

Series: Resurrection!

May 28, 2017

Title: First Day

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Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

The First Day

A new day:

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Did you ever wake up to a brand new day in a brand new place – a place brimming with all sorts of amazing possibilities beyond anything you had ever experienced, or even imagined?

I had that experience a few years ago when my wife and I had the opportunity to go to the Big Island of Hawaii. We left Vermont on a cold late fall morning, rode the plane for a day and what seemed like half a night, and finally settled into our lodgings in a shore-side resort.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of tropical birds singing songs I had never heard before. It was still early morning – I was on Vermont time. The air was clear and full of the lush smells of flowers. Looking to the north I could see a massive volcano. To the south: the vast Pacific Ocean.

My schedule? Nothing to do, except go out into this brand new world. My only concern was that there weren't enough hours in the day for all the things I wanted to see and do.

There's nothing like the first moments of the first day in a brand new, wonderful place!

New Creation change:

Just such a day awaits you. The end of the long story of God and His world turns out to actually be the *beginning* of a story more wonderful than anything we can possibly imagine.

Paul writes:

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1 Corinthians 15:50-52 NIV

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

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Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

The end of this world's story is the beginning of God's new story: the story of our living forever with Him in His New Creation. It is a story in which everything – and every one of us – experiences a radical change. Nothing less than a brand new beginning.

This is not a utopian vision that we can somehow bring about if we just try hard enough. Our very *biology* must be radically changed. "Flesh and blood" cannot live in that brand new world. Nor is it a place for the disembodied dead. The only way to enter this new reality is to experience the creative power of the Creator God.

In a flash:

And how long will it take? A blink of an eye. God will bring the reign of disease and death, sin and guilt to an end in a split second with the final appearing of Jesus the King.

Paul says that Jesus' return will be announced with the blast of a trumpet – the "last trumpet." He will come as the King who conquers every last enemy of God and His creation, fulfilling the words of the prophet Zechariah:

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Zechariah 9:14 NIV

Then the LORD will appear over them;

His arrow will flash like lightning.

The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet;

He will march in the storms of the south, and the LORD Almighty will shield them.

In an instant all of God's creation will be changed, both the living and the dead.

How long will it take? As fast as you can blink your eye.

The Death of Death

New clothes:

When you go from winter in Vermont to a beautiful tropical paradise, the first thing you notice is that you need a totally different wardrobe! You went to the airport wearing your winter coat, boots, hat and gloves. And you were no doubt wearing several layers under your coat. But when you step out into brilliant sunshine and a temperature of 85, you know it's high time for shorts, tee shirt and sandals.

Paul says that our new life in God's New Creation will likewise demand a brand new wardrobe:

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1 Corinthians 15:53 NIV

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

Our earthly bodies are perishable and mortal. This is the only reality we know. But in God's new world there will be no place for that which perishes. He will clothe us in a brand new wardrobe: bodies that don't wear out and will never die.

The death of death:

When He issues us our new wardrobe, the defeat of Death will be complete:

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1 Corinthians 15:54 NIV

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah, who wrote:

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Isaiah 25:7-8 NIV

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

The tears, the pain, the sorrow and grief that we carry like a wound that never heals – all will be wiped away in that moment when God destroys Death and all its horrible effects. Death's kingdom will be not only captured, but destroyed. Death's prisoners will be released into the brilliant light of God's New Creation.

God's Victory:

Paul can't help but break into a victory song:

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1 Corinthians 15:55 NIV

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

But note: Paul dares to sing this taunting mockery of death *right now* in the middle of this death-ruled, fallen world. Why? Because he knew that no matter what death could and would do in this fallen world, death's days were numbered. Jesus had already risen *from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep.*"

Paul explains that Sin is the poison in death's sting.

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1 Corinthians 15:56-57 NIV

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Law rightfully makes us aware of our own sin. But Jesus died "for our sins, according to the Scriptures." Jesus drew the sting of Sin and neutralized its poison. The proof: God raised Him from the dead.

The victory has already been won. Our own death is but a temporary nap. What God did in Jesus the King He will do for all who have chosen to be part of Jesus and His kingdom.

Not in Vain!**Vanguards of God's New Creation:**

Because the victory over Sin and Death is already won, and because God's Spirit already lives in us, we have work to do:

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1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Think of what it's like to pack for that tropical vacation. The snow is falling outside. The forecast is for below zero temps through next week. And you're digging out bathing suits, shorts, tee shirts, sunscreen, and shades? What are you thinking?

You're thinking of the new reality at the other end of tomorrow's flight. You're standing firm, letting nothing move you, giving yourself fully to what you will soon be experiencing. And you know that your labor is not in vain.

We are the vanguards of God's New Creation. We are already building that new world. What we do right now matters for eternity. That's why Paul tells

us to “stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.”

Not in Vain:

Every day you face the choice to see the world through the eyes that are perishable and mortal. After all, these are the only eyes we have. This is our only viewpoint.

But what if we were to see the world through Jesus’ eyes? What would it look like then?

If we do that, then we begin to catch a glimpse of what will be our sole reality in God’s newly made world. It’s a world where:

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Revelation 21:4 NIV

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

So no matter what we face in this world, God will have the last word. He has won the victory. And our work is not in vain.

LIFE Group Lesson for “First Day”

Ice Breaker

- What was the best trip you ever took in your life?
- What made it so special?

Home, at last!

- Here at last, Paul brings us to our new home.
- The long journey from the Garden of Eden to God’s renewed Creation is complete.
 - We started with the resurrection of Jesus and the affirmation of so many witnesses.
 - We learned that Jesus died to free us from the curse of sin and death.
 - Paul has explained that our journey takes us through death to a life *just like Jesus’ new life*.
 - *Now, Paul gives us a peek at that amazing moment when Jesus returns and God restores His Creation.*

When Jesus returns:

- In another letter Paul explains the end of the journey in this way:
 - *1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 NIV*
 - *According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*
- The people of Thessalonica knew what it meant for a king or emperor to visit their city:
 - They would *go out* onto the great road leading into the city and meet their king. Then they would escort him back into the city itself.
 - Thessalonica actually had a cemetery lining that main road, so that both the living and the dead would in a sense greet the coming ruler.

- The coming of the king was called in Greek a *Parousia*.
- Paul uses this exact word to describe the appearing or coming of King Jesus: *Parousia*.
 - This time Jesus comes from His “capital”: Heaven.
 - His subjects – living believers – go out/up to greet Him and accompany Him into His earthly kingdom.
 - Those who have died are raised to resurrection life; the cemetery is emptied by the coming of the King.
 - Then a transformed human race dwells with its King forever in God’s New Creation.
- Note:
 - This passage may sound to us like it is saying that we go “up” and stay there.
 - But remember that Paul stresses the fact that our new bodies are physical – designed for earth, not heaven.
 - In the Book of Revelation the grand climax comes when Heaven comes down to earth, not earth ascending to Heaven.
 - Then, finally, our journey is complete: we will be the bearers of God’s image in a world free at last of the curse of sin and death.

Prayer time:

- What circumstances in your life right now look totally different from the perspective of God’s New Creation?
- Pray for each other to hang in there and be strong!