

Rocks in the River

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

We are going to finish 1 Corinthians 15 this morning, and I want to talk about priorities. We give a lot of priority and importance to a lot of good things in life, but sometimes that comes at the expense of the best. If you're still in school you might prioritize your schoolwork, sports, and friends. If you're an adult it might be your career, kids and family activities, or favorite hobbies. There is no shortage of important and good things in life to devote ourselves to.

Amy and I are at a stage where kids activities are at full swing. There are all kinds of opportunities for kids in our area that relate to different interests. School is obviously a big one and a huge commitment – there's transportation to and from school, homework to check up on, and a steady flow of information to try to keep up with. Amy stays on top of all that and I'm extremely thankful because it's very overwhelming to me, especially with four kids in school.

But school is just the beginning. Kids can be in choir and band, which means practices, seasonal concerts, and competitions. Once they hit middle school they can be in jazz band and jazz choir, which usually practices before and after school. There's an annual high school play or musical that usually involves about 2 months of practice, rehearsal and performances. All these things require transportation, attendance, and some level of participation from parents. Then there's sports, which isn't a big deal when they're little, but by the time they hit middle school, in order to keep up they have to do regular school sports, club sports, weightlifting, practices, extra practices, scrimmages, games, tournaments. And they can be in 3 or 4 different sports during the year. So, more driving, more meetings, more commitments.

Beyond these, there are clubs like Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, DI, Drama Rama, Chess Club, 4-H, FFA, Parle-Pro, Forensics, and more. There are friend gatherings that they want to go to. And if that's not enough, once kids reach about 14 years old they start wanting a job to be able to pay for things they want.

Amy and I are right in the middle of all that, (Picture) and as parents you do the best you can to keep everything in balance, and you end up having to say no to a lot of things, but there's this relentless pressure to do more, and more, and more.

That's where things are at for us, and that's just one example of how our society works because that level of opportunity, pressure, and intensity is reflected in just about every spectrum of society. There's pressure in jobs and careers to go above and beyond where you're currently at in order to keep up with the competition. There's pressure in taking care of your home and vehicles – repairs, upgrades, maintenance, bills. There's even pressure in hobbies and pastimes. My hobby is deer hunting – I don't even try to hunt ducks, pheasants, or anything else, just deer, and you would be blown away by how hard it is to keep up with just that.

There are so many good things demanding our time and attention that you could live multiple lifetimes and not have time for it all. And everything seems to be so important – you almost can't avoid living an over busy life because of the pressure. It's a powerful river we're floating in.

But there's a growing concern that I have when I look at all this. The pressure to do all these things is minimizing the time and effort that we put into growing in our own faith and doing the work of ministry. The consistent trend I've seen for the past 20 years has been toward less involvement in our own spiritual growth and the ministry of the church. And I'm not pointing fingers – the same trend is happening in my own life, and I'm a pastor.

Spending time in the Word, personal devotions, going to church, youth group or small group, serving in ministry, these are in decline – generally speaking (I know there are some exceptions). We experience less growth spiritually and less impact on others in the church and in the community because we just don't have time anymore. It's not that we're doing bad things; it's that we've got too many good things going on in our lives.

I think most of us are aware of this and it doesn't seem like a big deal right away, but the gradual outcome is very serious. It's like spiritual anorexia. We're slowly starving ourselves, depriving our souls of the life-giving Spirit of God. We see less and less spiritual fruit individually and as a church. Churches are having less and less impact in society and I think it's the result of simply being over-busy and slowly pushing the things of God out of our lives. We're heading for godlessness and we're already a long way in that direction.

This morning I want to sound an alarm, but also give encouragement for why we should take steps to turn things around. We need to regularly realign our priorities so that we are standing firm like rocks in the river of our society's way of life. (Picture) This river eventually goes over a waterfall, so let's not keep getting pushed downriver. Let's go a different way and try to rescue a few others while we're at it.

The encouragement and inspiration we need today comes from 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul talks about what's in store for the people of God who persevere in faith. We're going to see that Paul talks about exciting things to come, but I want to start with what he says in the last verse.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

How well does that describe you right now? Are you steadfast in your relationship with Jesus? Immovable? Always abounding in the work of the Lord? I'm assuming that most of us are thinking, "Not exactly. I'm just trying to hang on." Paul urges his readers to live this way because of what he just wrote about exciting things to come, so let's go back and see what he had to say. It starts at verse 35...

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-37.

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"³⁶ You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.³⁷ And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

At first, I saw the questions Paul raised and wondered why he responds like he does. They seem like good questions. Why would he call someone foolish for asking them? But then I started to think about the context a little more and I think he's responding to those questions coming from someone who was denying the resurrection of the dead, which we've seen was happening in Corinth.

The Reformation Study Bible says that some of them were probably influenced by a philosophy of Dualism, which held that immaterial things were good while material things, including our bodies, were evil. They likely assumed that the

same corrupt bodies that died would rise again and couldn't conceive that God would do that. Thus, they denied the resurrection and argued against Paul: "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? You think God is going to bring a bunch of evil bodies back to life?" So Paul answers, "You foolish person..." and goes on to tell them how the bodies that rise from the dead will be much different than these original bodies that go into the grave. And he uses the analogy of a seed to do so.

I read about seeds this week and it's fascinating how well they fit with what Paul is saying. A fully mature plant reproduces by producing seeds. It doesn't produce little plants, it produces seeds. And one of the things Paul points out is that those seeds have a very different body than the plant they will become. (Picture) They look and act differently – they're just a bare kernel. The other thing he points out is that the only way a seed will ever become a plant is if it dies first. It has to be cut off from the nutrition of the parent plant in order to germinate. So it has to be cut off and essentially die. And then after it dies, it can germinate and become the fully mature plant it's supposed to be.

Paul is saying that our natural bodies are like seeds – they have to die in order for us to receive resurrection bodies, and they are different than what our resurrection bodies will be like – as different as a seed is from the plant it eventually becomes. He reiterates that in the next few verses, pointing out that God has created all kinds of different bodies and each has a glory of its own.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:38-41.

But God gives it (a kernel of wheat) a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ³⁹ For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies (objects in space) and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

God has created all kinds of different bodies, and each has a glory of its own. And that applies to our natural bodies and resurrection bodies as well, which is where Paul goes next.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-49.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

So first Paul points out that not only are our resurrection bodies going to be different than our natural bodies, they're going to be a whole lot better: imperishable, raised in glory and raised in power. We get fascinated with models and bodybuilders who sculpt their bodies into the best these bodies can be, but compared to our resurrection bodies, these are far inferior. They're perishable, sown in dishonor, and sown in weakness. They're not going to last, they're corrupted by sin, and they have all kinds of limitations and weaknesses.

Right now we live in bodies inherited from Adam with all their limitations, but when Christ returns we'll receive a new bodies from Jesus, filled with his life and power. It's going to be awesome. And the reason we get those new bodies is because we'll need them for what's coming. And Paul finishes up with that.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-57.

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of

death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The reason we need new bodies is because the immortal and imperishable kingdom of God is coming and these bodies won't cut it. We need a body that's ready for an eternal, immortal, imperishable, and spiritual kingdom – a body completely free from the corruption of sin and death, a body that can display the glory and power God intended for humanity, and a body that that will last forever without breaking down or aging. And the way we get that body is these bodies have to die (or be changed). Humanity generally looks at death as something terrible to be avoided, but God has taken something as terrible to use it for his good purposes for those who are in Christ. Death opens the way for us to receive our resurrection bodies. Therefore death is swallowed up in victory and has lost its sting. In Christ we have victory over sin, the law, and death.

Someday soon that's going to happen. And when it does, it's going to be overwhelmingly awesome beyond what words can describe. The menacing power of the law, sin, and death that brings condemnation and dominates this natural world will have no claim on us, because we have eternal victory through Christ. We will live forever and ever with glorified bodies in eternal joy and glory that keeps getting better and better.

But listen to me... We aren't there yet. We're still here. We have to make it to the end without giving up. So while we're here, we need to remain steadfast and immovable, and always be abounding in the work of the Lord as Paul says in the last verse. We have a glorious future, but we have³ to make it there. We need to remain faithful and persevere throughout this life. And we have a lot of work to do to encourage and spur one another on and to rescue others who are floating down the river.

So I want to urge all of us to look at our priorities. Where are your priorities taking you? Toward Christ or away from him? What do you need to do to stop floating downriver? What do you need to cut back on and say, "No. My relationship with the Lord has to come first. The work of the Lord has to come first."? Most of us can't add another thing to our schedule and expect it will last – something has to go. Something good... Jesus isn't something we should add to our schedule – he's something we should start with. At some point we have to take a stand and we

have to make some changes. Jesus needs to be first, not last. And all these other things, as important as they are, need to come only after him.

So now I've given you something very hard to do. How are we going to do it? We need the Holy Spirit to move. And we need to start making changes. Most of us can't transform our lifestyles overnight, but we can make incremental changes. We didn't become the way we are with one big decision, but many little ones. So now, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, may we start making little decisions in a different direction with the desire to put Christ first and fit everything else in around him.