

“FROM THE GRAVE OF THE INNOCENT ADAM”

1 Cor 15:17-24

4/1/18

**Introduction:**

A. Pastor Mike Woodruff, over at Christ Church, passed along a *New York Times* column from last year where **Nicholas Kristof** interviewed **Pastor Timothy Keller**. Kristoff began by saying, “*Tim, I deeply admire Jesus and his message, but am also skeptical of themes that have been integral to Christianity — the virgin birth, the Resurrection, the miracles and so on.*” They had a respectful exchange over these issues.

Eventually, they got to the Resurrection. Keller said, “*The Christian Church is pretty much inexplicable if we don’t believe in a physical resurrection.*”

And Kristof replied, “*So where does that leave people like me? Am I a Christian? A Jesus follower? A secular Christian? Can I be a Christian while doubting the Resurrection?*”

To which Keller replied, “*I wouldn’t draw any conclusion about an individual without talking to him or her at length. But, in general, if you don’t accept the Resurrection or other foundational beliefs as defined by the Apostles’ Creed, I’d say you are on the outside of the boundary.*”

B. **Turn to 1 Cor. 15, (p.857) the Bible’s greatest chapter on resurrection.** In the first half of this chapter Paul, who himself had seen the risen Christ, as had hundreds of other witnesses, basically says,

**I. IF YOU TAKE AWAY THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST FROM CHRISTIANS YOU TAKE ALL WE HAVE (15:17-19)**

- A. **V.17**, “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile,*” deceptive at worst and powerless at best. It is a spiritual Ponzi scheme, the faith of one sucker feeding the faith of the next. In the end, there are no assets. **If Christ has not been raised.**
- B. What a chilling statement going on in **v.17**: “*You are still in your sins.*” Even if Jesus died on the cross for our sins, even if he is the Son of God sent as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, if Jesus wasn’t raised by God from the dead, then we are “still in our sins” because the debt he came to pay is still being paid. God’s justice is not yet satisfied. And we’re still as good as dead. Forget the John 3:16. Believing is not enough, and all the testimonies you’ve heard were wishful thinking. Jesus was wrong in his last words: it was *not* finished, and salvation will never be finished, for God has nothing else up his sleeve. **If Christ has not been raised.**
- C. What’s more, as v.18 says, “Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.” Our Christian friends did not awaken from death on the other side to breathe celestial air. They did not awaken to reunions and the face of Christ. They did not awaken to hear, “*well done, good and faithful servant,*” for there was no Master alive to greet them. **If Christ has not been raised.**
- D. And now, in this life, we are fooling ourselves, as v.19 says, “we are of all people most to be pitied.” Why pray and persevere, why trust or suffer, if we have no **union** with Christ. We are not the **body** of Christ, for Christ is dead, so we might as well all go our separate ways. We are not God’s **temple** for the barrier remains between the Holy God and sinners. We pray in vain. We are not the Bride of Christ but his Widow. **If Christ has not been raised.**

V.20: ***“But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead!”*** Your faith grips everlasting life. Sins are gone and the slate wiped clean. Those who have fallen asleep in Christ are at this moment with him. And we are of all people most blessed.

## **II. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS THE DOOR TO ALL GOD HAS PLANNED FOR US (15:20-23; 42-54)**

A. Listen to vv.20-22.... When Adam sinned it was like a spiritually mutant death gene was introduced into his line, and every son or daughter of Adam since then has been infected with sinfulness that doomed us to death and hell.

Jesus, as the son of Mary, was **fully human** but never infected with Adam’s sinfulness nor ever guilty of a single sin in his life. Jesus was **fully God** so that his value as a sacrifice was more than sufficient for all who would trust him. Jesus did not raise himself from the grave. God the Father raised him, evidence that he had accepted Jesus’ sacrifice. The work of salvation was finished.

B. **V.20** says that Christ was *“the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* On the day after the Passover, Jews celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits when they’d harvest one sheaf of the spring grain that was just ripening and wave it before the Lord as a Thanksgiving Offering. Then 50 days later, when the complete harvest was brought in, they would celebrate the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost. So *it appears that Christ rose from the dead at almost exactly the same time as when the sheaf of the firstfruits was being offered in the temple on the day after the Sabbath following the Passover. As our firstfruits, the risen Jesus is the guarantee of a harvest of life to come.* [Tidball, *The Message of the Resurrection*, pp.130-131]

- C. Later in this chapter, Paul returns to this language of grain:  
*“When you sow, you don’t plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or something else.”* Let’s say, tulip bulbs. Then in **vv.42-45** he gives us a glimpse of the kinds of bodies we will have: *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 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. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.”* **The first Adam, you might say, was the *breath-ee***, someone who breathed life *from* God. But our sin has given us all a kind of deadly spiritual emphysema that leaves us gasping for life. **The second Adam, the innocent Adam, Jesus Christ, once he rose from the grave, was a *breath-er***—he was the *“life-giving Spirit”*—the life-giving Breath of God for all who trust in him. In fact, when Jesus first met his disciples after his resurrection, John tells that he *“breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”*
- The Day of Jesus’ Resurrection became a kind of eighth day of creation, for God raised from the dust of death a new Adam, the first person in a new race of humanity. God didn’t breathe into him the breath of life, as he had with the first Adam. Jesus himself was God’s life-giving Spirit. **And this Adam’s Eve, the woman brought to him by God, is us, the church, the Bride of Christ**—Christians, immune to the powers of sin and death because we are taken from his resurrected body; a Bride imperishable and immortal.
- D. This imagery of firstfruits brings to mind a vast field or garden, both of those asleep in Christ and those still alive,

all waiting for harvest. Vv.51-54, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”

- E. These mortal bodies must be changed because they couldn’t function in God’s eternal kingdom. They can’t breathe there. They can’t move there. They can’t *last* there. The **beauty** there is too bright for these eyes, the **fragrances** too intoxicating for these noses, the **feasts** too sumptuous for these taste buds, the **hymns** too musical for these voices, the **sounds** too delicate and thundering for these ears, the **leaves and stones, friends and Savior**, all too holy to touch with these hands. The **love** we will have for our brothers and sisters, and for our great Lord and Savior, will be too great for these hearts to bear. Our flesh and blood cannot *inherit* God’s kingdom; we must—and *will*—have new and better bodies.
- F. So, praise God, “we shall all be changed,” as we must. We shall find ourselves in bodies that cannot deteriorate. Bodies and minds that are always fresh and strong. But more, for we will not have anything in us at all of death. In us now, death is not just evident in our wrinkles and dimming eyes or aching bones. Death is evident in our carelessness about what is right, in our wishy-washy consciences, in our love of earthly things, in our weariness of the holy and beautiful. All that death set deep in our blood and bones will be changed to a holy, Christlike

immortality—an eternal life that seeps deep into our consciences and minds, our bodies, wills and spirits. The very breath of God going to the core of who we are.

- G. The great Puritan, **Thomas Brooks**, wrote of Christians, *“Remember this—death does that in a moment, which no graces, no duties, nor any ordinances could do for a man all his lifetime! Death frees a [person] from those diseases, corruptions, temptations, ... that no duties, nor graces, nor ordinances could do... Every prayer then [when we die] shall have its answer; all hungering and thirsting shall be filled and satisfied; every sigh, groan, and tear that has fallen from the saints’ eyes shall then be recompensed. That is not death but life, which joins the dying man to Christ!”*

***“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”***

Illus.: There is a story I often think of at Easter and that I’ve told you before. On the afternoon of May 2, 1990, I heard holy things. I visited a father and husband from our church in Pennsylvania whose name was Larry Hildreth. He was just in his 30s and he was near death from cancer. I had gone to serve him Communion because he was too weak to come to church. He was a deeply thoughtful man, and that day as he spoke, slowly and deliberately, I realized I was hearing extraordinary things, and started scribbling them down on the margins of a bulletin in my Bible.

*“Even if I have a short time to live,”* Larry said, *“he’s given me a great hope. Sometimes life throws us some tremendous curves but death has lost its sting.”*

I wish I had time to read to you the two pages of insights I got from Larry that day about suffering, about his struggle for faith, and his experience of God’s strength. *“At the point in my life when I’m the weakest,”* he said, *“I’m the strongest I’ve ever been.”*

We started talking about his funeral, which as it turned out would be exactly one month later. He told me he wanted lots of singing; and I remember how in church, when he was healthy, Larry would put his head back and sing with such unabashed gusto. I asked him what he wanted his funeral to be like. He said, *“The only thing I want people to think on that day is joy; is... [and he raised his hands deliberately in a slow, triumphant clap]. When I pass into his kingdom I envision this spectacular light, this spectacular feeling of being able to let go. I’ve felt a lot of grief for my children, my wife, my family, myself, but I’ve had to get over that. But once you get past that, you know that God is there—that spirit of joyfulness.*

*“It’s going to be a happy day for me. No grief for me. God chose **me** this time!”*

**“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**