

The Necessity Of Christ's Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[2 : 42] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Just how remarkable it is that he would choose to set his love upon such as us. Not of our deserving, but rather of his sovereign mercy and grace.

And so our first singing this evening is from Psalm 8. And we'll sing from verse 3 through to the end. Psalm 8 on page 10 in the psalm books. Verse 4 reminds us, Then say I, what is man that he remembered is by thee?

Or what, the son of man, that thou so kind to him shouldst be? So let's sing to God's praise Psalm 8, beginning at verse 3. When I look up unto the heavens with thine own fingerspring, That to the moon and to the sky which were mighty or pain, Then say I, what is man that he remembered is by thee?

God, the son of man, that thou so kind to him should see?

[illegible]

A miracle God turn ye and be set in the field to see.

Fouls of the heaven's all thirsty, all that comes through the sea.

Perfect, excellent in all the earth, Lord our Lord is thy name.

Please stand and we'll turn to God in prayer. Amen. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[6 : 41] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Lord, as we are reminded of this, your call upon us. We are all too aware of how far short we have fallen of this standard.

That though perhaps we might say that we have loved you, yet we cannot claim it has been with all of our hearts and all of our soul and all of our minds.

Even this day, this afternoon, even as we have sought to honour you, yet we have failed to do so fully. We have failed to honour you as we know that we should.

Even perhaps there is part of us that was reluctant to come here again this evening. That thought perhaps we might stay away, might turn to other pursuits.

Lord, thank you that you have nevertheless gathered us here. Thank you for this privilege of coming to you. And we pray that as we spend this time together, that it will indeed be to your honour and to your glory.

[7 : 44] And that we will find that there is, by the end of our time together, no part of us that regrets having come, but that we find that we have spent our time as fruitfully as we possibly could.

That we find ourselves rejoicing in what we have heard from you. Delighting to have come to you in praise. Lord God, you are the one God.

One God in three persons. Exalted over all the earth. Glorious over the heavens above. You are the one who sits on the throne.

You are the one who flung stars into space. Who with butter worked, created this whole universe in which we exist. And you chose such as us.

You chose to create us as the pinnacle of what you made. Those created in your image. Lord, we marvel to think of this. It is beyond our comprehension.

[8 : 53] That you would choose not only to create us in such a way, but when we turned away from you. When our first parents sinned against you. And when we, in our lives, in our hearts, in our minds, follow in their footsteps.

Yet you choose not to leave us to our sins just deserts. So the wages of sin is death. Yet you choose to offer us an alternative. You choose to make a way by which we might be redeemed.

You choose to offer us life at your hands. Lord, thank you for taking away that sentence of condemnation. Thank you for that offer of life.

Thank you that though we fall so short of this standard, yet you choose to love us. Lord, be glorified, we pray, in what we do this evening and in our whole lives in your service.

For we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're going to turn to sing again, turning to the 110th Psalm, of which we will sing verses 1 to 4.

[10 : 01] Psalm 110, page 236. The Lord did say unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes a stool, whereon thy feet may stand.

Psalm 110 from the first verse. The Lord did say unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes a stool, whereon thy feet may stand.

The Lord shall out, cross thy own stand, put in thine's blood.

The Lord shall put in thine's blood. In this all I care be, Be I the governor.

Aware in me, Every day of time Shall come to thee, And holy beauty From our womb Thy gift, my gift, Shall be.

[12 : 09] The Lord himself Has been my Lord, And will repay him ever.

Of your heart All I care is today, The Lord will not be forever.

Amen. So will you turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 15. and we're going to read the whole chapter together. 1 Corinthians 15 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

[13 : 50] After that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles, and last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Therefore, whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed. Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen? And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain? And your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain. Ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perish.

[15 : 06] If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

But every man in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet.

But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is accepted which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

[16 : 15] Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead? If the dead rise not at all, why are they then baptised for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage of it me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Be not deceived. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Thou fool! That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die.

And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain. It may chance of wheat or of some other grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

[17 : 19] All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial, but glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. For one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.

It is sown in corruption. It is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power.

It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy, and the second man is the Lord from heaven.

[18 : 29] As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy, and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery.

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, 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.

[19 : 39] But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the world.

Amen. Thanks be to God. Let's turn now to prayer once more. Lord God, again, we thank you for the privilege of coming to you in prayer.

We recognise you as the awesome, sovereign King of the universe. And we might tremble to come into your presence. Were it not that you have also invited us to call you Father, to pray to you, Abba, Father.

You welcome us into your presence as beloved sons and daughters. We, children of the King himself. And so, we dare to bring to you the things that trouble us, the ways that we are, the concerns that we have for our own selves, as we think about the week that lies ahead, the things that we wonder how we will deal with that difficult situation at work, how we will keep a lid on things in a trying circumstance at home, as we wonder how we will juggle all the different balls that we are managing, as we wonder how we will do these things.

Lord, we thank you that we can bring them to you, you who are all sufficient, you who never lack the resources to achieve that which you intend. Lord, thank you that you give us strength for each day.

[21 : 28] And thank you that you remind us that the troubles of each day are sufficient. Lord, guard us against concern for the troubles of tomorrow and next week and next year.

Natural though it is that we cast our minds forward and worry about what tomorrow will bring. Lord, keep us trusting in you. Teach us to trust you more.

Teach us that you have it all in hand. That we need not fear the future. That even the things that we see on the horizon that naturally trouble us.

The storms we see coming. Lord, you are the God who calms the storms. You are the Lord of the harvest. You are the one who is all sufficient.

You are the Lord our protector. The Lord our provider. The Lord who heals us. And so, Lord, we trust all of these things to you in our lives and in our families.

[22 : 23] And we trust to you those in this congregation and those in the community and those whom we know and love who are unwell in body or mind or spirit. Lord, you know the circumstances far better than we do.

You know their physical needs. You know the ways that they are troubled. And Lord, more than their physical needs, you know their spiritual needs.

Lord, we recognise that so often illness can breed in us impatience, anger, bitterness, especially when that illness long endures. But Lord, we pray guard against us.

We pray that rather than pain being something that drives our friends and loved ones away from you, that it will rather cause them to cling to you. That it will be a teacher showing us our dependence upon you, showing us our need of the one who is closer than any brother who cares for us more than any mother.

Lord, thank you that you are sufficient for all of these circumstances. Be near to those we love, we pray. And as we pray for people, Lord, we pray also for our nation.

[23 : 43] Lord, we grieve to see much of the trajectory on which we seem to be headed with recent legislation around the beginning of life and the end of life, much of which goes so obviously and defiantly, contrary to your will.

Lord, at this late stage, we pray that the bills in Holyrood and in Westminster around assisted dying, Lord, we pray that these might be curtailed, though in our own strength, according to the wisdom of this world, it seems so unlikely that these might be halted.

Yet, Lord, you are not stymied by majorities and vested interests or even by the pretended wisdom of this world that sees these things as beneficial.

Lord, you are able to overcome. You are able to work your will and so, Lord, we pray for your mercy. We recognise the harm these laws will cause if enacted, the lives that will be lost, the pressure on those who might have years to live and yet see themselves as a burden on those around them and so choose this terrible cause.

Lord, we pray that you would intervene. We pray that you would give boldness who know the wickedness of what is being proposed. Lord, we pray for our nation and we pray knowing that our hope ultimately is not in the laws that will be enacted, not in politicians or even our king and the royal family, but our hope is in you and in you alone.

[25 : 32] Our hope is in the glorious future that you have in store for us. The hope for our nation is in a return to you, turning to you in a recognition of the good news of the gospel and so we pray that you would strengthen your church as that gospel is proclaimed.

As pastors, preach the good news. this day and week by week. Lord, we pray that you would put the right words in our mouths, that you would draw the right people in to hear it.

Lord, we pray that particularly here in this place next week. We pray that on that back to church Sunday there will be people coming through those doors who have not been for many years or maybe have never set foot in a church save for weddings and funerals.

Lord, draw them to yourself and give your words to Thomas and to Ian as they seek to proclaim good news boldly and without fear. Help them to know how to be both winsome and truthful, to be upfront about the horrible cost for those who do not know you and to set forth the loveliness of Christ that men and women and boys and girls might be transformed by that good news.

Lord, we pray that across our denomination and particularly today we pray with others for the congregation at Dow and Bale, for Kenny MacLeod, the minister there and Ian, his assistant.

[27 : 04] Lord, we pray that you would strengthen them in your service. We pray that you would be with the congregation as they plan their different programs and activities, as some things resume following a summer hiatus and as they seek to link with their community in international outreach and in the provision of the food bank and in numerous other ways.

Lord, we pray that these things would be successful not only in meeting people's physical needs and providing fellowship and a sense of community, but more than that, Lord, we pray that people will see something different in the lives of your people, something different in the people who organise and attend these events and that they will be moved to find out who you are.

Lord, our desire is to see lives transformed from one end of this country to the other, from one corner of the globe to the farthest away. Lord, we ask for you to do these things because we are not sufficient for them.

We cannot in our own strength turn one hair on our heads from white to black, and yet you, Lord, can move mountains.

And so our faith is in you and in you alone. Amen. Our next psalm, before we turn again to 1 Corinthians 15, our next psalm reminds us of resurrection hope, Psalm 16, from verses 8 to 11.

[28 : 42] Because verse 10 is fundamentally true of Jesus himself, then by our union with him, it is true of us also, that because my soul, engraved to dwell, shall not be left by thee, nor wilt thou give thine holy one corruption to see.

So let's sing God's praise, Psalm 16, from verse 8. before me stills the Lord, I say, miracle of Because of this my heart is vast.

The joy shall be expressed. In Christ my glory and my flesh.

In God's forgiveness shall rest. Because my soul and grace could dwell.

God, I will be left by thee. Now will the gift I only want.

[31 : 00] For I have such mercy. Thy will make sure that I have so light.

For joy is there in the storm. Before I face that thy bright hand.

I pray, your gift of the Lord.

So do please keep open if you can. 1 Corinthians chapter 15. At the Science Centre up in Glasgow.

There's one of the exhibits where what you have to do is you take a variety of phone blocks. And you assemble them in the right order. And you build an arch. And as you're building up each side it's all very unstable.

[32 : 18] One bump and it all falls down. But once properly assembled, once every piece is in place in the right order, it stands up very nicely. Now, lots of people want to suggest, want us to believe that the Christian faith is like a wall.

See with a wall, if you take out one or two blocks, that section might fall. But the rest of the wall may well be fine. And you could think, well it doesn't matter if I don't believe this particular thing or that bit.

The rest of it is all fine. It's all separable. But what Paul shows us here in chapter 15 of his letter, is that at the very least in some areas of the faith, that is not a valid way of thinking.

Now what Paul shows us is that the Christian faith is much more like that archway. That if you take out any single block, it is certain the whole thing will come crushing down.

Yes, there are things that are slightly more preferable, some things that permit a degree of difference and disagreement. But at least in the areas that are covered by the Apostles' Creed, you cannot have a pick and mix approach.

[33 : 33] Take away one part of what is covered by that statement of the centrality of the faith, take away one part, and you are left with absolutely nothing.

For sure, for sure, that is true when it comes to resurrection, as Paul demonstrates in no uncertain terms here in tonight's passage.

See, the archway, it might be weak if you take away a single block. But rightly built, the archway functioning correctly bears an enormous weight, doesn't it?

So too, the truth of the resurrection bears upon it the weight of our faith, the weight of our hope of eternity. In the first 11 verses of the chapter, Paul sets out a variety of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

He says it was delivered to them that which he had received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried, he rose again the third day, seen by Cephas, and so on.

[34 : 35] That is, their shared common understanding. Paul reminds them that's the consistent message of all the apostles, and it's what the Corinthians themselves believed. This is Christianity.

If you don't believe this, you are not a Christian. If this is not what your church proclaims, it is not a church. Christ died for our sins.

He was buried, he was raised on the third day. It is non-negotiable. And with those fundamentals clear, Paul then proceeds to his actual argument, which is that their denial of the resurrection of the dead makes no sense.

See, there clearly were, in the Corinthian church, people who asserted that there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead. And Paul sees this as absolutely vital to deal with, to counter, to convince them, no, there is such a thing as the resurrection.

Verses 13 and 16, he makes it perfectly plain. If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. See, you can't have two contradictory statements, can you?

[35 : 42] You can't say at the one and the same time, Christ has been raised, and at the same time say, there is no such thing as resurrection. Dead people don't come back to life. The two are inextricably connected.

For Paul, it's clear. There's no point in being a Christian if this message is not the ground on which you stand. If you try and take the resurrection block out of the archway, it crumbles and you're left with nothing.

So we're focusing this evening from verse 12 onwards. Verses 12 through 19, Paul shows them the awful consequences that would be true if they were right, that there's no resurrection, and therefore Christ has not been raised.

20 through 28, he tackles what is gloriously true precisely because Christ has been raised, and then rounds out the section, verses 29 through 33, with some examples of behaviour that only makes sense in light of the resurrection.

We're not, this evening, going to tackle verses 35 onwards around the nature of the resurrection body. Wonderful stuff there, but more than enough to be going on with in 12 through 34.

- [36 : 52] So first heading, verses 12 through 19, if Christ has not been raised. Paul enumerates here five distinct consequences that would follow if it were true that Christ has not been raised.

We'll take each of those five briefly in turn. First up, verse 14, if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. When Paul says his preaching, the preaching of the other apostles and teachers, would therefore be vain if Christ is not raised, the word vain here, it means empty, useless.

If you take out the resurrection of Jesus, there's nothing left at all. There's nothing to preach if there is no resurrection. There's no good news to proclaim if Christ has not been raised. The whole thing is completely useless.

And of course that's true, because it is an absolutely fundamental, foundational truth of the gospel. It's there in the summary, in the starting verses of the chapter. It's what God said all along was going to happen.

He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. If you take away the resurrection of Jesus, there's nothing on which to rest anyone's faith, is there? Nothing but the decomposing corpse of an itinerant Jewish carpenter turned rabbi.

- [38 : 06] If Jesus was not raised after he said that he would be, how can you trust anything he said? If Jesus was not raised when that's what the disciples say they saw, when that's what they're travelling around proclaiming, then how can you believe any part of their message?

If Jesus was not raised when that's what these Corinthians first had proclaimed to them, first believed, first trusted, then what's left of their faith? If Jesus was not raised, when that is foundational to everything you have ever heard preached from this pulpit, then what on earth do you mean when you say you have faith in Jesus?

If Christ has not been raised, my preaching is useless and you may as well leave now. And so is Paul's. If Christ has not been raised, the faith of the Corinthian church is empty and so is the faith of the Free Church of Scotland.

You cannot take away the resurrection and think you are left with anything at all. Second implication, verse 15, if Christ is not raised, then preachers are all liars.

Paul says, we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. It's kind of a development of the first point, isn't it?

- [39 : 25] Not only is their message found valueless, they themselves are found to be liars. If the fact is untrue, the witness to it is untrue. And you can imagine Paul's horror on that prospect, aren't you?

Because that would be a lie carried out in God's character. That would be declaring untruths not just about man, but about God himself. Paul says, if Christ has not in fact been raised, then we've borne false witness about God.

In fact, we've testified against God by saying that he raised Christ. It's hard to see what would be a more fundamental breach of God's commandments than this, isn't it?

How could we bear for it to be true that we're found to be liars about who God is? For Paul, Christ's resurrection is not actually Christ's own doing, is it?

No, Christ's resurrection is God's vindication of the work of his son. Which means that denying the resurrection of the dead leads to a denial of the gospel altogether and levels an accusation against the living God.

[40 : 28] It accuses God of doing something he did not actually do. If they're right, that there is no resurrection. Second half of the verse and into verse 16, it reiterates the fundamental link.

You cannot maintain the dead are not raised without also declaring that Christ has not been raised either. Which brings us swiftly to the third consequence, verse 17. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain, futile, you are still in your sins.

We're given a specific example now of why faith is empty without the resurrection. Why? Because if Christ has not been raised, then you are still in your sins.

If Christ has not been raised, they have not been dealt with. They have not been wiped away. They have not been imputed to Christ. If Christ has not been raised, then God's anger against sin has not been poured out on his son on the cross.

And you are therefore left to face his righteous wrath yourself. Paul says he preached nothing but Christ crucified. But to preach Christ crucified requires preaching Christ resurrected.

[41 : 38] Because without the resurrection, death alone has no meaning. No atoning, redemptive, liberating effect. Without the resurrection, then God has to still judge and condemn the Corinthians for their own sins.

God must still condemn us for our sins. See, Paul's clear in these verses there's a link between sin and death and he says it succinctly in his letter to the Romans.

The way Jesus' sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. If Jesus has been raised, then the power of death has been broken and final victory is assured.

Verse 26, the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. Because death is the result of sin. As human beings turn away from God and seek life elsewhere in a search that is inevitably vain and fruitless.

But if death has been defeated, if that's demonstrated by someone rising from the dead, if death has been defeated, then sin has been defeated. If death has not been defeated, sin has not been defeated.

[42 : 47] See, if Jesus was raised, it proves he was the Messiah. If Jesus was raised, God thereby reversed the verdict of the court.

God declared that Pilate and the Sanhedrin were wrong to find him guilty of being a messianic pretender. God declares that everything Jesus said was true. God declares that he really was entitled to refer to himself as I am.

That Jesus was right to accept worship in a way that only God ever should. That he was justified in calling himself the Lord of the Sabbath. That he legitimately claims to authoritatively interpret God's own law.

And on and on and on. God vindicates every action of Jesus' life. If Jesus was raised, God affirms all that he ever claimed. If Jesus was not raised, then his death was tragic and ghastly, but it achieved nothing.

If he was raised, then it is God's means of dealing with the sin of the world. If he was not raised, then he was not and is not the Messiah.

[43 : 57] Everything he said was a lie. The cross resolved nothing. Sin has not been dealt with. The world has not been changed. You are still in your sins, cut off from God, facing his judgment, hanging over us, just like everyone else.

If he's still dead, we are dead men walking. Fourth implication, verse 18. If Christ is not raised, the dead are lost forever.

It's not here just a polite euphemism that Paul refers to the dead as those who've fallen asleep. It's not just a euphemism. No, it's a pointer to appropriate Christian confidence. For those who are in Christ, sleep is an entirely appropriate term, because they are even more certain to rise in due course than you or I are certain to get up tomorrow morning.

Death is a passing thing with an end in sight. But if Christ has not been raised, then that's not true. If Christ has not been raised, then those who have died did so under God's condemnation.

The wages of sin is death. And if Christ has not been raised, then that's all we have to say. We have no hope to offer. I am the resurrection and the life, declared Jesus.

[45 : 11] If that is not true, then I have no hope to offer at a funeral service. If Christ has not been raised, death is not merely, verse 26, the last enemy to be destroyed.

If Christ has not been raised, death is the one invincible terror. If Christ has not been raised, death has not been defeated. And there is no hope we will ever see our loved ones again.

If Christ has not been raised, death is not falling asleep in Christ and waking to the smile of his welcome to his father's house. Rather, we are doomed to perish without hope and without God.

So no wonder Paul concludes, fifth consequence that combines all of the proceeding, no wonder Paul concludes if Christ has not been raised, we are of all people most to be pitied.

we are the most miserable of men because this life only is not enough. If Christ has not been raised, then the gospel has no substance and faith is ineffective and the witnesses are liars and sin retains its destructive control and believers who have died are lost forever and we deserve only pity.

[46 : 21] not that there are no benefits apart from hope of a life hereafter. No, there is. There should be joy, peace, purpose, forgiveness, meaning, hope, more, here and now.

Living in life to the gospel is living life in all its fullness, is living as God intended us to live, living as we were made to be, living according to the Creator's plan. But what is it that underwrites all those blessings right now?

What is it that makes those blessings even in light of immense suffering and huge challenges and insurmountable opposition? What underwrites it all is that that's not the whole story.

It's what God has in store for us in the resurrection. Romans 8, Paul sets out a similar argument. He says in verse 18, our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

It's not that the present sufferings might not be real, but rather that they pale into insignificance compared to what lies ahead. But if there is no glory ahead, and there can't be if Christ is not raised and we're dead in our sins, if there's no glory ahead, then these present sufferings are all there is.

[47 : 44] Tom Wright, a theologian, Church of England bishop, he refers to a survey of his episcopal colleagues now something like 25 years ago. Most bishops in the Church of England at that point at least did say they believed in the resurrection, which is reassuring, not necessarily guaranteed with the Church of England.

Most of them did say they believed in the resurrection. But many of them said that whether or not that was a bodily event didn't really matter. You can believe that or not as you choose.

Well, Paul has no truck with that argument, does he? As far as Paul's concerned, to say that is to cut off the branch you are sitting on. Without a real resurrection, which, as the close of the chapter makes clear, is and must be physical and bodily, without the resurrection, we are nowhere.

The whole gospel is lost and therefore so are we. It's pathetic, isn't it? If Christ was not raised, any expectation of life beyond death with him is obviously lost.

Forgiveness of sins out the window. If Christ is not raised, we are left with some weak facsimile of a pseudo-gospel that is no gospel at all.

[49 : 01] We're left with something that tries to give meaning to life here on earth, but doesn't have any actual meaning to impart. Without the resurrection, we're left, I guess, trying to do our best to follow the example of Jesus, or frankly, at that point, we could just as well pick out any of a variety of other mentors and gurus and wise men.

Without the resurrection, we're left trying and inevitably failing to live up to an example that even if we achieved that example, well, so what? This attitude to Jesus is pitiable and pathetic.

If there is no resurrection, then Jesus' teaching is shown to be false. If he was not raised, he is not Lord. If all there is in his life on earth ending in an ignominious death, if that's all there is to him, then it makes no sense to base our lives and our hope on the groundless promises of someone who made empty assertions about eternity.

If there is no resurrection, the Christian faith is based on lies and vapour and anybody is better off than Christians. Folks, we'll turn in a moment to see what Paul says is gloriously true because Christ has been raised.

Well, let me conclude this rather negative first point by pointing out what we conclude from the inverse of Paul's arguments. If this is what we've lost if Christ is not raised, well, what's true because he has been?

[50 : 34] Well then, Paul's preaching is not useless, nor is that of faithful saints through the ages. My colleagues and I, those who come to serve you here week by week, we're not wasting our lives.

If Christ has been raised, then your faith is not empty, rather it rests on solid ground, it sits on the certain promises of God. If Christ has been raised, then the testimony of Paul, the apostles, and those from whom you have heard these things, their testimony is true.

If Christ has been raised, then your faith is powerful and effective because your sins are forgiven. God remembers them no more. The price has been paid. If Christ has been raised, then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are safe in his presence and will join them one day in eternal worship.

If Christ has been raised, then we look forward to our eternal glory. If Christ has been raised, we are not to be envied, but rather, not to be pitied, but rather we are of all people most to be envied because we have a sure and a certain hope.

And what is more, second heading, Christ has indeed been raised, verses 20 through 28. Paul begins this section with something of the nature of Christ's resurrection. Christ is, we're told, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

[52 : 00] Firstfruits is Old Testament language, isn't it? Leviticus 23 talks about consecrating the firstfruits of the harvest to the Lord. But why do you do that? Well, you do that because the firstfruits are emblematic of the whole.

So it's not just that God gets his portion first, as it were, but even more importantly, by giving God the firstfruits, you symbolically give him the whole of the harvest.

By giving the firstfruits, it's a recognition that you would not have any crops at all were it not for the God who sends the sun and the rain, the God who causes the seeds to grow. So when Paul speaks of Christ as the firstfruits, it's an acknowledgement that Christ's resurrection is the first, that others who came back to life before him, Lazarus for instance, are not in the same category because Christ is the only person thus far raised never again to die.

So it's Christ is temporally first, first in time, but more than that, when he's the firstfruits, we're saying Christ's resurrection is a representation of the rest, which means this verse and what follows should give us assurance.

as the bringing in of the firstfruits guarantees that the rest of the harvest will follow, so the raising of Christ guarantees the rest of us will follow in his wake.

[53 : 28] Maybe you've occasionally had your attention captured by a video of a domino run on a grand scale, you get them on YouTube and so on. I don't mean set up a couple of dozen dominoes on the living room floor with the grandchildren.

The biggest one I saw had 800,000 dominoes all set up in a giant warehouse. It took them weeks to set it up with a team of many people and it took about 10 minutes from the first domino falling to the last as they spiralled around and threw all this complicated thing.

It takes all that time and yet once the first one falls, the last is certain. The raising of Christ guarantees the resurrection of his people.

Why is that a guarantee? Well, verses 21 and following, we've got these two figures, these two heads, two representatives. You've got Adam and you've got Christ.

Adam, a historical individual, a man who lived, but also in some sense a corporate entity. Humanity described as being in Adam. Perhaps you know the Hebrew name Adam.

[54 : 34] It means mankind, humanity. And it's a simple brute fact that the whole human race is bound up in the consequences of the life and destiny of Adam, particularly bound up in his sin.

Death entered the world through the sin of one man and it infects all of us because we descend from him. We're under his headship. Verse 22, in Adam all die.

But wonderfully, as death came through Adam, the second half of verse 21, the resurrection of the dead comes also through Adam. Verse 22, in Christ all will be made alive.

Functions in a similar sort of way. As descendants of Adam, we inherit death, we're infected by his sin, and yet in the same way being adopted into God's family, being therefore descended from God, we receive his righteousness.

We're cleansed by his blood. We deserve by vicarious merit eternal life instead of only death. Paul's scope here is the situation of those who have fallen asleep in Christ.

[55 : 46] This is about those who have been adopted into his family. It's clear from the reference in verse 23, they that are Christ's. It's they of whom it's true that in Christ all will be made alive.

And therefore there's an implicit warning here, isn't there? For all of whom that is not true. Those who are not in Christ. If you're not in Christ, then you remain in Adam.

And you are therefore still in the domain of death that came through Adam. Two men, two heads of all humanity. So for the believers to whom Paul writes, and for us today just as much, we're now in the in-between times.

The first fruits of the harvest have been gathered. Christ has indeed been raised. But the full gathering of the whole harvest is yet awaited. It's certain but not yet done.

Verse 23 tells us this will take place when he comes. Resurrection is not the present experience, not our present experience here on earth right now, nor the present experience of those who have fallen asleep.

[56 : 56] No, this will be the reality at the end of days when Christ returns. So verses 24 and following then have that future day in view.

Yes, Christ already rules as exalted Lord. He has been raised. He ascended into heaven. He's seated at the right hand of the Father. So why?

If Christ rules, why does he apparently not yet have every rule under his control? Why are we under a government that makes unjust laws?

16th century reformer Martin Lisa, he's helpful on this one. He argues that during this intermediate period, this is a kingdom of faith in which Christ rules through the word and not in a visible public manner.

it is like beholding the sun through a cloud. One sees the light but not the sun itself. But after the clouds have passed, both light and sun are viewed simultaneously.

[58 : 02] In other words, Christ is now Lord. It is absolutely unequivocally true. And also at present, Christ does not exercise that lordship fully.

It is only when he returns that he will then annihilate all rival claimants. All rule, all authority, all power, verse 24, all of it will be at an end when Christ returns.

So he says we're looking forward to a day when all of the apparent powers, political, economic, whatever, and all the spiritual powers that lie behind these visible powers, all of these powers will be destroyed in the face of the glorious appearance of the fullness of God's own kingdom.

Which is hopefully a reassurance to those who feel oppressed and beaten down by these various world powers. And hopefully a reassurance to all of us who know the impact of the present reign of the prince of this world in all of the aspects thereof.

But alongside that, what is maybe at first sight less reassuring, but actually is also a good thing, is that this means also an end to our own dominion, authority, and power.

[59 : 22] If Christ puts an end to all dominion, authority, and power, that includes mine and yours. And I don't mean your power over other people, whether you think you have that or not.

That's not the power I'm worried about here. No, I mean your inclination to claim autonomy as a kingdom of wife. We, all of us, are inclined to claim the right to control our lives, to claim authority over our own circumstances.

And Paul says even that will come to an end, which perhaps is troubling at first, but that really is a good thing for those of us who trust Jesus.

Because the truth is he knows far better than we do. Don't you share with Paul the experience that you don't actually do what you really want to do? That your desires are at war within you?

Well, is it not good then that your rebellious heart will be quelled? It all goes back to Adam. Adam, given dominion by God in Genesis 1, dominion that should have been an appropriate stewardship under God, and yet Adam sought dominion outside of God instead of under his authority, and therefore introduced a dominion of sin and death.

[60 : 45] Romans 5, death reigned from the time of Adam. The latter part of that chapter in the next tie this to sin, and then to the wonderful promise in 6:14, sin shall no longer be your master.

See, the truth is when I'm my master, sin is my master. God the dominion of sin and death will be brought to an end. It will be destroyed when Christ hands the kingdom over to God.

He must reign, verse 25, until he has put all his enemies under his feet, which does not, of course, mean that after he's done so, he will cease to reign. Verse 25 combines the language of Psalm 8, verse 6, Psalm 110, verse 1, that's why we sang them both earlier, but Paul's not just quoting random bits of Psalms, no, he's thinking his way through, he's explaining to the Corinthians a whole theology of creation and humanity.

These biblical allusions bring in the narrative of which Jesus' resurrection is the climax, the failure of Adam, and with Adam all humanity, to be God's wise, image-bearing stewards over creation.

It didn't cause God to rewrite that vocation or revise his planned role. No, he sent his son to be the Messiah, to be the one true human being, to be the one who acted as he should, to be the one who fulfilled the role that was always intended.

[62 : 13] In this renewed, resurrected human life, he can be and do for us what we could not be and do for ourselves.

In that context, verse 26, the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. Now, Paul clearly views that destruction of death as something that comes about when the end comes, when Jesus destroys all dominion, etc.

Death, in many respects, is the most egregious of these dominions. He sees it as something that happens when Christ returns, and yet, Paul actually writes in the present tense in verse 26.

Not in the future tense, not he will, but the present tense, he is. Now, not one single English Bible translates it that way, but if you want the most literal version of this verse, it would be the last enemy, which is being destroyed, is death.

I think it doesn't get translated that way, because we find it so hard to wrap our heads around the idea of how destruction could be ongoing for a period of thousands of years.

[63 : 28] And yet, that's what Paul says. And I think in the sense that this annihilation, though it is of course yet incomplete, that annihilation has been set in motion by Christ's past death and resurrection.

The same idea as the first fruits, isn't it? There's no doubt whatsoever. Death absolutely certainly will be destroyed. In fact, it's happening already.

Death is being destroyed. Where, oh death, is your stake? And it's true, isn't it? It's true that the abolition has begun.

It's true that even our present experience of death here and now is transformed by the resurrection of Jesus. It's true that the way in which we mourn our loved ones is not the same as it would otherwise be, because we know that we will one day see them again.

We know that in the meantime they are in a place of joy and happiness. Jesus reigns not just to bring in the fullness of the kingdom, but his mission includes the destruction of death itself.

[64 : 41] Verse 18 there we saw, if Christ is not raised, death is not the last enemy to be destroyed, but rather the one invincible terror. death is the last enemy to be destroyed.

Death is being completely undone, because resurrection is a reality. The future that we look forward to, it's not some disembodied post-mortem existence, it's not mere immortality of the soul.

No, that would be at best a partial victory over death. No true genuine bodily resurrection, it bespeaks absolute complete victory, destruction of death.

And that's vital. We need that to be true, we need death to be destroyed, because we should not mishear the fact death is actually the enemy.

Sometimes people, at least these days, sometimes people try to minimise death, don't they? Maybe you've seen adverts for funeral companies, death is just a natural part of life.

[65 : 56] Or maybe you've been to a funeral and you've heard the poem read, death is nothing at all. Well, the problem is, whether these are well intentioned attempts to lessen the pain, or cynical attempts to win business, whatever the intent, these kind of sentiments don't ring true.

Death does not feel like nothing at all, does it? Death does not feel like a natural part of life, and nor should it. Paul says death is the last enemy to be destroyed.

Death is unnatural, death is not part of God's good design, death is a malevolent spiritual enemy, it is a blight caused by sin, it is a breach of what should be reality.

Death is not nothing, death is the enemy, but it is an enemy that is being destroyed. And we hold both of these truths together.

Death is our enemy, and it is being destroyed. And thus, we rejoice in the reality of Christ's resurrection that guarantees our own, he the first fruits, and we certain to follow.

[67 : 08] And so Paul rounds out this series of arguments about the paramount significance of the resurrection. By returning to that question, what would be true if there were no resurrection? Third heading, verses 29 to 32, don't worry, it is shorter than the first couple.

Resurrection makes sense of everything. Paul gives two examples of behaviour that make no sense if you don't believe in the resurrection. One from the Corinthians behaviour, the other from his own actions.

Verse 29, else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptised for the dead?

Now, as verses that are challenging to understand, go, this one is well up there, because we don't want to set one part of the Bible against another, we believe God is perfectly consistent, God does not change, so we're not going to find something in one place that contradicts what God said elsewhere, and there have been a whole host of different interpretations of this verse, as is usually the case for more challenging parts of the Bible.

I will spare you the analysis of them all on this occasion, because it's been a long enough day already. Folks, my conclusion after extensive reading is Paul means the for, in Matt is for the dead, not in the sense of on behalf of, but rather in a sense that's kind of more like because of.

[68 : 39] So what we're presuming here is relatively recently deceased relatives, but the baptism that Paul's talking about is still regular ordinary Christian baptism, for the benefit of the person who is being baptized, not for the benefit of someone else, the person who is appropriating to himself the promises of God.

But the significance of talking about someone who's died is that the supposed new convert, the person who's coming to be baptized, is that they have heard about the resurrection, they've heard Christians believe in the new heavens and the new earth, and they want to participate in that, at least in part because they wish to be reunited with their deceased loved ones.

So, this interpretation that I'm suggesting, you could paraphrase the verse as follows. Now, if there is no resurrection, what will be accomplished by those who get baptized because of what they've heard about how our dead will be raised?

If the dead are not raised at all, why are people undergoing baptism on account of them? They've heard that dead people are raised to new life and glory, and they want to be part of that group.

They want to participate in eternal life along with Christians who have already died. not. Maybe it's not that common to hear a testimony today at a baptism that someone was motivated by a desire to share eternity with a dead relative.

[70 : 11] But I can think of people for whom seeing the confidence, seeing the quiet hope of someone on their deathbed, a Christian dying in the Lord, with visible hope, people for whom that was a serious factor that prompted them to investigate the Christian faith that they had previously dismissed.

Because look what a difference it makes. In any case, whether you take that interpretation or any other, Paul's overall point in bringing this up here is abundantly clear, isn't it?

This behaviour with which the Corinthians are clearly familiar, this behaviour makes no sense if there's no resurrection to look forward to. So if they say there is no resurrection, what are they playing at?

Paul's next example, thankfully, is less challenging to understand. Verses 30 through 32, why would you put yourself in danger? Why would you face the real prospect of death if this is all there is?

If you only have one life to live, then the only attitude that makes sense is let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. If there's nothing else to look forward to beyond death, then the only rational approach right now is to maximise your present happiness and never mind anything else at all.

[71 : 35] Luke 12, 19, the rich fool says to himself, soul, thou hast much good layed up for many years. Take thine eats, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.

Then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided. But if there is no resurrection, if there's nothing beyond death, then that rich farmer is no fool at all.

He maximised his happiness while he could. But the reality that Paul has embraced, that he challenges the Corinthians to reclaim, that we must rest ourselves apart, that reality is that the dead in Christ will indeed be raised, and therefore will have a gathering around the throne of God, when all the reconciled people of God enter fully into salvation on the last day.

Suffering makes sense, suffering has a proper place in that eschatological corporate context. Paul says, I become all things to all people, that by any means I might save some.

Well, why do that? it only makes sense if there's something to be saved for. Otherwise it's empty, it's pointless. Without the resurrection, all tenacity in the face of suffering is just a waste of time.

[73 : 05] Without the resurrection, nothing we are doing makes any sense at all. But my friends, the tomb is gloriously empty.

Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. He is busy destroying all his enemies and outs, abolishing death, that we may live forever, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Amen. Let's come again to God in prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Lord Jesus, again we rejoice in the good news of your resurrection. We rejoice in the hope that is ours because you rose again because death could not hold you, because the tomb is gloriously empty.

We rejoice that you have power and authority even over death itself. We rejoice that our enemy is even now in the process of being destroyed. We rejoice because death has lost its sting and will one day lose it entirely and forever.

[74 : 21] We rejoice because what we have believed rests on a solid foundation. We rejoice because it is not fragile and to be knocked over as one part is taken away but rather the faith that we have held, the faith that we have proclaimed is coherent, is consistent, is a solid foundation.

Lord Jesus, we rejoice in what you have done as you took away our sins on the cross. We rejoice that that is guaranteed by the concrete historical fact of the resurrection.

We rejoice to know that we need no longer die in our sins because you took our place and you were gloriously vindicated as your father showed that that sacrifice was accepted, that everything you have said was true, that you truly were the promised Messiah.

Lord Jesus, we rejoice in you, we give you all glory, we give you all of our thanks and we dedicate our lives to you. Thank you for that reminder that we are no fools who give up that which we cannot keep to gain that which we cannot lose.

we give you thanks that our lives are ultimately not worth us clinging on to because they are safe in your hands, because we have a hope of something greater, because we have the hope of eternal glory, because we have the confidence that we will spend an eternity that we cannot even wrap our heads around in your presence, in the fullness of joy, when all of our present pain, suffering, struggles, difficulties, tears, fears, griefs, all of them are washed away, when we are caught up into an eternal song of praise.

[76 : 25] Lord our God, you are worthy. Worthy is the Lamb to be praised. Worthy is our God of all glory, honour, God, Amen.

Amen. We'll finish then with Psalm 103, the first five verses of Psalm 103, page 210.

O thou my soul, bless God the Lord and all that in me is. Be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless.

Amen. O thou O Thou, my soul, blessed God, the Lord, and all that in me is.

He's dedicated to his holy name, who magnified and blessed.

[77 : 50] Praise O my soul, the Lord, Thy God, and all forget for me.

Of all his anxious benefits, may I restore on Thee.

All I need in me, which he through does most graciously forgive.

His anxiousness, says all that things, does he live and be relieved.

Who does redeem Thy light, but Thou, who death may not go down.

[79 : 31] To Thee with loving guide, yet just Thou may never work.

Thee with loving guide, yet just Thou may not go down. Thee with loving guide, yet just Thou may not go down.

Good things, does satisfy Thy light, so that He must be God's life, so that He must be constantly renewed in the use.

Will you please stand to receive us one second? May the Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Amen.