THE POWER OF THE RISEN CHRIST (2)

(He Hands Over The Kingdom To God)

1 Corinthians 15:12-34

Key Verse: 15:24

"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom

to God the Father after he has destroyed all domin­ion,

autho­rity and pow­er."

In verses 1-11 we learned the contents of the gospel: first, Jesus Christ died for our sins; second, Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. We learned that this gospel is good news of great joy to all people. In verses 12-34 Paul teach­es about the power of the Risen Christ. In these verses we learn: first, why the resurrection of Christ is necessary (12-19); second, what the Risen Christ's power is like (20-28); and third, a short warning, "Do not be mis­led." (29-34)

I. The necessity of the resurrection (12-19)

In this part Paul writes very logically, step by step, to explain why the resurrection of Christ is necessary. At that time, in most Christians' hearts there was a question: "Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ necessary?" They were Chris­tians, but they were still earthbound, and they were re-al­ists. If they did not get an immediate profit in whatever they did, they would say, "This is not necessary." They did not know that the ultimate necessity was in their faith. Once they had been very zealous Christians, and spiritual. But now they were lukewarm Christians, inclined to be unspiritual.

Look at verse 12. "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" This verse indicates that among the Christians in Corinth there were those who be­lieved in Jesus, but whose faith was not rooted in the resur­rection. They attended church and enjoyed Christian fellow­ship. But whenever they heard the words "the resurrection of Christ," they drew the line in their minds and thought, "No way. That is not ne­cessary. Never!" They thought the resurrection was not practical, and that resurrection faith did not add any prac­tical benefits to their welfare. So some of the Corin­thians were saying, "There is no resurrection," even though it had been preached to them that Christ rose from the dead. Their faith in Jesus was more concerned with their present situa­tion than with man's salvation from sin and eternal life through the death and resurrection of Christ. Admittedly, their lives in the cold reality of the present world were hard enough. Liv­ing in this hard world, they did not think about what they were doing or what they were believ­ing. They were habit­ual. It was a mistake for them to deny one pillar, the resur­rec­tion of Christ, of the two pillars of the Chris­tian faith: the death of Christ and the resur­rection of Christ. Their faith which ig­nored the resurrection could not be called true Chris­tian faith. How can someone call himself a Chris­tian if he denies the very essence of Christianity? That's like say­ing, "Sure, I'm a communist because I live in Rus­sia," even though he knows nothing about the Communist Manifesto. He can be a Russian, but he cannot be a communist. Likewise, Paul was amazed at such an absurdity, that many claim­ed to be Christians even though they did not put their faith in the resurrection of Christ. In the next 7 verses Paul ex­plains why the resurrec­tion is necessary.

**First**, if there is no resurrection, the world is under the power of death. Look at verse 13. "If there is no resurrec­tion of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." If there is no such thing as being raised from the dead, then "not even Christ" has been raised. What does Paul mean by "not even Christ"? Amidst all the names and faces of people who have died, only Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. In a vast field of death, Jesus Christ is the only seed of eternal life, through his resurrection. When they claimed that there is no resurrection, they denied the re­surrec­tion of Christ--the only firstfruits of eter­nal life for mankind.

Paul wrote this part of his letter in the subjunctive mood to help them think about what the contents of the world would be if Jesus Christ had not been raised. If Jesus Christ has not been raised, then there was "never" "any" resurrection. If Jesus Christ has not been raised, then the world in its con­tents is nothing but death, a sea of death. The world is full of graveyards and graves and dying people and ghosts and evil people and evil spirits. In this world, all the activi­ties of all people end in death. Mark Twain wrote beautiful stories about life. So everyone thought he was full of life. But he died re­luc­tantly with the last words, "It might have been!" Some­one said that these last words, "It might have been," are the most sorrowful words a man can utter. Even Mark Twain was a slave of the thought of death. Taking a nice swim in a calm and warm sea is very re­freshing. But swimming day and night in the cold and dark sea of death is unbearable punishment. Those who have no faith in the resurrection of Christ are the living dead, who do not know how to cope with the thought of death. Life to them has be­come a hollow mock­ery and a sham; life has lost its purpose and meaning. These people are bored and fed up; they have no zest for living. If Jesus Christ has not been raised, then the world is full of dead things and elements of death.

**Second**, if there is no resurrection, faith would be in vain. Look at verse 14. "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." Christian faith rests on the death and resurrection of Christ. We Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God; but he died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day and gave us a living hope in the kingdom of God. It is good news of great joy to all people. We Christians believe this and proclaim it to the whole world. The greatest news mortal ear has ever heard is the news that Jesus Christ rose from the dead as he promised. The resurrec­tion of Christ is the chief proof of the Christian faith. In the resurrec­tion of Christ we have the answer to the great question of the ages, "If a man dies, shall he live again?" The Bible teaches that be­cause Jesus Christ lives, we also shall live. (Jn14­:19) If we don't believe in the re­surrection of Christ, we are just a bunch of hypo­crites and plastic smile-makers. Because we be-lieve in the resurrection of Christ we can live victor­ious lives. Because we believe in the resur­rection of Christ we become vic­tors over the power of evil and death. Because we believe in the resur­rection of Christ we invest our lives in the work of the gospel and make daily sacrifices. Because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day according to the Scrip­tures, our faith is not in vain.

**Third**, if there is no resurrection, we deny the almighty pow-er of God. Look at verse 15a. "More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God..." The Bible says that after Jesus Christ had been in the tomb three days God raised him from the dead. This means that God is the Almighty Crea­tor God. Our God is the Almighty God who created the heav­ens and the earth by the word of his mouth. Our God is the Al­mighty God who made Aaron's dry rod bud. Our God is the Al­mighty God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This power of Almighty God is the only clout we have. If Jesus Christ had not been rais­ed from the dead, our God is not the Al­mighty God. Moreover, we are found to be false wit­ness­es. Throughout history there have been many kinds of witnesses, but most of them turned out to be false witnesses. Recent his­tory attests that during the last 70 years there have been scores of false witnesses of communism. But through the wit­nesses of the re­surrec­tion of Christ, the course of his­tory has been changed many times over, because the witness of the res­ur­rection of Christ is God's truth. The Bible says in Acts 2:23,24, "This man was hand­ed over to you by God's set pur­pose and foreknow­ledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, be­cause it was impos­sible for death to keep its hold on him."

**Fourth**, if there is no resurrection, we cannot solve our sin problem. Look at verse 17. "And if Christ has not been rais­ed, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." As we have studied, sin is spiritual sickness. Sin makes man spir­itually sick and unhappy. Sin finally leads man to the second death--eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sul-fur. If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, he did not conquer the power of sin and death. If Jesus Christ did not con­quer the power of sin and death, all human beings are still under the power of sin and death. But Jesus Christ was raised from the dead according to the Scrip­tures. Through his resur­rec­tion God solved our sin problem. (Jn.1:29)

**Fifth**, if there is no resurrection, Christians are to be pit-ied. Look at verse 19. "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." Christians are people who walk the narrow way. We carry the cross of mission and are called to live sacrificial lives. We are called to expand the territory of the kingdom of God. In do-ing so, we are despised and rejected by worldly people, sim­ply because we want to be like Jesus, not like "one of them" in the world. We keep the faith and fight the good fight because we believe that the Risen Christ is our inheritance.

Look at verse 18. "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost." "Those who have fallen asleep" refers to the faithful servants of God down through history who died in God, like Moses and Elijah. They denied luxuries and comfort and suffered end­lessly during their lifetimes for the sake of the Lord God Almighty. If they had only died, just like ev­ery­one else, then their lives were foolish and piti­ful. If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, then ni­hilism, the men­tality of seeking fleeting pleasures, the pessimistic view of man, "Let's eat and drink, for tomor­row we die"--this might be the best life­style for mankind. (32b) And if there is no re­sur­rection, then those who partici­pate in the remain­ing suffer­ings of Christ are the most piti­ful people. But Jesus Christ was raised from the dead accord­ing to the Scrip­tures, and Chris­­tians are not pitiful people; they are the most glori­ous people in the glorious re­surrec­tion of Christ.

II. The power of the Risen Christ (20-28)

In this second part Paul explains how great the power of the resurrection is. He begins with the words, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead." When Paul said "in­deed," he meant that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just a theory or supposition, but a fact. He did not just postulate that Jesus Christ could have been raised by God's power; he states the fact that Jesus Christ was actually raised by God's power. The resurrection of Christ is not a concoc­tion of abstract theories; it is the demonstration of the power of Al­mighty God. In verses 20-28 Paul gives us three facts about this power of the resurrection of Christ.

**First**, the Risen Christ has the power to change a man's inner man. Those who met the Risen Christ were all changed into new men and women. Mary Magdalene had a sorrowful past. Her life problem was a sorrowful mind. While she was under the wings of Jesus' grace, she was happy. But after Jesus' cruci­fixion, she became even more sorrowful. Mary Magdalene and sever­al other women were weeping at the graveyard. The Risen Christ, whose appearance was like lightning and whose clothes were as white as snow, appeared to them. When they were met by the Risen Christ, the sorrow in their hearts was gone, and new hope and new joy smeared into their hearts. They were over­joyed in the hope that they could be with beau­tiful Jesus for ever and evermore. (Lk24:1-12; Jn20:10-18)

That same day two of them were going to a village call­ed Emmaus, about 7 miles from Jerusalem. These two men must have been two of his disciples. They had hoped Jesus was the one who would redeem Israel. But when Jesus was cruci­fied, they lost their hope and de­spaired. In deep de­spair and fear they were going down to Emmaus, where they could es­cape from the eyes of the temple police and spend the re­mainder of their lives in seclu­sion. When they arrived at the vil­lage and sat at the table, their eyes were opened to see the Risen Christ who appeared to them. After meet­ing the Risen Christ, there was no more fear or despair in their hearts. Instead their hearts were burning with the spir­it of boldness and victory. They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem to par­ticipate in the remaining suffer­ings of Christ. (Lk24:13-33a)

**Second**, the Risen Christ has the power to give a man new life. Look at verse 20. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first­fruits of those who have fallen asleep." Down through history every­one has had to bow down to the power of death. Mohammed died on June 8, 632 A.D. Even though he was wise enough to make many people follow his teachings, he himself knelt down before the power of death. Buddha also knelt down be­fore the power of death, instead of going to Nirvana through his right thinking and right living.

Why do all men have to live under this power of sin and death? Look at verse 21a. "For since death came through a man..." In this verse, "a man" refers to Adam. Adam was the an­cestor of the human race. He yielded to the tempta­tion of the devil and disobeyed God's absolute word of com­mand. Be­cause of his disobedience, sin came into the world. When men became sinsick, they began to see God rela­tively. They also began to see other human beings and the world with rela­tiv­ism, not with the absolute truth of God. In their relativ­istic thinking, if they need God, they say there is a God; if they don't need God, they say there is no God. In this way, sin reigned in mankind and in all their offspring. Sin began with Adam's disobe­dience, and the consequence of sin was death for everyone. (Ro5:12) Many great humanist think­ers have struggled with this problem of man's tendency to sin and with the prob­lem of death. They tried hard to get rid of sin and death with many kinds of positive think­ing. But all their strug­gles failed. Most of them finally admitted that there is no way to solve the prob­lem of sin and death.

So Paul said in verse 22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made a­live." God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and made him the first­fruits of eter­nal life. Who­ever believes in him will not perish but have eter­nal life. (Jn3:16) The Risen Christ has life-giving power. So when Paul spoke of the dead, he did not call them "dead"; he spoke of them as "those who have fallen asleep" (18,20,51), because in the Risen Christ there is no death. To God's peo­ple, death is like a cat-nap. Look at verse 22b. "...so in Christ all will be made alive." Whoever be­lieves in Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead, will live for­ever. (Ro5:17b)

**Third**, the Risen Christ has the power to restore the kingdom of God. (24,25,27,28) Look at verse 24. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." In the course of restoring the kingdom of God, the Risen Christ will first de­stroy all evil and unrighteousness. No matter how good many things of the world may seem, we know that under­neath the world is full of evil. Where there is evil and un-right­eousness, there is always fear and sorrow. (Isa7:2; 8: 22) Fear and sor­row make man miserable. Politi­cal sys­tems are necessary. But ultimately, they all make some people rulers and most people slaves. So they are called a "necessary ev­il." Even democra­cy, perhaps the most ideal form of govern­ment, has hatched capital­ism and imperialism over the poor and over those from inferior na­tions. The utopian dreams of democracy have produced effects as evil as those of commun­ism, which uses any available means to a­chieve its ends. This world is full of evil people. There are also "necessary evil people." But when the time comes, the Risen Christ will de­stroy all evil domin­ion, authority and power. (24b)

Next, the Risen Christ will destroy death. Look at verse 26. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Death is the fruit of sin. There are two kinds of death--first physi­cal death and then spiritual death--called "the second death" or eter­nal condemnation. Death is the last enemy of man. Death has in it a sting. During their lives, those who sin against God get many injuries and wounds both in body and spirit by the sting of death. And after death they can't just die; they have to live forever in the midst of the sting of death in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Look at verse 26 again. "The last enemy to be de­stroyed is death." The power of death is imbed­ded in man and in the world beyond reme­dy. But the Risen Christ, the one and only Son of God, will de­stroy this last enemy of mankind, death, with his resur­rection power.

Finally the Risen Christ will restore creation order. Read verses 24,28. Originally, there was one king­dom--the kingdom of God. But because of Adam's diso­bedi­ence, another kingdom came into the world--the king­dom of Satan. Satan was origin­ally an angel of God. But in his vanity he abandoned God's mission and became Satan, and he has ruled the dark­ness of the world ever since A­dam's fall. This Satan has been roaming around, captur­ing all unbelieving, wicked peo­ple and locking them in the dungeon of his kingdom. But when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, he assured the complete destruction of the kingdom of Satan, and at the same time the complete res­toration of the kingdom of God. Here we learn that the Lord's Pray­er, "Your kingdom come," means the de­struction of the kingdom of Satan, and at the same time the complete restora­tion of the king­dom of God. In the Risen Christ, God will once again be re­garded as the Center of the uni­verse. Here we also learn that the power of the Risen Christ is the power of the Al­mighty Creator God. For example, man's ability is greatly limited. So, in restoring the roads of Chicago, road workers make countless bumpy pat­ches on the roads. They don't get rid of the old asphalt completely and con­struct a new road. We can't say that patching is res­tora­tion. But the Ris-en Christ has the power to restore the king­dom of God. The re­storation of the kingdom of God does not mean mending it, for the kingdom of God was never dam­aged. Ra­ther, it means that man again obtains the privilege of enter­ing the kingdom of God--whoever believes in the Risen Christ. Man lost the kingdom of God because of his sins. But the Risen Christ opened the doors of the king­dom of God through his resur­rec­tion. We don't have to worry about living in the dung­eon of Satan anymore; we can expect the happiness, love and peace of the kingdom of God for ever and ever. (Isa11:1-9; Rev21:1-4)

III. Do not be misled (29-34)

Look at verse 29. Through baptism for the dead, the Corin­thians hoped that the dead could live again. But Paul said that with­out resurrection faith, this ritualistic baptism had no mean­ing. Paul knew that some of the Corinthians were sin­cere, even amidst the ritu­alis­tic church activities and the ridi­cule and disap­proval of the general public. But they had come to their human lim­ita­tion in keeping up their lives of faith. Paul knew that they had become shaky in their lives of faith because they had not taken deep root in resurrection faith. So Paul ex­plained why he and his co-workers strug­gled to live a vic­tori­ous life. It was because he and his co-work­ers believ­ed that Christ is risen. So they lived like good soldiers of Christ. Look at verses 30-32. "And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not rais­ed, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"

Paul gave them some final advice. Look at verse 33. "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good char­acter.'" Who are bad company? They are those who live without resur­rection faith. They live in the world like dead fish. Such people put all their attention into what the world has to offer. The things of the world are glittering and desira­ble. Paul said in verse 34a, "Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning." Paul said, "Stop sinning." It meant that those who say, "I am a Chris­tian," but who do not have resurrection faith are sinning, because they are living double lives. May God help us to be­lieve in the resur­rection of Christ.