

NEW LIFE

1 Corinthians 15

WEFC Easter Sunday April 12, 2009

Tim Timmons relates this:

If you've ever gone through a toll booth, you know that your relationship to the person in the booth is not the most intimate jewel ever have. It's one of life's frequent non-encounters. You hand over some money; you get some change; you drive off. I've been through every one of the 17 tollbooths on the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge on thousands of occasions and never had an exchange worth remembering with anybody.

Late one morning in 1984, headed for lunch in San Francisco, I drove toward one of the booths. I heard loud music. It sounded like a party or a Michael Jackson concert. I looked around. No other cars with their windows open. No soundtracks. I looked at the toll booth. Inside, the man was dancing.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm having a party," he said.

"What about the rest of these people?" I looked over at the other booths; nothing moving there.

"They're not invited."

I had a dozen other questions for him, but somebody in a big hurry to get somewhere started punching his worn behind me, and I drove off. But I made a note to myself: find his guy again. Something in his eyes says there's magic in his tollbooths.

Months later I did find him again, still with the loud music, still having a party.

Again I asked him, "What are you doing?"

He said, "I remember you from the last time. I'm still dancing. I'm having the same party."

I said, "Look, what about the rest of the people?"

He said. "Stop. What do those look like to you?" He pointed down the role of tollbooths.

"They look like... tollbooths," I said.

"Nooooo imagination!"

"Okay, I give up. What do they look like to you?"

He said, "Vertical coffins."

"What are you talking about?"

"I can prove it. At 8:30 every morning, live people get in. Then they die for eight hours. At 4:30, like Lazarus from the dead, they reemerge and go home. For eight hours, their brains are on hold, dead on the job. ... going through the motions."

I was amazed. This guy had developed a philosophy and mythology about his job. I couldn't help asking the next question: "Why is it different for you? You're having a good time."

He looked at me. "I knew you were going to ask that," he paused. "I'm going to be a dancer someday." He pointed to the administration building. "My bosses are in their, and they're paying for my training."

Timmons reflects:

16 people dead on the job, and the 17th - precisely the same environment - figures out a way to live. That man was having a party where you and I probably wouldn't last three days.

He and I had lunch later, and he said, "I don't understand why anybody would think my job is boring. I have a corner office,

glass on all sides. I can see the Golden gate, San Francisco, the Berkeley hills. Half of the Western world comes for vacation. And I just stroll in every day and practice dancing."

There, in the middle of nonexistence, stuck among vertical coffins ... one person out 16 was alive.

There was a pulse, vitality, a freshness ... that we desire to characterize our own lives.

Easter – Christ's resurrection – does better than the toll booth on that bridge.

The writer from Scripture put it this way:

1 Corinthians 15:3-5

... for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ...

Then the writer goes on to note ... (15:20)

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Jesus Christ died for our sins.

That is comparable to cleaning up a horrible mess. All of the garbage of our lives, regardless of how it has been wrapped or concealed ... has been more than adequately handled by Jesus Christ's death.

But God was not satisfied with just getting rid of our trash.

His plan was to get us to live in such a way that we would see His kingdom become a reality on this earth as it is a reality in heaven presently.

Key Thought:

Christ's resurrection, is God's intrusion into the old way of living, with a new dynamic.

Let us attempt to understand ... to see what His resurrection was intended to do ... so that we might die and live with Him.

To many the "news" of Jesus' resurrection is just Christianity's very positively biased view on their religious leader.

God's Word explains it in very different terms.

1. This reality is not a fact restricted to religion, but is a truth that affects the entire universe.

Through His resurrection, Jesus is not merely making a religious or spiritual statement.

Jesus is not just addressing a few select godly people ... those who make up His church.

This is not just for those who are His supporters.

He is making a definitive statement that changes the ground rules for everyone past, present and future.

The RESURRECTION OF CHRIST breaks through all the boundaries and walls that people have attempted to construct and hem it in.

But their attempts to contain it; restrict it's broad, sweeping reality are all proving to be unsuccessful.

Neither is this a private, personal matter ... things that I personally have chosen to believe in ... and you can believe in what you want to believe.

This is a fact from which no one can remove themselves. What it means is of such power that it is just as real as the World Wars we have experienced, just as real as the economic downturn in which we find ourselves.

Those events were and are global ... the whole world felt them.

The resurrection ... is more than global, it affects the entire universe.

We have not gathered here today for a religious holiday ... contrary to what many may say,

We have gathered to celebrate the day when God broke through into the old corrupt system, when He hacked, as it were, into the old infected program ... and launched a new "virus", not one that is bad, but one that is good to the fullest degree.

A new kind of life that will one day dominate the entire universe ... one that we today know as the way things ought to be, but are not.

Christ's resurrection was Inauguration Day for the God's New Life "System" for the Universe ... that which He intended the world to be like way back from the beginning.

This is a religious reality, political fact, social truth, economic understanding ... for Christ's resurrection is that big ... and affects, literally, everything.

Jesus' resurrection was the kickoff of what God had always intended life to be ... but sin had delayed and wrecked ... and now God was once again untangling sin's mess and damage.

This morning we are celebrating something that is humongous. It is so sweeping in its scope that we have not seen anything like it ever before.

Key Thought:

Christ's resurrection, is God's intrusion into the old way of living, with a new dynamic.

Let's get a few of the details.

Ask someone what "Resurrection" means ... and they will probably answer, "Life after death."

That is NOT what RESURRECTION means in God's Word.

Phil Callaway, who was with us at our church's 50th Anniversary about a year a half ago recalls ...

One sleepy Sunday afternoon when my son was five-years-old, we drove past a cemetery together. Noticing a large pile of dirt beside a newly excavated grave, he pointed and said: "Look, Dad, one got out!"

That is what the resurrection is about - When one gets out ... when one broke death power and lived again, in a body that no longer surrenders to death.

2. The Resurrection is NOT “Life After Death”

In Jesus’ day people outside of Christianity and Judaism (and possibly one other group) were convinced of the fact that dead people do not rise again.

The Jewish people believed that it could happen, but that no one had ever risen from the dead and that no one would do it until God’s great resurrection time.

The world was convinced that death always won. All died and no one could overcome its dominance.

No one had an answer to death in the ancient world.

In the world of Jesus when people talked of the resurrection it never meant, “life after death”.

Rather, **resurrection meant “BODILY life after death”**.

Discussions that centered around RESURRECTION meant that someone died and then they received a new BODILY life.

It did not refer merely to “LIFE AFTER DEATH”.

The RESURRECTION referred specifically to what would happen to the BODY.

Most people at that time believed in some kind of “life after death”. What they were certain of is that this did NOT mean that they believed in a RESURRECTION.

So on that first Easter morning when Jesus’ followers stated that Christ had been resurrected they knew what they were saying ... and what it meant.

What had happened to Jesus ...

- **had not happened to anyone else**
- **no one had expected it, not even they, themselves**

They were NOT saying that Jesus had ...

- gone into a kind of heavenly state
- now become divine

None of his followers upon His death said, “Oh, that’s okay. He needed to die to save us. Do not worry. He’ll be back in a few days. Do not get upset!”

Nor did any of them say, “Now He is in heaven with God, His Father.”

No one understood what Jesus had accomplished in these ways.

Today, **attempts to discredit Christ’s resurrection** continue. People refuse to believe what happened.

1. **Jesus did not really die; someone drugged him that make it look like He had died and then revived Him in the tomb.**

Response:

Roman soldiers knew how to kill a person and no disciple would be fooled by a half-drugged, beat-up Jesus and say that He had defeated death and inaugurated God's new kingdom.

2. **The women who said they saw Jesus at the tomb saw someone else and mistakenly thought they had seen Jesus in the early morning dawn.**

Response:

They would have noticed soon enough that they had made a misidentification soon after.

3. **Jesus appeared only to people who believed in Him**

Response:

Thomas did not believe that He was alive, neither this Saul of Tarsus, who was later named Paul.

Further, actually none of the disciple's believed He had been raised from the dead.

4. **The accounts we have are biased.**

Response:

So is all of history, all journalism. Every picture is taken by somebody from a particular angle.

5. **His disciples started by saying, "He will be raised," as people had done with the martyrs, and this quickly**

turned into saying, "He has been raised," ... which is essentially saying the same thing.

Response:

No it isn't saying the same thing.

6. **Many people have visions of someone they love who has died: this is what happened to the disciples.**

Response:

The disciples were aware of such experiences and they had language to for such an experience where they would say, "Its an angel." or "Its his spirit."

They would not say, "He has been raised from the dead."

7. **This was a rich spiritual experience. Jesus, after all, was now "spiritually" alive.**

Response:

That is following Plato's understanding of life, not God's way.

Resurrection was not a word used to make death sound nicer, more spiritual. It was something that happened after real death.

Jesus had taught His followers that His kingdom had finally come, even if it was in its infancy.

It was He who had taught them to pray "... Your kingdom come on EARTH as it is in heaven."

But when He died everyone who had followed Him knew they had wrongly lined up behind the wrong individual.

BUT ... then came the third day.

The world had never experienced anything like this ... like what happened with Christ's resurrection. **Jesus had not just come to life, He had come to new BODILY life.**

He had been resurrected!

Even though Judaism allowed for a resurrection, even the Jewish belief of resurrection was changed by Christianity.

Christianity made a number of changes to the Jewish understanding of RESURRECTION.

Remember the setting.

When it comes to what people believe about LIFE AFTER DEATH is generally very conservative.

When we are hit with death, those left move back to the safety of what they have heard and learned before.

But the early Christians didn't. They stepped across old lines quickly ... because the evidence was all too convincing.

They did not just buy in to the old understanding of things ... they changed things because Jesus made them change their understanding.

This is how it was.

1. Within early Christianity there is very unified understanding of the resurrection.

Within Judaism the Pharisees believed in a bodily resurrection, the Sadducees did not.

Other groups of people had various opinions on the matter.

Within Christianity, the teaching on the resurrection became quickly united and clear delineated.

... for Jesus had set forth an extremely strong precedent.

The event was that clear and that convincing.

It was not a matter open to discussion ... the point was that obvious.

2. What was somewhat important in Judaism became central in Christianity.

Remove the resurrection of Christ from Christianity and you have nothing.

3. The resurrection, as an event, has split into two.

No first century Jew prior to Easter expected the resurrection to be anything other than a large-scale event happening to all God's people, or perhaps to the entire human race, as part of the sudden event in which God's kingdom would finally come on earth as in heaven.

There is no suggestion that one person would rise from the dead in advance of all the rest.

In Jesus we find in the middle of “old” history God starts a new thing through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

His resurrection becomes the advance notice, the down payment, the firstfruits of what would happen to all of Christ’s followers.

4. Making a connection between Resurrection and Messiahship.

Nobody in Judaism had expected the Messiah to die, and therefore nobody had imagined that He would rise from the dead.

Where messianic speculations existed, the Messiah was supposed to fight God's victory is a battle against the wicked pagans; rebuild or cleanse the temple; and bring God's justice into the world.

Jesus, by appearance, had done none of these things.

He had

- suffered the typical injustice of the world
- mounted a strange and apparently ineffective temple cleansing
- died at the hands of unclean Romans rather than defeating them gloriously in battle.

No Jewish person with his head half screwed on would have imagined that the Messiah could, after Jesus’ crucifixion, was genuinely the Lord's anointed.

But from extremely early on, right off the bat, the early Christians confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, precisely because of His resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ some 2000 years ago, is a historical reality ... an event that happened to a real person ... and it has been proven as would any other event in history, to be a real occurrence.

Jesus was RESURRECTED – He died and came back to life BODILY.

The first installment of God's great plan.

... and here is what it means for us today.

Lou Holtz, former head coach of the Notre Dame fighting Irish, said,

"I don't mind starting the season with unknowns. I just don't like finishing the season with them."

God has taken the guess work out of the future – not the surprise - but the guess work and given us confidence about tomorrow.

3. The Resurrection: Christ’s New Life in an Old World System

Recall that we said at the beginning that this is not just a spiritual, religious event ... this RESURRECTION, but an event that changes the whole world?

It can be described as so pervasive and broad that we can refer to it as THE NEW CREATION.

The resurrection of Jesus presents itself to everyone, be that the historian, scientist, atheist, stay-at-home mom, medical profession, truck driver, Christian, and person on death row, ... not as an odd event within the world but as the new norm, that which will be characteristic, proto-typical, and foundational event within the world when Christ takes control of the world.

It is not a far-out, left-field, ridiculous event within the world as we know it, but rather it is the first of many to many come resurrections ... the starting point of God's New World started through Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not merely create a new religion. He came to give New Life, a world where in the end Heaven and Earth, as stated in Revelation 21 would be joined together ... and Christ would be the Supreme Leader.

This is not just new ethics, new moral laws, but a NEW CREATION.

What Scripture tells us that at that first Easter, the New Creation was let loose, so to speak, "the cat was let out of the bag" and you things would never be the same.

That means that historians had never seen anything like this before.

Scientists have no way to compare results of the event to others. There would be no experiments that one could conduct to verify the results.

So while Jesus breaks open a New Creation, He does so within the Old World System.

So in the middle of Life-and-Death, we have a NEW CREATION that has begun to operate.

This is not just about a Jesus who is a wonderful idea in people's hearts ... but a Jesus who comes out of tomb in Jerusalem's vicinity, who walks around in a real, physical, resurrected body, not merely as a spirit.

In the middle of the old, decaying and faltering world, Jesus starts something entirely new.

This New Creation of God's is where Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Model, our Lord and King.

This is not a private religion, a personal thing, but a fact that affects all of the world ... This is a public event in the fullest sense of the word.

Conclusion:

Key Thought:

Christ's resurrection, is God's intrusion into the old way of living, with a new dynamic.

With Jesus' resurrection ... everything changed.

And He offers to us His new resurrection life ... where He deals with all our sin ... but then He does more.

He gives us life.

Life that we get in on now, but will get its full dose when we receive our new, resurrection bodies, like His,

This is what it means to be accept Christ.

To recognize that we are “dead in our sin”; we are living an old life ... but that Jesus broke through all that.

And God the Father makes it clear to us that we are lost, finished without Him, but if we sense His tug on our hearts, we can respond to His invitation and receive Jesus ... and God the Holy Spirit completes that transaction.

... and we receive New Life today ... Resurrection Life ... and tomorrow, after death, should our Lord not return, we will wait for that day when the promise will be entirely fulfilled and we will be resurrected with a new, physical and eternal body in God’s Kingdom.

It is Jesus who has broken the old, sinful, mangled molds of hatred, one-up-manship, bitterness, feeling sorry for ourselves ...

It is Jesus who is the Savior that God presents as God in human flesh, raised from the dead – the Conqueror and Giver of Life.

Mike Kollin, former linebacker of the Miami Dolphins, was asked by his coach to do some recruiting. Mike said, "Sure, coach. What kind of player are you looking for?"

The coach replied, "Well, Mike, you know there's that fellow who gets knocked down and just stays down?"

Mike said, "We don't want him, do we?"

The coach answered, "No, we don't want him. Then there is that fellow that gets knocked down and gets up and then gets knocked down and stays down."

Mike said, "We don't want him either, do we?"

The coach responded, "No, and then there is the fellow who gets knocked down, gets backed up, gets knocked down, and gets back up again and again."

Mike said, "That's the guy we want, right?"

Then the coach said, "No we don't want him either. I want you to find that guy who's knocking everybody down. That's the guy we want!"

Jesus, who was raised bodily has knocked SIN and EVIL down and keeps knocking them down, and will do so until He has stomped them out completely.

He is God ... raised bodily from the dead ... our Savior.

He, the Resurrected One, desires to pass His Resurrection Life on to you.

Receive it ... and live the resurrected life.

** N.W. Wright SURPRISED BY HOPE has given excellent information on the resurrection which I have freely used.*

Faith in Jesus risen from the dead transcends above includes what we call history and what we call science. Faith of this sort is not blind belief, which rejects all history and science. Nor is it simply - which would be much safer!