

Sermon 58: 1 Corinthians 15:29-34: Because the Resurrection is True...

OUTLINE

We baptize in hope
We risk our lives
We depart from sin

INTRODUCTION

Here is a little thought experiment. How would you live this day and the rest of your lives if what the Bible said about Christianity were true? Of course it is all true, but we don't always live in light of that truth. Paul in the next section in Corinthians is getting the Corinthians to see just this. They have been influenced to think that the resurrection of the body is not true, and Paul is spending time, writing the longest chapter in the Bible on the resurrection to correct this thinking. He has established the resurrection of Jesus as a fact in history; he has refuted the logic of denying bodily resurrection by showing that this would deny the resurrection of Christ; and last week we looked at the mechanics of how it will all work with Jesus as the firstfruits, and our own resurrection as the guaranteed part two of a new creation resurrection harvest. In the verses before us in v29-34, Paul picks up on further arguments for why the resurrection is true. He points out two more negative implications of denying the resurrection. To deny the resurrection is to deny the meaning of baptism; and it makes all the suffering of the apostle's ministry futile. I do not want to focus so much on the negative elements of his arguments but the positive. You see, Paul knows the resurrection to be true, and it is because the resurrection is true that Paul draws out three important implications for us. Because the resurrection is true: we baptize in hope; we risk our lives; and we depart from sin.

We baptize in hope

V29, '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?' This has been called one of the hardest verses in the bible. And we can see why, what is Paul talking about when he talks about baptism for the dead? There are many many theories about what baptism for the dead is. All commentators acknowledge that we cannot have 100% certainty about what it is, but here are just some of the views, one commentator counted over 200 different views on what this means, and I will indicate which ones I think have merit.

Firstly, the only ones we know of that practiced baptism for the dead literally were those of heretical groups like the Marcionites and the Cerinthians. In both cases these groups believed that baptism was necessary for salvation. This led to the problem of what to do about those who died before they could be baptized. There was a trend to delay baptism until one's death bed because many believed that there was no forgiveness for sin, or only forgiveness for one sin after baptism. What if someone died before they could be saved through baptism? This led to a practice of proxy baptism among these gnostic heretics. Today the Mormons, a heretical cult that deny the trinity also baptize for the dead. They believe that everyone should have the opportunity to be baptized but many died without even hearing the gospel. Mormons believe that their proxy baptism gives people in the afterlife the opportunity to receive the baptism that saves by proxy. So Mormons have been baptized for many

including Hitler and others. They rest their practice on this verse and a wrong understanding of baptism as saving.

Some think that Paul might be referring to Jewish washing rituals after touching dead bodies. The Jews washed bodies in preparation for death because of their hope of resurrection. Some think that Paul is calling them out on an inconsistency, 'why do you wash the dead in preparation for resurrection but deny bodily resurrection.' There is no evidence that this Jewish practice was present among the Corinthian Christians.

Some have suggested that early Christians might have conducted their baptism in graveyards or above the graves of dead believers. But there is no record of this practice.

John MacArthur suggests this the example of faithful saints encouraged some to get baptized, so that 'they were being baptized because of those who were the faithful dead.'

An Eastern Orthodox theologian has suggested that some Christians were getting baptized into the names of certain famous or dead saints; but the veneration of saints is a later accretion.

John Gill favours taking baptism as a symbol for martyrdom and a willingness to die, in the hope of resurrection.

Some think that the early Christians uttered a basic creed at their baptisms, like the apostle's creed that included a statement about resurrection of the dead.

There are others, but the two views I think have the most going for them is the most common one where Paul is seen to be calling out those who deny bodily resurrection based on an inconsistency in one of their bad practices. It appears that some might have syncretized Christian practices with rites for the dead resulting in a weird practice of being baptized for the dead. Paul shows the inconsistency of doing this if you deny the resurrection because baptism is a sign of future resurrection. The only trouble I see with this being a watertight case is that Paul calls out a bad practice without comment, he does not follow up his comments by exposing the error in it, as he has done in this letter so far.

The other theory says that Paul is referring to 'the dead' as the body of death that we put off when we are converted. The word in the Greek behind 'on behalf of' has a wide set of possibilities, this view amounts to saying, 'what do you hope to accomplish being baptized for your own dead bodies if you deny bodily resurrection.'

That said, even though we cannot know 100% what Paul is referring to we can know that Paul sees baptism as linked to our resurrection hope. Paul makes this connection elsewhere in Rom. 6:3-5, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.' Baptism is a clear picture of the death and resurrection of Christ; but not only that it is also and a picture of our participation in His death and resurrection.

Baptism speaks of Christ dying under the judgement of God, just like God drowned the world in judgement for sin at the flood; and just as He drowned

Pharaoh's army; Christ went under the waters as a symbol of death and judgement. We know He was sinless, and had no sin of His own. He suffered the judgement our sins deserve because our sins were imputed to Him and seen as His. But Christ Himself was sinless, and once our sins had been paid for, death had no right to keep Him. God vindicated the personal righteousness of Christ by raising Him from the dead. This is pictured by us coming out of the watery grave in a symbolic resurrection in our baptism. Water baptism, the sign of your Christianity, the ceremony by which you are added to the people of God; a sign that is not arbitrary but the very actions themselves speak of the death and resurrection of Christ; a sign that shows that we are united with Him, that He was our representative; a sign that points back to what He has done, a sign that points to our present union with Him, and a sign that points to our own future resurrection just like His—baptism is deeply connected to the concept of bodily resurrection. It is no wonder then that Paul calls out those Corinthians for their denial of bodily resurrection in light of their practice of Christian baptism. No matter what weird practice they may or may not have been engaging in, they were inconsistent with themselves by using Christian baptism, in whatever way, and at the same time denying bodily resurrection.

This brings us to a very practical point concerning baptism. Yes every believer should be baptized; yes baptism should be by immersion corresponding to the primary reference of baptism, the death and burial of Christ. Baptism is a sign to you, in other words a promise that God is making to you. Just as a fiancé gives his future wife a ring as a token of his promise, it is a sign of things to come, to promises a wedding ceremony. In the same way, God gave us a token of things to come. The new covenant signs of the Lord's Supper and Baptism both have this forward looking eschatological orientation. The Lord's Supper promises a wedding supper, a true and ultimate communion between Christ and His people; baptism promises a day when death is overcome, when all the things that we hate about ourselves and our lives are removed and we will be fitted for eternal fellowship with God. Think about your baptism, ponder it, ponder what it signifies about your past, your present, and as Paul reminds us, of our future. Remember it is a promise from God to you about what He will do for us. More than an act of obedience which every Christian must obey, it is a promise of what God will do on that final day. We can focus on baptism in such a way to make it all about us and what we do; but let us think about it as God intended that we also see it as a sign of things to come, things that are sure, things that He will do for us. And remember the reason baptism is a promise of this nature is not because baptism saves but because Jesus died on the cross, paid for our sins and rose again for us.

We risk our lives

V30-32a, 'Why are we in danger every hour? ³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! ³² What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?' Paul has called them out of using baptism in an inconsistent way, the next argument he employs is from his own life. If the resurrection is not true, then why do we, the apostles willing lay down our lives and suffer daily for a lie? Paul lays out his thinking in a question, 'Why are we in danger every hour?' Followed by an oath, 'I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!' Followed by another question, 'What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought beasts at Ephesus?'

Paul is tapping into a thought he hinted at earlier in the chapter. Paul after listing the eye witnesses and including himself as last on the list. He talks about his great labours, enabled by the grace of God that are not in vain. Paul ministry efforts are not an empty gesture or a misguided effort resulting in nothing. No, Jesus has died and resurrected and the apostle's difficult ministry does actually bear fruit. Paul is willing to embrace this life of suffering service because it is the truth and because it results in benefits for others. In the last letter Paul write, while he was in prison facing his execution he writes this, 1 Tim. 2:10, 'Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.' Because the resurrection is true, because the message about the resurrection saves, Paul is willing to lay down his life in proclaiming that message to others. Paul gives us a list in 2 Cor. 11:24-28, 'Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.' Earlier in the same letter he says the same thing, 4:8-12, 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.' He believes that his sufferings are not in vain but bear fruit, just as our own sufferings for Christ are not in vain but bear fruit.

What does this mean for us? It means that if we are avoiding difficult ministry and service because we don't want to suffer or sacrifice or miss out, we are not thinking in the same way Paul does. So it is a rebuke, but it is also an encouragement to us that if lay down our lives, we will see fruit from our labor. Christ is resurrected, the Spirit is working through these jars of clay and our feeble efforts, death may be at work in us, but life comes to others.

Now in our modern world everything we do is oriented to alleviate suffering and increase pleasure. The thought of enduring suffering with patience is an alien thought, but I would like to share with you an insight from John Piper. He believes that suffering is one of the key things used by God to fulfil his mission in this world, he says "I don't just mean that suffering is the consequence of obedient missions. I mean that suffering is one of Christ's strategies for the success of his mission." God has chosen suffering as one of his weapons to overthrow Satan, Rev. 12:11 (ESV), "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." Tertullian is remembered for his famous statement, 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church'. Over and over again the Scriptures speak of rejoicing in suffering, and God using suffering to achieve his purposes (James 1:2; Genesis 50:20). God allows suffering to come upon his Church, he wants suffering to come upon his Church, not because he is vindictive, but because he is wise and is working out his good purpose. John Piper highlights

how God used suffering in Adoniram Judson's life to achieve his purposes, let's look at some of what he suffered in order to remind ourselves that suffering is not an evil to be avoided at all costs, but an opportunity to bear fruit.

"When Adoniram Judson entered Burma in July, 1813 it was a hostile and utterly unreached place. William Carey had told Judson in India a few months earlier not to go there... But Judson went there with his 23-year-old wife of 17 months. He was 24 years old and he worked there for 38 years until his death at age 61, with one trip home to New England after 33 years. The price he paid was immense. He was a seed that fell into the ground and died. And the fruit God gave is celebrated even in scholarly works like David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*: "The largest Christian force in Burma is the Burma Baptist Convention, which owes its origin to the pioneering activity of the American Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson"...Today Patrick Johnstone estimates the Myanmar (Burma's new name) Baptist Convention to be 3,700 congregations with 617,781 members and 1,900,000 affiliates- the fruit of this dead seed... Judson was a Calvinist,... and Adoniram inherited a deep belief in the sovereignty of God... He said, "If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings."

...Ann, who married Judson on February 5, 1812 and left with him on the boat on February 19 at age 23, bore three children to Adoniram. All of them died.

...In May of the next year [after the death of his second child] the British fleet arrived in Rangoon and bombarded the harbor. All westerners were immediately viewed as spies, and Adoniram was dragged from his home and on June 8, 1824 and put in prison. His feet were fettered and at night a long horizontal bamboo pole was lowered and passed between the fettered legs and hoisted up till only the shoulder and heads of the prisoners rested on the ground.

On November 4, 1825 Judson was suddenly released. The government needed him as a translator in negotiations with Britain. The long ordeal was over - 17 months in prison and on the brink of death, with his wife sacrificing herself and her baby to care for him as she could. Ann's health was broken. Eleven months later she died (October 24, 1826). And six months later their daughter died (April 24, 1827).

...The psychological effects of these losses were devastating.

...In October, 1828 he built a hut in the jungle some distance from the Moulmein mission house and moved in on October 24, 1828, the second anniversary of Ann's death, to live in total isolation.

His brother, Elnathan, died May 8, 1829 at the age of 35. Ironically, this proved the turning point of Judson's recovery, because he had reason to believe that the brother that he had left in unbelief 17 years earlier had died in faith. All through the year 1830 Adoniram was climbing out of his darkness.

He married Sarah Boardman, a missionary widow, on April 10, 1834, eight years after Ann died. They had eight children. Five survived childhood. But 11 years later she was so sick that they both set sail for America with the three oldest children. They left the three youngest behind, one of whom died before Judson returned. Judson had not been to America now for 33 years and was only returning for the sake of his wife. As they rounded the tip of Africa in September, 1845, Sarah died. The ship dropped anchor at St. Helena Island long enough to dig a grave and bury a wife and mother and then sail on.

To everyone's amazement, Judson fell in love a third time, he lived 4 years before he died. In his misery he would be roused from time to time by terrible

pain ending in vomiting. One of his last sentences was: "How few there are who . . . who die so hard!"

The Bible was done. The dictionary was done. Hundreds of converts were leading the church. And today there are close to about 3,700 congregations of Baptists in Myanmar who trace their origin to this man's labors of love." (Piper; how few there are who die so hard)

Those who believe in the resurrection are not afraid of suffering for others knowing it bears fruit.

We depart from sin

V32b-34, 'If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

³³ Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." ³⁴ 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.' Paul quoting from Is.22:13 highlights the only worldview that makes sense if there is no resurrection. If this life is all there is, then suffering should be avoided and pleasure indulged, but this life is not all there is. So Paul warns the Corinthians about the danger of false teachers, their teaching about denying bodily resurrection and the ensuing lifestyle that pursues sin and not life in eternity. Paul quotes a Greek poet to demonstrate that this is a common truth, no matter how good you are if you open yourself up to bad company they will wear you down and influence you. Paul adds a warning that they need to wake up from the equivalent of a spiritual drunken slumber; to put away any lifestyle that has been influenced by this hedonistic perspective instead of an eternal perspective. He illuminates that those who think and live such a way which has been influencing them, cannot be Christian and should not have been tolerated in their midst, or entertained as friends. He rebukes the Corinthians for allowing such a situation and allowing them to come inside the church as if they were Christians and to have this effect.

The implication of what Paul is saying is simple, because the resurrection is true, we are not those who try and extract all the pleasures we can in this life; we pursue holiness; we live with eternity in view not dictated by the sins of the flesh.

Well let us conclude. From this section Paul has been continuing to prove that there is a resurrection and the illogical nature of denying the resurrection. He has reminded us that the resurrection is true and we should be those who live like it. This means that we baptize in hope; risk our lives and pursue holiness. Are you living a life that belies your belief in the resurrection?