THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

(``For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.'')

1 Corinthians 15:12-34 Key Verse: 15:22

When Apostle Paul was writing this letter, the Corinthian church had various problems and the church members had questions about what was right or wrong in related issues. Many people were confused with different answers and opinions. Through this letter Apostle Paul gave clear answers and directions with warnings and call to repentance.

This evening we will consider one of the questions the Corinthian church had. The question is this: ``Is there going to be resurrection of the dead?'' Some first-comers to the church thought that there is no resurrection whatsoever. Some church leaders also said that there is no resurrection of the dead, but their claim was much more subtle. They believed that the souls of believers go to heaven, but they denied resurrection of the body. They claimed that a soul exists forever, a body goes back to dust, and no resurrection. What do you think about this question? Do you have a clear answer? Let us listen to Apostle Paul's answer to this question.

Part I: If there is no resurrection of the dead

Look at verse 12. ``But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?'' Corinthian Christians believed that Jesus Christ died for their sins and was raised from the dead. Still, some of them claimed that there is no resurrection of the dead. Apostle Paul points out that their claim is a huge contradiction. He is saying, ``How can you make such a claim? That doesn't make sense at all.''

For the sake of argument, Apostle Paul assumes that their claim is true, and shows what kind of absurd conclusions they have to make. Look at verse 13. ``If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.'' If their claim is true, then the first consequence is that Jesus has not been raised either. Clearly, Jesus died and was among the dead. By claiming that there is no resurrection of the dead, they were denying Jesus's resurrection as well. If Jesus's soul went back to heaven and if that was enough, there was no need for God to raise Jesus's body from the dead. Apostle Paul repeats this point two more times in verses 15 and 16. ``God did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.''

Now, if it is really true that Christ was not raised from the dead, what immediate consequences do we have? Look at verse 14. ``And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.'' If Christ has not been raised, a direct consequence is that our preaching and faith are useless. We become a Christian through the faith that Jesus Christ saves us from our sin and death. Jesus died on the cross in our places to pay the cost of our sins on behalf of us, so we also died on the cross with him. When Jesus was raised from the dead, we also came back to life with him and began a new life as children of God. Because our sins are all washed away with this new life, God accepts us into his kingdom and gives us eternal glory. Romans 6:4 says, ``We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.'' According to this truth, baptism has two steps. A person goes into water to die with Christ and comes out of water to live with Christ. If Christ has not been raised, this truth collapses and we would feel as if we are half saved or as if we are drowned in the baptism water without receiving new life. Paul concludes in verse 17. ``And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.''

Now, if we are still in our sins, we cannot enter the kingdom of God and there will be no eternal life for us and we will be lost forever with death. Look at verse 18. ``Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.'' Since we are raised with Christ into new life, we enter the kingdom of God as children of God and will live there forever and ever. Even if someone in Christ leaves this world earlier, we have hope to see the person again in the kingdom of God. As long as we are in Christ, no one is lost. However, if we did not receive new life through Jesus's resurrection, we will never be able to enter the kingdom of God and there is no hope for us to see each other again after we die. We will be all lost.

Moreover, if Christ has not been raised, we become liars. Look at verse 15. ``More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.'' We Christians spread good news to the world, and the good news is that Jesus died for our sins and God raised him from the dead. If Christ was not raised, we become liars and we are spreading fake news in the name of God. That would be a serious sin against God. Our message of salvation becomes a lie and we should stop spreading deceptive messages based on falsehood.

Look at verse 19. ``If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.'' Our hope is in the kingdom of God, where we will enjoy eternal life with all our loved ones in Christ. That is why we are celebrating Jesus's resurrection today. If Jesus was not raised from the dead and if our hope is actually based on falsehood, we are most stupid people in the world and we are indeed to be pitied most.

Part II: All will be made alive

Now Apostle Paul comes back to the reality of Jesus's resurrection and explains why there should be resurrection of the dead. Look at verse 20a. ``But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...'' Yes, we all believe that Christ has been raised from the dead. Then, how does this fact make resurrection of the dead inevitable? First, it is because Jesus is the representative of all. Look at verse 21. ``For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.'' When the first man Adam sinned against God, death came into the world and all the descendants of Adam have died in their sins. Likewise, Jesus Christ came as a man representing all human beings. Now that he was raised from the dead, anyone in Christ is raised with him into new existence without sin and death. Verse 22 declares this glorious fact so succinctly. ``For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.''

Second, Jesus's resurrection makes the resurrection of the dead necessary because he will come again to gather his people. Look at verse 23. ``But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.'' Jesus promised that he will come again and call his people from all corners of the world. He said, ``Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out...'' (John 5:28,29a) Jesus also said, ``At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.'' (Mark 13:26,27) God calls us to be his children so that we may live with him forever. Can any parent lose any of his or her children and forget about it? No, that is not thinkable. My wife lost our son, Joe, for 10 minutes when he was 3 years old, and felt as if the whole world collapsed. Even more, our heavenly Father cannot lose any of his children. When God the Son comes again, every single believer will be raised to life so that no one may be lost.

Third, the dead will be raised to life because death should be destroyed. Look at verses 24-26. ``Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.'' When the end comes and everything is restored to God's order, God the Son will destroy anything that is against God and submit a perfect world to God the Father as the final outcome. In such a perfect world, death has no place. If people are weeping because their loved ones are still captured by death, it is not a perfect world where God rules as God. In God's kingdom, there should not be even a hint of death. Therefore, the dead will be raised to life when God the Son destroys death.

Look at verse 28. ``When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.'' In the end, God will become all in all. There will be no place where God does not fully exist and completely rule, and there will be no place for sin and death. Everywhere, God will be all in all with his power and glory. At that time, all God's children should be raised to life so that death may be completely destroyed, and we will praise God for ever and ever. ``Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'' (Revelation 7:12)

When I was five or six years old---I don't remember exactly---I came to realize for the first time that everyone dies. After that, every night in the bed, I was worrying and thinking about death. I asked, ``What happens after death?'' There was no answer and I got really scared. One night, all of sudden---I don't know how---it occurred to me that people become stars after they die. It was an ah-ha moment for me. I stopped worrying about death and could sleep well. As I become older than 50, I clearly feel that my life is in the middle of afternoon. I am not physically strong or mentally sharp as I was in my twenties or thirties. I see that night is approaching in my life, and I become sad from time to time. Consciously or unconsciously, I was worrying about getting old and facing death. I think that there is nothing wrong about it. My worries and sorrows are as natural as the worries and fears I had as a five-year-old boy. I still have to ask, ``What happens after death?'' And I have an answer, not based on imagination but based on God's promise that there is resurrection of the dead. God the Son will surely come again to gather God's children, and my true hope is that I will be raised to life and enter God's kingdom. I pray that God may help me keep this hope to the end.

Part III. Come back to your senses

In the previous part, Apostle Paul pointed out that those who claim that there is no resurrection don't know God's ultimate plan or understand God's absolute power which has been revealed through Jesus's resurrection. Now he assumes again that their claim is true, and shows contradictory consequences in personal life. Look at verse 29. ``Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?'' After 2000 years, we don't know about this special practice of baptism at the Corinthian church. Whatever it might have been, it was a sheer contradiction against their claim that there is no resurrection, and they were proving themselves that they were in error.

Moreover, if there is no resurrection, Apostle Paul's life would be insane. Look at verses 30 and 31a. ``And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day.'' After receiving his mission for the Gentiles, Apostle Paul has been preaching the gospel throughout the Gentile world. As we know well, Paul not only worked very hard day and night but also faced constant life-threatening oppositions from the Jews and the Gentiles alike. He confessed, ``I die every day.'' It was not a joke. He meant it as surely as he boasted about the Corinthian church in Christ Jesus. Look at verse 32a. ``If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?'' In Ephesus, the opposition was so brutal and life-threatening that Paul describes it as fighting wild beasts such as lions or tigers in an arena. Why did he live such a difficult life facing death every day? Was he really insane?

In his letters to many different churches, Apostle Paul deals with various issues and problems of the churches. But there is a common theme throughout his letters. That is his hope for resurrection. In Romans 8:18, Paul says, ``I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.'' In 2 Corinthians 4:17, he also says, ``For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.'' It seems that Apostle Paul was always calculating and comparing. He loved math. After all calculations, his conclusion was always that resurrection hope is infinitely better than momentary troubles. He could see his reward so vividly that he could die every day. When his departure from this world was near, he wrote, ``I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day---and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.'' (2 Timothy 4:7,8) Apostle Paul was not insane. He was truly wise and smart, and was willing to face death every day because he believed that there is resurrection.

Look at verses 32b and 33. ``If the dead are not raised, `Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' Do not be misled: `Bad company corrupts good character.'\,'' In the Corinthian church, there were various problems such as faction, sexual immorality, and the like. Worst of all, some people claimed that there is no resurrection of the dead. The influence of this no-resurrection group made the members of the church earth-bound, narrow-minded, nihilistic and pleasure-seeking. When we think about life without resurrection, it actually makes a good sense to say, ``Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'' If one has some doubts about resurrection, pleasure in this life seems more attractive than doubtful rewards in the next life. Paul rebukes them sternly. ``Do not be misled. Bad company corrupts good character.'' When they allowed doubts about resurrection to circulate in the church, their hope for the kingdom of God diminished, and all kinds of problems erupted in the church.

Look at verse 34. ``Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God---I say this to your shame.'' Apostle Paul tells them to come back to their senses. They were drunken and sleeping because of the intoxication of no-resurrection claim. They need to get awake and see clearly future resurrection of the dead and put their hope in the kingdom of God. Those who have been claiming that there is no resurrection should be ashamed of their falsehood. They simply didn't know about God's plan, power and glory.

In conclusion, there is resurrection of the dead. It is inevitable and necessary for the grand finale when God becomes all in all. Let us look forward to this and live a life of faith with resurrection hope.