

Seeing Life through Resurrection Coloured Glasses

We have all heard the phrase “Rose Coloured Glasses.” People who look at the world through rose-coloured glasses are understood to be optimists, seeing life in a hopeful and positive way. I would like to suggest that it is those who are Christians and believe in the Resurrection who are the true optimists because of what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 20-34. For Christians are to see all of life through the lens of the Resurrection and so be true optimists, filled with a wonderful and glorious hope.

Beginning with Verse 20, we now come to a section where Paul’s thoughts sweep across the centuries to declare the ultimate effects in history of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul begins by saying our resurrection is tied to Jesus’ resurrection.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. 21 For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; 22 for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

The key to this passage is the twice repeated word, “first fruits” found in verses 20 and 23. Paul is referring here to the ritual that was given to Israel in the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus, known as the Feast of First Fruits. It began on the morrow of the Passover. Now remember Passover ended on a Saturday so the Feast of First Fruits began on a Sunday. On this day the Israelites would offer the first fruits of the barley harvest. They were commanded to bring a sheaf of grain, the first of the harvest, to the priest, who would wave it before the Lord. By doing this they were giving thanks for the full harvest that would follow. Now the Feast of the First Fruits began on the exact morning of our Lord’s resurrection. There, in the feasts of Israel, you have a prediction that the resurrection of Jesus would be the first fruits of the harvest. Paul’s argument is that not only did Jesus rise from the dead on the exact day predicted by the ritual, but, furthermore, his resurrection is a sample and a guarantee of the entire “harvest” of resurrection, which will include ours as well.

He speaks about our resurrection by comparing Adam with Jesus. At verse 22 he writes “for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.” We die because, as far as our bodies are concerned, they are part of the race of Adam. By man came

the breakout from Eden; by man came also the breakthrough back into Paradise, by means of resurrection. What he is really saying then is that resurrection is just as certain as death.

It is a rather sobering thing to realize that we are all dying this morning. We begin to die the moment we are born, and the process keeps going on relentlessly. Though we can cover up the outward appearances for a while, the inward decay cannot be arrested; we are all headed for death and there is nothing we can do about its eventuality.

Now, with equal certainty, here is the good news. It is not up to you to be resurrected, but it will happen. Just as surely as death is at work in us because we are in Adam, so life is at work in us because we are in Christ. Therefore, it is just as certain as death that we shall be resurrected again from the dead and brought into a quality and level of life that we have never known before. Now that is a wonderfully encouraging thought. The apostle puts it in the strongest terms possible.

When you may ask will this resurrection happen? Paul answers that great question in verse 23: “But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.” This resurrection will happen at his coming.

Now because of what Paul says here it has been at times understood that people who die before the coming of the Lord either lie asleep in the grave until he comes, or they drift around in a disembodied state. I think this is to misread what the Scriptures are saying. Paul teaches, as does Jesus, that when those who are in Christ die they will be with the Lord in heaven. In Philippians Paul says that it is his desire to depart to be with Christ because that will be far better. Jesus in John 14 says “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

Both Paul and Jesus say the same thing, believers will be with the Lord when we die.”

This is a teaching that I imagine most of you believe and accept. However what you might not realize is that this is only the first stage of the life that is to come. When Christ comes again we will then inhabit a new earth. There will no longer be any separation between the realm we call heaven, that domain which is uncreated where

God has always dwelt, and the realm God created which we call the universe, of which the earth is a part.

At the time of the Second Coming there will be a coming together of heaven and earth in such a way that we will inhabit this new earth with resurrection bodies.

Beginning in Verse 24, Paul moves on to that final scene, to the time when Christ has returned into time when Jesus will have completed his work, subdued his enemies, cast the devil and death and Hades into the lake of fire (as we read in the book of Revelation), and then delivered the kingdom back to the Father.

Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every 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.

Paul says, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” This can be seen to be true in both an individual and a universal sense. Universally, death is never going to disappear from this earth until we come to that moment, described in the book of Revelation, when a new heaven and a new earth come into existence. In this present heaven and earth death reigns and will continue to do so until Jesus comes again.

But there is a sense in which this is individually true of us right now. What is going on in your life and mine? Well, we are experiencing a continual mutual exchange in which life comes out of death. We are all fighting battles, struggles in which at times we fail, falter, and are overcome. We give way to worry, we give way to impatience, anger, malice, fear, gluttony, sloth, covetousness and lust. Sometimes we struggle against these things with great effort; other times we give in quickly. But we are all engaged in a great battle in which we are assaulted continually with temptations to yield and to fall into death. Yet, even out of those times of failure, by the grace of God’s forgiveness we are restored. Life is handed back to us, in a sense, and we go on to walk for a longer time without failure, until gradually we gain victory over evil habits and evil attitudes. These earthly years are therefore a continual experience of life coming out of death, of pain leading to joy. This struggle will never end as long as we are in this present life.

But once death is destroyed Paul describes what will happen next.

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 this does not include the one who put all things

in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

Here is the description of the end of Christ's work as a mediator between God and humans. During this present time, our Lord Jesus is singled out, as it were, from the persons of the Godhead as the supreme object of worship, and we are invited to worship him and give honor to him.

But there is coming a time, Paul says, when the work of the Son in subduing a lost creation will be finished. When the full results of the atonement of the cross have been completed and all the harvest of the earth is gathered, then, according to this account, the Lord Jesus returns the kingdom to the Father in order that "God [the three-fold God, Father, Son, and Spirit] may be everything to every one."

What this means is that then, for the first time in our experience, we will understand emotionally the mystery of the Trinity. We now know the Bible teaches that there are three persons in the Godhead, that they are equal in glory and honor, and that they somehow coalesce (that is they are united together) so that there are three persons but only one God. Intellectually we can grasp that; emotionally I do not think anyone does. But there is coming a day when we will thoroughly understand, emotionally, the makeup of God, and we will understand the great truth God has been seeking to teach us all through this earthly experience that he is all we need, that God is everything to every one.

In the next section, from Verses 29-34, the apostle brings out the motivating power of the resurrection. He starts with this puzzling verse,

Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

This verse evidently refers to some form of proxy baptism. Perhaps it was a case where some people had died without being able to be baptized; they had become Christians by faith, but they had not had an opportunity to be baptized before they died. So some were adopting the practice of being baptized on their behalf, out of a kind of superstitious idea that you could not enter heaven unless you were baptized. Lots of people have that idea yet. Whatever it was, the apostle is arguing that the belief in a resurrection has a profound motivating force upon our lives, and it will make us do things to help others. Therefore what he is saying is that believing in the resurrection has a great effect upon you. It will change your life. It will make you do things that you would not otherwise do, and one of the things is that you will be

concerned about the salvation of others. He speaks about a similar effect in verses 30 through 32 concerning himself:

³⁰ And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? ³¹ I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, as my boasting of you—a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised,

That is a reference to persecution Paul endured for the sake of Jesus. There is another verse in the Second Corinthians letter that probably refers to the same thing. In Chapter 1, Verses 8-9, he says:

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

That is the point. To believe that God raises the dead is a tremendous encouragement to endure suffering and even physical affliction now. The fact that the apostle understood this enabled him to bear up in a time of great physical pressure, when, as he put it, I think figuratively, he “fought with beasts at Ephesus.” It was almost like going into the arena to fight wild beasts.

Are you, perhaps, wearing out your life in some obscure corner? Do you think you will never be heard of, that nobody will ever know the kind of struggles you have to endure because you are a Bible believing Christian? Well, have no fear. Paul says “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure”. The resurrection is the ample recompense for all human suffering, no matter how bad it may be. He closes this section with an appeal to let the hope of resurrection determine your life style:

If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

If the resurrection isn't going to happen Paul is saying we might as well be hedonists. What is hedonism? Every beer commercial we watch during the Playoffs celebrates this philosophy. It was wide spread then and is widespread today. “Live it up. Get it all now. Don't bother with giving yourself and wasting your time on doing things for

God. Enjoy yourself. Spend all your free time having fun and pleasure.” But, Paul says:

Do not be deceived:”Bad company ruins good morals.”³⁴ Come to a sober and right mind [that is, be realistic] and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

What was happening in Corinth is what is happening in Calgary. Many Christians there were giving way to this “live it up” philosophy. Instead of making themselves available to spread the word of truth, instead of giving themselves to the Spirit of God to be used in ways that would plant the seed of righteousness and love and truth in areas where people were hurting and suffering, they were giving way to the idea, “Enjoy yourself; that is what life is for.” And they were running with people who thought that way. Paul reminds them, quoting a proverb of that day. “Bad company ruins good morals.” So he says, “Come to your right mind; begin to face life realistically; stop kidding yourselves. This is a battle, and we have the privilege of living in this time of history and affecting the world of our day. The time is rapidly passing. Make the proper use of it,” he says, “for some are even professing to be Christians and have no real knowledge of God at all because they are living just like everyone around them.”

So the apostle closes this section with this note: We are not the creatures of time. We are immortal beings. When we gather at the throne of God, the greatest privilege we will claim for ourselves is that we had the opportunity to labor for his namesake here in this life.

When we see life through Resurrection Coloured glasses we will heed Paul’s words because we know that Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.