

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: [www.churchredeemeraz.org](http://www.churchredeemeraz.org)

**Series:** Special Messages  
**Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:12-58  
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**Pastor/Teacher**  
**Gary L. W. Johnson**

### DEATH DEFEATED

Steve Jobs, co-founder of *Apple Inc.* and CEO of *Pixar Animation* died Oct 5 of pancreatic cancer. He was 56. He is hailed as being one of the most significant people of our times. As head of *Apple Inc.*, he is credited with spearheading the advent of *iPod*, *iPhone* and *iPad*. Andy Crouch wrote an essay for *The Wall Street Journal* entitled “Steve Jobs: The Secular Prophet” in which he wrote: “Steve Jobs was extraordinary in countless ways – as a designer, an innovator, a (demanding and occasionally ruthless) leader. But his most singular quality was his ability to articulate a perfectly secular form of hope. Nothing exemplifies that ability more than Apple’s early logo which slapped a rainbow on the very archetype of human fallenness and failure – the bitten fruit – and turned it into a sign of promise and progress.”<sup>1</sup> Crouch highlights the way Jobs articulated his own secular vision of the gospel. After being diagnosed with cancer in 2003, Jobs declared: “No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don’t want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It’s life’s change agent; it clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now, the new is you. But someday, not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it’s quite true. Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice, heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.” This in turn prompted my friend Dan Phillips to say that Jobs, in his own unique way, defeated death by simply redefining it! According to Jobs, death is not an evil, death is not an enemy. In fact, death is “the single best invention of life. It is life’s change agent: It clears out the old to make way for the new.”<sup>2</sup> Phillip then proceeded to contrast Jobs’ perspective with that of Christ’s saying that to Jesus, death wasn’t a good thing. It was the result and penalty of sin, and its aftermath held terrors which those on this side of the divide can only imagine. But Jesus used the most lurid and frightening imagery to try even to hint at the horrors that death held for each and every one of us, apart from a miraculous act of God. In fact, He would tell the tale of a rich man who lived his dreams, and dreamt of more and more, until death dashed his expectations and brought him face to face with the myth-shattering reality of God’s judgment (Lk. 16:19-31). Where were his heart’s dreams then? Lost in the flames, drowning in oceans of regret. Death was not that rich materialistic dreamer’s friend. In fact, as Jesus’ spokesman would later affirm, death is man’s enemy, his last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). Not his friend. Well then, what did Jesus do about death? Redefine it? Not in the first place. In the first place, He yielded to it on its own turf and then He defeated it. For the first time ever, death was not able to hold one of its victims, but forever lost its grip on Him and His (Acts 2:24), for He not only was resurrected to life, but was the resurrection and the life (Jn. 11:25). For that reason, by His submission to death for His people He defeated the one who had the power of death and freed His people from its slavery (Heb. 2:14-15; Phil 2:1ff). Clarence Darrow, the famous lawyer in the Scopes trial, once said in reference to the Christian belief in life after death that it was an “absurd idea...it is kept alive by hope and fear, by a childish faith, and by cowardice.” H.L. Mencken, the noted journalist and social critic of the first half of this century, wrote: “I do not believe in immortality and have no desire for it. The belief in it issues from the puerile egos of inferior men.” Christianity teaches that there is life after death – but it is not an escape from the body – in fact, biblical Christianity (unlike Gnostic forms of Christianity) emphatically teaches the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

## **I. THE CENTRALITY OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 12-19)**

The realities of the resurrection are established upon the absolute certainty of the actual event. The Corinthians had imbibed the Greek notion that the body was innately evil and a bodily resurrection was absurd (cf. Acts 17:32-34). Paul responds with the consequences of such a denial.

- A. This is a Denial of Christ's Resurrection: (vv. 12, 13, 16). Jesus was a genuine man and possessed a real human body. If He has been raised, then there is a resurrection of the body.
- B. This Denial Makes the Christian Faith Vain: (vv. 14-16). In a word, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then forget it – chuck the Gospel out the window. The KJV word vain (*KENOS*) means devoid of value, empty, useless. If Christ did not rise bodily from the grave, the Gospel is a hoax, a mirage.
- C. This Denial Means Christians are Still in Their Sins: (vv. 17-19). There is no salvation, no forgiveness of sins unless Christ has been raised from the dead. The word translated vain here (*MATAIOS*) refers to that which is void of useful aim or effect (NIV and the ESV translates this *futile*). Regardless of the sincerity of our faith, sincerity won't make it real. If our "faith" is not based upon the reality of the empty tomb, then we are only fooling ourselves.

## **II. THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 20-34)**

The Apostle now moves to the reality of the resurrection. It actually did happen, and this in turn points to the unity of Christ's work on our behalf. Redemption and resurrection belong together, and those who benefit from Christ's work await in eager anticipation the redemption of their bodies (cf. Romans 8:21-23). There is a proper sequence, a two-fold order.

- A. Christ the Firstfruits: To what is the Apostle referring? There can be little doubt that this language refers to the "firstfruit" offerings of grain, wine, cattle, and the like appointed by the Mosaic law (Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:10; Numbers 15:20; 18:8; Deuteronomy 18:4; 26:1-10). "Firstfruits expresses the notion of organic connection and unity, the inseparability of the initial quantity from the whole. It is particularly this aspect which gives these sacrifices their significance."<sup>3</sup>
- B. Believers the Harvest: In late spring or early summer the Israelites would go into the wheat field and gather the first heads of ripened grain. These would be offered up as a sacrifice and a promise of the general harvest in due season.<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Paul uses this as an illustration of Christ and the church. The Apostle here is arguing by analogy. What happened to Christ in the resurrection (and transformation of His physical body) is going to also happen to Christians at some time in the future. Note how Paul reasons here in terms of how belief in his biblical truth affects how we live. If life ends with death, then let us eat, drink and be merry – such was the reasoning of the pagan world.

## **III. THE MANNER OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 35-49)**

Paul next turns his attention to the question, "How are the dead raised and with what kind of body?" – His answer is in verses 36-38 and the emphasis is on the power of God. In essence the Apostle argues as follows: Since God is able to give the kind of bodies needed for life at this earthly and physical level, He has power to give life at the eternal and spiritual level. This is illustrated in two ways.

- A. The World of Vegetation: Wheat is a grain, which in the process of time, falls to the ground and, through the various processes that are inherent in its properties, it dies. But out of this death comes not one grain of wheat but many.
- B. The World of Creatures: Human beings possess one kind of body, animals possess different kinds of bodies, while fish and birds are likewise entirely different. The heavenly bodies (moon and stars), it will be granted, are also different. These "bodies" all have one thing in common – they are limited. They all suffer from the effects of time. Our earthly bodies are adapted to the needs of this physical plane of existence, while the resurrected body will be a body perfectly adapted to the needs of the eternal state. It is a real body – but it is a new body, one that is conformed to Christ (cf. Philippians 3:20-21).

#### IV. THE NECESSITY OF THE RESURRECTION (vv. 50-58)

The question of when this event will occur is now addressed. Paul takes up the subject of the nature of the resurrected body. This is done first negatively and then positively.

- A. The Negative: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” This assertion is not meant to imply that the resurrected body will not be physical. Rather, the Apostle is stating the fact that our bodies as presently constituted, i.e., weak, frail, and subject to corruption, cannot inherit the full blessing of the eternal state. There must be a change. This change will affect not only those who are alive at Christ’s return, but those who have died as well (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).
- B. The Positive: The perishable and mortal must put on that which is imperishable and immortal. This is the only way we can enjoy the glories of the eternal state. We will no longer be subject to death. The result of the resurrection is now stated – death is completely robbed of its victory (cf. Revelation 20:5-6). “Through sin, death has had dominion over man, but through the redemptive work of God through Christ the dominion of both sin and death has been defeated. Victory over sin comes in regeneration; victory over death comes in resurrection. It is Paul’s view that God’s purpose for man is to redeem him in his total personality. Only through the process of resurrection can this victory be completely realized.”<sup>5</sup>

CONCLUSION: In his life and death, Steve Jobs is celebrated by an adoring public, grateful for his many contributions he made during his lifetime. His legacy indeed will probably extend for years to come. He definitely made his mark. My Welsh friend, Martin Downer, in reflecting on Steve Jobs, was reminded of the elegy written on the country churchyard tombstone of Thomas Gray. “The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, and all that beauty, all that wealth e’er gave, awaits alike the inevitable hour. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”<sup>6</sup> Thousands of years ago, the psalmist sung of two totally different paths (Ps.1). Jesus spoke of the same (Mt. 7:13-14), and warned of any who would try to blur the borders (7:15ff.). Nothing has changed. One way leads (in thrall to our hearts’ dreams) to death. The other leads (away from our hearts and word-games) and to life, to Him who *is* life (Jn. 14:6). So when Steve Jobs said of death, “No one has ever escaped it,” he made yet another critical miscalculation. Christ escaped it. Thus *Christ alone* defeated death, and *Christ alone* preaches a Gospel which saves in reality, and not merely technologically nor rhetorically.<sup>7</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203476804576615403028127550.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://teampyro.blogspot.com/2011/10/how-steve-jobs-and-christ-defeated.html>

<sup>3</sup> R.B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Pauline Soteriology* (Baker, 1978), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> The language of firstfruits is used elsewhere in the New Testament. In Romans 16:5 and 1 Corinthians 16:15 it is used of the first converts in a particular location. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and James 1:18 it is used of Christians in general, and in Revelation 14:4 of the 144,000 saints in heaven.

<sup>5</sup> Ray Summers, *The Life Beyond* (Broadman, 1959), p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> <http://against-heresies.blogspot.com/2011/10/steve-jobs-paths-of-glory.html>

<sup>7</sup> Phillips, *op. cit.*