christmas in the stores everywhere you go. There are decorations, toys, and gift cards, all encouraging us to remember what is to come. So when you go to the store this week and you see all this stuff for Christmas, you can smile and say "first fruits," and you'll remember that Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection, He was the first to raise permanently from the dead and that means that all of us who trust in Him will rise as well.

Paul goes on to explain this even more.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

OK, so we understand the order, but why the wait? Jesus rose from the dead a long time ago, how long between the first fruits and the rest of the crop? When is Christ's coming?

Honestly, we don't really know – the Bible doesn't tell us, but it does tell us something else quite plainly, and that is what's coming next:

24 Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. 27 For "*He has put all things under His feet.*" But when He says "all things are put under *Him*," *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Right now, as we speak, Jesus is continuing this work of putting all things under His feet. We learn in Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, that sin started with a rebellion against God. He told Adam and Eve they could do anything except eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But they chose to rebel. And now, all of human history has been characterized as one long rebellion against the God who made us while He simultaneously calls out to us to come back to Him.

The world started with an order – God was in charge and everything was under Him. But He didn't want us to love Him like robots, just doing what we were pre-programmed to do, so He made it possible for us to choose against Him. Adam and Eve did that, people throughout history have done that, and you and I do that daily.

So, how should God respond? How should any parent respond to a rebellious child? They should discipline that child, right? And that is what God will do. One day, everyone who has and is persistently rebelling against God will receive the discipline they deserve. Right after that first sin, God gave the first promise that He would deal with things. He told Adam and Eve that He would send someone to rescue mankind and that Satan would bite His heel but He would crush Satan's head. Satan, who had led the rebellion against God, and everyone who persisted in that rebellion would eventually be put back under His feet.

Did you ever get in trouble with your parents when you were younger and you had to wait until you got home and then you knew the discipline was coming? Or you did something at school and you knew as soon as your parents found out you were busted? It's a pretty awful feeling, isn't it? While you waited did you ever get a sense of true regret and remorse? Well, that same thing happens with some people on the spiritual level – they recognize their sin. They know they've blown it. They realize that they have rebelled against and offended a holy God. So what do you do? You're guilty. You did whatever you're in trouble for. You deserve the punishment.

Well, that's where the good news of the gospel comes in. God knows that you can't bear the discipline that is coming your way. And so, even though you are guilty, in fact, because you are guilty, He decided to take things into His own hands, and He sent Jesus to offer Himself up as a sacrifice in our place. When Jesus went to the cross that wasn't a mistake, it wasn't an injustice; He wasn't a martyr. It was intentional; it was for us. There was some very heavy work that had to be done and He did it *in our name*. There, on the cross, Jesus stood in our place and took the discipline that we deserve.

And that gives us a very unique chance to place ourselves back under His feet voluntarily.

In many parts of the world the bottom of the foot is considered unclean and offensive. You may remember when the statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled to the ground in Firdos Square after the initial invasion in 2003 and people went up to it and began hitting it with their shoes. They were expressing their contempt for that man.

And in a somewhat similar fashion, many Somalis were deeply offended when our American forces arrived there in the early 1990s. You see, we had guys flying around in helicopters and they sat in the open doors dangling their feet outside - the soldiers were just trying to stay cool in desert heat, but when the Somalis on the ground looked up, they saw the bottom of the American's feet pointing down at them and were deeply offended.

Why is it so offensive to be under someone else's foot? The answer is because when someone else has their foot on you it's a position of conquest. That's why the Scripture talks here of Jesus *putting* all things under His feet. Remember, we have rebelled against God and He's not going to just let that go unpunished. He will re-exert His authority for all of eternity. We are ALL going to be under His feet.

The question is, will it be voluntary, or involuntary? God is calling us to the cross where we can find forgiveness for our rebellion. We can hear His voice and come place ourselves under His nail pierced, blood stained feet, and we can, in worship, kiss His feet, understanding that this is the love our God has shown to us; understanding that being under these feet is not an insult, it's safety, it's security, it's protection from my own tendencies and the pain of the world around me.

Or, we can resist that call and persist in our rebellion - "I know what God has said, I know what I ought to do, but I'm not going to, I don't want to." Well, if that's your position, you're still going to be under His foot, but you're going to be under His conquering foot and the experience will feel a little different than being under His crucified feet and that feeling is going to last for a very long time...say, forever.

Paul goes on to respond to some objections about resurrection.

29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

And you and I go, "Yeah. Why are they baptized for the dead?"

Well, you might be comforted to know that a lot of other really smart people ask the same question. And the truth is, we don't know. We don't know what they're talking about. It's possible people in Corinth were baptizing one another in the name of people who had already died – let's say Jimmy died without being baptized, and you want to make sure that doesn't give him any problems in the afterlife, so you go ahead and ask to be baptized in Jimmy's name because you know he would have done it himself if he were still alive. In light of all the other things that the Corinthian's were doing wrong this is not outside the realm of the possibility. Mormons actually do this today – it's one reason why they're so into genealogy – they want to make sure everyone is baptized.

Or since baptism is supposed to be done in Jesus name, this passage could be saying “why are you baptized in Jesus' name if He hasn't risen, if He's still dead?” There are several hypotheses out there, and we're just not sure which one is right. But, we also don't see this practice mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. And Paul seems to speak of it as an outsider. He asks “what will *they* do?” Not, “what will *we* do?” Whatever was happening, the bottom line was that it was pointless if there was no resurrection.

But there is. And because there is, Paul is willing to suffer.

*30 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? 31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*

Paul has suffered a long list of things for the sake of the Gospel. He has suffered personally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, all for the sake of others having the opportunity to hear the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and if you asked him, he'd tell you it was absolutely worth it. But he's also pointing out once again that all of that suffering is worthless if there is no resurrection.

*32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”*

You've got to stare that in the face. You've got to really think about what Paul's saying here. If there's nothing after this life, then why don't you just do whatever you want and make the most of it? *“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”* If it feels good, do it. As Elsa would say, “Let it go!” There's no need to “be the good girl you always have to be.” Think for yourself, do what's right for you. You're all that matters.

Now, that feels kind of liberating at first, to shake off all the chains that bind you, but there's a dark side to that as well – since life is full of disappointment and pain for most people, why keep going at all? If you're just a random collection of atoms and energy that's floating through space on a completely insignificant speck in a pointless galaxy, why keep going at all? Why not just punch out early and be done? What value do you add to the process? If there's no resurrection because there's nothing after this, *“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!”* But if life hurts, if there's nothing to eat or drink, why not just die today? Folks, that's intellectually honest, and you've got to consider it.

But Paul says no, there is something after this, and that's why he's so willing to suffer. And not just to suffer, but also to be sanctified – that's a fancy theological term for being set aside for holy purposes. It's why Paul doesn't "Let it go!" And it's why he encourages the Christians in Corinth:

33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." 34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.

We must keep reminding ourselves: as shocking though it may be, this book was written to a church, to a group of believers like you and me. But the believers in Corinth were becoming increasingly self-centered and they were less and less willing to suffer for the gospel, much less to even share the gospel – they were going off into their own ways in life and being corrupted, being drawn away from holiness and while they chased after their own pleasures people outside the church with no knowledge of God are dying every day without salvation. That should be shameful to the church in Corinth and shameful to our church today. Are there people around us that have no knowledge of God and yet we're too busy, or too timid, or too backslidden to tell them? Brothers and sisters, we must awake to righteousness!

These are matters of eternity, and yet back in Corinth people were apparently mocking such basic Christian doctrines.

35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"  
36 Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. 37 And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other *grain*. 38 But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. 39 All flesh *is* not the same flesh, but *there is one kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, *and* another of birds.  
40 *There are* also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. 41 *There is* one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for *one* star differs from *another* star in glory.  
42 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, "*The first man Adam became a living being.*" The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit.

Paul is making the point that the body that we will have for eternity will not be exactly the same body that we have today. We're not sure exactly how different our eternal body will be, but we know it will be something different, something better.

One of the things that I love about living on the East Coast is that we have four distinct seasons. And that means that at times like this, during the fall, we plant bulbs that will give us flowers in the spring. Have you seen one? Do you know what bulbs look like? At this time of year, when you buy them, they don't often look like much. They're just this little brown clump that's all dried out, often has some dirt on it and some withered roots. There's not much that's attractive about them.

And, you can't tell exactly what's going to come out of the bulb by looking at it. You have to sow it in the ground and wait. But eventually what was sewn in dishonor in October or November, begins to rise up out of the ground around January or February.

You see these little bits of green come poking up through the earth and you get a sense of expectation for the beauty that is on it's way and the whole change of season that will be coming soon. So as the days and weeks go by eventually that little brown bulb produces a shockingly colorful and beautiful flower. It was sown in weakness, but it was raised in power. You couldn't believe that this flower came out of that bulb.

That's like you and me. Right now we're a dirty little dried up clump. But one day, after they put our bodies in the ground, we will be raised as something with extraordinary beauty, strength, and design. There will be some sort of a relationship between what is and what will be, but we just don't know exactly what our forever bodies will look like.

And now Paul goes on to describe more of the timeline of things again.

46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.  
47 The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. 48 As *was* the man of dust, so also *are* those *who are made* of dust; and as *is* the heavenly Man, so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

We can trust that what has happened to Jesus will happen to us. I can trust that what happens to one bulb will happen to the other.

OK – but here's a technicality - what about those people who haven't died by the time Jesus returns again? What about the bulbs that haven't been planted? How are they going to receive this resurrection to a spiritual body?

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

Think of the caterpillar that spins itself a cocoon and doesn't die, but undergoes a metamorphosis and turns into a butterfly. So too, in someway we don't fully understand,



those who are alive at Christ's return will be instantly transformed from a physical to a spiritual body. Their corruptible will put on incorruptible; their mortal will be swallowed up by the immortal. And as with the bulb, what comes next will be far greater than what it is.

And now Paul goes on to rejoice in what all this means.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: *"Death is swallowed up in victory."*

55 *"O Death, where is your sting?  
O Hades, where is your victory?"*

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Death was once the victor - it claimed all men. But now the resurrection of Christ is passed on to all those who are righteous in His name and death is no longer king, it is simply a gate we pass through on the way to glory.

58 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

So, here's the big take away: we ought to find hope in the resurrection. The knowledge that there is something to come should keep us working today, and as we work we should be steadfast, immovable, because of the assurance we have that nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But along the way, we must "[Know] that your labor is not in vain." That's interesting, because it wouldn't be said if it didn't need to be. There are times when we are tempted to feel that our labor is in vain.

All of us feel difficulty and frustration at one time or another while we walk on this earth. The question is: does that crushing, that bruising, that friction, come from resisting Christ, or from being conformed to Christ?

Does the pain I feel come from Christ pressing His conquering heel on my head, or does it come from the nails piercing me, as I take up my cross each day?

Either way, Christ will win. He will put all things under His feet, including you, including me, and then we will all be resurrected – to either eternal life or eternal suffering. Life is either about you, or about God. But not only that, today is either about you or about God. This decision you face is either about you or about God. This relationship is either about you or about God? What's it going to be? Who is going to be exalted in your life today? These are the questions we have to ask. Let's pray.