

"The Drop in the Bucket" 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Introduction

- [slide#1] A man and his ever-nagging wife went on vacation to Jerusalem. While they were there, the wife passed away. The undertaker told the husband, "You can have her shipped home for \$5,000, or you can bury her here, in the Holy Land, for \$150."
- The man thought about it and told the undertaker he would just have his wife shipped home. Perplexed, the undertaker asked, "Why in the world would you spend \$5,000 to ship your wife home when you could have her buried in the Holy Land and spend only \$150?"
- The man replied, "Long ago a man died here, was buried here, and three days later he rose from the dead. I just can't take that chance."
- Sometimes I get the impression that our belief in the resurrection only comes into play when someone dies. And if we're not facing death it has little to no bearing on how we live now. We've been in 1 Corinthians 15 for a few weeks and we're just scratching the surface of what the resurrection means for us as Christians.

Transition

This morning I want to suggest to you that when we think about all that God has done, is doing, and is going to do we need to remember...

Proposition

- **The Resurrection of Christ is just a drop in the bucket**

Transition

[slide#2] Jesus' resurrection is the first drop in the bucket of the coming flood of God's work. It is the most important drop in the bucket. It is the first drop in the bucket. But it is not the only drop. It's just the beginning. Jesus' resurrection has set in motion the wheels of God's plan. What strikes me most about the passage for this morning is how much actually happens as a result of Christ rising from the dead. May God open our eyes to see more clearly what Christ's resurrection means for us now and in the future. From verses 20-28 there are ...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two bona fide after-effects of Christ's resurrection**
- If something is bona fide it's as good as done. It's hard to come up with examples of things that are bona fide. Death and taxes? The sun coming up each morning? Last July [Reuters](#) reported a story about a group of meditators. By harnessing the power of group transcendental meditation, by thinking lots of positive vibes, this group claims it's all but certain that by July of this year the Dow Jones Industrial Average will be pushing 17,000. They believe that by releasing simultaneous positive vibes from large groups of meditators they can control the weather. They believe when their group reaches 2,500 members there will be a major drop in crime and the "virtual elimination of all major social and political

woes.” With 8,000 people meditating they think they can achieve world peace.¹ Is that what we mean when we talk about after-effects of Christ’s resurrection? No. The after-effects are solid gold. They’re bona fide. They are as good as done. Not some kind of flight of fancy—wishful thinking, I hope it happens—it just might, if we meditate long enough kind of stuff.

- [slide #3] The **first** after-effect, from **verses 20-23** is this. Because Christ has been raised **all the dead in Christ must necessarily rise to life—no ifs ands or buts**. And the **second** from **verses 23-28**, because Christ has been raised **God must necessarily rule over everything and everyone**.

Transition

Look at **verses 20-22**. *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 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. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

Main Points

- In the words of **Gordon Fee**, “We do not merely live out our length of days and then have the hope of resurrection as an addendum; rather...Christ’s resurrection has set in motion a chain of inexorable events that absolutely determines our present and our future.”² **Verse 20**. *Christ has indeed been raised from the dead*. It is a done deal. And because Christ has been raised what’s good for the goose is good for the gander. Jesus’ resurrection absolutely guarantees the resurrection of those in Christ who come after him. If he’s raised His followers are raised. **They must necessarily rise to life**.
- To make this point Paul uses this metaphor of the firstfruits. Look at **verse 20**. *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. This idea of firstfruits comes from Leviticus 23:10-11. *“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.* The whole idea is that initial offering, the firstfruits part of the crop represented the whole—the rest of the crop that would be harvested later. In other words, the whole harvest was deemed acceptable based upon God’s acceptance of the firstfruits. Paul captures this idea of the firstfruits in another New Testament passage, Romans 11:16, when he says *If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches*.
- Paul uses this metaphor of firstfruits to make his point about Christ’s resurrection and the after-effect for us. Christ’s resurrection is not an isolated event but guarantees something even more stupendous; a greater, more widespread resurrection.³ Paul’s point about firstfruits is not just about chronology.⁴ It’s not just that Jesus was the first to rise. Because he wasn’t even the first. Others before Jesus rose from the dead. Lazarus. Tabitha from Acts 9. Paul’s point is that Jesus’ resurrection is different—it’s the first of a kind. His

¹ © 2005 Reuters Limited. “Meditators predict Dow 17,000, near U.S. utopia,” Mon 30 Jul, 2007 13:20:10 GMT By Ayesha Rascoe.

² Fee, p. 760.

³ Commentary on NT use of OT, p. 744-5.

⁴ Garland, p. 705-6.

resurrection is the down payment, the earnest money.⁵ It's the pledge of the part which represents the whole thing later on. It's just a drop in the bucket.

- This connection between Christ's resurrection and the Christian's is no different Paul says than the connection between Adam and all humanity. The resurrection of believers works the same way as does our condemnation through Adam. *Verse 21. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.* Adam's sin and death mean that you and I necessarily sin and must die. It is a given. And it's both a physical and spiritual death. Don't ever forget that part of it. The horror of this life is not just physical death. It's that because of sin we are spiritually dead to God. Paul's point is that in the same way that we are tied to Adam—*for in Adam all die*, those tied to Christ must rise like he did. As one commentator says, "All those bound to Christ receive reconciliation and will share his resurrection and heavenly blessings."⁶ **All the dead in Christ must necessarily rise to life.**
- But here's the kicker. All who are in Adam, which includes every single one of us in this room, that's not the same as all who are in Christ.⁷ The promise of resurrection, *all will be made alive*, is as *verse 22* says, only for those *in Christ*. It's only for *those who belong to him*, implying that there may be some even here this morning who belong to Adam but not to Christ. And if you are not yet bound to Christ your fate is not resurrection but Adam's fate; you're spiritually dead awaiting physical death.
- When Miriam and I lived in Chicago back in the days of the dot com boom we had the opportunity to take part in an IPO, an initial public offering, through the company Miriam worked for. An IPO is the first sale of stock by a private company to the public. And in our case as an employee she had an opportunity to buy the stock even before it was offered to the general public. During the dot com boom it employees at other companies with IPO's would buy as many shares as possible prior to the IPO hoping for a run up in price and then dump their shares at the IPO for huge profits. As expected, at the IPO the stock went pretty high; much higher than the sale price first offered to Miriam and her coworkers. You know what? Miriam and I didn't do it—we didn't take part. In hindsight we should have. In hindsight, that decision was far and away the dumbest financial decision we've ever made.
- Jesus' resurrection is the IPO, the initial public offering, in which everyone is invited to participate in the most celebrated public offering the world has ever seen—forgiveness of sins, being made spiritually alive to God, and the resurrection of the dead. But you have a choice. By faith you either say yes. "I'm in. I want Christ's death to count for my own. I want his punishment on the cross to count as my punishment for sin." If that's your choice then you're *in Christ*. And all who are in Christ must necessarily rise to life. Or, you reject that offer and choose the alternative. Death. You can overcome some bad decisions. Not choosing to be part of an IPO, you can recover from that. But should you choose to stumble over Christ—that's something you can never recover from. *This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life.*⁸ Choose Christ.

⁵ Fee, p. 749.

⁶ Garland, p. 707.

⁷ Morris, p. 210.

⁸ Deuteronomy 30:19

- On the other hand if you're *in Christ*—if you already belong to Christ how must your life change? How should life be different now knowing that one day your body must necessarily rise to life? I think one of the most obvious things is the importance of the body. Sometimes I get the impression that Christians think they can abuse their bodies now because one day they'll get a new glorified body. That's like saying "I don't have to worry about holiness now—I'll just let my spiritual life go to pot." On the other hand, we're not like the non-Christian either, who out of a fear of death, tries to preserve his body for as long as possible.
- Bodies are important enough to God that he resurrects them too. Resurrection is not just a spiritual thing. It's physical. Our bodies aren't something we shed, like an exoskeleton, at the time of death. Instead, through a resurrection they're transformed from corruptible to incorruptible. So if we live now with blatant disregard for our bodies, with no self-care, what we're really saying is that we believe in a different kind of resurrection than what the Bible talks about. From God's perspective the body is so important that God plans to redeem it along with our Spirit, therefore we must take care of it now. *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*

Transition

Look at [verses 24-28](#). I want you to see the [second](#) bona fide after-effect of Christ's resurrection. Because Christ has been raised **God must necessarily rule over everything and everyone**. *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.*

- One of the most striking things about Christ's resurrection is what it means for God's rule. I like how [Leon Morris](#) puts it. "No matter how strong the powers of earth and hell may seem, no matter how much the Christian may fear that the wicked will triumph, at the climax of history it is Christ and none other who reigns and must reign. This reign is a career of conquest, until all enemies are put under his feet."⁹ God reigns unchallenged through Jesus. And because Jesus rules over all one of the eventualities of his resurrection is that he must eventually and necessarily defeat death. **God must necessarily rule over everything including even death itself.**
- Think about this for a second. In these verses Paul presents Christ's conquest of death, our greatest enemy, as an afterthought. That is so reassuring and we're not wrong for relying on that hope when a fellow brother or sister in Christ dies. But his conquest of death is just a drop in the bucket. Because Christ has been raised, when he comes again at Jesus' second coming, he will annihilate all rule, all dominion, all authority, and all power as it says in [verse 24](#). The word used for Jesus' coming is a technical expression for the arrival or visit of the king or emperor.¹⁰ When Jesus the King comes he vanquishes all his enemies.

⁹ Morris, p. 212.

¹⁰ Reinecker, p. 441.

- Oh, and death? Death is just a tick mark, a tiny little footnote in the litany of Jesus' conquests. [Verse 26](#). *The last enemy to be destroyed is death*. It's no big deal. It's a foregone conclusion because Christ has already been raised. The King defeated death by his resurrection. And so death must necessarily be defeated for all the King's followers. The King must reign. He must rule. Jesus is the conquering king. None can stand before him. And death? It doesn't stand a chance.
- To make this point about God's necessary rule over everything which results from Christ's resurrection Paul quotes from two Old Testament passages, Psalm 8 and Psalm 110. Notice how the NIV puts quotation marks around the words in [verse 27](#). Paul's quotes these verses to stress that *when the end comes*, [verse 24](#), when Christ returns he will exercise full and complete authority over all things and all people; he will reign in majesty. All because he first rose from the grave himself. Then Christ, when he returns, and after having gathered all authority for himself, will turn all of that authority over—all rule, all power, all dominion to his Father.¹¹ So that in the end God must necessarily rule over everything and everyone. All of these things are after-effects of Christ's resurrection. [Verse 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*. **God must necessarily rule over everything including even death itself** because Christ has risen from the grave.
- The hard part is living with this in mind right now. On Valentines Day a gunman opened fire in a lecture hall on the campus of [Northern Illinois University](#) killing a number of students. Does Jesus really rule? He does but our experience in life is to the contrary. It's as Hebrews 2:8-9 says. *In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him*. That phrase. *Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him*. And so we wait. And we pray. Revelation 22:17 *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!"* Come quickly Jesus. Throw down the gauntlet. End all this. Exercise your rightful authority. And in the meantime, while we wait for our King, we carry on his work as subjects loyal and true. We fight evil. And we work to suppress evil and evil systems. And we wait for God's rule which must come—because Jesus has risen.
- [Sam Bronfman](#), the late CEO of the Seagram Company, entered a crowded conference room one day and anxious to get on with the meeting, plopped into the nearest chair. One of his young assistants immediately said, "No, Mr. Bronfman, you're supposed to sit at the head of the table." "Young man," replied Mr. Bronfman, "wherever I sit is the head of the table."¹²
- Jesus is not yet sitting at the head of the table but he still rules. It doesn't matter where he sits. The question for us here and now is pretty simple. If one day God must necessarily rule over everything and everyone because Jesus has risen how is that rule manifesting itself in our lives now? How are we living as subjects to the King? Are we living for ourselves, or some other king? Or are we living with Jesus' reign and rule in mind? Is he at the head of your life right now?

Conclusion

- It's official. At least in Poland it is. On December 20, 2007 [Michal Szybalski](#) sent a letter priority mail from his work to his home. To his surprise it took 13 days, some 294 hours for

¹¹ Morris, p. 211.

¹² www.preachingtoday.com from Leadership Journal (5-7-96) p. 12

the letter to travel 11.1 kilometers. Given the distance and the time, he calculated the speed of the letter to be about 0.03775 kilometers per hour. Then, and how he did this I don't know, then he calculated that the average garden snail travels at around 0.048 kilometers per hour. That's right. A snail would have made it to his home even faster than the letter. It's official. In Poland the mail really is as slow as a snail.¹³

- Sometimes I think we slip into the belief that God is just slow—like a snail. He makes promises in his Word and then those promises come about at some future point so far off in the distance they have little or no meaning for us here and now. We believe God will get around and do what he says he's going to do just not in our lifetime. We forget the words of 2 Peter 3:9, *the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.*
- It's easy to slip into this mentality when it comes to the resurrection. We think the after-effects of Jesus' resurrection are so far off in the distant future they have little or no influence on us now. And it should not be that way. As the German theologian [Wolfhart Pannenberg](#) has said "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."¹⁴ The drop in the bucket is meant to change everything? Has it? Pray with me.

¹³ Reuters *Oddly Enough* by Karolina Slowikowska; editing by Ibon Villelabeitia, January 2008.

¹⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, German theologian (1928—).