(36) THE NEVERENDING AWAITS: 1 CORINTHIANS 15

Focus Idea: Because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, all who are in him also have the same hope of life beyond the grave.

The Context: The First Epistle to the Corinthians has been introduced in earlier Core40 presentations. Chapter 15 follows on other extended important teachings for the believers there: Chapter 13 offers a memorable excursus on love. Chapter 14 describes proper worship, especially with respect to speaking in tongues.

The Characters: 1 Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul, previously introduced in other Core40 lessons.

The Core: Everybody dies. One man, however, came back to life.

1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's epic sermon about resurrection from the dead. In this text, the Apostle shares how he knows that Jesus has been raised, what it implies that Jesus has been raised, and what the resurrected body itself will be like.

Paul begins with a fundamental core-within-a-core report. His "gospel" (vs. 2) consists of what he received as of utmost importance: That Jesus died an atoning death in fulfillment in of Old Testament expectation and that he was raised on the third day, proving his resurrection with a series of appearances to Christian friends (vs. 3-8). This primitive Christian creed is extremely early and suggests that the Easter report is not a later development but goes back to the first years after Jesus died in Jerusalem.

After a short autobiographical note (vs. 9-11), Paul explains his hope for resurrection, without which faith is futile and believers are to be pitied (vs. 12-19). Jesus' resurrection is, Paul says, the "firstfruits" of those who are dead. Firstfruits are the earliest reaping or ingathering of the harvest – the first ripe apple from the tree or first ear of corn from the field. Firstfruits are a sign that more is to come. Because Jesus came back from the grave, others can and will, Paul teaches.

For Paul, this is not abstract theology. His confidence in the resurrection of Jesus has allowed him to face life-and-death danger including attacks from wild beasts (vs. 29-30). If this life is all there is, Paul continues, he ought better to be living life up with food and drink, because there is nothing more to existence than the here and now.

In the third section of the chapter, beginning at verse 35, Paul provides more detail, apparently in response to a set of questions about the kind of body that resurrected persons will have. His teaching circles an important analogy – like a seed that is buried in the ground produces a plant that is more wonderful than the seed was, so the present body (Paul calls it "perishable") will be raised in a beautiful new splendor – more glorious, more powerful, more *spiritual* (vs. 42-50).

Paul concludes his long explanation of resurrection with words of triumph and of encouragement. He is able, along with the prophet Hosea, to taunt death, because death will not defeat him forever (vs. 55). Because Jesus has conquered even the grave, nothing should intimidate or dissuade the work of the church (vs. 58).