

RISE
Part 4: “The Hope of the Resurrection”
Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on February 25, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** In the film *Grand Canyon*, Danny Glover plays an African American tow truck driver named Mack. Mack shows up just in time to help a rich white man whose car has broken down. It's a bad part of town and a street gang is threatening the man.
 - Mack takes the leader of the gang aside and attempts to diffuse the situation. He says, ***“Man, the world ain't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without askin' you if I can. And that man is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you rippin' him off. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here.”***
- This truth echoes in the deepest part of us. When we hear of another school shooting, or another earthquake leveling a city, or come face to face with our own death, we cry out, ***“this is not the way it's supposed to be.”***
 - So how do you deal with a bent and broken world? Where do you place your hope for the future? In our culture, people typically try to gain hope in one of two ways.
- The first is to take the optimistic view that the human race is progressing - that through science, education, and technology we will eventually attain a world that *is* the way it's supposed to be. Politicians preach the hope of progress: ***“If you vote for me things will get better.”***
 - While this view should be commended for trying to make life better it totally underestimates the power and nature of evil.
 - In the face of two world wars, oppressive dictators, child pornography, sex trafficking, Auschwitz, apartheid, and drug crime, it is naïve to believe that the human race is evolving toward some future utopia.
- The second way our culture tries to find hope is in escaping the physical world. This second view comes from Buddhism, Hinduism, and all the new age spiritualties we hear about on the Westcoast.
 - This view says, ***“It is obvious that this world is evil and cannot ultimately be changed. This should tell you that you were not made for this physical world of space and time. The real you is spiritual. Ultimate reality is spiritual. Your hope should reside not in changing the world but in escaping this physical world to become one with the universe, to attain nirvana, or to be absorbed into the divine.”***
 - While this view should be commended for taking evil seriously its mentality of escaping from this world does nothing to help the millions of children who will die this year of preventable diseases.
- Over and against these two popular but misguided views comes the message of Christianity. The Christian message offers the ultimate grounds for hope. It is not naïve about evil – it meets evil head on. It does not seek to escape this physical world – it seeks to transform it for good.
 - The Christian message of hope is simply this: **(SHOW SLIDE) what God has done in raising Jesus from the dead, He will also do for the entire cosmos.** When God raised Jesus from the dead he set in motion a chain of events that will culminate in the total

defeat of evil, the destruction of death, the resurrection of the dead, and the renewal of this physical cosmos.

- In verses 20-28 Paul describes this hope in terms of three events that result from God raising Jesus from the dead. So as we learn about these three future events let them fill you with hope - hope for a future when things will be the way they are supposed to be.

GOD WILL RAISE ALL THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHRIST

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2) Event #1: Since God raised Jesus from the dead, He can and will raise all those who belong to Christ from the dead.**
 - This is actually the main reason why Paul wrote chapter 15. We know that there were some influential people in the church in Corinth who denied that Christians would one day be raised bodily from the dead. Look at verse 12. ***READ 12 - Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?***
 - These Christians, like so many Christians today, simply followed their cultural beliefs about the afterlife. They believed that when you die, you escape your body and live as a spirit being in some happy place. They laughed at the idea of a person coming back in a new body. But Paul has argued that if there is no such thing as resurrection then not even Christ has been raised. In our passage today he argues that since God raised Jesus from the dead, He can and will raise all those who belong to Christ from the dead.
- Paul's main point is in verse 20 but just to feel the force of it let's read verse 13 and then verse 20. ***READ 13, 20 - But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. . . . But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.***
 - The key here is to understand this concept of 'firstfruits.' A few years ago I was officiating a wedding in Vernon early July. As we drove into Vernon there was a fruit stand with a sign that said, ***"Now available: first cherries of the season."***
 - We could not resist. As Heather and I sat eating those cherries this passage was on my mind. I said to Heather, ***"Do you know what it means that we are eating the first cherries of the season?"*** Pastor's wives have to put up with questions like this. I said, ***"It means that an entire harvest of cherries is right around the corner."***
 - The first fruits are a sample of the great harvest that will soon come. That is Paul's main point here. In raising Jesus, God was giving a sample of that great event in the future when he will resurrect all who belong to Christ.
- That's the main point. Now Paul works it out in detail. Verses 21-22 say basically the same thing. ***READ 21-22 - For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*** The idea is easy to see.
 - There are two men. The first man is Adam and the second man is Christ. Each man is the representative head of his people. What happens to the representative also happens to his people.

- Let's talk about Adam first. Adam is the head of the entire human race. When he sinned he brought death to the entire race. Notice in verse 22 that since we are all 'in Adam', we will 'all' die.
 - No one escapes death. You will attend many funerals in your life and the last you will attend will be your own. That is because we all belong to Adam. You are human and are therefore 'in Adam.'
 - But the Bible says that all who die in Adam will also face a second death. The second death is to be rejected by God forever in a place Jesus called 'hell.'
- But the good news of the gospel is that God sent another man named Jesus. Where the first man Adam failed, the second man Jesus succeeded. After dying for our sins God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead. And now as verse 21 says the resurrection of the dead will come through Jesus.
 - He is specifically talking about Christians for in verse 23 he says God will resurrect "those who belong to Christ."
- So you see the gospel message is all about two men, Adam and Christ. One brings death and the other resurrection from the dead.
 - So right here I need to press home to you this question: who do you belong to? By default we belong to Adam because we were born into his race. If you continue in Adam you will die and perish eternally.
 - But if you belong to Christ, if you are in Christ, then the promise is that you will be raised to glory. Jesus promises to unite to his destiny all those who come to him. Call on Jesus to rescue you today.

THE FIRST FRUITS AND THE HARVEST

- OK so when will this resurrection of those who belong to Christ take place? In verse 23 Paul restates his main point and gives some detail on when this resurrection of Christians will take place. **READ 23 - But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.**
 - So there is the order. First, God raised Jesus from the dead. He is the firstfruits.
 - The second thing that is going to happen is that Jesus, the resurrected one, is going to return one day – **"Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming..."**
 - And then thirdly, when Jesus returns, God will reap the great harvest. God will raise all those who belong to Jesus to eternal life. That is the order. First Christ is resurrected and then when he comes he will resurrect all who belong to him.
- When it comes to death, do you see how the hope offered in the gospel is far greater than the hope our world offers? The gospel does not offer some naïve optimism about how the human race is hopefully progressing to the point where we will be able to live longer and maybe even beat death. No, the gospel meets death head on in Jesus. Jesus conquered death and since he was raised we have rock solid hope that we also will be raised.
 - But notice that the gospel also does not encourage us to long for escape from this physical world of our bodies in order to become spiritual beings. Our hope is that God will take this perishable body and resurrect it to live on a renewed earth.
 - So when it comes to dealing with death the gospel offers hope that the world cannot give.

- In his book *The Case for Christ* Lee Strobel interviews Dr. Gary Habermas on the resurrection of Jesus. Habermas is the distinguished professor and chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University. At the end of the interview Habermas told how his wife Debbie slowly died of stomach cancer. ***“I sat on our porch,” he began...He sighed deeply and went on. ‘My wife was upstairs dying. Except for a few weeks, she was home through it all. It was an awful time. This was the worst thing that could possible happen.’***
 - ***He turned and looked straight at me. ‘But do you know what was amazing? My students would call me – not just one but several of them – and say, ‘At at time like this, aren’t you glad about the Resurrection?’***
 - ***As sober as those circumstances were, I had to smile for two reasons. First, my students were trying to cheer me up with my own teaching. And second, it worked.***
- ***‘As I would sit there, I’d picture Job, who went through all that terrible stuff and asked questions of God, but the God turned the tables and asked him a few questions. I knew if God were to come to me, I’d ask only one question: ‘Lord, why is Debbie up there in bed?’***
 - ***And I think God would respond by asking gently, ‘Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?’ ‘I’d say, ‘Come on, Lord, I’ve written seven books on that topic! Of course he was raised from the dead. But I want to know about Debbie!’ ‘I think he keep coming back to the same question – ‘Did I raise my Son from the dead?’ ‘Did I raise my Son from the dead?’ - until I got his point: the Resurrection says that if Jesus was raised two thousand years ago, there’s an answer to Debbie’s death in 1995. And do you know what? It worked for me while I was sitting on the porch, and it still works today.’”¹***
 - Friends, this is hope in a world that is not the way it’s supposed to be. Since God raised Jesus from the dead, He will also raise all those who belong to Christ.

GOD WILL RENEW ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST

- We spent most of our time on this first point because it is Paul’s main point in chapter 15. But Paul now wants us to see that our future resurrection is just one part of a larger and more glorious story. What God did in raising Jesus he intends to do not just for those who belong to Jesus, but for the entire cosmos. Paul then talks about a second event that should fill us with hope. I put it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 3) Event #2: Since God raised Jesus from the dead, God will renew the entire cosmos through Christ.**
 - When God raised Jesus from the dead he set in motion an unstoppable chain of events. Jesus’ resurrection is like a crack in the dyke that surrounds this world that is not the way it’s supposed to be. Slowly the water of God’s future glorious age is spilling into this present age. On the day Jesus returns whole dyke will break. The waters will rush in destroying all that is evil and cleansing this world.
 - You see it is not just that Jesus will return and resurrect Christians. There is so much more. What happens next?
- **READ 24a - *Then comes the end.*** So what will happen at the end? **READ 24-27a - *Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.*** ²⁵ ***For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his***

¹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 326-327.

feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.”

- So now the image shifts from the seed and harvest imagery to that of a king coming to take back his kingdom by destroying all his enemies. It is all about the cosmic scope of Jesus’ kingdom.
 - Verse 24 says that he will destroy every dominion, authority, and power that is opposed to him. And when he has done this he will reign. Verse 26 says that the last enemy he will destroy is death itself. And when all these events have come to pass verse 24 says he will hand the kingdom over to his Father.
- Friends, this world is not the way it’s supposed to be. But the hope of the gospel is that this is not a permanent state for the world.
 - But the gospel announces that what God did for Jesus at Easter He will do for us and for the entire cosmos. This is hope.

THE TRUE FAIRY STORY

- J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *Lord of the Rings* has written an essay entitled *On Fairy Stories*. He points out that the best fairy tales are filled with evil, sorrow, and failure but at the end we get the joy of a happy ending. But it never says they simply lived happily. It says they live happily...what? Ever after. We only get a taste of their forever happiness but it makes us long for what they have.
 - So do you remember at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* when Frodo sails into the West to the land of the undying? We read, **“Then Frodo kissed Merry and Pippin, and last of all Sam, and went aboard; and the sails were drawn up, and the wind blew, and slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth...and the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that...the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.”**²
 - When you read that you yearn to know what is there. You yearn to go there. You can taste the sweetness of it and feel its joy.
- Tolkien says the point of fairy tales is to awaken that desire in you for the joy of a happily ever after. Then he asks, what if we found out that one of these stories like *Sleeping Beauty* or the *Cinderella* were true? He then goes on to say that in the gospel all the fairy tales come true. All of the fairy tales point to the one true story.
 - Only Christians can read or watch fairy tales and when it is all over look at each other and say, **“All of this and more is coming true. What is going to happen to us is better than this.”**
 - How do we know this? How can we be sure the gospel is not just another tale? Because of what happened in history. In raising Jesus from the dead God was giving us a foretaste of what is to come. One day we will breathe that new air. One day we will behold those white shores. What God did in raising Jesus he will do, not just for us, but for the entire cosmos.

² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 1007.

- So the Christian hope is that one day God will raise all who belong to Christ from the dead and secondly he will renew the entire cosmos to the way it's supposed to be.

GOD WILL REIGN WITHOUT RIVAL

- But Paul is still not done. We have not reached the highest point of the story yet. Very quickly now, let's talk about the last event that will take place. I put it like this: **(SHOW SLIDE) Event #3: Since God raised Jesus from the dead, God will reign without rival as supreme over all things.**
 - In verses 27-28 Paul corrects a possible misunderstanding about what he has said. But in verse 28 we see that he is in fact using all of this to make his ultimate point.
- First he clarifies a possible misunderstanding in verse 27. When he said that Jesus would reign over all things he wants you to know that this does not mean over God himself. **READ 27b-28a - But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. ²⁸ When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.**
 - So Paul is clearly saying that for all eternity the Son of God will be subject to the Father. It is the same argument he uses in chapter 11 for why men and women, though equal in value, have different roles in the church. These differences in roles do not diminish their equality because we see the same thing in the God-head.
 - The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all equal in essence, value, dignity, and worth. None is greater than the other. But equality does not mean sameness in roles. The Son will always be subject to the Father but this does not mean that the Son is less in any way. The Son delights to glorify the Father and he will do it for all eternity. So that clears up any wrong ideas that Jesus reigning means he is greater than His Father.
- And then secondly Paul hits the pinnacle of his thoughts at the end of verse 28. All of this is going to take place so that **"God may be all in all."**
 - This does not mean in some eastern mystical sense in which all will be swallowed up in the divine. It means that although God's supreme authority was challenged by evil and death, God will, in the end fully establish his rightful place as supreme over all things.
 - In the end God will win. He will have no rivals. No competitors. No adversaries. No enemies. They will all be destroyed and the Triune God will reign supreme.
- In this short passage Paul has taken us over the entire scope of God's plan for the universe. We have gone from paradise lost to paradise regained. The Corinthians did not just have a wrong view of life after death; they had a wrong view of God. If our bodies are destroyed in death then death wins. But God will not allow death and evil to have one tiny victory. He will reclaim everything that was lost.
 - This world is not the way it's supposed to be but the hope of the gospel is that one day it will be as it is supposed to be. In raising Jesus, God set in motion an unstoppable chain of events.
 - What God did in raising Jesus from the dead he will do, not just for us, but also for the entire cosmos. On that day God will be all in all.