

1 Corinthians 15

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the significance of the resurrection of Christ and the saints, and the relationship between the knowledge of God and redemption.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:20

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Resurrection"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on 1 Corinthians 15, emphasizing the significance of resurrection and its implications for both the righteous and the wicked. He highlights that just as all in Adam die, all in Christ will be made alive, underscoring the total identification of Christ with humanity. Darby clarifies that the resurrection is not merely a concept but a vital truth that affirms God's acceptance of those raised, and he contrasts the first and last Adams to illustrate the transformative power of Christ's resurrection. He also discusses the nature of eternal life and the importance of understanding our identity in Christ, which shapes our actions and responsibilities as believers.

Transcript

The apostle now speaks of resurrection. His keeping it till the last, in this way, is remarkable. We have a great truth brought out in the chapter, in the total identification of Christ with men - saints, but man as man, because he says, if men do not rise, Christ is not risen. I have not the least objection to verse 22 as it stands in the English Version, for all the wicked will be raised, as well as the righteous. As in Adam everybody in Adam dies, so in Christ all in Christ will be made alive. Verse 21 is more general; it is merely the fact that resurrection comes by man. You could only say "in Christ" of the wicked, if you take it in the power of Christ. The whole account is the resurrection of the saints. When you take in resurrection of the dead, it is abstract, and it is resurrection that is insisted on.

The destruction of death, if you take it for the wicked, will be the second death. The wages of sin is death in general, but strictly the first death; though wrath of God from heaven is revealed along with the gospel. I know of no scripture that speaks of Christ bearing the second death. He bore what brings us into it. It is a great thing to keep to Scripture. "The lake of fire," "the second death," is not annihilation.

You must recollect that all that is behind death is fully brought out on either side by the gospel. The Pharisees spelled out something of resurrection, but life and incorruptibility are brought to light by the gospel. In the Old Testament eternal life is mentioned but twice, and both times in connection with the millennium; and in the judgment on Adam there is no judgment beyond death - "dust thou art, and unto

dust thou shalt return" - that is all. Of course, when God was driving out the man, the woman was to have sorrow in her conception, and so on; and plenty more comes out in the other scriptures; but as for the present state, death of the body was what was imposed on him as the consequence. There were other intimations in the Old Testament, whence the Pharisees had gathered the truth, but it was a matter of spiritual apprehension. All the Old Testament saints will be in the resurrection, though I do not know that they are included in this scripture. "They without us shall not be made perfect."

287 The resurrection of Christ from among the dead is the testimony to God's acceptance of those that are raised. It is merely a question of time. If the dead are raised altogether, then they are all to come together into judgment. But God takes Christ out - the seal of His perfect acceptance - from the rest of the dead; and when the time comes, we shall be taken out from the dead in just the same manner. God does raise the wicked, and Christ will judge the wicked, and then He will give all up to God.

There is a passage in Philippians 3 as to the resurrection, which makes it simple about the body: "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." It is wonderful what revelations we have of the plans of God, compared with the darkness of man! Romans 8:11 also refers to resurrection - "shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

In our chapter two things are evident: one that is always our portion in spirit, that is, the time when the dispensation and ordering of things will cease; and the other, the actual having to say to God, "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." There is the whole system of dispensed power which comes in by-and-by; and then you get God all in all, when all mediatorial provision to bring it about is complete, and He will render up the kingdom to God. In one sense we reign for ever and ever, but all the governmental system that brings the thing about will be closed.

288 The apostle John does not give dispensations, but deals more immediately with natures; what he does is evidently the bringing out the manifestation of God. "No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "If we walk in the light, as God is in the light," and so on; it is the revelation of God's nature.

But here it is all a system of counsels and power, which is, in a certain sense, provisional, and so only for a time. The object is, that God - not the Father - may be all in all. And there comes a blessed fact with it, that the Lord Jesus never gives up His manhood; "then shall the Son also himself be subject." You have the sonship in John most fully. Christ was God, and came to be a servant, presently to take the government, and all authority and power is put down, and then He takes the place of subjection, and all as man. It is not that He is not God, for He is God all the time. His divinity comes out in John at every step. He is never as a mere man in John's Gospel; yet He never goes out of the place of a person that receives everything. He has taken the form of a servant, and says, "I have glorified thee on earth," and now "glorify thou me." He does not say, I glorify Myself. And again, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; if God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him." In John 17 He speaks as Son of God; "Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

It is beautiful to see Him God, but man, all through that Gospel! That is just what Satan tried to get Him out of down here; but no, if Satan says "Give up your place as a servant," He says, "That is where I am now come." Nor does He ever cease to be the firstborn among many brethren, and that is a wonderful thing to us. But you never find the glory of His person touched, however much He comes amongst us, and at His baptism by John, He quite takes His place as a man. Of course, there was no need for Himself to be baptised with the baptism of repentance; but in grace He takes the place with those who did need it; whereon immediately heaven is opened to Him, and the Holy Ghost comes down, and He is sealed and anointed by the Holy Ghost. If the Father owns Him as His Son, there also He takes His place with us.

289 When heaven is opened to Stephen, at once we see the difference. Stephen has an object in heaven which he is looking at, and which forms him into the same image. But when heaven is opened to Christ, heaven is looking down at Him, not He at an object there. And so the glory of His Person is always secured. In the transfiguration He was in exactly the same glory as Moses and Elias, and they were as He; but, the moment the glory comes out and the Father's voice is heard, Moses and Elias are gone. Even where His saints are in the same place with Him, the glory of His Person is completely secured. It was so at the transfiguration, as well as at His baptism. And the nearer we are to Christ, the more we shall see the glory of His Person. It is blessed to see this. He still remains the firstborn among many brethren. If it were only an angel, there would not be much in it.

Psalm 8 will be made good at the beginning of the millennium. His enemies will be made His footstool according to Psalm 110, but the same general sense. He is sitting at His Father's right hand now, but when His Father makes His enemies His footstool, then He begins to trample them down. In Psalm 8 He gets this power, and is set over the works of His hand. He has three distinct titles to this place over all things: He created them in Colossians, and therefore is Head over all things; then, in Colossians and Hebrews, He takes it as Son, because, if He is Son, He is heir; and then there is a third title, as Son of man He takes it to Himself, but in the way of doing it, He takes it in redemption: God reconciles everything by Him. The full result of Psalm 8 Will not be reached until death is destroyed. God puts all things under His feet as Son of man at the beginning of the millennium, and then He begins to put them down, and, when all is done, He gives the kingdom up. The kingdom of heaven is going on now; not the kingdom of the Son of man, though He is King, and entitled to take the kingdom at any time. He is ready to judge both quick and dead; only He is sitting there till the moment, known to God, when He is to take the kingdom manifestly, and in actual execution. Now it is all a provisional state. He is sitting on the Father's throne, and has not taken His own at all; still the kingdom belongs to Him; only it is going on as in the parables of Matthew 13, a kingdom without a king, in patience, not power. This is not a kingdom in the literal sense, but the shape the kingdom takes before the King takes His power, though He is King.

290 The destruction of death will not be until the great white throne. The taking of the kingdom will be a total change in the order of things; but the great difference will be, that (instead of a rejected Christ, and the Holy Ghost giving power to go against the stream) when the Lord comes, the stream is in the way of righteousness: power and glory, and everything, are in the way of righteousness. Now people have to make sacrifices; if they follow Christ, they have their cross. Only He is excepted who did put all things under Him: otherwise it is all without exception. We have it in Psalm 8, and quoted in three places - Ephesians 1:22, Hebrews 2, and this chapter. It is more developed in Hebrews 2; it says, we see not yet all things put under Him. Half the psalm is fulfilled, but not yet the other half. He is crowned with glory and honour, but we do not see everything put under His feet, and there He sits on the Father's throne. In Ephesians He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is

His body. In Psalm 2 we have Him as Son of God and King of Israel down in the earth: only He is rejected, and then we have the state His rejection leaves the Jews in, until Psalm 8, when we have everything put under Him. We find the Messiah's glory and title set aside for a time, when those who followed with Him are in trial and difficulty; and then Jehovah's name is excellent in all the earth, when the Son of man is set over everything, and this is seen in Psalm 8.

That gives the whole scheme of God's ways in Christ, not the church, but as to the earth. In the end of John 1 Christ is owned according to Psalm 2, "the Son of God and King of Israel." And Christ says, You shall see greater things than these - the Son of man on the throne. And then, in John 2, we have the millennium settled among the Jews on earth, the water of purifying turned into the joy of earth at the marriage, and with a scourge of small cords He purges the temple. Those are the two sides of the millennial character, and that is why it is called the third day. You cannot make anything of those days in John, if you do not see it is the remnant up to Nathaniel. The history, in fact, has many days; but the days taken notice of are John Baptist's ministry, Christ's, and then the third day. It is just the same at the end of John: this is the third time that Jesus shewed Himself, and that third time is the millennium. It is meant to be mysterious, and it is so. The first time He sent His disciples for a haul (Luke 5:6), the net brake; but now, when the Lord comes back again, the net did not break, although there were so many fishes (153). It is purposely mysterious, I do not doubt. There had been the revelation to Thomas before; and He had shewn Himself eight days before that. This was the third time, when He gathers them at the end. Paul's ministry is entirely left out here, but we have Peter and John's ministries: - Peter's, to feed the sheep; and, as for John, the Lord says, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me"; and this is what John did; he goes watching over the church until Christ come.

291 In our Lord's speaking with Peter (John 21), two words are used: *phileo* (I am attached) is more intimate, *agapao* (I love) is more general. Peter says, I love you with the intimacy of a friend. It is curious, that, though the verb *phileo* is used, the noun from it is never used in the Greek. The Lord uses the general word first, and probes his heart; and then again, "Lovest thou me?" and the third time He says, "Affectionest thou me?" "I not only love you," says Peter, "but have affection for you." I think there is great instruction there. The Lord never reproaches Peter, but goes to detect the root that had produced the fault: and Peter is not really restored until he had judged the root. I do not mean that he may not have confessed it honestly, but he is in danger of the same again. The moment he had been put to the test, he did not know the Lord at all, and nothing but divine knowledge could have said that he loved Him. Divine knowledge could say all things; and then, when the Lord has completely humbled him, He puts entire confidence in him: "Feed my sheep." The very thing Christ loves most on this earth He trusts to this man. It was a complete destruction of Peter's self-confidence, and then he knew what the resource for a poor sheep was: since he had judged himself thoroughly, he knew where to take the sheep. The Lord never can trust anybody that trusts himself. It is not that a person is not sincere. Peter was perfectly sincere, but he did not know himself.

Then the Lord, we may say, leaps over to His coming. Then there was another thing as to Peter I may mention - He puts an end to his will. Peter had declared he would follow Him to prison and to death - the thing he could not do. If only a servant girl asks him, "Are you one of them?" he is afraid, and begins to curse and swear. The Lord now says, "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he signifying by what death he should glorify God." 'When your will is gone, you will follow Me.' The very thing he said he would do, and could not, because he

trusted the flesh, that thing, when he had no confidence of his own, was what he would do, and really did so. It was a thorough breaking down of the flesh, and then Christ trusts all to him, both His sheep and His lambs. There is a difference there: first, "Feed my lambs"; then, "Shepherd my sheep"; and then, "Feed my sheep." "Shepherd," in that way, is sometimes important; the elders are called on to shepherd the flock; the Greek word means not to feed merely, but to care for and watch over them. We have no ascension here; all passes over to Christ's coming: we have nothing of Paul, but only Peter and John; Peter, the apostle of the circumcision, and John's ministry going on till the Lord came.

292 To return to our chapter. It may be remarked that the baptism for the dead, in verse 29, means, that you take your part with the dead, and for the dead, whether it be Christ, or anybody else. It is a very old thought. Doddridge had it two hundred years ago; he says, Here's a man who has fallen in the ranks, and another steps forward in his stead; what is the good of that, if nobody rises?

"I die daily" (v. 31) is an outward thing. The difference of the glories is, I believe, between the heavenly and the earthly. "So also is the resurrection of the dead" - the state of the resurrection is more glorious than the state down here.

All that is told of the first resurrection is testimony against the entire idea of taking people to judgment in the way the evangelical system does. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ" - be manifested there - that must be, but the saints are in glory before they arrive there: therefore the idea of a judgment, whether they are to have the place or not, is altogether too low. The real power of redemption has been lost sight of, and the resurrection itself is the fruit of that redemption. Just as Christ Himself was taken from among the dead (besides, He "could not be holden of it") by the glory of the Father owning Him in righteousness as Son, so the saints will be taken out too. But there the resurrection was putting the seal of acceptance publicly upon Christ's whole work; and everything is settled. Whereas, also, if the saints alone are raised, and taken out from among the wicked dead presently, it too is a positive testimony to their acceptance.

293 In Mark Christ told them, after the transfiguration, to tell no man until after He should be risen "from among the dead." The disciples were wondering what this rising from the dead should mean; that was what astonished them. Every Pharisee in the country believed there would be a resurrection; but a rising out from among the dead they could not make anything of. The whole idea of a judgment to come to settle a person's case seems to me to upset all Christianity. Paul has been eighteen hundred years in heaven, and you are going to take him out to judge whether he is to be there or not! It is absurd upon the face of it. People fancy that the testimony to the fulness of redemption weakens morality: nay, but the fulness is in Christ, and being in Christ I also see that Christ is in me. Then if Christ is in you, let us never see anything but Christ in your ways every day. All duties flow from the place we are in already. You could not have the duties of children to me if you are not my children, nor could you, if you slaved yourselves to death, become my children. But if you were my children, you would have the duty of living as such. A woman cannot act as the wife of a man, if she is not his wife, and so on. But then the duty is there if the relation is. Are you sure of being saved for ever? asks one. Well, is that my child? Yes; then he is my child for ever. God gives a ground for all action, but it is not duties and conditional promises: you cannot have a duty without first putting a person in the place it belongs to. And then God gives a new nature that delights in the duty, whereon He sets you to do it.

But I was alluding to the fact that we are raised in glory, and surely, if we are there, the question of judging whether we are to be there is all nonsense. And so the first resurrection is not merely a notion about some

high-flown thing. "Some have not the knowledge of God"; for this denying the resurrection was connected really with a moral state; there was no real knowledge of God. A Christian might have fallen into such a state, but the knowledge of God is that revelation of God to the soul which is estimated by the new nature, and is the spring of all acquaintance with truth. A saint may fall into such a state, for the flesh in the saint is as bad as in the sinner, or worse. Paul here states the fact, "some have not the knowledge of God," just as we were saying, the other day, a man asleep is, as regards others, just the same as a dead man. Some needed the exhortation, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." Such are thinking after the flesh, instead of thinking after Christ, though before God not really in the flesh.

294 The knowledge of God is immensely important; if I have not light, I do not know what light is; the knowledge of a being flows from partaking of the nature of that being. An animal does not know what a man is, though there may be greater men, and stronger men, and wiser, than myself. Hence "he that loveth not, knoweth not God." If God is love, and I have got His nature, then I know He is, and what He is. But there are some people who have not the knowledge of God. As I said, you must have the nature of a being to know that being; and now I know what God is, because I have been made partaker of the divine nature, or else I had not the knowledge of God. "We" walk in the light, as God is in the light, and that was the difference between Israel and Christians. God was behind a veil to them, but now He has come out in Christ, and that veil is rent, and we come in. And so now the wrath of God is revealed from heaven; that is not the government of God sending the people to Babylon, or elsewhere, but wrath in full, or else there must be no "ungodliness." And the death that rent the veil, and let God out, put away the evil that kept us outside. Of old they might have learned at least some of God's ways: for "He shewed his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel"; that is, if they were spiritual. Moses says, "Shew me thy way, that I may know thee." That was something of it, but the Christian, properly speaking, knows God. Galatians 4:8 gives you, "When ye knew not God," and then, "After that ye have known God." There is a moral estimate of what God is. If I find a ritualist, I say, You do not know God, you could not, as long as you bow down your head like a bulrush, as Isaiah says (chap. 58:5), and think God can be worshipped by all these mummeries; you do not know God really.

295 Those in 2 Peter 3, who were "entangled" and "overcome," had known Christ in a superficial way; there was no real change of life, no vital change, only an outward change through the knowledge brought to them, but, as the old saying is, "A washed sow is no sheep." It takes a new nature really to know God. Knowing Christ may be a little different from knowing God; knowing God is knowing His nature, whereas Christ has come, and there might, in another way, be such and such a knowledge of Him. Without knowledge of God, you may get your feelings moved about the truth. Look at Balaam. He can say, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his"; but there was no change as to his life, or anything. There may be such now, with no real knowledge of Christ. The outward manifestation of Christ may have come to a person, without any knowledge of what was inside. "When they knew God," in Romans 1, was the knowledge of God as in Noah, the preacher of righteousness; but they turned that into idolatry. They knew there was only one God in Noah's time, and they gave that up for idols. In one sense you may know everything, if you merely take the acquaintance with it. In Romans Paul is convicting the Gentiles on two grounds - their knowledge of God as in Noah, and on the ground of the creation-glory of God. The starting-point of the Gentiles was the knowledge of God, and they did not like to retain Him in their knowledge; that is the way they lost it, because the human mind, in a moral sense, cannot hold it. It is ginosko in Greek, in "After that ye have known God." It is the word constantly used in such a connection. The word epiginosko is more, it is consciously to know. He says of the Corinthians, they were ignorant of God; I think the knowing of God, in Romans, is a little more, because they had knowledge, for they started

from a point, and it was abandoned.

Now we have another very important thing, "The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit," etc. (v. 45-48). As we were like Adam, we shall be like Christ. There are many important things here. "The second Man" is the first truth; that is, we have no acceptance of the first man at all; we have acceptance of people, of course, but that is in the second Man, not in the first. God's thought is to bring in a second Adam, and the first is set aside; and as the first Adam was a head and centre, the second Adam is looked at as a head Man, and in a far higher way. In many places people think there is a great deal going on towards perfecting man, but, instead of that, Christ sets him on one side. Christ was "the last Adam" before He rose as to His Person, but not as to His state. Adam was so in the garden, in his person, in paradise, but was not exactly head of a race until he was outside; and this has its importance. So Christ was not Head of a race really until He had died and risen, because He died. Christ comes among men down here, and men will not have Him, but in His death their system is totally closed. Another man is set up: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Man rejected Christ, and that finished man's history. When Christ has risen, He begins a new state altogether, but it is in the last Adam. He is the last Adam; there could be no other after Him. "Adam," in contrast with "man," is looked at more as the head of a race.

296 Then notice the enormous difference between the two Adams. The first was a living soul, the second a life-giving Spirit. This is the very thing those who deny the immortality of the soul insist on, for they say animals were living souls, and so they were. But we know that after death comes judgment (Heb. 9:8), and that single text shews that after death the whole question comes in of judgment for what a man did when he was alive. These people talk of Hebrew and Greek about it (that is, one of their chief people, and one may say several), but he only proved that he knew nothing about the language, and could not even look out words in his dictionary; and yet it raises a cloud of dust. God had quickened Christ, but Christ is a quickener both of soul and body, and that is the way there is a spiritual body. Christ was born of a woman, "made of a woman," it says, "made under the law." "Made" is not the thing, but it is a word that signifies, "to begin to be," and that was not before; because "under the law" would not do. I could say, He became a man, but I could not say, became of a woman. "Became," in English, supposes a person to exist already, and then to become something, which is not the case here. And "was made" does not do, because it looks as if He was made what He was not before. Christ was always a quickening Spirit - He quickened from Adam. It is the contrast between the first Adam and last; the one received life, the other gives life; and then we shall be like Him who is from heaven.

297 As to soul and spirit, spirit is the upper part, and life was communicated to the body through it. Soul, when you make the difference, is that which you have in common with the beasts. The word is used in the Hebrew for everything; conscience, soul, spirit, and heart. Heart thus is really a figure, for else it is a piece of my flesh connected with the circulation of the blood. Take "if our heart condemn us not," there it is in the sense of conscience: "Love God with all thy heart," there it is the affections.

The "earth," in verse 47, is the ground the man is made of. I think we have to recollect that, in divine things, the force of words is known by the meaning of the thing. It is not so in human science, but the opposite. Our Lord asks, "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my words." Nicodemus shews what this is when he asks, "How can a man be born again?" It is of the first importance to lay hold of what the Lord is speaking, though we might learn Greek too; it is all well in its place. "We have borne the image of the earthy, and shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

When we learn that "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump," we shall be changed. The last trump, among the Romans, was the signal for all to start from the camp. They sounded one trumpet, and pulled down their tents; then a second, and put themselves in order; and when the last was sounded, they all started. It is the same idea in 1 Thessalonians 4; it is there the military technical shout when they were all called into the rank again from standing at ease (originally it was the sound given to the rowers to pull together). We have three there: the Lord first; then the archangel carrying it on; and then the trump of God that completes all. "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory; O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Yes, "the strength of sin is the law." It is astonishing the way people cling to the law for morality. I know nothing that shews more the perversity of man's mind than this. It is clear enough. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under law, but under grace." To put under law is to bring in sin, for you cannot keep it, and so it is "the strength of sin." The motions of sin were by the law. Law addresses itself to a nature, and forbids the sin, without changing the nature, or anything else; and it enfeebles the whole spirit of a man, by bringing his conscience into bondage. Indeed sin takes occasion by the commandment. If in this table, now, I had a drawer, and something in it, and I said, "Nobody is to know what is there," why, there are lots of heads in this room would be curious to know what it was directly. And the law is "the strength of sin," by binding the soul down to guilt: not that this is a fault in the law, but because of what my nature is, law does provoke. And then, besides, it ties the guilt down on the conscience. Law gives no life, no power, no object, but it provokes the lust, is the occasion of sin, and fixes my guilt upon me. Christ gives me an object, and life, and power, and delivers me from all that was against me. The law tells me to love God, and I ask, Why so? I have no nature that does. It states the duty, without acting on the person's heart one atom, but the sin that is committed it ties down upon the conscience. And it is very useful to tie sins down upon the conscience, but that is all it is useful for. Where Paul says, "Touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless," in Philippians 3, it was outwardly true: but he says in Romans 7, "We know that the law is spiritual," which is another thing. In Philippians he alludes to sins; so with the ruler, who says, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." But the Lord tests him with, "Go and sell all that thou hast," and that will not do for man.

298 The moment of the rapture (v. 54) is not in the scope of the prophets, and Paul merely states the fact without time. In Isaiah 25 we have the Gentiles brought in, and the Jews restored, and he puts the fact of the resurrection in without the precise order of events. The testimony of the Lord's coming is striking, for it is when He comes the first resurrection takes place. I say this, because it is considered to be a kind of bit of superior knowledge. 1 Thessalonians 4 gives it. There are two classes taken up, and they will be setting on the thrones of judgment, but it does not say exactly when.

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