

1 Cor 15:12-34 - The Walking Dad
Small group notes for the facilitator

Opener: Try to think as someone with no knowledge of Jesus or the Bible - what would be your best hope for when you die? Does resurrection seem a strange concept?

1 Corinthians 15 is all about resurrection. We should study the complete chapter (in fact, the whole letter) in one sitting but people complain when my sermons are over 30 mins! The passage this week is split in an ABA format. The first and last of the three sections are about how the Corinthians church has misunderstood resurrection and the middle part is the climax of the passage.

Read 1 Cor 15:12-34 and note the sections (12-19; 20-28; 29-34).

Q. Why does Paul say (in v19) that Christians are to be pitied more than anyone else?

A. *If* this life is the best that we can hope for then our talk of a future utopia is quite pathetic.

Q. If Christ wasn't raised from the dead, what 4 errors does Paul highlight in the first section that Christians have been making?

A. 1. The apostles preaching and the church's faith is in vain (v14,17); 2. They have been spreading myths or lies about God (v15); 3. They stand condemned in their sin (v17); 4. Those saints who have died before are lost forever (v18).

Q. Jumping to the last third of the passage, what's Paul's point about baptism on behalf of the dead? What is your understanding of this (maybe speak from knowledge of Mormonism)? Does Paul confirm baptism on behalf of the dead or condemn it?

A. We can't know for sure in this one sided conversation why Paul chooses to address this here except that their reason for doing it must have something to do with salvation by proxy. They must understand that baptism is required for some kind of future resurrection.

Resurrection from the dead was a widely held belief even amongst pagans and, bearing in mind that these Christians didn't have a New Testament canon it is forgivable that they would have seen some salvific effect in this ordinance (command of Jesus).

Paul's point is therefore - you must believe in resurrection otherwise why are you going through these motions? He doesn't condemn it or condone it - just questions why they bother. We know from the rest of Scripture (NT canon) that it is a pointless exercise as salvation is through grace by faith (Eph 2:8).

Q. Besides Baptism on behalf of the dead, Paul gives two other reasons in this final section why Christians should be pitied more than anyone if there is no resurrection. Can you spot them?

A. We have to be careful here because Paul is talking about works and in Eph 2:9 he specifically says that works are not part of salvation. But he questions the point of morality without Jesus setting the standard (he quotes from Is 22:13 and from a contemporary playwright called Menander). The other thing is that he questions the point of martyrdom without resurrection. If this life is the best there is, make the most of it - eat, drink and be merry and to hell with everyone and everything else. However....

v20: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead," a fact clearly irrefutable from the first 11 verses of this chapter.

Q. How is Christ the "firstfruits"? Jesus himself raised people from the dead, not to mention Elijah and Elisha centuries before!

A. The term 'firstfruits' is found in Old Testament law. The first of the harvest was to be given to the Lord by sacrifice. The fact that it's 'first' implies that there's plenty more to come. This isn't simply regeneration (bringing back to life) that Paul's talking about here, it's something wholly different. When we get to v53 on Easter Sunday we'll talk about the imperishable compared to the perishable body. But we know from the lack of immediate recognition of Jesus after the resurrection that there was something different about him.

I would also add that it wasn't until the ascension that Jesus' resurrection was complete.

Q. What's the point of the rest of that middle section? Is it so that Paul can set out his eschatological millennial view?

A. Probably not :-) I think the point of this whole passage is in verse 28 that when all things are subject to him then God will be *all in all*. God gave authority to Adam, Adam gave it to Satan, through the cross Jesus took the authority back yet we are still fallen (as is creation) until God fully redeems everything at the end of time.

In Rev 21:5, Jesus says, "Behold I make all things new" something he started through his birth when he brought the kingdom to Earth. You've probably heard the phrase, "now but not yet," in reference to God's Kingdom? The Kingdom of God is with us now but at the end of time we will be fully in it (God will be all in all). This is what resurrection brings.

Close: This is a big subject to cover so quickly and no doubt more stuff will come out over time but if God's Kingdom is in the here and now, what can he begin to resurrect in your life and the lives of your family and friends?