

Living in a World of Seeds – Acts 17:30-31, 1 Cor 15:42-44

Introduction – According to Scripture, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the assurance of His Lordship over all creation (Rom 1:4). It is also the assurance of His bodily return to this earth to judge all mankind. And finally, it is the assurance of our bodily resurrection from the dead for that judgment, either to eternal condemnation or to eternal glorification and everlasting life. These two texts combined compel us, upon reflection, to embrace, celebrate, believe, and proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.

The Resurrection Assures us of Christ's Return to Judge the World (Acts 17:30-31) – On Paul's second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit directs him away from Asia Minor (present day Turkey) and instead to Macedonia and south to Athens (Acts 16:6-10). Paul's spirit was provoked when he saw that the city was full of idols (Acts 17:1). It is said by the ancients that in Athens it was easier to find a god than a man (as in Seattle it is easier to find a dog than a child). Athens was a city of enlightened philosophy, promoting tolerance and yet snobbish about their high-brow intellectualism. As Paul reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and Gentiles, some called him a "*seed-picker*" (17:18). Luke mentions that "*certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered*" Paul and this helps fill in the story. Epicureans were pure materialists who taught that the chief goal in life was to attain the maximum amount of pleasure and the minimum amount of pain because this life was all there was. The Stoics pursued a balanced life of reason, virtue, and accepting whatever fate brought, with no acknowledgment of a divine person or purpose, giving them the "*grin and bear it*" tagline. These would be among those who called him a "*babbler*" in v18 and later mocked him over the *resurrection of the dead* in v32.

Paul was invited to go to Mars Hill (Areopagus) and make his case for "*Jesus and the resurrection*" (17:18). As he concludes, we come to our text, 17:30-31. While God had overlooked for some time the ignorance displayed throughout the world and exemplified in Athens, it was now time for all men to repent, turning away from false teachings, worldviews, philosophies, idols, and false religions (v30). And the reason that needed to happen was because a day has been appointed when Jesus will come and judge the world (v31). If any dared to challenge this, Paul says that God has given all men assurance (the word is *pistis*, *faith*) that this will in fact happen. That assurance is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Preaching to the World – It is important to note that the resurrection of the dead was no more believable in first-century Athens than it is for many in our modern, scientific age (which means that today's materialism and secular humanism views are actually the antiquated and old-fashioned views). But that is exactly what Paul preached. And not only did he preach the resurrection of Jesus, but that this fact proved that Jesus will come again, from the right hand of the Father Almighty in order to judge the living and the dead (as our Creed states). There is a place for giving evidence for the resurrection, but our emphasis is to be the declaration of the resurrection as proof that Jesus is Lord of this world. Lord, Judge, and Savior.

"There is a day appointed for this general review of all that men have done in time, and a final determination of their state for eternity. The day is fixed in the counsel of God and cannot be altered; but it is his there, and cannot be known. A day of decision, a day of recompence, a day that will put a final period to all the days of time" – Matthew Henry.

There will be a resurrection of every person on that day and then humanity will be divided into two and only two groups. There will be those who remain in the first Adam, our covenant head who threw us into hopeless condemnation; and those who are found in the second Adam, Who was born into this race (without sin), and lived a perfect and sinless life. He was crucified by our rebel leaders and in this way paid the debt for our sins. He was resurrected into new life, the beginning of His exaltation, and in such a way that we are able by faith to join with Him in that new life. His exaltation is perfected when He returns to judge the living and the dead on a particular day.

The Resurrection Assures us of our Future Incorruptible Bodies (1 Cor 15:42-44) – It was not enough to offend the philosophers about life after death and a resurrection. It was foolishness to the Greeks to preach a bodily resurrection. The body was, after all, simply a carrying case for our true essence, our spirits. The spirit was good (or could be made good), they taught; it was the material world that was corrupt, dirty, decaying, and our spirits needed to be delivered from them.

But God tells another story. He is the Creator of all things and when He created the material world, He called it all good, very good. We are made of matter, and we have a spirit as well. Ever since the Fall, our problem has been moral and not directly material, but the material has been deeply affected by the moral. The creation is not naturally corrupt; it has been held in bondage to corruption because of the Fall (Rom 8:18-25). What we learn here is that we do not have to deny the “wrongness” of any suffering. Instead, we are told to long for, to groan for and with creation and the Spirit, for “*the revealing of the sons of God.*” The sufferings from the Fall are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in that day.

Paul, in defending the glory of the resurrection of the body, likens our present life to a bag of seeds and a time of planting. In one sense, we are to look around and see nothing but seeds – we cannot imagine the glory that will come forth. We are to go to the graveyards and consider its similarity to your garden in early spring. The resurrection will be the great harvest of that field. And the seed metaphor is apt because there is complete continuity between the seed and the plant or tree that will come forth while at the same time complete discontinuity in the outward show (vv42-43).

Our bodies are now subject to corruption; we will rot in the ground. But they are also placed in the ground (in death) in order to sprout and grow – in incorruption. And from dishonor to glory. And from weakness to power. And from a “*soulish*” body to a “*spiritish*” body. Do not take verse 44 as contrasting “*material*” and “*non-material.*” The contrast is between a body animated by one type of life and a body animated by another type, “*soul*” and “*spirit.*” Our bodies are now dominated by a life force Paul calls “*soul.*” Our bodies then will be dominated by the “*life-giving spirit*” of the resurrected Jesus. From glory to glory.

The Resurrection Assures us that Our Lives Here are not in Vain (1 Cor 15:58) – The doctrine of the Resurrection is a great balm and a glorious hope. But you can only have that glorious hope if you have faith in the One Who made the Way for that glorious hope (Rom 10:9-10). Christ’s victory over the grave, over sin and death, declares His victory over your sin and death and every moment of suffering. In Christ, your little insignificant seed-life is going to be worked into immeasurable and eternal glory.

Dave Hatcher – Resurrection Sunday, April 9, 2023