

1Corinthians 15:12 "What is the Resurrection from the Dead?"

1CO 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.

As I mentioned last week Paul is addressing an apparent problem in the church at Corinth where some of the leaders were teaching a doctrine which at best questioned the bodily resurrection of believers and at worst denied the bodily resurrection of all believers.

The irony is that they all seemed to accept the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. You see a person cannot be a Christian and deny the bodily resurrection of our Lord. To deny the bodily resurrection of Christ is to teach that He is still in the grave.

Now, there are those who embrace the resurrection of Jesus Christ but they espouse a type of spiritual resurrection denying the physical body of Christ coming out from the tomb and thus in turn deny a physical resurrection of His followers.

But this does raise the issue of both a physical and spiritual resurrection, that is not often understood or discussed, that is a real aspect of the eternal state of God's people in His Kingdom.

When Adam was created by God on day six of creation God formed man from the dust of the earth, as we're told in Genesis 2.

Genesis 2:7 ⁷ Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground,

The idea of forming man carries with it God's construction or the fashioning of man in such a way that his physical form is complete with all its 12 different physical systems, including the cardiovascular system, the digestive system and the nervous system and so on.

In other words, when God formed man from the dust of the ground man's physical makeup was intact and ready to receive the only other aspect of his being that would animate man and that is a life giving spirit placed in the physical man.

Genesis 2:7 ⁷ Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, *and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

Man starts out as a physical being, but that physical being is not alive and therefore, on one level, is not much different, at least in substance, than the ground from which he was formed. The substance of the man was most certainly specially arranged and special in its new formation but it still lacks life until man becomes a living being as God breathes into his nostrils.

The imagery here is that prior to this life giving breath the man is incomplete, only being formed from the stuff of the earth as he lay there lifeless. God intervenes with His breath and brings life to the man thus completing the man as both physical and spiritual as the term “living being” could be living soul.

Therefore, man is both a physical being and a spiritual being as the entire man, body and soul, come to life as God gives him life.

However, after man’s rebellion against his creator and God he will suffer death where his body returns to the earth and his spirit is separated from his body, as the earth and the entire universe now suffers under the curse of sin.

Genesis 3:17-19 ¹⁷ Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. ¹⁸ "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; ¹⁹ *By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.*"

Paul records for us the anticipation of the entire creation being delivered from this curse.

Romans 8:19-22 ¹⁹ *For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.* ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that *the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

Notice that the creation is characterized as one awaiting to be delivered from its slavery to the curse, but it is contingent upon man's freedom into the glory of God that awaits the children of God. This is another way of describing the resurrection of the children of God. And this is the point that Paul makes to the church in Corinth.

The resurrection is central to the fulfillment of God's eternal Kingdom on earth in which righteousness dwells. And it is the glorious resurrection of God's people that will be the point at which the entire creation will share in that glory as the curse is lifted from the entire creation over which redeemed men will rule and reign.

This is in fulfillment of the original mandate given to Adam who was the first King of the world with the mission to rule and reign over all that God created.

Genesis 1:26 ²⁶ Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; *and let them rule* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

But since the first Adam failed in his mission to be both king and priest, as one who represented God on earth, it would take the second Adam to accomplish what the first did not as Paul points out in this very section of 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:22 ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 ⁴⁵ So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

We'll go into some detail with these passages when we come to them in a couple of weeks.

But the point is that the Kingdom of God that was given to Adam was meant to be ruled jointly by Adam and Eve, together with their offspring, and God, just as the Kingdom of God in Christ is meant to be shared by Christ and His people.

Romans 8:16-17 ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that *we are children of God*, ¹⁷ and if children, heirs also, *heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

Revelation 22:3-5 ³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; ***and they will reign forever and ever.***

This ruling and reigning is in the context of the bodily resurrection of God's people. Without the resurrection of the body there is no kingdom and there is no eternal life which is the hope that Paul was holding out for and of which these Corinthians had lost sight.

When our hope is skewed or put to the side then our reason for living for God loses its significance. The hope that we should embrace is the same hope Paul risked his life for. In fact, this was the hope Paul was arguing for when making his case before King Agrippa.

Acts 26:2 ² "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that ***I am about to make my defense before you today;***

Acts 26:6-8 ⁶ "And now ***I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;*** ⁷ *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. ⁸ ***"Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?"***

This was Paul's hope, the resurrection from the dead, which is the exact hope he previously argued in front of the Jewish council.

^{NAU} **Acts 23:6** But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; ***I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"***

What is fascinating about Paul's perspective on the resurrection being his only hope is that it necessarily excludes any idea of longing for some disembodied existence and calling that ***"the hope of the promise made to our fathers."***

This doesn't exclude Paul's understanding of the present heaven where disembodied spirits of the saints go to be at home with the Lord. But, Paul does not equate that with the hope for which he longs.

Philippians 1:21-24 ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ ***But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;*** ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Paul understood, given the choice to either remain in a sin-filled, cursed world, or to depart this life in death and his spirit be with Christ in the present heaven, that heaven with Christ would be much better. But to die and be in heaven with Christ is not the hope for which Paul longed, but rather the resurrection which he has already stated in his letter to the Romans which is connected to the restoration of the universe in the new heavens and new earth,

That's what Paul was waiting for and what he was willing to die for as he brought that message of hope to the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

Unless we too understand this the best we can hope for is a disembodied eternal existence in the present heaven which Christ Himself would not subscribe to as the hope He has in store for us, as He made plain to the Martha at the death of His friend Lazarus.

John 11:21-27 ²¹ Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." ²³ ***Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."*** ²⁴ Martha said to Him, "***I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.***" ²⁵ ***Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,*** ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world."

The life that Christ secured for us through His resurrection is a resurrection life in a resurrected world at the last day, as Martha points out and which Jesus confirms in the gospel of John.

John 6:39-40, 44 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but *raise it up on the last day*. ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and *I Myself will raise him up on the last day* ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and *I will raise him up on the last day*.

This is our hope and this is what Paul is trying to convey to the Corinthian believers as he shares this good news, not just as a hope for the future but also how this should affect their lives in the present with their fellow believers.

And this is precisely the point Peter was making as he reminded his readers how the hope of the resurrection of believers, along with the destruction of the present world, (God's final judgment, and subsequent restoring of the universe), should humble us, knowing that we have been delivered from God's wrath and into His eternal kingdom on the new earth.

2 Peter 3:10-14 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ *Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,* ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But *according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.* ¹⁴ *Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,*

And so, when Paul ends his letter to the Corinthians he doesn't simply throw in for good measure the reality of the resurrection as if this is only a response to nay-sayers who question its reality, rather he writes this so as to explain how their entire existence depends on it and how this understanding should color their appreciation of this new resurrection life in Christ both now and forever.

Again, when we understand what our hope in Christ is all about through His resurrection, then the things of this world begin to grow faintly dim in the light of what is about to come to fruition in this resurrection, and we along with Paul can say that no matter

what this world throws at us we long for the glory to be revealed in Christ.

Philippians 3:8-11 ⁸ More than that, *I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ *in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

So, this brings me back to my point of what this resurrection entails as we view it from both a spiritual and physical aspect. And by this I mean that human beings who have placed their faith in Christ for their salvation will one day be resurrected in both spirit and body.

This is why Paul can say to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

What is absent from the body? That part of you that is spirit that goes to be with the Lord after physical death.

But Paul glories in the reuniting of the body and the spirit thus completing what God had always intended for His people in a resurrected state. This was the hope he longed for in that final resurrection.

But the question then arises, what is a spiritual resurrection and what is a bodily resurrection? And a follow up question would be, since a bodily resurrection is still a future aspect of our salvation in the eschaton, is it possible to have a spiritual resurrection in the present?, keeping in mind that a human being is both spiritual and physical in nature, thus both must be resurrected.

And the answer is that there is a present spiritual resurrection unto life and there is a future bodily resurrection on the last day.

So, let's take a look at the spiritual resurrection of God's people which is identified as the first resurrection according to John.

Revelation 20:4-6 ⁴ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. *And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus* and

because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and ***they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*** ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. ***This is the first resurrection.*** ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

You'll notice that the first resurrection that John identifies happens in a specific place during a specific time.

The specific place is at the throne of God where the souls of those believers who had been martyred for their faith are gathered as they come to life and reign with Christ. The specific time period is a thousand years.

Many Christians will identify this thousand years as the millennial reign of the risen Christ on this present world, at that time still filled with sin, the curse and death.

In fact, Revelation 20 is the only place in Scripture where this reign with Christ for a thousand years is ever mentioned. But one thing becomes quite apparent with a careful reading of this passage in Revelation.

Nowhere in this thousand year reign does this present earth come directly into play. In fact, we are told that those saints who have died and gone to be with the Lord are the one's who have come alive and reign with Christ during this time.

Without going into all of the reasons as to why many Christians hold to a literal thousand year earthly reign of Christ on this present world, suffice it to say that a simple exegesis of the passage leaves much more room for a theological symbolic meaning of this thousand year period which, according to Revelation, is taking place in heaven, not earth.

Keep in mind that all of Revelation is of the genre of apocalyptic literature that is highly symbolic in nature as it explains real literal spiritual truths. In fact, the apostle John makes this quite clear at the outset of this revelation.

Revelation 1:9-12 ⁹ I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and

the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send *it* to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." ¹² ***Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;***

Here we see that John is in the Spirit when Jesus revealed these things to him. When John turns to see what the Lord was describing to him he saw seven golden lampstands.

Did John literally see seven golden lampstands? Absolutely! But the Lord makes it clear that though he is being shown lampstands these lampstands represent a literal manifestation of the church.

Revelation 1:20 ²⁰ "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and ***the seven lampstands are the seven churches.***

Here at the outset of this revelation Jesus Christ is making it clear that He is using certain symbols to represent literal things like the church and angels or leaders of those churches.

This is God's tone that He is intentionally putting forth for the rest of this revelation. And so, it shouldn't surprise us that we see a variety of images and strange scenes that are symbolic in nature to describe literal things like Satan, who is depicted as a serpent, or the attributes of a sovereign and omnipresent God as being described in Rev.3:1 as the seven Spirits of God.

There is only one Spirit, but like much of the other imagery in the book of Revelation even numbers are used in a symbolic way to describe literal truths. The number seven represents completeness and fulfillment of the will of God and this is demonstrated in many ways throughout the word of God starting with the six days of creation where God then celebrates His act of completing His creation as He is shown to rest on the seventh day.

The number 10 and multiples of it are also used by God to describe literal truths in a symbolic manner.

Psalms 50:10 ¹⁰ "For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills.

The first part of verse 10 defines the last part of that same verse. And so it is clear that every beast belongs to God and the cattle on a thousand hills is part of every beast, which is to say that the thousand hills is symbolic language describing the entire earth and every beast as belonging to God.

The same is true of the number 1,000 in the book of Revelation.

The 1,000 years is directly tied to a specific group of people only; those who have died in Christ and surround His throne waiting for the time that the 1,000 years are completed and Satan is released.

This study does not allow me to go into much depth into the whole realm of this thousand years, but suffice it to say that the number 1,000 describing the time of the saints in heaven reigning with Christ is symbolic time completing God's redemptive plan between Christ's resurrection and ascension, and His final return to this earth to raise His people to life in a bodily resurrection; as we'll see in a moment is the second resurrection.

So, what is the first resurrection referred to in Revelation 20? These are those saints who come to life (resurrection) as they have passed from death to life in the presence of the Lord in their spirits, awaiting their bodily resurrection.

And so, what is inferred in Revelation 20 is that all believers who suffer the ravages of the spiritual and physical death penalty, introduced in the Garden of Eden after the fall, are the ones in heaven between the time they suffer death in this world and are then transported to His throne awaiting the final coming of Christ in judgment.

Thus coming to life to reign with Christ is what is referred to as the first resurrection and the first part of the completion of a resurrection of both the spirit and body of man, the former being the introduction to the latter, what some call the "already/not yet" eschatology where we experience part of our salvation today only to expect the entire gift later.

For example, Paul describes the already/not yet aspect of his salvation in the light of his future bodily resurrection.

Philippians 3:10-12 ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ *in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.* ¹² *Not that I have already obtained it or have*

already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Paul is saying that he presently enjoys his salvation in the resurrection power of Christ with the assurance of his own bodily resurrection in the consummation of his salvation in the future.

And so, when we speak of the first resurrection we are addressing the “already” aspect of our resurrection being brought from death to life. And this is not just a NT concept but is spoken of in the OT.

When Ezekiel prophesied for the Lord to the spiritually dead house of Israel he prophesied of a future resurrection, but this resurrection addressed the heart that only God could change.

Ezekiel 37:9-14 ⁹ Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.'"" ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' ¹² "Therefore prophesy and say to them, '**Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. ¹⁴ "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land.** Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD."

This is the same spiritual resurrection that Ezekiel described earlier in this prophecy.

^{NAU} **Ezekiel 11:19** "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

This “already/not yet” aspect of our resurrection in Christ is further explained by Paul when he wrote to the Galatians.

Colossians 2:9-14 ⁹ For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, ¹⁰ and *in Him you have been made complete*, and He is the head over all rule and authority; ¹¹ and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the

removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; ¹² having been buried with Him in baptism, in which *you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.* ¹³ *When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him,* having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Here Paul is stating the fact that we who are in Christ have already been brought from death to life in Christ, we have been made alive, we were raised up with Christ who has already been physically raised after three days in the grave.

And so, our identification with Christ's resurrection life is no mere allusion but an actual working of that resurrection life to where we literally, albeit spiritually, have been raised from the dead.

This is exactly what Paul also wrote to church in Rome.

Romans 6:3-11 ³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.* ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, *certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,* ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ *Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

To be identified with Christ's death means that as far as the Father is concerned we have met all of the requirements for satisfying the Father's demand for righteousness and holiness that can qualify us for entry into the presence of God, taking us from the status of His enemies to that of His children.

But the reality is that we no more literally died on that cross than we literally rose from the dead. It was all Jesus Christ.

But because we are represented by Christ, and because He has imputed His righteousness to our account by faith, then we enjoy every aspect of His salvation including a present as well as a future resurrection of the whole man.

Our present resurrection, as we are brought from death to life in Christ, is such that we are new creatures with a new life and a new hope of a future physical resurrection unto the new earth where God's Kingdom will be established on that new earth with the new heavens all declaring the glory of God.

In this sense, we who are new creatures in Christ are presently part of that new kingdom to come. And so, we live in the "already" as present residents of heaven, awaiting the "not yet" completion of that heavenly Kingdom on the new earth.

I don't want to belabor this point of a spiritual resurrection, but unless we understand why John in Revelation 20:8 speaks of the first resurrection as he juxtaposes that with the second death, which is final death in the Lake of fire, implying a second and final resurrection, then we will not grasp the importance of that future bodily resurrection that Paul longed for and which he explains in some detail to these Corinthians.

Next week we will return to our text and join Paul in this anticipation of what God has ordained from eternity past and that is our future state with the Lord Jesus Christ where we will become like our resurrected Savior.

1 John 3:2-3 ² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that *when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.* ³ And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

We who are in Christ have *already* been raised from death to life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ but we have *not yet* experienced the final resurrection of our bodies though this is our hope.

Let me end with this encouragement from Paul as he wrote the church in Ephesus with the same message he has brought all the churches.

Ephesians 2:4-7 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ *even when we were dead in*

our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ *and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Glory in your first resurrection as you have been made alive with Christ, (for by grace you have been saved), and live in the hope of that age to come when our Lord shows His surpassing riches of grace in that second and final resurrection as He delivers His people to the Father on that final day.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.