

9,25,25 1 Cor. 15:36-58, Prepared To Meet Our Lord

In vs. 36, Paul begins by simply stating the obvious “What you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” You can’t have a resurrection unless first there is a death. To build his case, Paul starts there. The first thing the Corinthians need to have settled is that death is not the end; it’s only the beginning.

And that may not just be a Corinthian problem – how many of us see this life as either the only one that matters, or at least, the only one that matters the most? Paul had a different view. This life is only a preparation for the one that is coming; it’s our life in the eternal kingdom of God that matters the most.

And according to everything we’ve seen in the context of 1 Cor. 15, its resurrection that makes that life possible; without it, when this life ends, we end, and it will have all been for nothing.

(Heb. 11:9-11) By faith (Abraham) dwelt in the promised land as a stranger in a foreign country. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The evidence of Abraham’s mature faith was that he had inwardly made the transition from expectation in this life to seeing the life that matters most through the eyes of faith and spiritual revelation. This life is a shadow; the life to come is solid reality because it’s ‘architect and builder is God’. Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us, and that place is not here.

Satan wants us focused here. He’s the “god of this world” and the only ground he can have in us is the ground we give him by having our heart and our goals set in this world. The Lord wants us to set our mind on things above and to “love *not* the world, nor the things of the world.”

We all know the passages, but which world, which kingdom, which life occupies our minds and hearts? For Abraham (and for Paul) it definitely wasn’t the ‘tents’ of this “foreign country” we have to live in for now.

This world can be dark, deceptive and confusing – why would we want to try to find life in a place like this? But if our hearts are set above, and we know what that

means; we know our destiny and we know the One Who is waiting for our homecoming.

Then this life not only becomes tolerable, it becomes an inspirational challenge for us, so we can learn how our faith can be trained and perfected to abide above – to abide in Christ.

Ok, all that to say, “What you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” Everything the Lord did and taught had this principle behind it. He was explaining and demonstrating how He works in our lives to move us from the dominion of the flesh to life in the Spirit. Death and Resurrection is the key to spiritual life. For example;

(Matt. 14:19-21) He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

(Jn. 12:24) Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

(Lk. 22:19) And He took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body, given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

Another way to put that would be to say, “We can’t enter life as it’s meant to be lived until first we die to the one we have.” We have to be broken before we can become whole. Where there’s no cross; there’s no resurrection. God has to break us before He can use us; and when He’s breaking us with usefulness in mind, it always feels like He’s against us;

(Heb. 12:11) In the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

From what I read in the Bible and from what I know from experience, this always involves pain, weakness, loss and a sense of God’s abandonment – just as we see in

the crucifixion of Christ. But it always leads to bearing fruit; in resurrection in some form.

And as we've seen before, we can no more resurrect ourselves than we can crucify ourselves. This is the work of the indwelling Christ – He alone is our only hope of glory. What He has begun in us, in bringing the old man into death and the new man into resurrection life, He will complete. Our job is to trust Him to do what only He can do.

Several months ago, I jotted down what I called a “personal exhortation” – it was an attempt on my part to remind myself, as often as I needed to look at it, what I need to keep in mind. Here's what I wrote;

I need to give up on all my self-expectations; I need to forget the past and trust God for my future. Instead of trying to increase my faith, I can rest on the faithful One. I don't need to obsess on how I'm doing; it won't be my faithfulness that gets me there; it will be His; and He has promised to never leave or forsake me. Which is of us by worrying can add one moment to our lives? The sooner I give this to Him; the sooner I can rest in Him and trust Him to do what is needed in me. I have to take that position, because faith is the only thing that “pleases Him”; He can work with faith, no matter who the person is.

And then I included the following quote in my notes;

(John 13:1) "It was now just before the Passover Feast, and Jesus knew that His hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very end." I think in that statement, there is the most wonderful thing that ever came into this world. Jesus had a lot of trouble with those men. They had often misunderstood Him. They had often disappointed Him. They were really a very poor lot of men. He knew what a poor lot of men they were, but He loved them unto the uttermost. That is the first thing about this love. It is not offended by our failures. He does not withdraw His love because we make mistakes. We may often disappoint Him, we may often fail Him, we may often grieve His heart, but He goes on loving us. He loves us unto the very end. He is not offended by our failures."

Each of our ‘personal exhortations’ will probably be unique, because we all struggle with different things, but as long as we keep the overriding principles of the spiritual application of the cross and resurrection in mind, we can keep moving forward and trust the Lord for the outcome.

Paul’s next instruction to the Corinthians is gathered into verses 37 to 44. Paul uses several different illustrations to make his point, but he’s only addressing one main theme—and that is the type and the diversity of the bodies we will have in eternity.

In what you sow, you do not sow the body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial (lit. ‘heavenly’) bodies and terrestrial (‘earthly’) bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also, is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

We looked at the description in vs’s 42-43 last week, which focused on the vast difference between our earthly bodies and our heavenly bodies (corruption vs. incorruption; dishonor, vs. glory; weakness vs. power, etc.) The rest of this passage focuses on the *diversity* of these bodies.

In the realm of what Paul calls ‘heavenly bodies’ there is as much variety or diversity as there is in the sun, moon and stars, vs. 41; “ There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.”

Just like the doctrine of the remnant or “overcomers”, most believers seem to think that when we all get to heaven, we all shine with the same measure of radiance; we all get participation trophies; and we will all be reigning with Christ. We’ve already discussed the concept of overcomers and reigning numerous times, so we don’t have to revisit that, but it would be good to make sure we also remember

that each “star differs from another star in glory”. And as we saw in our study of John, the word “glory” refers to the measure of Christ that is formed in us in this life and how that measure will be visibly expressed as radiant light in eternity.

There will be a wide diversity of glory in heaven since each of us will be unique in terms of the degree of the glory, the light, that is manifested through us. It will all depend on how far we were able to go in our conformity to Christ in this *life of preparation* we’re in now. That’s why there is such a major emphasis on spiritual growth throughout the New Testament epistles.

The Church as a whole will be a many-membered, corporate, visible expression of the full glory of Christ – it will take all of the varied measures of Christ formed in each us, billions of us joined to Christ over the last 2000 years, to complete the Lord’s Second Body and express the fullness of Who He is outwardly to all creation.

We saw this verse in 1 Cor. 12:12, but it needs to be added to this context also;

For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body: so also, is the Christ.

This is one of the few places in the scriptures where the Church is used directly as a synonym for “the Christ”. It’s the Holy Spirit reminding us that when the Church is completed, it will be Christ Himself in corporate expression. That was the mystery Paul speaks of in Ephesians and Colossian that was hidden from all who lived before this revelation was given to the apostles following Christ’s ascension.

Here’s what one author I read wrote on this;

When you read the Gospel according to Matthew, you see one aspect of Christ; in reading the Gospel according to Mark, you discern another side of Christ; in reading the Gospel according to Luke, still another aspect of the holiness of Christ is in view; and reading the Gospel according to John, yet another facet of the glory of Christ is seen. Moreover, if you read Peter’s epistles you behold the splendor of Christ; in reading Paul’s epistles, there is still another presentation of Christ; and in pursuing the epistles of John, you must confess that his description of the glorious beauty of Christ excels anything that has ever been written. From all this it must be concluded that our Lord is so great that it requires believers of all ages and from all nations

to express Him. The body of Christ is where His life is manifested in all of its varied beauty and glory through the body's members.

This is what Paul was trying to communicate to the Corinthians whose minds, whose thoughts, were focused and limited to the things of this world – they had no conception or vision of our destiny, or how this life shapes that destiny; and their need to understand these things provided the perfect opportunity for this letter to be written which allows *us* to read Paul's explanation of not only what the Church is, but also of what it *will* be when this Age is finished.

Now, Paul concludes this section with his summation of this in vs's 45-49;

Thus, it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 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. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Paul brings in the incredible truth that following the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, there are now two completely distinct and different humanities sharing this planet. One humanity descends from the first Adam; the children of dust. The other humanity descends from the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ; the children of heaven.

True Christian discipleship is founded on death to one life and entrance into another life. Picking up our cross does not mean increasing our dedication and determination to be better Christians, it means ending our lives as children of Adam completely and entering a new life. The cross is an instrument of death, not a noble cause to emulate. Life isn't found by becoming more committed, it's only found by knowing and believing that we have been crucified, buried and resurrected as part of the new creation in Christ in order that we may walk in newness of life. The life Christ came to bring to us was not something we can imitate and it was not something separate from Himself. He, Himself, in us, is our hope of glory. *He* is the Way, Truth and Life; and now, instead of the likeness of Adam, Christ is being formed in us through that indwelling Life.

Just as we can see the nature of Adam throughout this world in those of his race; God's ultimate purpose for us is to bring about the testimony of Jesus in corporate realization and expression. Even angels and principalities are meant to see the likeness of the Second Man, the Second Adam, visibly expressed in His Second Body, the Church.

Numerous times Jesus called Himself the Son of Man. In Romans 8:29 He is called the "first born". In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Jesus is called "the last Adam", and in 1 Corinthians 15:47 He is called the "second Man". The point of these designations is simply this: The first Adam, made in God's image, failed to express that image. When Adam fell he became something other than what God had in mind. However, Jesus as the last Adam did not fail. As we saw in Hebrews 1:3, Christ perfectly expressed the image of God. Jesus was exactly what God had in mind when He created mankind. In Him God was well pleased. To look at Jesus was to see the exact image or expression of the invisible God in a visible form. In Jesus the image, the glory, was absolutely perfect.

Jesus is what "Man" was intended to be ("... Let us create man in our image", Genesis 1:26). It's no surprise when we see Paul stating that God's ultimate purpose for you and me is to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

So, we know what we are supposed to be; we know what God planned for us, but what we often forget is that only *He* can get us there and He *only* does that with people who truly realize how much, in themselves, in their natural state, they are not capable of even touching what God is after.

I'm going to read an extended quote from F.J. Heugel;

One cannot make a study of the New Testament without experiencing something of the nature of a shock, in view of the glaring difference between the Christian life as we desire to live it, and the ideal of the Master. The disheartening incongruities and the grievous contradictions are so painfully evident, that even those who have only a superficial knowledge of the Savior's Word — even those who have never looked into the pages of the New Testament — are shocked. What little faith they may have, is shaken.

When one considers the picture of the Christian life as set forth by the Apostles, that which today goes under the name, one staggers. The emaciated body of a dying friend — not to say his corpse — could not stand in more violent contrast with him who in the days of health and vigor walked at our side.

It is not my object to pick to pieces the contemporary Christian. I have no quarrel with the Church. I am not pretending to play the role of an iconoclast; but I have been for ten years a missionary of the Cross, and have no thought of deserting the ranks. My only purpose in calling attention to our failure as Christians is to point the way to the victorious life in Christ for those who are conscious of their spiritual poverty, and “hunger and thirst after righteousness”.

I speak to one whose thirst for the water of life, far from being quenched, consumes him, and leaves him sick with yearnings — one who feels that as a Christian he should be free from the power of sin, and who, in spite of all his struggles is crushed by a sense of failure — those who long for power — that power which is from on High — those who long to have their life and service, ministry, and preaching, charged with the Spirit of the living God.

I must briefly summarize the requisites of the Christian life. We are to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6) We are to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). We are to forgive as Jesus forgave — even as He who in the shame and anguish of the Cross looked down upon those who blasphemed Him, while they murdered Him, and forgave (Col. 3:13). We are to be aggressively kind towards those who hate us; we are actually to pray for those who spitefully use us (Matt. 5:44). We are to be overcomers — we are to be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). We are to give thanks in *all* things, believing that all things, even those which blast our fondest hopes, work together for our good (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 5:20).

We are to be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to let our requests be made known unto God, so that the peace of God which passes all understanding may guard our hearts and minds (Phil. 4:6). We are to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4). We are to think on whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are

honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise (Phil. 4:8). We are to be holy, for God is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). The Savior said that if we believed in Him, rivers of waters of life would flow from our innermost being (John 7:38). We are to stand out in bold, unmistakable contrast from the crooked, perverse world, blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, shining as lights (Phil. 2:15). We are positively to reject ourselves — not to pamper, nor to caress, nor to seek, nor to love ourselves, but literally to renounce our own selves, and that daily (Matt. 16:24). We are told that we cannot be Christ's disciples if we do not renounce ourselves utterly and absolutely in all things, and at all times (Luke 14:26). Paul tells us that our affections are to be set on things above (Col. 3:1).

Enough. We dare go no further. It would only increase our shame, and our pain. We stand indicted. We are not what Christ would have us to be. If this is the measure of the Christian life, if this is what God requires of us as Christians, like Isaiah we cry: 'Woe is me, for I am undone.'

Self-revelation, as Paul experienced on the road to Damascus, as John experienced in Rev. chapter 1, and as Isaiah experienced in Isa. 6:5 is a devastating thing. But it also puts us in the perfect position to be completely ready to exchange our life for His; even desperate to do so. We want to be free from us and fully alive in Him. And it is through the combination of self-revelation coupled with the revelation of His promise to conform us to Christ that creates in us the needed motivation and desire to lose all we are for the sake of gaining Christ.

Depending on how our parents impacted our lives, or whatever teaching ministry we've been listening to for most of our Christian life (or both), there may be just as much that we have to unlearn as there is to learn.

For example, one reaction that people might have when they hear what Heugel wrote is a combination of fear of always falling short and guilt over a life seen as being predominantly one of failure. But another reaction, the one that Huegel is hoping for, is a realization of the impossibility of living the Christian life, coupled with gratitude, knowing that what Christ has *required* of us, He is willing to *fulfill* in

us; because, as Paul said, it is God who works in you both to will, and to do, of His good pleasure.

We are called to faith, because the meaning of faith is to trust in Someone else to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. When we combine that kind of faith with the realization that we live in the Age of Grace, of undeserved favor, we can have hope in spite of what we see in ourselves.

God has never compromised or forsaken His original plan of having a race of humans in His image. Because of the fall, God's Son had to do what the first man, Adam, could not do. In Christ, God has simply started over in the "second Man". In His resurrection, Jesus became the first born of this new species of humanity, or as Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 5:17; "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation . . ."; a new race designed and indwelt by his Creator in order for God to *be* God in him.

Now, in the final section of this chapter, from another angle, Paul repeats and re-explains what God intends to do, and in this part, Paul also tells us *when* it will be completed;

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So, when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Grave, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The rapture of the Church is our final victory over death; it is the split second in time when eternity in a glorified state begins for us. In Thessalonians Paul calls it, "Our blessed hope". Let's look again at that event as it's described in 1 Thess. 4:13-18;

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

We have studied the events surrounding the rapture of the Church before, especially in our study of Revelation, so I will only focus on a few things related to this event that we need to make sure we keep in mind. If you listen to some of the end-times podcasters, you are already getting fairly consistent reminders about the basics of this; but there are some things that are rarely discussed that I feel are equally important.

First, we are commanded in 1 Thess. 5:4-6 to be awake and aware when that time comes;

You are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Of course, this is in the context of the rapture of the Church, but in principle it is identical to our Lord's exhortation to Israel related to the timing of His return at the end of the Tribulation;

(Matt. 16:2-3) He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

(Lk. 12:35-37) Stay dressed for action, and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding

feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.

Just like the end of the Age of Isreal, there will some Christians in our Age who are aware of our time in history and are awake and ready to meet the Lord; and there will be others who fit more into the camp described in 2 Pet. 3:3-4;

Scoffers will come in the last days . . . following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”

So, this is the first thing we don’t want to lose sight of – we are commanded to know the time of the Lord’s return, not to live as though it doesn’t matter or could be delayed for another 10 or 20 years.

To help with that, the Holy Spirit has given us several indicators to watch for so we can know whether we are in the terminal generation or not. This isn’t all of them, we spent a great deal of time on them in the past, but here are two that are extremely important and should be obvious to anyone paying attention;

- 1) Just before the Lord’s return for us, the majority of Christians will be in a condition of apostasy – they will have either stagnated or fallen backward in their spiritual growth.

(1 Tim. 4:1) Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits . . .

Those in apostasy can’t see through the surface to the spiritual reality behind the events taking place; they can’t give a spiritual interpretation to what’s happening in this world, and in the Church; they won’t know what the Lord is doing or what He intends for His people.

- 2) There will be a final purification of the Church in preparation for meeting their Lord.

(1 Pet. 1:6-7; 4:12-13) In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, so that

the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

(1 Thess. 5:23-24) From the Amplified version: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you through and through [that is, separate you and make you pure and whole —consecrated to Him—set apart for His purpose]; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept complete and [be found] in a state of holiness in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful and absolutely trustworthy is He who is calling you [to Himself] and *He will accomplish this* [He will fulfill His call by establishing you, guarding you, completing you, watching over you, and protecting you as His own].

I want to close with some comments by Sparks that can give us a contemporary version of what all this means for us;

This is something that the Lord has provided for- to have a people here on this earth who are the channels for the enrichment of others in all directions, a people through whom there shall go out spiritual riches (rivers of living waters). This is the calling of the Church: that wherever people are really seeking to know the truth, to know the Lord, to come into the light, the Lord should have a vessel where that light can be found. It is a challenge, as well as a statement of fact. It is something that we must quite definitely lay hold of by faith. It is God's intention; therefore, it must be possible. The Lord provides all that is needed for what He desires. It is not necessary for any child of God, who is standing by faith in the good of the heavenly calling and vocation, not to be a vehicle of light to others. The Church is to be that light at the end.

This world is going to see a measure of the glory of Christ shining out through His Church. Through God's remnant believers scattered throughout the nations, the

Lord will give this darkened world one last glimpse of what God has done for us in Christ.

God's attention, His heart, is riveted on His Church and on preparing her to be the eternal bride of His Son. We are to simply stay awake, stay teachable, prayerful and watchful; and move forward, not turning to the right or to the left, trusting the Lord to complete what He's begun in us. If that's our focus, and the anchor of our souls, we will more than survive whatever comes.