

The Resurrection and the End of the World as We Know It
1 Corinthians 15:20-28
May 30, 2010

INTRODUCTION

“All Authority on heaven and earth as been given to Me,” says Jesus. Let’s see if we can figure out what He means.

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

The term first fruits is bestowed not only on the fruits that grow first; rather it refers to those fine fruits that are offered to the Lord in sacrifice. The man, Christ Jesus, fell asleep, or died, like many faithful men before Him. Even like many godless men. Like all men. Jesus fell asleep, died. There are those who seek to water down the faith of the Bible and to explain away the miraculous portions that claim that Jesus did not die, but only that He swooned and then was later revived by the cool moist air of the tomb, recovered from His illnesses, and then moved along with life. Others, like the Islamic faith, say Jesus did not die at all, but that it was an illusion; that the real prophet Jesus was translated to heaven without needing to actually die. However, all that would be news to the Apostles. They saw Him die. They knew fellow disciples who handled His dead body, who wrapped it in the grave clothes of death. They knew dead when they saw it, and Jesus was certainly dead.

Now here is an odd thing. Humanity is being spoken of in terms used for agricultural worship offerings. You plant seeds. From them, you yield living, growing fruit. Before you profit yourself, remember your God and offer the first fruit to God. This is the Law of the Jews. And here, we have all of humanity dead and in the ground. But none of them are yielding fruit. All the seeds have died, and been buried, if you will. But none has grown new life. Then here is Jesus. He has arisen from the grave. And He is an offering to God; the first fruit from the dead.

What is the explanation for this strange situation, where the seeds of humanity, dead bodies, have been laid in the ground for thousands of years and remained dead, but now Jesus’ dead body comes back to life and is offered to God as first fruit? He explains it by pointing to the big story of humanity. He points to Adam. In Adam, all die. By Adam, death came to us all. One man brought death to all men, women, and children. Everyone who is “in Adam” dies. Who is “in Adam?” Everyone is of course. So, in God’s story, the cause of the problem is one man’s sin that was spread to all. The solution, likewise, is one man’s life that is spread to all. Adam brought death with him. “Through one man came death.” When he was made he should have gotten a tattoo that said something like born to raise hell! It would have been true for him! He is

the true AC-DC singer! Death came through him!! Eek! What a legacy!

But it was through another man, Jesus that resurrection came. And what about all those dead bodies? Those were Adam's legacy. But, bodies raised from the dead? Those are Jesus' legacy. Jesus has reinvented the human race. He has made the new human. He is the prototype. He is the first one, but one day, everyone who is called a human being will have a super body like His. There will be no human beings who will have these weak, sickly things we take such pride in now! In Adam, all die. Who is in Adam? Everyone who is human is in Adam. In Christ, all are made alive. Who is in Christ? Those whom He has saved, those who believe and are born again are in Christ.

Now, since Jesus has reinvented humanity, making the new human, as of now, there is only one of these new bodies. We all have the same dying body we have in Adam. We might want to know where our new body is. When will it come? Has anyone here ever ordered a new car? Or perhaps ordered a new house to be built? Or ordered a new computer or cool phone and you haven't gotten it yet? You can't wait for the new model to be yours! Well, these new bodies, when do we get one? Paul answers that question:

23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

Christ has His new human life, His new body. But you don't get yours till He returns. That's the plan. That's the Father's order. When is that? You ask. That is the million dollar question, isn't it! No one knows the day or the hour. So we wait. After we get our new bodies, another event will follow. That event is called: the end. At the end, Jesus will deliver the Kingdom He has made through His death and resurrection to God the Father. First He must destroy every rule and authority and power.

Here we are getting into the murky but exciting area known as future events. There are two main camps as to when this event called the end happens. Some people say that when Jesus returns, and we are raised, He will immediately turn over the Kingdom to God and the eternal state of the New Heaven and New Earth will come. Others say, I included, that Jesus will reign on the earth for a thousand years and that is the period of time where His Kingdom is realized on earth, and at the end of that time and the events He has planned for that time, the end will follow. Good Christians hold to both views. One day everyone will know which is right. (I'll try not to gloat).

In either case, He will deliver the Kingdom to His Father. This is about a transfer of authority. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to God. That means that all authority belongs to God. God is in charge of everything, everywhere, at all times. That means that all authority on earth is borrowed, or better bestowed by God. Any time any person has any authority over anyone else or even any thing else, that authority belongs to God and has been granted to man.

If you eat your food, your authority over that food has been granted by God. It is His, not yours. If you tell your dog to sit down and he does, you are using authority that belongs to God to get a creature that belongs to God to obey you. If you are a parent or a teacher or a governor, or a president or a general, your authority is on loan from God. It is His. You don't have any organically, naturally. It is all His.

What rebellion is, then, is the usurpation of that authority. Rebellion is saying, "I'll do it my way, even if it is against your authority God." Rebellion takes the authority God has given and misusing it. God will not stomach rebellion for long. He will not allow anyone anywhere to continually take what is His and misuse it. There will be a day of reckoning when all scores are even and all is made right.

Now, before you point the finger at other people and say, "I can't wait until the day of reckoning when God corrects those who misuse authority" –and you might be thinking of presidents and dictators or even your sixth grade teacher– for you are a rebel. Every time you sin in the smallest way, in word, thought, attitude, or deed, you are misusing authority God has lent you over your body and His world. You see, the earth is a world in rebellion against God. Jesus was sent to correct that, to bring everyone back into line. That is why Paul, in verse 24, says that Jesus will destroy every rule and authority and power. Why must they be destroyed? They must be destroyed because they are all in the hands of sinful men. They must be torn down and handed back to Jesus who is the rightful authority. There is rebellion in God's universe and on His earth. The demons and Satan are in rebellion, borrowing His authority and misusing it. Mankind, with his lies and killing and self exaltation is in rebellion. Jesus is sent by the Father to fix that, to destroy those authorities and replace it with submission to Him. And the reason this works is because Jesus is not in rebellion against the Father. He is obedient.

So Paul says, in the end, the Kingdom is handed over to the Father. To explain why this is needed, we have the final verses of our text:

25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 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 he is excepted 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 him who put all things in subjection under him that God may be all in all.

During the thousand years that Christ reigns on earth (or, now, if you are a-mil in your theology) Jesus reigns over all things. Finally, the last enemy of God, death itself is destroyed. God subjected all things to Jesus. This man Jesus, whom the majority of the world rage against and disbelieve and dishonor with their sins, He is the man God but in charge of everything. This is why we say, "Jesus is Lord." We are recognizing the truth of reality. Everyone who will not say, "Jesus is Lord" are believing and living in an illusion. Everyone who does not bow the knee to Him is still in his sins and still blind, for He is in charge of all things.

Clearly, there is authority in heaven, because God sent Jesus and Jesus obeyed. Jesus joyfully returns that authority to the Father. His work in paying for sins was completed on the cross. However, history still must play out. Some of you are probably thinking, where can I find all this stuff in the book of Revelation? 1 Corinthians 15 corresponds nicely with Revelation 20. Here are a few highlights:

Revelation 20: Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven ... 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan ... 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus ... 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 ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. 7 And when the thousand years are ended ... the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

This is how it ends. There is no other ending that will be written for our universe and our world. All who live in rebellion to God, be they spirits or humans, will be punished forever, and all authority restored to God and all who live will love that authority, rejoice in it, and obey happily. Among those who enjoy that authority will be all those who follow Jesus in the resurrection from the dead. Is that you? If not, I call you and warn you at the same time. Come to Jesus and bow your knee. Acknowledge that He is Lord of all. Turn from your sins. Don't stay in them for they are rebellion against God. Believe in Jesus for He has died in your place to make it possible for you to be forgiven all your past sins. I call to all individuals: bow your knee to Jesus, the Lord of all. Actually, it is not I who call, it is God's Holy Spirit, and He has testified that all is written in the book is true. And He also calls to the leaders of all nations. We live in strange and perilous times. Nations are rising and falling quickly. People are struggling for power, not realizing that they are fighting over something that belongs to God and they might not want to get it –for those who gain power and rebel against God shall be destroyed by His rightful King, the Lord.

This is the theme of the Bible. All of you here seeking to understand the world and what is happening look at what was written 2700 years ago, when God in His kindness revealed His plan to the ancient ones:

Psalm 2:1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, 3 "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." 7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." 10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

What is good for the nations is what is advised by God to you. Take refuge in the Son. Find your shelter in Him. Run to Him now!