

1 Corinthians #39
“Christ, The FirstFruits” - 1 Cor. 15:12-34

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Wide World

1. Prior to the Age of Discovery in the 15th & 16th centuries, most Europeans believed the world was flat
 - a. sailors feared that if they sailed too far from land, they would fall off the edge of the world
 - b. this fear kept their journeys in familiar waters
 - c. as a result, their lives were narrow and restricted
 - d. but they had adapted to it, and learned to live within their narrow confines
2. Then came along some explorers and men of vision who began to suggest that maybe the world was not flat
 - a. they suggested it might be round
 - b. that there was not edge to fall off of
 - c. rather, there were new lands to discover
 - d. and maybe these lands were filled with untold wealth just waiting to be gathered
3. At first, the people jeered and mocked these men of vision
4. But more and more they began to hear how past ages believed, not in a flat earth, but a round one
 - a. strange rumors began to be heard about those new lands away off to the west
 - b. but still, most people just passed off such stories as the wild eyed dreaming of men that had nothing better to do but cause trouble
5. Final, Columbus was able to persuade enough people to allow him to put the idea to a test
 - a. he sailed away into the West in three small ships
 - b. and the rest, as they say is history
 - c. not long after, Magellan proved the world was indeed round by circumnavigating the globe
6. When Columbus returned with news that there were new lands to discover and explore, all of Europe began to buzz with the excitement of a new world just waiting to be entered
7. Suddenly, the safe, narrow world in which they had confined themselves because of fear was seen for the poor, pathetic little thing it was

B. A Wider World

1. It is sad to say that most people alive today have confined themselves to only this narrow, pathetic little world
2. They refuse to listen to those who have come to know that there is another whole realm of existence just waiting to be entered into
 - a. this other realm is filled with treasure just waiting to be gathered up
 - b. it is a world of delight and joy
3. That realm of which I speak is the realm of the Spirit
4. A whole new dimension of living that was opened for us by our great Captain - Jesus Christ
5. Columbus opened the new world by a sailing ship
6. Jesus opened the realm of the Spirit by rising from the dead

C. Today

1. Our study today is a very simple one
2. We are continuing in the same subject and passage we looked at last week = the Resurrection
3. Today we will see how the Resurrection forms the very heart of the good news of Jesus Christ

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 12-19

12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.

1. Corinth was a Greek city
2. As such, it was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy
3. One of the more popular branches of Greek philosophy believed that physical laws governed everything
 - a. and that if there were gods
 - b. they never violated the laws of the physical universe
 - c. in today's terms we would call these people, "materialists"
4. Everyone has what are called, "presuppositions"
 - a. mental starting points that we take as givens
 - b. Renee Descartes began his philosophy by trying to

- strip away every last presupposition
 - c. he concluded that was impossible because we HAVE to start somewhere
 - d. his starting point was this, “ I think -- therefore I am!”
- 5. Many people take it as a given that miracles do not happen
 - a. this is one of the founding presuppositions
 - b. so, any account of a miracle is dismissed by them
 - c. they believe that what others might call miracles actually have a rational and natural explanation
 - d. if you ask them why they don’t believe in miracles, they will say, “Because miracles don’t happen.”
 - e. now, that is arguing in a circle and is in itself illogical
 - f. the only way in which a person could say with absolute certainty that miracles do not occur is if their knowledge spanned the length of the physical universe
 - g. in other words, they would have to be “all-knowing”
 - h. so, to say miracles do not happen is a logically absurd position
- 6. Even so, there were some in Corinth who held this belief
- 7. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is the greatest miracle of all time.
- 8. Paul says, “If resurrection is impossible, then Christ did not rise.”
- 9. He is just showing the logical result of denying the miraculous
- 10. But believe it or not, there were people in the church who were denying resurrection
- 11. Paul now shows the results of denying the resurrection . . .

14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up; if in fact the dead do not rise.

16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen.

17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!

18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

12. If Christ did not rise, then what I am doing right now is utterly pointless and empty
13. All true Christian preaching would be a sham
 - a. there would be not one shred of redeeming value in it
 - b. because it would all be based on a horrible lie
14. If Christ did not rise, faith is vain
 - a. if no resurrection makes preaching meaningless,
 - b. it also makes the response to preaching meaningless
 - c. a dead savior cannot give life
15. If Christ did not rise, Christians are false witnesses
 - a. they are lying to people
 - b. filling them with a false hope
 - c. calling them to a lifestyle that is a total rip off
16. If Christ did not rise, then we are still in our sins
 - a. if Christ did not rise, then he would still be dead
 - b. and that means he would still be paying for our sins
 - they would still be exacting their toll on Him
 - because He had not done it all at the cross
 - c. there is a heresy afoot today that says that after Jesus died, demons dragged his spirit to hell where he suffered torment at the hands of the hordes of hell
 - they say that Jesus had to not only suffer physical death on the cross
 - but that he had to suffer spiritual death in hell
 - they say that after he suffered at the hands of the devil
 - God the Father looked down in pity on Him and cause Him to be born again
 - d. no where in scripture do we find even a shred of evidence for this trash
 - rather, the word tells us that the requirements of God's justice were fully satisfied at the cross

- Jesus was not hauled to Hades by demons
- He went there as a conquering King to liberate the souls who had been patiently waiting for Him

- e. yes; Jesus entered the domain of death
- f. but only so that He could rip it wide open
- g. and in the resurrection, we see the proof that our sins have been fully paid for
- h. but -- if Christ did not rise, we have no such guarantee

17. If Christ did not rise, there is no comfort in the death of fellow believers

- a. if Christ did not rise, then there is no resurrection
- b. and that means there is no life after death for us
- c. so when we say good-bye to someone here on earth, it is the last good-bye

18. Finally, if Christ did not rise Christians are utter fools and worthy of pity

- a. we would all need serious mental help
- b. because we are staking not only our eternal destiny
- c. but our present lives on a rip off

- d. to be a Christian means to live a deferred life
 - we do not live merely for the here and now
 - for the passing pleasures of the age
 - no, we live with an eye to eternity
 - we temper our lives with a view to what is ultimately best
 - if there is no resurrection, we are missing out on all that there is = the present
- e. the way I see it, there are only two options for living
 - total hedonism; "You only go around once in life and you gotta grab for all the gusto you can."
 - or --
 - totally soldout, gospel preachen', bible thummpen', devil stompen', holy livin' Christianity
- f. look = don't pity me = I'm heaven bound!

B. Vs. 20-28

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

1. It gets a little difficult here because Paul uses a picture that the Jews at Corinth would have easily understood but which we are not acquainted with.
 - a. but what he says here is important
 - b. because it gives us a clue as to what kind of a resurrection awaits us
2. He says that Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep
3. Firstfruits was a religious feast and holiday of the Jews
 - a. in the Spring season of each year, just as the first grains of the barley harvest were ripening
 - b. the people would bring the first ripe sheaves of their fields to the temple
 - c. the priest would take these sheaves and wave them before the Lord as an offering to Him
 - d. these first sheaves were offered as a representative of the entire harvest
 - e. no one was allowed to reap any of the rest of the harvest until the firstfruits had been offered
4. Now, what's fascinating, is to realize that the Feast of Firstfruits was celebrated on the day after the Sabbath which followed Passover - in other words, it was held on a Sunday
5. That means Jesus rose from the dead on the day of firstfruits, thus, literally fulfilling the meaning of the feast
6. Jesus is our firstfruits
 - a. He had to rise first so that we might rise
 - b. and with His resurrection, our resurrection is guaranteed

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

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

7. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they plunged mankind into the realm of death and decay
8. The overwhelming testimony of history is that people eventually die

9. But with the resurrection of Christ, the death that reigned over humanity from Adam till then was defeated
10. Because we are all biological descendants of fallen Adam, we enter into this world as sinners
 - a. and because we are sinners, we are destined to suffer death
11. But by believing in Jesus, we can break free from the shackles of sin and death and gain eternal life.

23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

24 Then comes the end, 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.

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.

12. These verses may seem difficult because as Christians we are convinced that the Son and the Father are equal
13. Yet here Paul subordinates the Son to the Father
14. Paul's idea is this:
 - a. The Son had a specific task to perform in His incarnation
 - b. that task was to liberate mankind from sin and death
 - c. Jesus did that perfectly
 - d. but His final victory has not yet been achieved
 - e. at the cross He set in motion a chain of events that will ultimately see death destroyed and sin utterly banished from creation
 - f. the final victory won't be seen till Jesus comes again
 - g. once He does, He turns all the redeemed creation back to The Father
 - h. and the specific task He was given will be totally complete

15. In our last section today, Paul returns to the idea of what it means if resurrection does not happen

C. Vs. 29-34

29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

16. Paul refers to a practice that we simply know nothing about today
 - a. apparently, there were some Christians who thought it was possible to be baptized for people who had already died
 - b. they believed that this substitute baptism somehow granted eternal life for those who had passed away
 - c. Paul does not condone it here
 - d. he simply shows the logical results of its practice
 - e. if the dead do not rise, then what's the point in being baptized for them
17. The early church rightly halted this practice quickly
18. But the Mormons have restored it
19. We can dismiss the idea of being baptized for the dead very easily by remembering that it is not the act of baptism that saves a person
 - a. it is personal faith that brings salvation
 - b. so, if a person cannot save themselves by baptism
 - c. how could they save someone else by it?
20. Paul only mentions it here because it was a practice they were doing while toying with the idea that there was no resurrection

30 And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?

31 I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

32 If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

21. He returns here to what he said before
22. If there is no resurrection, why are we fooling ourselves?

23. For Paul, living the Christian life meant being in constant danger
- a. he had suffered shipwreck
 - b. spent a whole night and day floating on wreckage
 - c. he had been flogged & beaten several times
 - d. he had suffered deprivation, hunger, need
24. If there was no resurrection, then Paul realizes that he was the greatest of all fools
25. So it is for us . . .
- a. if there is no resurrection, we are we wasting our time
 - b. we might as well adopt the philosophy which says --
 - c. **"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"**
 - d. we might as well all become total party animals
 - Party Hardy Marty & Mary
 - e. because you live, you die, and that is it
 - there is no one to answer to
 - there is no judge before whom you stand
 - this life is all there is
 - so who gives a rip?
27. IF -- IF -- there is no resurrection
28. But if there is, then we are left no other option but to live for the glory of God
29. I think this is the heart reason why we see our society falling apart all around us
- a. people have forsaken the idea of the life to come
 - b. this life is all that is left to them
 - c. and they figure they better get in their piece of the pie and good times when they have a chance
 - d. Thucydides, a Greek historian records that when a mortal plague began to take the lives of thousands of Athens citizens, people abandoned all sense of morality and began to engage in rampant crime and sexual violence
 - because they had no hope for life after death
 - they gave themselves over to their passions
 - e. is this not what we are seeing today?
30. But if there is a conviction that this life is but a preparation for the life to come, then this life becomes filled with meaning and values
- morality becomes a chief concern

- as people seek to be prepared for the next world

33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

31. Paul tells them to not keep company with those who deny the resurrection
 - a. just as you would avoid an infection for the danger it presents your body
 - b. so you must avoid infectious false teaching that can harm your soul

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Jesus, The Firstfruits
 1. Because Jesus is our firstfruits,
 2. We have the sure promise of the final complete harvest
 3. One day, you and I will be raised into immortality
 4. And when that happens, this life will be seen for the time of preparation that it is
 5. How's the preparation going?
 - a. are you awake to righteousness --
 - b. or asleep in the light?

Rom 13:11-12 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

1 Th 5:5-8 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.