

Sermons on 1 Corinthians: A Burning Fire (1 Cor 15:29- 34)

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I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Many people have a void in life because they lack any purpose.
 - 1. H. G. Wells, said at the age of 61: “I have no peace. All life is at the end of the tether.”
 - 2. The literary genius Thoreau said, “Most men live lives of quiet desperation.”
 - 3. Ralph Barton, one of the top cartoonists of the nations, left this note pinned to his pillow before committing suicide: “I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day.”
- B. Sadly, many Christians feel the same way—they are simply going through life without any purpose or direction.
 - 1. Perhaps that is why Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life* has been so popular.
 - a. Inside the front flap, the book says, “You are not an accident. Even before the universe was created, God had you in mind, and he planned you for his purposes. These purposes will extend far beyond the few years you will spend on earth. You were made to last forever! This book will help you understand why you are alive and God’s amazing plan for you.”
 - b. With all due respect, I do not need Warren’s book to inform me of God’s plan for my life.
 - 1) Scripture does an excellent job of telling me God’s plan for my life.
 - a) Solomon puts that purpose this way: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl 12:13).
 - b) Micah puts that purpose this way: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do

justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

- 2) If only Wells, Thoreau, Barton, & countless others had turned to the pages of Scripture, much heartache could have been avoided.
2. But, simply understanding what our purpose is doesn't necessarily put a burning fire in us to fulfill that purpose.
 - a. While I could argue that knowing God designed me to honor him in every aspect of my life ought to be enough to fulfill that purpose, many need an extra push.
 - b. Paul provides that burning fire in this morning's text.
 - 1) I don't need to go out & by a book by a denominational "pastor" to find that burning fire.
 - 2) I can turn to Paul's inspired words right here & find my burning fire.
 - a) Of course, we speak of the resurrection of the dead as that burning fire.
 - b) Paul tells us that the resurrection is a drive for SHARING, for SUFFERING, for SWEATING, & for SEPARATING.

II. THE RESURRECTION IS MY BURNING FIRE FOR SHARING, v 29.

- A. There are many theories about what "baptism for the dead" really is.
 1. The Gr term rendered "for" in the KJV & NIV means "on behalf of" or "in place of."
 2. It seems quite apparent that the Corinthians knew some who were being baptized on behalf of those who had already died.
 - a. Paul uses here what is commonly known as an *ad hominem* argument, an argument based on someone's behavior.
 - b. Paul does NOT say here that he approves of such a practice.
 - 1) He simply points out that such a practice is, indeed, taking place.
 - 2) Over in chapter 8, Paul says this about eating in pagan temples: "Some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol" (v 7). Paul isn't saying that such behavior is acceptable; he is simply saying that such behavior takes place.
- B. Many in the early church seem to have accepted a sacramental view of baptism. They believed, in other words, that baptism—in & of itself—imparted grace.
 1. That is why infant baptism developed in the second century.
 - a. Parents were concerned about the final state of their children who had died.
 - b. Because they had heard it was impossible to go to heaven without baptism, these parents reasoned that their infants couldn't go to heaven without baptism.
 2. The same thinking seems to have led some to be baptized by proxy on behalf of the dead.
 - a. They were right to acknowledge the role of baptism in salvation: "Baptism . . . now save you" (1 Pt 3:21).

- b. They were wrong, however, to believe that they could be baptized on behalf of another.
 - 1) Notice carefully what Peter says in Acts 2:38: “Repent and be baptized every one of *you* in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of *your* sins, and *you* will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - 2) Those who wished to have the forgiveness of sins were those who needed to be immersed.
- C. Yet, let’s not get so caught up in the erroneous belief some had to miss Paul’s greater point: If there is no resurrection of the dead, why do these folks care about the eternal destiny of their loved ones?
 - 1. If Jesus has rotted away in Jerusalem, there’s no reason to care about whether the dead go to heaven or hell, because there is no heaven or hell.
 - 2. But, because there is a resurrection of the dead, there is A BURNING FIRE FOR SHARING.
 - a. Those who were being baptized on behalf of the dead had a burning fire for sharing their salvation, but they waited until it was too late.
 - b. Let us not wait until it is too late to have A BURNING FIRE FOR SHARING!
 - 1) Jesus instructed us to share our salvation: “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).
 - 2) Paul had a burning desire to share his salvation: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col 1:28-19).
 - c. Do we have—because there is a resurrection of the dead—A BURNING FIRE FOR SHARING!

III. THE RESURRECTION IS MY BURNING FIRE FOR SUFFERING, vv 30-32.

- A. Paul asks the rhetorical question, “Why are we in danger every hour?”
 - 1. Paul faced much danger in his ministry.
 - a. “We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the afflictions we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself” (2 Cor 1:8).
 - b. “As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger” (2 Cor 6:4-5).
 - 2. One of the hardships Paul suffered was fighting with the wild beasts at Ephesus.
 - a. Scholars debate as to whether Paul was literally thrown into an arena with wild animals or whether he is simply speaking metaphorically of some great trial he faced in Ephesus.
 - b. Personally, I believe that Paul literally fought with wild beasts, but either way does not negate Paul’s point: Without the resurrection, why have a burning fire for suffering?

- B. There is much suffering in this world:
1. There is not a one of us who hasn't suffered in this world in one way or another.
 2. However, Paul is not talking simply about suffering. He speaks specifically about suffering for the faith.
 - a. So many suffered violently in the earliest days of the church.
 - 1) According to *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, Timothy, Paul's protégé, died in AD 97 in this way: "As the pagans were about to celebrate a feast call Catagogion, Timothy, meeting the processions, severely reproved them for their ridiculous idolatry, which so exasperated the people that they fell upon him with their clubs, and beat him in so dreadful manner that he expired of the bruises two days after."
 - 2) Ignatius, a Christian leader who personally knew the Apostle John, was on his way to Rome to be eaten by wild animals. He wrote to the church in Rome these words: "Now I begin to be a disciple. I care for nothing, of visible, or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!"
 - b. We may not suffer as did Timothy & Ignatius did, but suffering is part of the Christian life.
 - 1) To the disciples, Jesus says, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own" (Jn 15:18-19).
 - 2) Paul writes to Timothy, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tm 3:12-13).
 - c. Each of us knows suffering for the cause of Christ, don't we?
 - 1) Rolf Szabo, a 23-year employee with Eastman Kodak, lost his job when he stood up for his Christian values.
 - a) Szabo was sent an e-mail promoting a "Coming Out Day" for homosexuals, as part of Kodak's Winning & Inclusive Culture" movement.
 - i. The e-mail urged workers to be supportive of people coming out at work & urged them to acknowledge their "courage" for disclosing their homosexuality.
 - ii. The e-mail further encouraged workers to "be sensitive to the employee's language in defining their personal orientation" and to "acknowledge your level of awareness of this topic, and share your personal willingness to understand."
 - b) Szabo sent his supervisor an e-mail requesting that he not be sent his type of information as he found it disgusting & offensive. Szabo was then terminated.

- 2) How many of us have been ostracized from family for doing the right thing? How many of us have lost friends for doing the right thing?
- d. What provides the strength to keep going when we are persecuted? We have A BURNING FIRE FOR SUFFERING because we are going to be resurrected!

IV. THE RESURRECTION IS MY BURNING FIRE FOR STANDARDS, v 32.

- A. Paul here gives us a reason for standards, for ethical behavior.
- B. In Paul's day, many Christians lived however they wanted.
 1. Some denied that there was any law—like many in our own day, they said that not even God could tell them what to do.
 2. Others denied that anything they did in the flesh affected their spirit—they could sin all they wanted to, but the sin could not and did not affect their relationship with God.
 3. The Book of First John deals extensively with these heretics.
- C. Paul says, "You know something? Those folks over there that we consider heretics are right! If there is no resurrection, we have absolutely no reason for morality."
 1. Life is so short.
 - a. "You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (Js 4:14).
 - b. Unless Jesus comes first, we are all going to die.
 - 1) We have no idea, of course, when we are going to leave this world.
 - 2) How many people woke up this morning with big plans for the day but have already left this world?
 2. If there is no resurrection, we need to live it up because life is so short.
 - a. The so-called "rich fool" had it right: "I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry" (Lk 12:19).
 - b. Without the resurrection, we need to forget every moral norm we've ever known—we need to get drunk, we need to engage in every immorality imaginable, & live life to the "fullest."
- D. You know how hard it is to live while we fight this flesh.
 1. We are weak & sinful people—Satan constantly comes to bombard us with temptation after temptation.
 - a. Jesus faced temptation, and after Satan tempted him before his public ministry we read, "When the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Lk 4:13).
 - 1) Satan was not finished with Jesus—he would be back!
 - 2) Since Satan knew that if he got Jesus he got all of humanity, I'm confident that Jesus was bombarded with temptation like no other.
 - b. Paul himself faced a great struggle against sin. He writes, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (Rm 7:18-19).

2. Why did Jesus & Paul struggle so hard against temptation? Why do we need to have A BURNING DESIRE FOR STANDARDS, for a moral code of conduct?
 - a. Because of the resurrection of the dead!
 - b. Let us not forget when Satan attacks from every side to have A BURNING DESIRE FOR STANDARDS because of the resurrection!

V. THE RESURRECTION IS MY BURNING FIRE FOR SEPARATING, vv 33-34.

- A. The quotation in v 33—“Bad company ruins good morals”—comes from the comedy *Thais* by Menander.
 1. That’s something we wouldn’t customarily mention in sermons, but that is important for understanding this text.
 2. This play was commonly performed in pagan temples.
 - a. We know from chapters 8 to 11 of the problems of pagan temples in Corinth.
 - 1) Some in Corinth were saying that there was no resurrection of the dead, something taught in pagan temples, and some of the Corinthians regularly went to pagan temples.
 - 2) If you add two & two, it seems quite reasonable to suggest, as many have, that those who were denying the resurrection were the same ones frequenting pagan temples.
 - b. Therefore, Paul uses much irony as he quotes this play.
 - 1) He provides a maxim we have seen illustrated in Scripture & in our own lives a million times over, but he does so using a source those being corrupted by bad company would have known the best.
 - 2) It was those eating in pagan temples that would have seen this play that desperately needed to know that “bad company ruins good morals.”
 3. We typically apply this text to strictly moral issues (e.g., if I am around those who lie, I’ll end up lying myself), but notice that the context is actually one of doctrinal issues.
 - a. How many folks cozy up to those in doctrinal error & end up in such error themselves?
 - 1) That’s precisely what happened with Solomon: “When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Ki 11:4).
 - 2) When I was in college, there was a guy from the church that I ran around with all the time.
 - a) Timmy & I were inseparable; I was always at my apartment or I was at his.
 - b) Timmy knew the Scriptures forward & backward and he was dedicated to the Lord Jesus.
 - i. Timmy met a girl at work who caught his eye big time; they were soon married, and she was in serious doctrinal error.

- ii. Soon after they were married, Timmy said that he was no longer a member of the church, but a member of the group she attended.
 - iii. “Bad company ruins good morals.”
 - b. Let us commit ourselves to separating ourselves from those in doctrinal error lest we be swept away ourselves!
- B. Those being corrupted by bad company needed to wake up from their drunken stupor and stop their life of sin.
 - 1. The idea of a “drunken stupor” supports the idea that these brethren were learning their false ideas about the resurrection in pagan temples.
 - a. However, the idea of “drunkenness” is often used in Scripture to refer to proper thinking.
 - 1) “Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thess 5:6).
 - 2) “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers” (1 Pt 4:7).
 - b. Because alcohol takes away one’s proper senses, soberness stands for reasonableness, proper thinking.
 - 1) We must think reasonably—soberly—about sin: We must understand its consequences, we must understand its pain, & we must understand its destruction.
 - 2) When we think reasonably about sin, we can stop sinning.
 - a) The first step in overcoming the sin in our lives is to think reasonably about sin.
 - b) What sin do you need to think reasonably about? What sin do you need to stop?
 - 2. Paul says to the Corinthians shame that some have no knowledge of God.
 - a. It is the “some” who were denying the resurrection who have no knowledge of God.
 - b. Paul says, “You Corinthians denying the resurrection of the dead should have knowledge of God, but to your shame, you have no knowledge of God.”
 - 1) What if Paul were still living & were writing the book of “First Alum Creek”?
 - a) Could he write to us: “Some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame”?
 - b) Do we demonstrate a knowledge of God, not by answering all the Bible questions on *Jeopardy!*, but by the way that we live?
 - 2) Do you live in a way that demonstrates a knowledge of God, or do you need to come this morning and begin a life of knowledge of God?