

Sunday April 23

Lesson 8: Unwrapping the Gift of Resurrection

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15: 12-28

Context:

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “The Life of Faith.” In this second unit, “Wisdom and Doubt,” we are examining how faith helps us to bloom and grow. We continue to look at the word resurrection and explore how this theme plays out in our life. Today we look at how we are called to be astonished by the scope and significance of Jesus’ resurrection.

Our lesson today moves into the New Testament to one of Paul’s letters. Paul’s letters to the Corinthians are some of the most detailed glimpses into life in the early church. In addition to identifying leaders in the congregation and his connection to them, Paul addresses issues he has heard are developing within the congregation. Paul’s correspondence with the church in Corinth identify several important themes include instruction around the most important doctrines for the church.

One of the issues the church in Corinth is struggling with is the understanding of resurrection. Paul does not give us much information about those denying the resurrection of the dead, but there are some reasonable deductions found in this passage. Those most likely to be skeptical of *anastasis nekron* (“the rising of corpses”), would have been members of the community who knew enough philosophy to distance themselves from Paul, an unsophisticated Jewish preacher.¹ Many thinkers in the ancient Mediterranean world believed the rational soul should escape the body, viewing the body as a tomb from which the enlightened person ought to seek release.² Thus, there was a duality between the soul and body, making the body a shell protecting the soul. This of course conflicts with the incarnation and resurrection, God becoming flesh and dwelling among us and then dying and being resurrected. Both body and soul were tantamount to God’s story.

Paul seeks to explain to the Corinthians how the resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to their existence and to the foundation of the church. Using the allusion of a harvest, Paul explains how the resurrection of Jesus was more than God showing the power of God. Instead, Jesus came so all might be given eternal life and receive the promises of resurrection. For Christians, if Christ has not been raised, we offer the world a pious lie to veil ourselves from a terrifying tale of being powerless and alone.³ Paul is not asking them to prove the resurrection of Jesus; instead, he is inviting them to see the gift of hope which comes in believing in Christ.

Using an allusion to Adam, Paul illustrates how Christ brings new life as the second Adam, the one who fulfills God’s promise to redeem the world. Death is personified and Jesus Christ is the one to deliver God’s people from bondage to sin and death through obedience in

¹ Hays, Richard B. “First Corinthians.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011), 259.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 262.

going to death on a cross.⁴ The resurrection though gives a future as death is conquered and God shows us the victory God has over all things.

Application

If you have lived or traveled through any agricultural region, you can be amazed at how vast fields can spread with their crops. Growing up and living in Alabama, I am fortunate to see various crops being cultivated from cotton to peanuts. For me there is something peaceful about seeing all these crops which will cultivate daily goods whether it is the clothing on our backs or the food we place upon our tables. There is beauty in nature and seeing the bounty of God's gift in front of us.

Perhaps this is why I love this passage so much from the book of First Corinthians. If we are honest, the topic of resurrection can be a daunting one to explore or comprehend. We cannot develop some empirical formula for what happened when Jesus rose from the dead. For any scientist or historian, the resurrection of Jesus flies in the face of everything research and methodology give us as tools to explain life. The resurrection of Jesus is astonishing and almost unexplainable in a practical sense.

Yet in a meaningful sense, the resurrection of Jesus is the most powerful truth which continues to give us life every day. And our apostle Paul helps deliver as much with his allusion to a harvest where Jesus is named as the first crop to be raised, the first one to bloom and show signs of hope. Jesus is the first fruit, wondrous to behold.

It reminds me of times when gardeners or farmers till the land, looking for something to come up as they pour hours of time and energy into cultivating the right space for things to grow. The most exciting time is the first time something arises, and you can see the goodness right in front of you. There is the promise of more, the harvest to come and to give life to you whether it is blooms to fill you with joy or crops to fill your belly with food.

Jesus does the same thing for all his with his death and resurrection. None of us, even if we know our Bibles inside and out, can come and deliver an account of what happens exactly when we die. We of course have our beliefs and theories; we might even find a good book which people recount coming back to life. Yet much like the resurrection of Jesus, we are not given this practical formula where we can check back in.

What God reminds us in First Corinthians is we do have our Lord who fills us with hope, with the promise of resurrection. How this looks and plays out is all up to God, the one who is always mysteriously at work in our lives to surprise us. Jesus invites us to place the hope and trust of resurrection in his hands; he will be the one to lead us onward and in due time reveal all things. What we do know is when we die, we join the "great cloud of witnesses," a line we repeat each Sunday with the Apostles' Creed reminding us of all the times in scripture where God speaks of being with the Lord in life and death.

For our daily lives, we are to focus on what it means to be new creations in Christ. Jesus rose from the dead not just so we could focus on what happens when we die. Instead, Jesus invited us to be active as part of his harvest, blooming and growing seeking to tell his good news with our lives. He controls sin and death, calling us to lean into him. He wants us to see resurrection as a verb, to see life as a gift for here and now, however brief this life might be. He will be the one to control and direct all other things. We are to see the gift of new life we have in

⁴ Ibid., 266.

him every day, a gift to grow in God's grace and see we are planted right where God has placed us to be.

Why do you think resurrection is a pivotal doctrine in the Christian faith? How do the references of resurrection in scripture speak to you? When you hear about the resurrection, what images or modern-day allusions come to mind? How does having Christ as the new Adam give you hope for today? Why do you think it is important to speak of resurrection for life today instead of just when we die?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009