

YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL
The LORD God, Our All in All
1 Corinthians 15:19-28; Revelation 11:15-17
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Sometimes when you take a road trip, it's good to look at the big picture, not just the next town, to see the end from the beginning. As we read 1 Corinthians 15, we realize that Paul is not merely talking about what happens to individuals when we die. He is talking about something even bigger—the end of history. Jesus is the first fruits (vv. 20, 23). That was the first sheaf of harvest offered at the Temple. It's the best. But also there is a time lapse between this first fruit and the general harvest. (Christ was raised on Easter; we will be raised at the end of history).

When Christ's coming is referenced in v. 23, the word is *parousia*, used when an emperor made an official visit to a village or region. Paul declares that every kind of ruler (earthly and spiritual powers) will be subject to Christ, v. 24. Note the beauty of the scene. The Son hands it over God the Father (v. 28). God will be all in all! All in all—no more opposition to God. All in all—every being will bow before this King. All in all—this is the goal of all history. The victory begun at Calvary and the resurrection will be completed. This is how we close the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom and power and the glory forever and ever."

Corinth was a port city with lots of shipping lanes and a mix of nationalities. A city teeming with messed up morals and unhealthy practices. The followers of Jesus were trying to figure out how to be in the culture without letting it infect them.

Corinth had many temples, among them one to Aphrodite, one to Apollo, another to Poseidon. But the imperial shrine, the monument to Caesar, was a little higher than all the others (not a coincidence). And into a world with many gods, Paul has the temerity to announce, "Then comes the end,* when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, that God may be all in all" (vv. 25, 28).

This is why the Revelation 11:15-17 text is so powerful (let's read it). When the first followers of Christ called him Lord, they caught it from two sides. The Jews resented that title, because they believed it applied to only Yahweh; the Romans rejected it because that was Caesar's title. No. Jesus is Lord! This is why Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" is appropriate every Sunday.

We need a big God because this keeps us from being overwhelmed by loss. It helps us see the big picture. There was a huge social imbalance in Corinth, with a few rich, many poor and about half the population slave [N.T. Wright, p. 213]. Knowing a big God helps us deal with the injustice, knowing this resurrection God is going to turn things right side up. N.T. Wright says that followers of Jesus must get used to living with a form of theological jet lag. The world all around is still in darkness, but we've set our clocks for a different time zone [N.T. Wright, p. 222].

Let me give you an example of this. While interacting with Venezuelan believers this summer at Baptist World Alliance, we heard stories of horrendous persecution, rape, killings and abuse. But we couldn't keep them focused for very long on their miseries. They kept jumping subjects, talking about how many doors the Lord was opening. Remember our new vision statement: Compelled to be Christ's love and hope. Hope isn't a feeling. It has to be practiced. You don't get better at playing the violin by feeling warm and fuzzy about the subject. You get better by practicing. You don't get better at soccer by feeling warm inside when you watch it on TV. You get better by practicing.

When we fail to trust God and fail to commit to the Lord, we're saying we don't think God is big enough. But God is big enough and adequate for our needs. And remember. God is love. This is love, not that we loved God, but that God loves us and sent Jesus (1 John 4:8,10). This is God, our all in all.