

Series: Resurrection!

May 7, 2017

Title: The Last Enemy

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Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Deadly Infection

Kikwit, Zaire: 1995

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Imagine an infectious disease so deadly that once infected, you are almost guaranteed to die.

Now imagine that 1 person somehow survives this terrible disease. He is infected, suffers a full-scale attack of the microbe, but recovers.

This actually happened in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo back in 1995. A person known only as "subject 1" was infected with the Ebola virus. He became severely ill and battled the disease for weeks. But then, amazingly, he made a full recovery. He even went back to the Ebola ward to help other patients, thus exposing himself to re-infection over a substantial period of time.

mAb114:

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Eleven years after 'subject 1' was infected with the Ebola virus and made such an astounding recovery, researchers began studying his immune system. They discovered and isolated a single antibody that his immune system had created which gave him complete immunity to the virus. This antibody, named mAb114, did what no other antibody had been able to do. It attached itself to the Ebola virus, followed it into an infected cell, and then blocked the virus from releasing its deadly payload inside the cell. The result was that the virus could not reproduce. The infection was cured!

Researchers were able to not only isolate this antibody, but produce it in sufficient numbers to run trials on monkeys. The infected monkeys recovered, even if they had been infected with the Ebola virus 5 days earlier.

Human trials are in the works at the present time. Should this antibody prove as effective in humans as it was in 'subject 1,' the Ebola virus will have met its match!

The last infection:

Each one of us is infected with something far more powerful than even the Ebola virus. Think of it as "the last infection: Death." Diseases like Ebola or malaria, heart failure or cancer, are but the ugly servants of this greater master.

But *what if* Death – this last infection – is not as 'fatal' as we thought? What if, even after Death had done its work, we could make a full recovery? What if, once recovered from Death's sting, we could never be re-infected by it?

We spend our greatest efforts attempting to avoid this last infection. But what if the cure for the sting of Death is on the other side?

Firstfruits

Firstfruits:

Ancient peoples in biblical times placed great importance on the first things to come from the garden. They called them "firstfruits." The firstfruits were celebrated as the beginning of the full harvest that would provide for their needs throughout the winter.

In a sense, 'subject 1' and his unique antibody that conquered the deadly Ebola virus, was a "firstfruit" of a gift of life that could one day save many tens of thousands of lives. His victory over the Ebola virus was not just something that happened for him; it opened the door for the possibility of rescuing the rest of humanity from the virus.

So what about that *other* infection: the "last infection" of Death?

Paul proclaims that when it came to this last infection, Jesus the Messiah is 'subject 1'. He is the firstfruits of the cure for the disease of Death itself:

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1 Corinthians 15:20-22 NIV

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

God's 'subject 1':

In order to become the source of mAb114 and its power to eliminate the Ebola virus, 'subject 1' first had to contract the Ebola virus. He had to suffer the full course of the disease. In the process, his immune system created the mAb114 antibody that conquered the virus.

Likewise, in order to conquer the "last infection" of Death, Jesus had to allow Death to fully infect Him; He had to die. That is what happens when you experience the "last infection."

But when He rose from the dead, He introduced into this old world a brand new life that is immune to the last infection. Just as 'subject 1' can never be infected with Ebola again, so too, Jesus can never die. He is immune to Death. And He returned with the antibody of the Holy Spirit – the same Spirit that raised Him from the dead.

He is God's 'subject 1'!

All will be made alive!

Think of it: Death is not the end. It is a disease from which God means for us to recover. If we have been immunized by that same powerful Spirit which raised Jesus, then Death will take its shot – deliver its sting. But instead of having the last word, Death itself will be put to death right inside us!

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1 Corinthians 15:22 NIV

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

The Creation Story went horribly wrong when Adam rebelled against the Creator and unleashed Death upon God's image-bearers. As a result, we are all infected – from the womb. There is no escape.

But God sent Jesus the Messiah to rescue His world, not by avoiding Death, but by enduring it and rising on the third day. Death is not the end. It is a temporary infection that is undone, wiped out, cured by the Creator God through His Holy Spirit.

The Last Enemy

God's order:

What Paul is describing for us is nothing less than God's *re-creation* of His world. And just as the original Creation Story meant bringing order to chaos, here, too, God brings order to His New Creation. He explains:

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1 Corinthians 15:23-26 NIV

But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Then the end will come, when he hands the kingdom over to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

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For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

This is God's order for His New Creation:

- The resurrection of Christ
- The resurrection of all who belong to Him at His return
- The End: when power opposed to God is destroyed, including Death itself.

Those who belong to Him:

When the antibody mAb114 is approved and available to immunize people from the Ebola virus, people will have to make a choice: do I receive the antibody or not?

To receive it will mean to “belong to subject 1’, to use Paul’s terminology. His immunity becomes someone else’s immunity. They belong to him, in the sense that they share in his post-Ebola immunity.

Likewise, “to belong to Christ” means to share His immunity to the sting of Death. When we die, Death no longer has the last word. Death is rendered a temporary and ultimately defeated infection. Death becomes something we “get over.”

Like Jesus, we will experience resurrection. Like Jesus, we will be immune to Death. Like Jesus, we will have eternal life in a new body.

We receive this immunity when we place our trust in Him and invite Him to come live inside us as King. When His Holy Spirit comes to live in us, we know that we are immunized against that last infection – Death.

God will be all in all:

It’s a wonderful thing that ‘subject 1’ survived Ebola and was able to provide the mAb114 antibody to the world. It will be an even more wonderful thing for untold thousands of people to become immune to this horrible disease. But the best thing is that God’s good Creation has been rid of at least one terrible scourge.

Paul makes sure that we see the big picture of what it means to gain immunity from the sting of that last infection of Death. It means more than Jesus rising from the dead. It means more than our own rising from the dead when Jesus returns. It means that God’s greatest cosmic enemy has been defeated, and that His kingdom has fully come:

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1 Corinthians 15:27-28 NIV

For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.

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When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

The end of the story is God's final victory over evil and chaos in all its forms, including Death. Then, and only then, all of Creation will honor and serve Him as it was meant to. God will be all in all.

If you belong to Christ, you are already part of God's New Creation. God is already living inside you through His Holy Spirit. He is already bringing His New Creation order to your life – renewing your thoughts and mind and filling you with His love. Bit by bit we discover what it means for God to be “all in all.”

When we see God and honor Him as being “all in all,” then even the last enemy has nothing for us. Death is already under the feet of God's ‘subject 1’, because:

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

LIFE Group Lesson for “The Last Enemy”

Ice Breaker

- What for you is the first sign of spring? What tells you more than anything else that the long cold winter is finally coming to an end? How do you celebrate?

God’s re-conquest of His Creation:

- Paul tells us that God has a specific *order* for bringing about His New Creation. He describes this ordering of the world in terms of a military conquest that moves relentlessly forward until the enemy is completely defeated and destroyed.
- After announcing that Christ has indeed risen from the dead, and has reversed the curse of Death, he proceeds to lay out God’s step by step plan for implementing His New Creation:
 - *1 Corinthians 15:23-26 NIV*
 - *But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits;*
 - *Then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*
 - *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.*
 - *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*
 - *The last enemy to be destroyed in death.*
- The term ‘in turn’ describes things happening in a certain order. It is term that was used for troops arraying themselves for battle.
 - Each unit would have its place in the vast array of the army; each unit would play a special role.
- The same is true of God’s re-conquest of His Creation.
 - His good Creation was invaded by Sin and Death.
 - Spiritual forces described by Paul as “dominions, authorities and powers” have usurped God’s rightful reign over the world.
 - Each one will be destroyed, including death, when God’s world is completely renewed.

Living in the “in between time”:

- You and I live in the “in between time” between Christ’s resurrection and His Second Coming.

- In this “in between time” we have been given the mission of waging God’s warfare against those spiritual forces that have corrupted and destroyed His Creation.
- Paul writes to the Ephesians:
 - *Ephesians 6:10-12 NIV*
 - *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*
 - *Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.*
 - *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*
- Here we meet again those spiritual forces that must be defeated by Christ, the Messiah King, if God’s Creation is to be restored and redeemed.
 - But note the focus here: we are called to take our stand against these forces right now in this “in between time.”
 - God has promised to make us strong with “his mighty power” so that we can stand our ground.
- Paul makes this same point a different way in an earlier chapter:
 - *Ephesians 3:10-11 NIV*
 - *His [God’s] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
- God put us here as His people, the Church, to stake out new ground for God’s New Creation kingdom.
 - We’re part of that advancing army.
 - We have a part to play in our place and our time – a part that no other human beings can fulfill.
 - Our mission: to make known to those dark forces that Jesus is the true Lord of the world and all humankind.
- Remember the question about how you know it’s springtime?
 - Well, when it comes to the long cold winter of Satan’s rule, we are the first signs of God’s Spring.
 - Our battle isn’t against other people; God wants to renew and rescue them just as much as He does us.

- Our battle is against those forces that have preyed upon people's minds and desires, fears and aspirations to lead them away from the honoring of the Creator.
- We take our stand and signal God's Spring by refusing to worship anyone or anything but Him. That alone says it all!

Prayer time:

- Where is God challenging you to take your stand in your life right now?
- Pray for each other to find His strength and faithfulness for this assignment.