



(X) Death: Friend or Foe?

Chapter 15:20-28

HUMAN DILEMMA:

I MIGHT BE ALL WRONG ABOUT THIS, but as an observer of social behaviour, I must ask: What is with our generation's fascination with death?

Pop music contains a great deal of content concerning death. Maybe less than it used.

Just this week a retired cop committed suicide in Montreal when it was revealed that he was an informant for the mafia of police operations. Why would he commit suicide? I think because of the shame involved in facing a trial. Death was probably an escape from the hardship of life that he had created for himself. In many segments of society there is an increase in suicides - probably for this very reason. There is also a far greater interest and pressure on governments to permit euthanasia. My assumption is that people choose death because, in their minds, it will be an easier road for them than life.

It appears that our generation has concluded that death is the answer to mankind's challenges with life.

You have heard it said: Life stinks. Life is the pits and life is so unfair. Life can get so bad that Death is the only friend one has.

I'm here to tell you based on the word of God that death is your enemy - not your friend. Though God is often touted as the villain behind some of life's suffering (and He would admit that) Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 wants you to know that Jesus is your friend.

Man's dilemma is this: If he is looking for a friend to help him to deal with life's issues, death is not the one to turn to. Death, no matter how we spin it, does not resolve the injustices and hardships we face in life. According to the Bible, death entered into everyone's life experience as a curse, not as a friend.

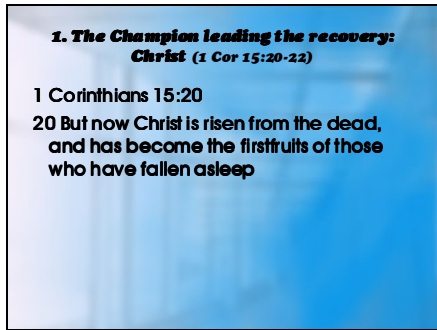
We discover this truth when we go to 1 Corinthians 15. Throughout this passage we will see that death is not a solution to our problems; it is a problem to overcome while we are living.

Last week we ended our talk concluding that if there was no resurrection from the dead, the Christian would be one of the most pitiable people to walk on the face of the earth. This week the tables are turned and we consider the opposite thought. BUT NOW CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD. With that fact comes a

new observation. Christians, then, should be the most envied people in the world. Why? The answer unfolded in this passage is because you, as a Christian, are in the process of recovering the life that was lost when sin cursed the world... before death became a curse for our sin.

Let's look at the text.

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(X) I. The Champion leading the recovery: Christ (1 Cor 15:20-22)

1 Corinthians 15:20

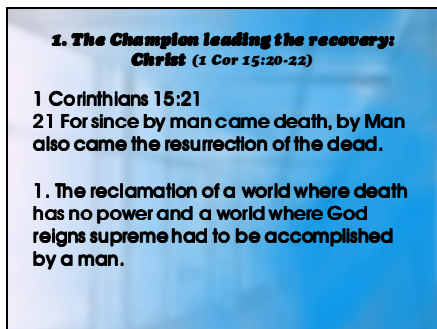
20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep

The recovery of the lost world - a world where death has no power and a world where God reigns supreme - where God is all in all (see v.28) has already started. It started when Jesus was raised from the dead.

- A. Christ has been raised from the dead
- B. He is the first fruits of all who have died

The recovery of the world started with the resurrection of Jesus, our Messiah. The resurrection was the beginning of reclaiming the world from the curse of the fall. What was the curse of the fall of man into sin? Death.

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(X) 1 Corinthians 15:21

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

In this verse we see a common denominator = "by a man"

(X) 1. The reclamation of a world where death has no power and a world where God reigns supreme (we'll call it paradise) had to be accomplished by a man.

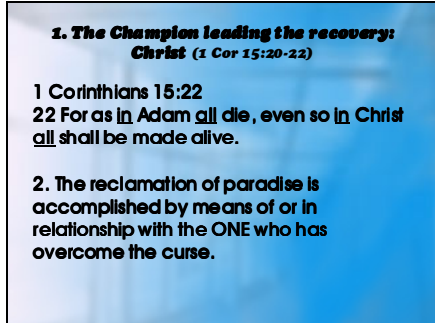
A man got us into this mess. A man was going to have to get us out of this mess.

When Jesus was raised from the dead, he became ... THE FIRST HUMAN WHO NOW LIVES A LIFE IN WHICH DEATH PLAYS NO PART

a) death came (no verb in original) by a man

b) a life in which death no longer plays a part (the resurrection life) came (no verb in original) by man as well.

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Since death came by a man, it seems to have required the effort of a human being to reverse the process. Resurrection was the response. Jesus is the first human being to be raised to a life in which death no longer plays a part. (Others in history were raised from the dead, but died again. The wonder of Jesus is not that he lived and died, BUT that He died and lives - to never die again).

(X) 1 Corinthians 15:22

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Notice the common denominator here = "in" and "all"

(X) 2. The reclamation of paradise (of a world where death has no power and a world where God reigns supreme) is accomplished by means of or in relationship with the ONE who has overcome the curse.

Our destinies, no matter what we believe about religion, are wrapped up in two figureheads/human beings.

a) If our present identity is in relationship with Adam (if we are casting our lot in life with Adam) - our destiny is death. We are dying (it's happening right now - present, active, indicative tense) - Adam represents for us the life of those who choose to be disobedient and whose destiny is a curse - death.

On the other hand . . .

b) If our present identity is in relationship with Christ (if we are casting our lot in life with Christ)- our destiny is LIFE. We are being made alive. Jesus represents for us the life that has chosen to be obedient to God and whose destiny is a life in which death has been overcome.

We talked last week about things being bundled. You can't pick and choose what you want about Jesus. It's also true that you can't pick and choose what you want about Adam. Everything that Adam has to offer is packaged up as a bundle and labeled "DEATH." Everything that Jesus has to offer is packaged up in a bundle and labeled "LIFE/RESURRECTION".

CHRIST is the catalyst and the champion of a life in which death plays no role. It is he who will recover the paradise that was lost at the fall and restore God's original design for which mankind was destined.

Let me remind you of N.T. Wright's observation:

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Everything that God has done for Jesus in the middle of history, in HIM, God is going to do for EVERY BELIEVER in the future.

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II. The Order in which the recovery will happen (1 Cor 15:23-26)

1 Corinthians 15:23-24

23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, . . .

23 . . . afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

24 Then comes the end . . .

(X) Everything that God has done for Jesus in the middle of history, in HIM, God is going to do for EVERY BELIEVER in the future.

(X) This idea is expanded as we move on to verse 23. Let's look at . . .

II. The Order in which the recovery will happen (1 Cor 15:23-26)
... OR ... The Chronology ushering in the recovery

Here is the order in which the recovery of a life without death will take place. This is how a life where God is all in all will come into being.

Stage #1: Life without death starts with the resurrection of Jesus (23)

1 Corinthians 15:23

23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, . . .

Stage #2: Life without death takes a giant step forward when Christ returns for those who belong to Him (23)

(X) 23 . . . afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Stage #3: Life without death is completed when Christ's reign is supreme.

(X) **1 Corinthians 15:24-26**

24 Then comes the end . . .

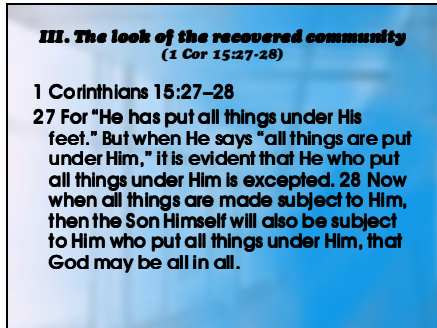
3 indicators that Jesus' mission is complete:

24 . . . 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.

The mission of Jesus will be complete when . . .

1. Jesus hands over the kingdom to the Father

2. He abolishes all rule all authority and power (that oppose the Father)



3. He defeats the last enemy - death.

(X) III. The look of the recovered community (1 Cor 15:27-28)

1 Corinthians 15:27-28

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.

What will the total recovery (makeover/restoration) look like? When all is said and done, how will we know that we have entered fully into the promise of God and the resurrection of Jesus has achieved what it was intended to do?

Again there are three indicators that paradise has been fully regained:

A. Everything will be subject to the authority of Jesus (27) except the authority of God Himself.

B. The Son Himself will, in like manner to the creation, subject Himself to the authority of the Father. (28)

-it's not that the Son is not subject to the father right now

The indication is that the Son will publicly and cheerfully do this as a demonstration to the rest of creation that they have done the right thing by submitting to Jesus. It never was the intent of the Son to rob the Father of the worship due him. It was always the intent of the Son to bring us to the point of full surrender to the Father. Jesus knew that we could not do it without us first surrendering to Him. Jesus also knew that He could do it for us. By focusing our attention on Jesus in this day and age, we are not robbing God of worship, we are joining Jesus in His worship of the Father. We will get Jesus' true esteem of the Father in the day that He Himself submits Himself to the Father. No attention given to Jesus throughout history has been in rebellion to the Father, but in total submission to Him. I think the Father's response to the worship of His Son, is that He will highly exalt His Son forever and ever.

The final indicator that we have reached paradise is, in that community . . .

C. God will reign supreme. He will be all in all. (28)

Stated in more logical terms:

A. All created things will be subject to Jesus.

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Wrong Response / Right Response

What if I reject the resurrection? What if I choose Adam rather than casting my confidence in Christ?

What are the destinies of those who join Adam and make death their friend? (1) You are dying. (2) You are joining the team that Jesus has made it his mission to defeat.

If you say "yes" to Jesus, without a doubt we will be victorious over death and we will stand as complete before God as Christ Himself.

- B. Jesus Himself will be subject to the Father.
- C. The Father will be all in all.

(X) Wrong Response:

What if I reject the resurrection? What if I choose Adam rather than casting my confidence in Christ?

If we do reject Jesus then we have chosen Adam. There are only these two options.

(X) What are the destinies of those who join Adam and make death their friend? The passage gives some clues. (1) You are dying. (2) You are joining the team that Jesus has made it his mission to defeat. Death came by Adam, Jesus' mission is to defeat death and therefore, to defeat Adam.

Right Response:

(X) If you say "yes" to Jesus, you will be rescued from death. It's Jesus' job to deal with death - not yours or mine. It is IN Jesus that victory will come. There is nothing you can do outside of Jesus. God has left nothing for us to do except to place our full confidence IN Him. If we make Him the goal of our life, without a doubt we will be victorious over death and we will stand as complete before God as Christ Himself.

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My Response

- (1) Trust Jesus.
- (2) Be patient while he brings his mission to a completion.
- (3) Start now to surrender every aspect of your life to God.

(X) My Response:

(1) Trust Jesus.

Jesus is the Champion leading the quest to recover paradise lost:

Relationship is the key. "In Him" is the only way of living a life in which death plays no role. Being "in Christ" is a bundle deal. It's not about you or your good works. Your destiny is sealed up by the identity of your champion. On the other hand, being "in Adam" is a bundled deal as well. It's not about you and how evil you are. Your destiny is determined by the identity of your champion. If it is Adam - it is death.

The pick and choose decision is not complex. Is it Adam or is it Christ. In two individuals are bundled everything in life. Saying "yes" to Adam means saying "no" to Christ and there are no exceptions. Saying "yes" to Christ means saying "no" to Adam.

So let's say you say "yes" to Christ. When you say "yes" you are guaranteed a life in which death will not have a lasting impact. But be patient.

(X) (2) Be patient while he brings his mission to a completion.

By looking back at the resurrection of Christ, you get a snapshot of everything God has promised to you as well. He is the guarantee of what is coming, but it might take some time. When he returns to this world, he is coming for his own - those who belong to him - NOT those who belong to Adam. We need to be living in light of his return and busy living out the commandments he has instructed us to obey.

(X) (3) Start now to surrender every aspect of your life to God. Surrender is the ultimate outcome of the resurrection and is the greatest indication that the power of the resurrection is at work in you RIGHT NOW!

Don't wait until the end of time to become submissive. If the "end of time" is what it takes to make you submissive, I suggest that you have cast your lot in life with Adam - not with Christ. We must live like Christ has lived from the beginning - in surrender to God. The purpose of everything we do in life daily should be the same purpose that Christ has been fighting for - that God may be all in all.

N.T. Wright: The role of being under God and over the world is not just the task of the Messiah; it's what God had in mind from the very start when he created humans in his own image.

That's what we need to be doing. Living under God and living over the world. Living under Christ and living over Adam.

The reason we are not to be pitied is because everything that is being done for us is to defend us against and conquer our most vile enemy - death.

In our generation we have begun to look at death as a friend. In a twisted kind of way, we have begun to see life as our enemy and death as our friend. We think: Death will resolve all of life's inequities. For the believer, death is not to be feared, but it is by no means our friend. People who do not know Christ and think that death will be the solution to their problems with life must struggle with the teaching of Scripture. Death will never resolve life's inequities. God is the one who will resolve those things and the resurrection is his promise or his down payment that guarantees that he will do it.

Life stinks. Life is the pits and life is so unfair. God is often touted as the villain and death frequently considered a friend. Scripture says that Jesus is your friend and he is fighting FOR YOUR LIFE.

Have you joined him in it?