

Born to Win

Christian Origins #33

by: Ronald L. Dart

Okay, so you already believe in the resurrection. You believe that man will be raised from the dead. Well, that raises the most interesting question of all: What for? When man has finished out his miserable existence down here on Earth, why not just leave him dead? He has no pain any longer. He may be sleeping sounder than at any time in his life. Why on Earth wake him up—to go to heaven? I'm sorry, but some of the most boring sermons I have ever heard in my life have been descriptions of what life in heaven will be like.

Now I don't know how much self analysis you do, but you probably already know this about yourself. There is nothing you do in life that would not become boring if you had to do it all the time. I think it was Rita Rudner who observed that someone she knew had been in labor in childbirth for 24 hours. She said she didn't even want to do something that *felt good* for 24 hours. I thought that put it things in perspective.

So walking around on streets of gold, dining on milk and honey, singing praises with the angels, looking up into the master's face; I don't mean to be irreverent, but don't you think all that could get a little tedious after a hundred million years...or so? I will admit that it sounds a lot better than burning in hell for a hundred million years...or so.

But there is something wrong with this picture. If God is going to pass by and wake us up from our eternal sleep, He must have something in mind. And it has to be rather more than milk and honey, don't you think? And that brings me back to Paul's letter again.

1 Corinthians 15

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³⁵ But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?

³⁶ You fool, that which you sow is not made alive, except it die[.]

"Thou fool." Paul's not exactly mincing words. Paul's analogy is that of a seed which is sown in the ground, but his point is that you can't get from here to there (that is, from this life to the next life, to the Kingdom of God, to heaven or wherever it is you think you're going) without dying.

1 Corinthians 15

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³⁷ And that which you sow, you sow not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may by chance be wheat, or of some other grain:

³⁸ But God gives it a body as it has pleased him, and to every seed its own body.

We know a bit more about that now that in Paul's day. DNA rules. Buried deep within every seed is a kind of code that determines what it is. If you bury a petunia seed in good soil and water it, you are going to get, not merely another seed, but a petunia.

We know that in every cell of our body, we carry a unique DNA code. You can find it in a strand of hair. I don't know, maybe you can even find it in a fingernail shaving. Everything that makes us what we are, physically, is recorded in that code. Now, is Paul suggesting that we also carry some kind of spiritual DNA? Listen to his argument:

1 Corinthians 15

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³⁹ All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, and another of birds.

Of course. DNA rules. You can't breed a dog with a cat. Man is a certain *kind* of being, but he is destined to become something rather different from what when he goes into the ground.

1 Corinthians 15

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⁴⁰ There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differs from another star in glory.

The difference, of course, is fire. The Sun is a blazing nuclear furnace. The Moon is a dead rock. The only reason we can see the thing is because the Sun shines on it. We go into the ground as an earthly, moonlike body. We come out of the ground as something very different in the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15

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⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

"Sown in dishonor." It is true, you know. In spite of all the flowers, the eulogies, the column of cars that follows us to the graveyard, the honor of being buried is an honor we would just as soon forgo. There is nothing honorable about being buried in the ground, getting stuck in a slot in a mausoleum, or burned in a crematorium. It is an honor we would like to avoid entirely if we could manage it. We are buried in dishonor. We are raised in glory. Now what exactly does that mean?

1 Corinthians 15

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⁴⁵ And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁶ But that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

⁴⁷ The first man is of the earth, made of dust: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

Now, I don't know if you caught the significance of what Paul is saying. What Paul seems to be saying here is that you can't go from nothing to the spirit being that God is looking for. You have to go through a progression. First you have to be physical, and then you have to be spiritual.

1 Corinthians 15

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⁴⁸ As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

⁴⁹ And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Is Paul here saying that we will be *like God*?

1 John 3

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¹ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

² Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be[.]

That's interesting. Here we are; we're in the flesh. We're walking around every day, doing our job, living our life, and we are right now sons of God. But what we're going to be—that's not apparent.

1 John 3

KJV

² [...] but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Now, the implications of this are pretty profound, too. Flesh and blood cannot see God as He is. In order to see Him as He is, you're going to have to be like Him.

1 Corinthians 15

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⁵⁰ Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption.

You know what this means? It means you can't get there like you are. It means you've got to die first. And this requires a little explanation. One respected theologian opined that in the resurrection we will all be like bright, shiny mirrors that can reflect the Glory of God. It was an interesting article by this fellow, because he was talking so much about how God, throughout our lifetime is hammering and shaping and changing and whittling on us to make us into something that we are not, so that in the resurrection we will come up and be able to perfectly reflect the Glory of God.

There is something you should know about the idea of *glory* in the Bible. It is not a synonym for honor or adulation like it is for soldiers, who would go into battle and cover themselves in glory

because of their bravery. No, in the Bible it is, in a way, a synonym for fire.

Hebrews 12

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²⁵ See that you refuse not him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven:

²⁶ Whose voice then shook the earth[.]

This is a reference all the way back to Mount Sinai, when Israel had gathered around the mountain and God came down and put his feet on the mountain and the mountain started burning with fire and smoke. You know why? It wasn't just to hide God, it was because of the incredible power of the all-consuming fire that had descended on that mountain. It created a lot of smoke when that power came into contact with those rocks. The earth shook.

Hebrews 12

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²⁶ [...] but now he has promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

²⁷ And this word, Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Quite an image isn't it. God returning to this Earth, and everything that is on it being shaken, even exposed to fire, and only those things which are indestructible will be left.

Hebrews 12

KJV2000

²⁸ Therefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

²⁹ For our God is a consuming fire.

That's interesting, isn't it, and a little frightening to think about? God is a fire and when we come into his presence, we too, one way or another, will be set on fire. And when we get there, the real test is going to be what kind of stuff we are made of. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, the bush burned but was not consumed. Some things can come into the presence of God and endure, some things cannot. Moses wanted to see God. Moses wanted to come into his presence, as God is.

Exodus 33

KJV2000

¹⁷ And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that you have spoken: for you have found grace in my sight, and I know you by name.

¹⁸ And he said, I beseech you, show me your glory.

¹⁹ And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

²⁰ And he said, You can not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.

Now, I suppose when you read that some people might think that God would not *allow* a person to see His face and live to tell about it. But that's not what he's talking about.

Exodus 33

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- ²¹ And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand upon a rock:
²² And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by:
²³ And I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back: but my face shall not be seen.

The reason why he could not see God's face: because he could not survive the experience. The one who had descended on Mount Sinai in all of His glory and all of His power and all of His fire; who set the mountain on fire, could not be viewed face to face. Not by a man. Not in his glory.

There was no danger to Moses from some kind of punishment. It was from the sheer power of God's presence. Moses had to be shielded, or he would die. Here we are in the modern world and we understand all about radiation shielding, don't we? We know we can't come into the presence of one of these great nuclear cores without shielding. We'll be irradiated and we'll die. And the same problem was the problem that Moses faced. The time will come when every man and every woman must appear before God. In person. Unshielded. That's what Paul's driving at in this resurrection chapter. Some will be burned to a crisp. Some will light up with the same fire and the same glory. Going back to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:

1 Corinthians 15

KJV2000

- ⁵¹ Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump[.]

What he means by that is—some of us, he thinks, are going to be alive when Christ returns. Not all of us will die. But we will all, whether we are dead or alive, be changed.

1 Corinthians 15

KJV2000

- ⁵² In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Now, if you've ever wondered about some of the images that people connect with the judgement day, here's where one of them comes from. There was a Jack Benny movie many years ago called *The Horn Blows at Midnight*. It wasn't a great success, but an angel's comedic struggle with the blowing of the horn was the idea behind it.

This is the judgement day; God's return; a great trumpet being blown when men would come into the presence of God. But Paul says that time is coming. There is a real horn that is going to blow. It is, oddly enough, the "last" one—which signifies that there are some before it. I won't go there today in the book of Revelation is the only place I know of in the Bible where you have this sequence of trumpets being blown. And there are seven of them; blown one after the other. The last trumpet is the moment of time when the resurrection takes place.

1 Corinthians 15

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⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Now, do we understand the difference between the words “mortal” and “immortal”? Well, to be “immortal” mean you don’t die. You are going to live forever. To be “mortal” means that you are subject to death. Now, when you face up to this scripture and what we’ve been reading through 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection of the dead, you see we have a lot of people out here who are mortal. They’re not immortal. They don’t ever have immortal souls. They’re not somewhere else, they’re all dead in the grave and waiting for God to pass by and bring them back to life.

"This mortal" (that’s you and me) have to put on immortality. We don’t have it now.

1 Corinthians 15

KJV2000

⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵ O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?

The grave has held God’s people all through the generations, and all through this long time. It appears as though the grave has won. It appears as though death has won. But when the last trumpet is blown, the grave loses. Death loses. We win.

1 Corinthians 15

KJV2000

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

It’s the transgression that we have all chased through our lives that has brought us to the terrible pass of death.

1 Corinthians 15

KJV2000

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are, when all is said and done, going to win.

1 Corinthians 15

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⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable [...]

Don’t be shaken by the things that happen to you, because there is ahead of us this moment in time; this resurrection of the dead when we come up out of our graves as something *totally different* than what we are right now. And we can come into the presence of God’s face and see him in his glory. Instead of being burned to a crisp, we will light up. There is a passage in Isaiah that says:

Isaiah 60

KJV2000

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

It's actually talking about a resurrection from the dead. And instead of being some kind of reflection of God, we actually shine with his own kind of light, shining out of us.

1 Corinthians 15

KJV2000

⁵⁸ [B]e steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, since you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 16

KJV2000

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do you.

Once again we are reminded that we are reading someone's mail. What is this "collection for the saints" Well, some prophets had been foretelling, for some time, a coming famine in Jerusalem. And once they had gotten this prophecy spread throughout the church, the churches in Asia and Europe had decided that they would try to send an offering. Not money, because when you have a famine money isn't worth anything. You've got to send food. So they were putting together a collection of food in the different locations to take to Jerusalem on account of the forecasted famine.

1 Corinthians 16

KJV2000

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do you.

² Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

Now, I have seen this scripture on the back of little offering envelopes in church, as though it means you are to take up an offering on Sunday. I've actually heard people talk about from the pulpit in those terms; that you're supposed to take up an offering on the first day of the week. The problem is that that's not what Paul is talking about here. Paul is talking about a collection of food that is going to have to be carried to Jerusalem. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by *him in store*". Not God. And do it right away so "there be no gatherings when I come" so we don't have to get this stuff together when I show up down there. It's going to be awhile, but this is where you're supposed to get your offering.

Actually, this expression that Paul uses here, "the first day of the week" does not refer to one day out of every week. It doesn't mean "every Sunday". It is actually not one day in the week, but one day in the *year*. If Paul had intended to refer to Sunday as a day of the week, he would have called it "the morrow after the Sabbath." That would have been the normal manner of speaking. But the expression in the Greek is "on the first day of the *weeks*", not "week". Actually the word "weeks" is "sabbaths" (σάββατον — *sabbaton*). It is a technical term. It refers to those seven Sabbaths between the Days of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Pentecost.

In the Old Testament, we're told that they were not allowed to partake of any of the grain from the fields, make any of it into bread, or use it in any way until the first of the firstfruits had been offered to God in the Temple. That first sheaf of grain was cut on the "morrow after the Sabbath" during the Days of Unleavened Bread, which is the "first day of the Sabbaths" or the "first day of the weeks" leading up to Pentecost. It is not establishing Sunday as the worship day of the church, or anything of the kind. It is a reference to a day well-known to people of this time in relation to the harvest and the harvest festivals. It's the first day of the 50-day countdown to Pentecost. It's also the first day you're allowed to get into the fields to begin to harvest. So, it's totally logical that Paul would say, "On the first day of the weeks (the first day you can get into the fields and harvest) lay by your offering for the saints in Jerusalem in store. *Do that first.* That way, when I come, there will not be any questions or delay in gathering and I can be on the road in a hurry.

Pentecost, by the way, is called the "feast of weeks." The Israelites could not eat any grain until then, so the grain had to be cut on the morrow after the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The way that was done was, whenever the sun was going down on that Sabbath, a noisy little gang would go down to the fields where, already, some sheaves of grain had been selected for this purpose. They were actually pulled together and tied into a bundle, but not cut from the ground yet. And a man would go down there with his group from the Temple, holding a sickle in his hand (and probably a few wineskins being passed around, as well). And when he got there, there would be a few questions that would be asked like, "Is this the sheaf?" and the crowd would yell back at him, "Yes!" And he would say, "Is the sun set?" And they would yell back, "Yes!" And he would ask, "Shall I reap?" And they would say, "Yes!" And he would cut that first sheaf from the ground.

Why did the sun had to be set? Well, because it was the beginning of harvest, and you don't work on the Sabbath. You start your work after the Sabbath, so he cuts this off. Through that night, they prepared this little bit of grain. They threshed it off from the stalks. They, I think, roasted it a little bit. And the next morning, at a given time, it is brought into the Temple and it is waved before God as the first of the firstfruits.

What many people don't realize that on the morning when Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared to Mary:

John 20

KJV2000

¹⁶ Jesus said unto her, Mary. She turned, and said unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Teacher.

¹⁷ Jesus said unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Later in the day, he invited people to touch him. During that intervening time, Jesus ascended to the Father as the first of the firstfruits from the dead. So what Paul is asking for is: on the morrow after the Sabbath, on the first day of the weeks, prepare a grain offering to be shipped as a famine relief to Jerusalem. He wanted them to put it together on the first day it was available.

1 Corinthians 16

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³ And when I come, whomsoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

⁴ And if it be fitting that I go also, they shall go with me.

⁵ Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia.

⁶ And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that you may bring me on my journey wherever I go.

⁷ For I will not see you now in passing; but I trust to tarry awhile with you, if the Lord permits.

⁸ But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.

⁹ For a great and effective door is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

¹⁰ Now if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear: for he works the work of the Lord, as I also do.

¹¹ Let no man therefore despise him: but send him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren.

Paul closes out 1 Corinthians with a number of personal remarks and greetings and references to people we don't even know. (Like I said, we're reading someone else's mail.) But right in the middle of it he says:

1 Corinthians 16

KJV2000

¹³ Watch, stand fast in the faith, be men, be strong.

¹⁴ Let all your things be done with love.

Finally he closes out this letter:

1 Corinthians 16

KJV2000

²³ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

²⁴ My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Until next time, this is Ronald L. Dart and you were *born to win*.

Christian Educational Ministries

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