

Text: 1 Cor 15.53
St Stephen's

April 25/26, 2009
Sat/Sun

The Death of Death

My first experience of death: a 16 year old orderly. By the end of that summer I knew death was real, and I knew that dead people stayed dead. So it is no surprise that there was a problem with the resurrection. Some people just couldn't believe it. It is the same today. Some people doubt...

Some People Doubted:

"But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead?"

1Cor 15:12

Did you ever have the experience of looking straight at something that was plainly there, and finding that you didn't believe it? Your mind can do that to you.

People have **glasses** on. We see the world through these glasses. Your glasses are a set of experiences and convictions that tell you how to see the world. You can have anti-god glasses. Anti-supernatural glasses. Anti-forgiveness glasses. "Don't confuse me with the facts"!

Some People Died: Some people were dying (falling asleep) & they were surprised at this

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

1 Thess 4.13

They didn't expect to die; they thought Jesus would come back first. But he didn't, and they did (die). And they were confused by that.

So some of them said, 'There is no resurrection'. Or, 'our new birth was the resurrection'. Or something like that. And it **shut down the future** for them.

Paul

"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."

1 Cor 15:19

He's saying... "I have suffered and sacrificed for the sake of this gospel. I have given up what I might have pursued. I have believed in the future when there is no future. And **if Christ is dead, it is all a lie.**" Some would say, 'Paul, you have been an idiot!'

Visiting **Kenya** in 1987. Missionaries among the **Masai**, who had **no future tense** in their language. No nouns for 'next year'. No future tense in their verbs. No hope.

"If there's no resurrection, "We eat, we drink, the next day we die," and that's all there is to it."

1 Cor 15:32 Msg

I know too many **people who have no future tense**, who have no hope. I know other people who have a hope, but it **hasn't penetrated** the deeper parts of their minds and hearts. Here's **a test**: what happens to you when you almost have an accident? When you get a bad report from a Doctor? I had a friend tell me once – a Christian friend – 'Well, I guess it's **the end of the trail**'! You are kidding!!

God wants you to have a **strong future tense**...

So Paul answers two questions in this chapter:

First Q. Will it happen?

"But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died."

1Corinthians 15:20

Say '**in fact**' with me... Paul **lays out the facts** in the first paragraph.

- He died.
- Three days later the tomb was empty.
- He appeared, not one but over and again. 11 times. Once to 500 at

the same time. And Paul adds the note, 'most of whom are still alive' – meaning,

- go talk to them yourself. And then to me! All facts.
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Say 'in fact' again. That is the phrase that we translate, '**indeed**'.

'Christ has risen!'

'The Lord has risen indeed!'

Paul says this is something that we **have to get straight**. Because we have glasses on. We have to see straight on this issue.

Paul says Jesus' resurrection is '**the first of a great harvest**'.
Firstfruits... Like an engine pulling a train.

His resurrection pulls along your resurrection. They are **connected**. The resurrection of every believer is as **certain** as the resurrection of Jesus. It is '**in fact**'.

Second Q. How Will It Happen?

"Someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?"

1 Cor 15:35

Verse	Earthly Bodies	Resurrection Bodies
v. 42	perishable	imperishable
v. 43a	exist in dishonor	raised in glory
v. 43b	exist in weakness	raised in power
v. 44	natural	spiritual
vv. 53–54	mortal	immortal

Here is the short answer:

"Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is."

1 John 3.2

There is a lot we do not yet know. But here is b: we shall be like him. Ready for immortality. Ready for eternity. We are not ready yet. But we

will be.

Note the future tense. It is nice to have a future. You have a great future.

And Paul has **one more word** about 'how' this will happen.

"It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we will be transformed."

1 Cor15:51-52

The word for 'moment' in the Greek is 'atom' – something so small, so fast, it is indivisible. We worry all the time about **how slow we change**. But there is coming a moment – when he returns, when a great trumpet sounds, when it will be **sudden, quick, instantaneous, and complete**.

That brings us to **one of my favorite verses**:

"For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

1 Cor 15:53-54

I have thought a great deal about this word '**must**'. Why 'must' we be changed? Well, because otherwise we **wouldn't be ready for eternity**. Because we would still have these old bodies, these old hearts, these old minds – and we wouldn't be ready.

But there is **another reason Paul uses the word 'must'**. It is not just a 'must' for our sake, but a '**must**' for **Christ's sake** as well. If we are not raised from the dead then his victory over sin and death and decay will not be complete.

He hates death! He has stamped it for conquest and defeat! It is his

enemy. **Our resurrection is the death of death, his final victory!**

He is that committed to it!

Because this must happen, Paul is **certain about his destiny**.

So Paul stands with one foot in the future (Holy city, throne, lamb, the redeemed, the river of life, tree of life...)

and with the other foot in a church that has lost brothers and sisters

and (in vs 55) he **taunts death**:

*O Death, Where is **your victory**? So, King Death, where is your sting?*

the answer:

*Thanks be to God who **gives us the victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ!*

Death has no victory over those who belong to Jesus!

How's your future tense?

John Yates: During the last decade of his life, my father became a convinced believer. He grew close to Jesus. When he was in intensive care and I talked with him for the last time, he told me that Jesus had been there with him a few hours earlier – as Dad and a pastor friend had prayed, with their hands clasped on the side of the bed, he saw another hand resting there upon theirs. It was scarred. He said to me, "Son, I've never felt anything like that in my life. I wanted to go with him. If he had spoken and said, "Now's the time, come with me, I'd have gone, boy, no hesitation, no fear, no regret." Two days later (John says) he left us.

I have heard that kind of story again and again from those God has let see through the veil. *'I'd have gone, boy, no hesitation, no fear, no regret.'*

When you see him, it will be just like that.
He is very near. That day is coming soon.
He calls you and me to be his.
He will place his hand upon us, and it will be wonderful.

Prayer:

That's one of the **great purposes for this life**, to **get ready for forever**. This is like **High School**, and graduation is ahead! This is like the **minor leagues**, and the big leagues are just around the corner. You want to be ready.

Everyone you see and work with and live with – these are not just moments given you for this life; these are moments that will impact people forever! Because **people** are eternal. For better or for worse, **immortal**. It is not mortals that you work and live with, that you greet – or ignore. That you love - or hate. It is immortals. People last forever. What you do, how you live and love makes a difference. What you say is important. Because **people last forever**.