

Chapter 15

Vs 1-28, The central message of the Christian faith –THE gospel- has always been “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” This is the message that has been passed down from (Mary Magdalene, whom Paul omits from the list of important apostles) to Peter to the twelve to more than 500 people at one time to James (Christ’s brother), to all the other apostles (more broad category than the twelve) to Paul, who considers himself the least of the apostles because he was the last one to see the Risen Christ and he persecuted the church. YET, as an ultimate expression of the grace of God, Christ came back just to appear to Paul and to transform him and to equip him with everything he would need to become the apostle to the gentiles. The grace of God that has been shown to Paul is his driving motivation for working as hard as he can in service to the gospel. No one is doubting that Christ was risen from the dead, but Paul is reiterating the central tenants of the faith before he moves to the issue they are challenged by.

In vs. 12, Paul’s tone shifts to address the skepticism some have about the resurrection of the dead, a skepticism that is still alive and well in our world. Even though all of these people (many of whom were still alive at the time of Paul’s writing) saw the Risen Christ, some doubt that there will be a resurrection of the dead. The resurrection of the dead was hotly disputed in Jewish circles: the Pharisaic branch supported the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection of the dead. The Gentile Christians, including those in Corinth would have likely been met with skepticism because of the fact that in Greek philosophy, the body was considered dirty and evil. The goal was to shed the body in death so that the spirit would be free. For some it would have been a skepticism about the resurrection of the dead in general, others might think that we’ll only have a resurrected soul and not a body. But, Jesus was raised from the dead bodily. Jesus was the “first fruits” of the resurrection of the dead, so we can find some of the answers to our questions about what our resurrected bodies will be like by looking to what Jesus’ experience in resurrection was like. Jesus was raised from the dead bodily, and in the fullness of time, at the end of time itself, Christ will raise all who have been made alive through him. For death came into the world through Adam, and life came into the world through Christ. Paul says in verse 19 that if none of this is true then Christians are to be pitied more than anyone else.

The end of time seems to be laid out like this, first Christ will defeat every power and authority of this world, the last of which will be death itself. Then, Christ will raise all of us from the dead, and finally will hand the kingdom over to God the Father.

Vs. 29-58,

This is the only passage in the whole New Testament that mentions baptisms for the dead. It’s unclear how common this practice was. However, Paul does assert the importance of the hope in the resurrection of the dead for those who –like Paul- feel like they die every day –they put their lives on the line- for the sake of others. The hope

of the resurrection is the strength than spurns him on. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then we all might as well end up like the author of Ecclesiastes (the most depressing book of the Bible) whose take away was that all of life is absurdity, so we might as well “eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Paul answers for those who question what happens to the body when we die, and Paul draws on the analogy of gardening. When a seed is planted in the ground, it becomes whatever plant it was meant to be, it does not remain a seed but becomes greater than the seed that was originally planted. So too with human bodies. Just as we humans have shared Adam’s dust, so we will share Christ’s heaven.

Those who are alive at the end time will not die, but will be transformed into their imperishable body, just as those who are raised from the dead will receive an imperishable body. Death has no more sting for the living, nor victory over the dead because of the hope we have in Christ. The sound of the trumpet historically was the sound used to call God’s people to worship, to call them home from exile, and to announce the resurrection of the dead at the end times.

Chapter 16

Paul’s mission to bind the Gentile and Jewish branches of the Christian church together into one united fellowship of believers was done through a massive stewardship campaign. The way Paul got the Jerusalem church to accept the Gentile congregations of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, was to take up a collection from each of those congregations to support the poor in the Jerusalem church. This model of sharing resources through mission support was a way of unifying the church and was most important. This is the collection for the saints that Paul is talking about. He wants to make sure that healthy stewardship is a regular part of their worship life, and not just when Paul makes a visit. Paul wants to be able to enjoy the time he has with the church and not have to scold them. It’s believed that Timothy was the one who brought this letter to the Corinthian church. Apollos, who came from Corinth and was an important leader in their congregation, has now been sent out as an apostle in his own right and is busy doing God’s work elsewhere. “Let all that you do be done in love,” is perhaps THE take home message of this letter –and indeed of the whole gospel. Stephanas and Fortunatas were likely the messengers who sent word to Paul about what was going on in the church. Paul found their visit refreshing. Prisca and Aquilla now have their own house church in Ephesus. Paul eagerly awaits our Lord’s arrival, ending his letter with “Maranatha.”