

## **Longing for Things to Come** **1 Corinthians 15:20-34**

One of the things I really look forward to every year is an annual fishing trip to northern Wisconsin with Caleb and Matthew. (Picture) I've taken the boys for several years now and we join a group of friends in a wonderful fishing and camping weekend. The lake we go to is beautiful and remote. We get to enjoy the wonders of God's creation along with the fun of camping, campfires, meals over the fire, fishing, and friendship. It's a wonderful experience.

I love going on the trip, but I also love getting ready for it. The preparation is part of the fun because of the anticipation of the trip. We have to get the boat ready and our fishing gear, we have to go hunting for nightcrawlers, which is an experience all on its own. We get the tents ready, the cooking gear, food, all the packing. I enjoy the process because I'm thinking about the trip. I'm remembering the fun we've had and imagining the fun we're going to have.

If you think of your life, I hope you have things that you get excited about – vacations, holidays, family trips, reuniting with family and friends. I'm thankful God blesses us with things to look forward to, not just for when they happen, but for the days leading up to it as well. There are plenty of things to get us down in life. Plenty of struggles and disappointments, and we need things to look forward to, to give us hope and anticipation.

Well this morning I want to talk about something that can give us greater hope and anticipation than anything else – something we can live for and prepare for all throughout this life. And it's the second coming of Christ. We probably think far too little about the second coming of Christ than we should – I can definitely say that for myself. We get so caught up in living for the things of this world that we forget to live for the greatest thing that will ever happen to us.

But this morning we're going to look at a couple of things that are going to happen when Christ returns and my hope is that these will create in us a longing for his return that will outweigh the longing we have for anything else and give us hope and joy as we live out these days that can get pretty difficult and depressing at times.

We are studying what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 to the church in Corinth about the resurrection of the dead. Some of them were trying to deny it and we

saw last week that Paul was showing them how pointless and hopeless Christianity would be if the resurrection isn't going to happen. But it is. And now he turns his attention to what that means for those of us who are in Christ. We're going to look at two of the things that will happen. The first is in verses 20-23.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

*<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

One of the things that's going to happen when Christ returns, is a new kind of existence like we've never experienced before. We saw last week in verse 18 that if Christ had not been raised, those who have fallen asleep in him would have perished. They would have perished because that's the destiny that the first man, Adam, earned for us, which we see in these verses. Through Adam's sin, he earned the sentence of death not only for himself, but for all who are born of him – the entire human race. All of us inherit Adam's sinful nature along with the consequences, which ultimately lead to death. Romans 5:12 reiterates: *"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."* We all are naturally very good at sinning because of the nature we are born with, and that sin leads to death. We can see death all around us and it all stems back to Adam.

But just as death came into the world through one man, Paul points out that life after death comes through a man as well – Adam brought death, but Christ brings life. It's a life that begins here and now with a spiritual resurrection in our hearts when we're born again, but there will also be a bodily resurrection that takes place in the future, which is what Paul is talking about here. He declares that since Christ has been raised, those who fall asleep in him won't perish, but will be raised to everlasting life. And the way he describes this is by using the concept of the firstfruits. He says that in rising from the dead, Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

"Firstfruits" is a farming term that has to do with the harvest. The Reformation Study Bible notes: *"At harvesttime the Israelites were required to bring an offering from the first part of the crop. This offering was a token of the whole harvest, that all belonged to God."* That offering was the "firstfruits." The RSB continues: *"Jesus*

*is called the 'firstfruits' because His resurrection and the resurrection of believers are closely related events. Jesus was 'the first to rise from the dead,' rising as our representative. His resurrection caused us to be raised spiritually, and at the same time guarantees that we will be raised bodily."*

So by being the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, the risen Christ gives us a preview of what life will be like for us. All those who are united with Christ by faith will become like him. We get a small look at that in Luke 24:36-43: *"As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"<sup>37</sup> But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.<sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?<sup>39</sup> See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."<sup>40</sup> And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.<sup>41</sup> And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"<sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish,<sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate before them."* We will talk more about our resurrection bodies next week, but this gives us an idea of what they will be like. They could see him, hear him, and touch him. He had an actual body and he liked to eat.

Jesus is the firstfruits and we are the rest of the harvest. There's only one body like his right now, but soon we'll also be equipped with the same. And that's a day we can all be longing for. We need not fear death because death is the start of something much better than this for all who are in Christ. This gives us hope no matter what kind of trials and suffering we're going through in this life. Paul says this in Romans 8:22-23: *"For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

Do you groan inwardly for the redemption of your body? If you're young and healthy, you might not be there yet. But if you're getting older and you can feel your body's inevitable march to the grave, it starts to get exciting if you really think about it. Pain, disability, and death isn't the end for those who are in Christ! It's the end for these corruptible bodies, to which we can say, "Good riddance!" But we will be raised to life again and get a major upgrade!

So that's one thing we get to look forward to in our future, but Paul writes about a second that's equally exciting.

I Corinthians 15:24-28.

*<sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” 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. <sup>28</sup> 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.*

When Christ returns, not only will we receive new bodies, but we will also experience a new government. After we rise from the dead, Paul says the end will come, and he’s talking about the end of this world as we know it – the end is when Jesus delivers the kingdom to God the Father. But that won’t happen right away when Jesus returns. There are a few things that need to happen first. Paul says that Christ must reign here on earth until he has put all his enemies under his feet. He must destroy every rule and every authority and power that’s here on earth.

Revelation 20 talks about that. When Christ returns, it says Satan will be bound and thrown into what’s described as a bottomless pit for 1,000 years so that he can no longer deceive the nations. Satan and all the demonic strongholds on earth will be removed. Then it says this in Revelation 20:4-6: *“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”*

When Christ returns, we will be raised to life with him, and there will be a period of time when we reign with him on earth as he is destroying every other rule and authority and power. That includes demonic strongholds, as well as human government. No existing government will be left standing, only Jesus. Christ will

reign until he has put every enemy under his feet. That's the kind of government Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 15.

Can you imagine a world without demonic influence? Without corrupt leaders and government? Without armies, nuclear weapons and war? Can you imagine a world that is ruled by righteousness and peace? Try to imagine what it will be like where the only government left is under the authority of Christ. That's what's coming and we get to be part of it.

Isaiah 11 describes it like this: *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. <sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. <sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”*

I am so tired of what's happening in this world and the corruption that permeates our government and society. But it won't last forever. It will come to an end when Christ returns and sets up his kingdom and we reign with him. That's an awesome time to look forward to. And because we have that to look forward to, we can live with hope and anticipation today, no matter what we're going through. Knowing these things are coming can give us the strength to persevere.

Paul finishes this section by rebuking the church in Corinth because of their denial of the resurrection. It's a lot different than where we're at, and I don't think we need the same rebuke. But there's something he says at the end that applies very much to our situation.

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

*<sup>29</sup> Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? <sup>30</sup> Why are we in danger every hour? <sup>31</sup> I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! <sup>32</sup> What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." <sup>33</sup> Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." <sup>34</sup> Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.*

So he gives a few more arguments to confront the foolishness of their denial of the resurrection. One of them has to do with some kind of practice of being baptized on behalf of the dead. It isn't spoken of anywhere else in Scripture that I'm aware of and Paul isn't condoning it; he's just using it as part of his argument of the pointlessness of the Christian life if there is no resurrection.

And then he ends with a warning, and I think we need to consider what he says because of where we're coming from. I think Paul would tell us: don't be deceived like the Corinthians who were living as if there wasn't going to be a resurrection. Don't go through life like you're in a drunken stupor and look lightly upon sin or the way you live your life. That's how people live who have no knowledge of God.

We ought to live much differently. We ought to live with hope and anticipation of the resurrection when we will have new, incorruptible bodies and when Christ will reign on earth alongside those of us who persevere and are found in him. This is why we do what we do as a church family. What we're doing isn't just another activity on the weekly calendar, it's getting ready for the return of Christ. The reason we come together as a church on Sundays to worship and during the week to encourage and support one another at Recharge and small groups is because of what's going to happen in the future. We need to spur one another on and reach out to those who don't know Christ. It's our expectation of future events that drives what we do as Christians and as a church. Are these things a priority in your life? The end is coming and it's going to be incredible for those who are in Christ, so let's live with that in mind.