

Sermons on 1 Corinthians: Christ the Firstfruits (1 Cor 15:20-29)

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I. INTRODUCTION.

A. In Tewin churchyard, a short distance from King's Cross Station, in England, stands a great four-trunked tree growing out of a grave. Its presence there has given rise to much speculation among the residents of the section.

1. The grave from which it grows is that of Lady Anne Grimston.

2. Lady Anne Grimston did not believe in life after death.

a. When she lay dying in her palatial home, she said to a friend, 'I shall live again as surely as a tree will grow from my body.'

b. She was buried in a marble tomb.

1) The grave was marked by a large marble slab, and surrounded by an iron railing.

2) Years later the marble slab was found to be moved a little. Then it cracked, and through the crack a small tree grew.

c. The tree continued to grow, tilting the stone and breaking the marble masonry until today it has surrounded the tomb with its roots, and has torn the railing out of the ground with its massive trunk.

d. The tree at Lady Anne Grimston's grave is one of the largest in England.

B. How ironic that from the grave of one who said she would never live again, life came.

1. One of the greatest paradoxes of this life is that death brings life.

a. We understand that principle physically.

1) What if everyone ever born from Adam on down were still living?
Would it be possible for this earth to

support everyone who has ever been born?

2) If it were not for cell death, your hands would not have five fingers.

a) The cells that used to live between your fingers died way back when you were in your mother's womb & that allows you to be able to move your fingers.

b) In fact, babies as small as 8 to 16 cells depend on cell death for their growth & development.

b. That principle also works among plants:

1) "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain" (1 Cor 15:37-38).

2) Paul begins that analogy of a seed dying to bring forth fruit in today's text. Here Paul refers to Jesus as the "firstfruits."

2. This morning, we wish to examine Jesus as the "firstfruits" & we see that he is the firstfruits of RISING & of REIGNING.

II. THE FIRSTFRUITS OF RISING, vv 20-23.

A. Christ has been raised from the dead as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, v 20.

1) Paul has just written about a dark, fantasy world where Jesus has not been raised (vv 12-19), and he ends with the crescendo of v 19: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."

2) Yet, that world is only a fantasy dreamed up by some of the Corinthians, for "Christ has been raised from the dead as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

a. How is Jesus the "firstfruits"?

1) Under the OT, the Israelites offered to God the firstfruits of their harvest.

a) “When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted” (Lev 23:10-11).

b) “When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there” (Deut 26:1-2).

2) The first produce of the harvest was offered to God in recognition of his bountiful care & in hopes of an even greater harvest.

a) We do basically the same thing in our own age.

b) If you go to your garden & see a good, ripe tomato for the first time, you're likely to think, "We're going to have some good tomatoes this year."

b. Jesus, as the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep is the first to rise from the dead.

1) But, wait just a minute!

2) Jesus was not the first to rise from the dead.

a) "Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen and the man was grown into the grave of Elisha, and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet" (2 Ki 13:20-21).

b) When Jesus encountered a widow from Nain weeping over the death of her only son, we read, "He came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up and began to speak" (Lk 7:14-15).

3) I trust you are well ahead of me & you know how Jesus is the first to rise from the dead.

a) Jesus was raised never to die again.

i. All those whom Jesus raised were raised only to die again.

ii. That man who came back to life when he touched Elisha's bones doesn't even have bones anymore (he's nothing but dust); that lad in Nain was restored to his mother, but he died all

over
again.

b) No so Jesus!

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B. Death came through Adam, but life comes through Christ, 21-22.

1. Death is in this world because of Adam.

a. Everyone who has ever died or will ever die dies because Adam opened the door of death: “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rm 5:12).

b. We should not at all be surprised that death comes from sin, for God promised Adam that death would result from disobedience.

1) “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gn 2:16-17).

2) Because the Israelites did not separate the spiritual from the physical, it’s best to see both concepts in this text. When Adam ate of that fruit, not only did he bring spiritual death into the world, but he brought physical death as well.

2. While Adam brought death, Jesus brings life.

a. We have a type/antitype here, but in reverse; Adam, the first man, brought death; whereas Jesus, the second Adam, brings life.

b. Jesus can bring life, for he has all life:

1) “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (Jn 1:4).

2) “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6).

C. Notice, if you will, those who shall be made alive: “Those who belong to Christ.”

1. Not everyone is going to be made alive when Christ comes again.

- a. I did not say that only believers will be resurrected.
- b. The Bible teaches that everyone will be resurrected: “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out” (Jn 5:28-29).

2. Just because one is resurrected does not mean he’s going to have life.

a. If I were to have a heart attack while preaching this morning, I’m confident that several of you could do CPR—if need be—until the paramedics got here.

1) The paramedics could restart my heart if they needed to; my heart could be restarted in the ER, if need be.

2) Yet, it could all be in vain—my heart could be restarted several times just to flatline again & finally to flatline for good.

b. That’s how the Second Coming will be for many.

1) Most will be resurrected for judgment, for the Second Death.

2) Notice fully what Jesus says at Jn 5:28-29: “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

3. But, for those who belong to Christ, they shall have a resurrection of life.

a. “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (Jn 11:25-26).

b. Victor Hugo aptly wrote, “When I go to the grave I can say, as others have said, ‘My day’s work is done.’ But I cannot say, ‘My life is done.’ My work will recommence the next morning. The tomb is not

a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight but opens upon the dawn.”

c. Yet, Hugo’s words are only true if one “belongs to Christ.” Do you this morning belong to him?

III. THE FIRSTFRUITS OF REIGNING, vv 24-28.

A. Jesus is the firstfruits of reigning in that he reigns before he hands all authority back to the Father.

B. After the resurrection, the end shall come.

1. In English, the idea of “the end” denotes finality; in Gr, the idea of “the end” denotes goal or purpose.

a. In English, we might say, “I’m sure glad that football game has ended; the team just doesn’t know how to play.”

b. But, the term Paul uses in this text, would be used in the context of achieving our goal in the game, i.e., victory.

2. The point Paul makes in this text is that at the resurrection of the dead, the goal of human history, viz., the exaltation of God & his Christ will be completed.

a. All of human history is moving toward that point where God is exalted in & through his Christ.

b. Every hurricane, every presidential election, every birth, every death is moving us closer & closer to the consummation of the age.

C. At the consummation, Christ will deliver the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed every rule and every authority and power.

1. Christ is going to hand the kingdom over to God the Father.

a. The church is only one manifestation of the kingdom.

1) God had a kingdom long before the church was ever established:

a) “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations” (Ps 145:13)

b) Notice that the text says “Your kingdom

is” & not “your
kingdom will be.”

2) The Israelites were God’s
kingdom at one point, the church is
God’s kingdom now, and God is
going to have a kingdom comprised
of all the faithful when this world is
no more.

b. Jesus, as the present King, will come and deliver
the kingdom back to the Father, the ultimate King.

2. Jesus will present the kingdom back to the Father at the point
when he has subjected all authorities & all power to himself.

a. There is much authority & power in this world:

1) There is demonic power at work
in the present age.

a) “We do not wrestle
against flesh and
blood, but against the
rulers, against the
authorities, against
the cosmic powers
over this present
darkness, against the
spiritual forces of evil
in the heavenly
places” (Eph 6:12).

b) Daily we hear of
those evil powers—
when we hear of a
murder, an injustice,
an unwed pregnancy,
or any other sin.

c) But, Jesus shall
come and subject all
those demonic forces
to himself.

2) There are kings of this world.

a) Granted, they have
received their rightful
authority from God:
“Let every person be
subject to the
governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Rm 13:1).

b) Yet, it is Jesus who is “King of kings” & “Lord of lords” & shall, therefore, bring all power in subjection to himself.

b. Great earthly power has been demonstrated on TVs from Galveston over the past couple of days.

1) When local authorities tell those who were stupid enough not to evacuate, “Place your SSN on your arm so we can easily identify your body,” you know that there is great power in this world.

2) Jesus once subdued a great storm.

a) “A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling [He] rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mk 4:37, 39).

b) While Paul is not mentioning the forces of nature, the fact that Jesus calmed a storm demonstrates how easily he can subdue all powers.

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D. Jesus shall reign until he has put all enemies under his feet; the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1. The idea that death is an enemy has somewhat been lost in Christianity.

a. For example, we sometimes sing, "Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away."

b. While we rightfully look forward to laying aside this weak & sinful flesh, death remains an enemy of God.

2. How can death be an enemy of God?

a. Death provides a far greater existence than this life.

1) “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil 1:23).

2) When we leave this world, we will never again struggle against sin and we will never again inhabit a body that becomes sick, weak, and frail.

b. But, death is an enemy of God:

1) Death is an enemy in that God never intended man to die.

a) In the Garden, the first man & his wife had access to the tree of life.

b) Only after sin entered the picture, did God remove access to that tree. God drove man from the Garden, “lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gn 3:22).

2) As the firstfruits of rising & of reigning, Jesus is the guarantee that death is on its way to being defeated & will one day be defeated forever!

E. When Jesus returns the kingdom to the Father, he will be subjected to the Father in order that God may be “all in all.”

1. When Jesus hands over the kingdom after subduing all authorities, God will be glorified completely.

2. At that point in history, it shall be evident to all that God has all power & authority. He shall then have all possible glory.

a. When God is “all in all,” all people shall acknowledge his sovereignty & glory.

1) “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (Rv 15:4).

2) At that point, no one shall have a choice as to whether or not he glorifies God. God shall be “all in all.”

b. But, today we have a choice as to whether or not we glorify God. Are you glorifying God in your present life so that when this world is no more you can look forward to his great glorification?