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Sermon Notes

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God's Final Purpose in the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

As we look around at our world situation today, it is easy to feel that things are spinning out of control... as though we're on a big bus that has hit a patch of black ice and is hurtling out of control toward a precipice. But the Bible gives a completely different perspective... that Almighty God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and rules over all nations and even over all details—he controls the rise and fall of might empires, and he controls the birth of a single mountain goat in the Andes mountains and the death of a single sparrow in a forest in Italy. Nothing is too big or too small for the wisdom and power of God to oversee... and despite all appearances, everything on planet Earth is unfolding exactly according to plan.

And yes, I know that includes massive suffering for the human race... including a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico and fiery riots in Wisconsin. As I read history, the human race has been through immense suffering in various generations that dwarfs anything we see now... and as I read the Book of Revelation and the overwhelming tribulation yet to come described in Revelation 8-9, nothing the human race has ever endured even comes close to that which it will see then. All this has come because Adam, in the Garden of Eden, representing the entire human race, decided that he wanted an education in good and evil. So we have had a 6000 year education on evil... on the wages of sin is death.

But the infinitely good, infinitely patient, infinitely gracious and compassionate God has an incredibly wonderful plan to bring about a perfect world free from all death, mourning, crying and pain. And the resurrection of the body is a central part of that salvation plan.

Today, as we continue our study in 1 Corinthians 15, we will get to stand in awe at God's amazingly wise plan for resurrection!! And we begin with the concept of "firstfruits" ...

I. Christ Has Been Resurrected as Firstfruits

A. Context:

1. Paul has to address a serious doctrinal issue with the Corinthians
2. Some among them were saying there is no such thing as bodily resurrection from the dead

1 Corinthians 15:12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

3. He begins the chapter with clear evidence of the bodily resurrection from the dead, which they heard when the gospel was first proclaimed to them years ago in Corinth by Paul and his associates... evidence from prophetic scripture, and evidence from eyewitness testimony... CHRIST HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD!
4. Next, Paul then makes absolutely explicit how essential Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead is to the Christian faith
5. From verses 12-19, he shows what the ramifications would be if Christ had never been raised from the dead
 - a. If resurrection from the dead is a philosophical, spiritual, and physical IMPOSSIBILITY, then not even Christ has been raised from the dead
 - b. And if Christ has not been raised from the dead, look at all the ramifications

- i) “our preaching is useless and so is your faith”
- ii) “we are exposed as false witnesses... because we told you we actually saw the resurrected Christ”
- iii) “your faith is futile and you are still in your sins”
- iv) “Those who have fallen asleep in Christ are truly lost...”
- v) Paul said “we are of all people on earth the most to be pitied!” There is no reward awaiting Paul for all the beatings he received for the name of Christ!

6. Those are the deadly ramifications if there is no resurrection from the dead!!

B. Paul’s Triumphant Assertion

1 Corinthians 15:20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

1. Christ has been raised from the dead! We cannot say it enough! The victory has been won! Death has been defeated!! Jesus arose and ripped the dark shroud of the tomb with a stabbing shard of light that cannot be extinguished

John 1:4-5 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

2. BUT... some of the Corinthians may well have granted that CHRIST is risen, and still maintained their position that for THE REST OF US MORTALS, death is the end of everything
 - a. Christ is the exception, we are the rule
 - b. We are going to die, and for us ordinary sinners, we will never live again... our lives will end right there and then
3. So, Paul must extend the truth of Christ’s resurrection to US, his people... which he does here with the FIRSTFRUITS statement
4. But first, let’s see that CHRIST TAUGHT he would raise his people from the dead

John 6:39-40 This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 11:23-26 Jesus said to [Martha], "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

John 14:19 Because I live, you also will live.

So it is inconceivable that Christ would physically rise from the dead just for his own benefit.

The very reason he came to earth was to save his people from their sins

Matthew 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins

Death is the consequence of our sins...

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If in the end, death wins over Christ's people, and we remain forever in our tombs, then sin and death were finally victorious. We are not saved at all.

Paul makes this point plainly here in 1 Corinthians 15 with his teaching of Christ as the FIRSTFRUITS from the dead

C. Christ the Firstfruits

1 Corinthians 15:20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

1. The concept of “firstfruits” comes from the Old Testament, a sacrificial offering to God of the first fruit harvested and given to God in thanksgiving for the rest that would soon follow

Leviticus 23:10 *When you reap the harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.*

2. It was their way of acknowledging that everything they had comes from God, that God owns it all, that it is not by their own strength or ingenuity or wisdom that they are enjoying this bounty... so every stalk of grain still waiting to be harvested is likewise HOLY TO THE LORD, but only that small first portion was to be offered to the God as a sacrifice...
3. Paul calls Christ the “firstfruits” of *those that sleep*
 - a. “sleep” here clearly refers to physical death in light of resurrection
 - b. Since Christ has power to raise any person from the dead, to Christ a dead person is similar to a sleeping person... as he said concerning Jairus’s daughter, “She is not dead, but asleep”; and as he said concerning Lazarus, “Lazarus has fallen asleep... we must go and awaken him.”
 - c. So, with Christ the firstfruits of those that sleep, he is the first to be raised from the dead, with the vast number of all his believers to follow
4. BUT... didn’t others rise from the dead?
 - a. Yes and no!
 - b. In the Old Testament, there are three accounts of people rising from the dead—once in the ministry of Elijah and twice connected with Elisha
 - c. And Jesus himself raised three people from the dead in the pages of the Gospels—Jairus’s daughter, the son of the widow from Nain, and Lazarus
 - d. But all of those that were raised eventually died again... only Christ was raised in a resurrection body never to die again

5. Christ is the firstfruits AND the “firstborn” from the dead

Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

- a. “firstborn” means first in rank, preeminence, position in the family
 - b. Paul openly states in Colossians that the reason that God willed that Christ should receive his glorious resurrection body before anyone else was that he might have the SUPREMACY! Christ has had his glorious resurrection body for almost 2000 years now, and no one else has one... all the dead righteous people are ***“absent from the body, present with the Lord”***; they are ***“the spirits of the righteous made perfect”*** in the heavenly realms, heavenly Zion... (Heb. 12:23)
6. So, Paul completely refutes any concept that Christ alone will be raised from the dead... rather, he is the FIRSTFRUITS... with an innumerable harvest of his people from every tribe, tongue, people and language awaiting their time

D. The Theology of Federal Headship

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

1. This is a vital theological principle... it is called “federal headship”
2. It means that we have been represented before God by our head... by one who stood in our place; the word “federal” means representative... one man representing the whole group
3. Paul asserts here what he clearly develops in Romans 5:12-21... that Adam represented the entire human race in the Garden of Eden, and especially at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam had been clearly warned by God

Genesis 2:17 ... you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day when you eat of it you will surely die

When Adam reached out his hand and took that forbidden fruit and ate it, he was acting on behalf of the entire human race... all his unborn descendants SINNED in Adam, and thus also came under his physical death penalty... “death came through a man”

Romans 5:12 sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned

4. This is the doctrine of “original sin”... Adam’s sin is ascribed to every single human being because Adam represented us at the tree; the consequences of that federal headship is that every single human being dies because they are all descended from Adam
5. But federal headship also works to SAVE US as well... God uses the same principle to save Christians from sin, death, and hell

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

6. Paul states this principle also in Romans 5, saying that it works to make us righteous... Adam’s single act of rebellion made us all sinners and killed us all; Christ’s obedience made us all righteous and will raises us all from the dead

Romans 5:19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

So by federal headship with Adam, we all sinned and we all die; so also by federal headship with Christ, we are all made righteous and all will be raised from the dead (made alive forever)

E. On the Word “All”

1. It must be understood differently wrt Adam than Christ
2. All means “those whom the federal head actually represents”
 - a. For Adam, it’s every single human being
 - b. For Christ, it’s NOT every single human being... or else everyone would be saved; but its all Christians

II. Christ Will Resurrect Christians When He Comes

A. Therefore, the necessary consequence here is that all Christians will in the end be physically (bodily) raised from the dead!!

B. The Connection Clearly Asserted

1 Corinthians 15:23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

1. Each in his own turn: Christ gets it first, to be pre-eminent
2. THEN those who belong to Christ, he will raise from the dead
3. The word “belong” is a sweet one, a sense of ownership

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

John 10:3-4 He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price.

4. So, he will not allow his bride to stay dead, his bride whom he bought with the price of his blood ... to be wrapped in the chains of the tomb, cold, dark, unable to respond to his light and love
5. She belongs to him, and he will raise her from the dead!

Hymn: “The Church’s One Foundation”

The Church’s one foundation

Is Jesus Christ her Lord;

She is His new creation

By water and the Word:

From heav’n He came and sought her

To be His holy Bride;

With His own blood He bought her,

And for her life He died.

C. When? At the Second Coming of Christ! [*parousia*]

1 Corinthians 15:22-23 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

1. The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that the resurrection from the dead occurs at the Second Coming of Christ

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

III. Christ Will Progressively Subdue All His Enemies

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

- A. This Text Really Gets Infinite and Exponential and Astonishing
- B. God Has an Amazing Plan for the Unification of All Glorious Things Under One Head

Ephesians 1:9-10 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-

- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

1. Sin has had a devastating effect on the perfect universe God made... blowing it apart like a fragmentation grenade
2. Adam and Eve were estranged from each other—ashamed of how they looked making fig leaves to hide behind, representing all the alienation from human to human that sin would eventually produce

Titus 3:3 We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

3. And then Adam and Eve were very clearly estranged from God... hiding from God as he walked in the Garden

Genesis 3:9-10 the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

4. Then in God's judgment, man was alienated from nature... the created world was cursed because of Adam

Genesis 3:17-18 Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

Romans 8:20-22 the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

So nature has been hostile and decaying and fragmented and in anguish... "Nature red in tooth and claw" animal devouring animal; earthquakes, hurricanes, viral pandemics, tornadoes, forest fires... restless devastation wreaked by man's sin

5. God in Christ was reconciling all those fragments and bringing them back together into perfect unity under God

C. Future: Handing the Kingdom Over to God

1 Corinthians 15:24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father

Paul is about to explain what that means... but the idea is that the kingdom he has been progressively building will be perfected at that point, when he hands over the kingdom back to the Father

D. Abolishing All Rule, Authority, and Power

1. Before he hands over the Kingdom to his Father, he must first abolish (destroy, put to an end) all rule, authority, and power
2. This pictures a Kingdom advancing progressively against constant opposition... the steady march of gospel advance has been opposed every step of the way by organized, powerful foes
3. These terms refer to demonic powers...

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

4. But I believe this also refers to human governments which reign in opposition to Christ... for the Antichrist and the rulers under him will be organized in direct, blasphemous rebellion against Christ (2 Thess. 2:3-4)

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

5. God gives to angels and to people positions of power; he allows demons and wicked people to abuse their power for a period of time, seemingly not interfering; he allows Hitler to set up his extermination camps where millions of innocent people are killed; in the same way, he allows Satan to rule on earth as “the god of

this age” and in some sense Satan can rightly say of the kingdoms of the world that they belong to him right now:

Luke 4:5-6 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.

6. But in actuality, the sovereign God is controlling everything for his secret purposes... his own glory in the salvation of all the elect

E. Present: Christ’s Progressive Conquest of His Enemies

1. Little by little, Christ’s kingdom advances against all enemies, against all obstacles
2. Paul is quoting Psalm 110

Psalm 110:1-2 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." ² The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies.

3. Psalm 110 is an inter-Trinitarian conversation... from the Father to the Son, with David recording it for posterity
4. The first use of the word Lord is all capital letters: LORD... meaning Yahweh, the eternal God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; this is God the Father speaking to his only begotten Son, after Christ has won the victory over sin and death and rose from the dead, and ascended through all the heavenly realms to the right hand of the majesty of God... far above all created realms...
SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND
5. Then the Father promises to fight all of Christ’s enemies... to make them all a footstool for his feet! [This is a picture from the Old Testament, when conquered kings were made to lay down, and Joshua invited all his commanders to put their feet on their necks...]
6. Again this verse:

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

7. Christ's enemies have been legion... MANY MANY MANY... and very powerful
 - a. First and foremost, Satan himself is depicted in scripture as a mighty king ruling over a dark empire
 - b. Jesus advances his kingdom by defeating Satan and his forces
 - c. Jesus driving out demons with a simple word was clear evidence of his superior power... like when he dealt with the demoniac of the Gadarenes who had LEGION of demons inside him... this man was breaking chains and attacking people; Jesus drove out all the demons with a single word
 - d. When Jesus' enemies, the priests and scribes and Pharisees saw this, they ascribed it to Satan himself... that it was by Beelzebub, the prince of demons that Jesus drove out demons;
 - e. This was Jesus' explanation

Luke 11:20-22 if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. ²¹ "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²² But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

- f. The Kingdom of God advances by the overwhelming power of God in binding Satan spiritually and plundering his dark kingdom of human souls bound in slavery to sin
- g. Along with Satan and demons, we have human adversaries, actively serving Satan though they don't know that... many of them are even in positions of great power—kings, governors, Prime Ministers, presidents, dictators, even low-level officials, government functionaries that give out visas, or secret service agents who ferret out hidden Christians, arrest them and throw them in jail
- h. These are Jesus' enemies, as well... and Christians have had to stand before their tribunals and defend the gospel again and again; Christ-hating enemies have used their temporary positions of power to condemn Christians to death

Luke 21:12-17 you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³ This will result in your being witnesses to them. ¹⁴ But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵ For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ All men will hate you because of me.

- i. But Almighty God reigns over these enemies, and says to his Son, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
- j. Psalm 2 gives the same message of the awesome power of God in

Psalm 2:1-6 Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. ³ "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." ⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ⁶ "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

- 8. The gospel has advanced for 20 centuries against this kind of constant opposition... and it will be amazing and glorious look back from heaven to see how the sovereignty of God conquered enemies in every generation to win the elect to faith in Christ and advance the Kingdom of Christ

F. The Last Enemy is Death

1 Corinthians 15:26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

- 1. This is one of the bitterest and yet most hopeful statements about death in the Bible
- 2. It is bitter because death will continue to torment the people of God generation after generation, bringing untold sorrow and suffering to Christ's beloved sheep

3. This is precisely why Christ wept before raising Lazarus from the dead... he knew that countless millions, hundreds of millions of his people would have to bury loved ones and weep over their graves
4. Why does Christ not destroy death now? Because the “wages of sin is death,” and sin, pain, disease, and death characterize this present age
5. Since death is the LAST ENEMY, Christian doctors and pharmaceutical researchers working on COVID-19 medications know full well they are not progressively working to abolish death... for death by other means will still plague humanity
6. But the next age, the age to come, will be characterized by this

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

IV. Christ Will Finally Present a Universe In Total Submission to God

1 Corinthians 15:28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

- A. The Final Vision of Perfect Harmony in the Universe is Breathtaking
- B. All Opposition Will Have Been Subdued
- C. All of Christ’s Elect Enemies Will Have Been Converted
- D. All of Christ’s Non-Select Enemies and Devils Will Have Been Cast in the Lake of Fire
- E. Death Itself Will Have Been Destroyed... Cast into the Lake of Fire
- F. And the New Heavens and New Earth Will Be Created... All in Perfect Submission to the Reign of the Triune God
- G. More Next Time, God Willing!

V. Applications

- A. Live a Holy Life in Preparation for the Next World
- B. Understand the Current Disharmony and Discord is Part of God's Plan
- C. Look Forward with Great Hope to the Perfect Unity and Harmony of All Things in Heaven
- D. Understand the Significance of Death as "the Final Enemy"... it will persist, but it will be defeated
- E. Come to Christ!