

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus

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[0:00] We're going to think this morning about the resurrection after Easter, because it isn't just something that happens at Easter. Christians meet on Sunday because it is the day that Jesus rose from the dead. In other words, every Sunday is resurrection day.

And we'll say that every Sunday is Easter day in that sense. And what I would like to try to persuade us of this morning is that we should believe in the resurrection of Jesus with assured faith and solid comfort.

That's what my aim is this morning, to persuade us to believe in the resurrection of Jesus with assured faith and solid comfort. And I'd like to ask three questions and try to answer them. So question one, is it possible for people today to believe in the resurrection of Jesus? Is it possible? Question two, is it necessary? In other words, how important a bit of faith is this? Is it a bit that you can say, well, don't actually believe that part of it? Is it necessary? And thirdly, is it relevant? Is it helpful? Is it useful? Is it profitable to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

[1:19] And to the first question I want to answer, it is certainly possible. And to the second question I want to answer, it's absolutely necessary. There's no option.

It is forced upon us by the truths of history. And to the third question I want to say, it is the only way to live, both now and in the future.

To believe in Jesus is, to say it's relevant, helpful, useful, profitable, is a complete understatement. That's the way to live is believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So let's take these questions one at a time. I'm going to refer to 1 Corinthians 15, but I'm going to refer to some other parts of the Bible as well.

So question one then, is it possible for people to believe in the resurrection of Jesus? And I think I know most faces, but not necessarily every face.

[2:20] There are many people in our city and in our land who would say it is impossible to believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

And people would say, come on now. We are in the modern age. This is the age of the microchip and black holes and quantum theory and all of this.

We are not ignorant like those people in the past. They just believe anything. We nowadays, people might say, we're not gullible and unscientific like people in ancient times.

We know that people do not rise from the dead. Therefore, it is impossible for us to believe this. To which I would answer, you try telling that to the ancient Greeks.

Try telling the people in the time of Jesus and the time of Paul, oh, you lot are so ignorant, you just believe anything. Because they didn't. In fact, one of the things that they found really difficult to believe was the resurrection.

[3:29] They would have said, we can't believe that because we know it doesn't happen. We have a philosophy. Because their objection would have been philosophical.

They would have said that divine things are things you can never touch. And if it's something you can touch, it must be a lower form of existence.

So the idea of a physical resurrection coming from God, they would say, no, that just does not compute at all. So they, you see, would have found it difficult. And here's some examples of it.

1 Corinthians 15, 29, which we just read. In the church at Corinth, some of the people were saying, oh, I'm not sure about this.

There isn't a resurrection. That, no, not happy with that bit. That's just a Paul thing or something like that.

[4:30] In fact, when Paul preached in Athens in Acts 17, he preached to some very clever people. And he was talking about Jesus.

And he got to the bit about the resurrection. And when he got to that bit, those people sneered at him. And they said, resurrection. Oh, you know.

We can't believe that sort of stuff. We're very modern and up to date. They would have said all those years ago. So it's not as if in the past they were gullible.

They too would have said, there's no resurrection. And they also would have objected. There's no way it can happen. Did you notice the objection or the question that was raised in verse 35?

Someone may say, how are the dead raised? It's always an interesting question, how? Nicodemus asked Jesus, but how can someone be born again when they're old?

[5:33] Do they enter a second time into their mother's womb? So that question, how? He said, it's sort of saying, unless I understand it, it can't possibly happen. Nowadays, we would associate that question with science and engineering.

But people have always asked that question, how? And Paul's answer is very tactless. He says, you twit, you fool, you fool.

What a stupid question to ask. Did you expect to understand that? You know, in fact, we trust in many things that we haven't got the faintest idea how, don't we?

So when you use your mobile phone, you're quite happy to trust that that works. You know, how many of you actually know how 4G communication differs from 3G communication?

Or how many of you know how IP numbers are ascribed by a DNS server every time you log into the internet? You've no idea, have you? Apart from Matt. So I think if you say, I won't believe anything unless I know how it works, you are an idiot.

[6:42] That's what Paul says. If you think that God owes you an explanation about how the resurrection happens, you're a fool.

And what he, the way he answers it is to say, can't explain how. It's beyond us. You'd expect it to be beyond us, wouldn't you, if God breaks into this world in that way.

But I can insist again and again, it's what happened. And his answer is that people saw it. So in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 5, he says, So Paul was saying, if you really want to, it is a possible thing to drive all the way from Corinth back to, Jerusalem, I could put you in touch with people who actually saw it.

So you probably wouldn't do that, but there were people who actually saw it. That's the point. And he says, he appeared to James, and then in an abnormal way, says Paul, he appeared to me.

This is one of the, I think one of the strong points about the resurrection. They weren't gullible people. They weren't easily taken in. They weren't ready to believe anything.

[8:23] They only believed it when there was convincing evidence. So Luke 24, 11, the women came back to say, we've seen him. And the apostles, the mighty spiritual men, they said, nah, we can't believe that.

It's nonsense. But they say, it is true because we've seen him. And in verse 34, that's exactly what they say.

It's true. The Lord has risen. Simon's seen him. And then the two on the way to the road to Emmaus said, we've seen him. So the reason for believing it is the evidence of people who actually saw it.

Now we can add to that evidence. For example, in 24, 44, Jesus said, I told you I would do this. So we add to that the evidence that Jesus had unambiguously stated, unambiguously, meaning without any doubt, very clearly. He had stated, the Son of Man will suffer, be handed over, will be killed, and on the third day be raised from the dead.

[9:38] And he'd said that on multiple occasions. And Jesus, he sort of rebukes them, doesn't he? He says, well, I told you this. I did tell you. Not a surprise.

Did you not trust me on this? I told you I would do this. And then there's also, as Jesus points out, as a very strong thread, a very strong platform and foundation.

This is what I told you when I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms.

And then he opened their minds so he could understand the scriptures. And he told them, this is what is written, that Christ will suffer, rise from the dead on the third day.

Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations. So he says, it's what the Bible says. The Bible has been speaking about this.

[10:44] And all the convincing power of God's word embedded in people's lives and experiences and incidents and massive movements of history and geography and politics.

All this embedded word and revelation of God points to and predicts and is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.

You remember how Paul says, this is the gospel. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. That he was dead and buried.

And on the third day he rose again according to the scriptures. He says this is fully enmeshed in the flow of scripture.

It's according to the scriptures. And when Jesus rebuked his disciples in Luke 24, 25, 26, he said to them, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

[11:58] Didn't the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And that was when he explained from Moses and all the prophets the things relating to himself. And they said, when we got that, didn't our hearts burn within us?

So it's there in the scriptures. And Jesus said, open the scriptures and open their minds to the scriptures. So is it possible to believe?

It is possible to believe. This is the root. This is the basis of believing something that is so extraordinary.

You shouldn't just believe it without proper evidence. But the evidence is there. And it's in the form of what people saw. It's in the form of what Jesus predicted.

And it's in the form of what the Bible had always been teaching. End of John's gospel. I love this little bit where you remember Thomas is invited to touch the risen savior, to put his hands into the wound of his wounded side.

[13:04] And Jesus says, you do that. You're allowed to do that. And then write it down. And you remember that sort of time-divided blessing.

Blessed are you because you've seen. And then blessed are those who believe who haven't seen. That's us. Jesus does not rise himself from the dead for each new generation afresh.

And present himself in Emmaus and in Ditchling and in Czechoslovakia and in Cardiff. He's done it once in Jerusalem. Absolutely, clearly witnessed the things that we saw and heard and touched.

And it's written down. And these are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in his name. So that's what we have.

The scriptures, the testimony. Supernatural, multiple testimony. And if this is something that you are wrestling with, I urge you to run towards the testimony and not to run away from it.

[14:15] To run towards the things that God has said about his Son and ask him to help you to embrace them. Is it possible to believe?

It is possible to believe it is not a problem of shortage of evidence. It's actually more a problem of our foolishness and hardness and unwillingness to believe God.

Okay, that was question one. Question two. Is it necessary to believe? So is there such a thing as a Christian who doesn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

So let me try and do it in two parts. For Christians and then for somebody who isn't a Christian, is it necessary to believe? So for Christians, we're going to say absolutely and have another go at that this evening.

And if you're not a Christian, I want to try and press upon you, you should believe this. And I like to think of three sorts of things. One, superstition.

[15:19] Superstition.

I get emails. I am your long-lost cousin from Nigeria. I have inherited \$10 million and I just need your help to bring the money into the country.

And I think, oh, I didn't know I had a cousin in Nigeria. Actually, you might have a cousin in Nigeria, but I don't. And spam emails work on people's gullibility, their willingness to believe on completely inadequate evidence.

And the third thing is denial. Denial is when you insist that something isn't true when actually there's loads of evidence that says it is. So, for example, smoking damages your health.

There's a lot of evidence that smoking damages your health. And yet people still smoke. There's a lot of evidence that exercise is beneficial.

[16:44] But people don't always take exercise. You have the view that when I feel like taking exercise, I go and lie down in a darkened room until the feeling wears off.

I think you could quite legitimately say, if you really believed smoking damages your health, you would do something about it. If you really believed that exercise is beneficial, you would do something about it.

So those three things, superstition, gullibility, denial. And let's put resurrection against those three possible responses.

So let's go first back to the existence of God. I'm winding right back to the beginning of this. The existence of God is, now, is it superstition?

Number one. Is it number two, gullibility? Or number three, is it something that people deny? And the Bible says it is number three.

[17:55] The existence of God is something that people deny. The Bible is very robust about this. And it says, everybody knows that God exists.

Deep down, everybody knows that God exists. But what people do with that is they smother it and put cushions on it and sit on it so that you can hardly hear the squeak which says God exists.

The existence of God, everybody knows. Now, let's wind this up a step further. The truthfulness of the Bible, is that a matter of superstition or gullibility or denial?

Now, what does the Bible say about this? Well, the Bible says that it is a document which proves itself to the reader. That if you, let's put it this way, if you give it a chance, if you open it up and read it and listen and allow yourself to hear what the Bible is saying, and I mean, seriously, I don't mean just throw it in the air and see which page it comes down on and read the first bit that comes into your head.

Read it properly. You know, it's a story. You read it in sequence or the Gospels are meant to be read through with carefulness and thought.

[19:22] But if you do that, the Bible says it will prove itself. It will have in itself the ring of truth. As you listen to it, you will come to the conviction, this is God speaking.

And if you've never given the Bible a chance, I think you should. Read Mark's Gospel. Get somebody to read it with you.

Get somebody to, not to tell you what to think, but to explain to you what's going on, like a guide taking you around a stately home or something. The truthfulness of the Bible, it interacts with the reader.

It asks the reader questions. And it prompts, it probes, it requires a response from the reader.

It's a living book. So that's the truthfulness of the Bible. Now, the historical truth of the resurrection is the next step that I want to think about. And if we've submitted to A, that there is an almighty God, which there is, and if we've related to B, that his book is truthful and real and not deceptive and not just made up, then we will find ourselves receiving the testimony of the people, of Scripture as it goes forward, of the things that Jesus says, of the people who saw him, this is true.

[21:05] The historical truth of the resurrection, submitting to the existence of God, receiving the truthfulness of the Bible and the testimony in it, is it difficult to believe?

In a sense, the answer is yes, because it's a huge thing to believe. Is it necessary to believe? Yes. It's there. We're not, it's not a picking and choosing thing.

It's not a slightly doubtful thing. It's not a thing that Christians have never managed to come to a clear conclusion of over the centuries. It is clear and fundamental, yes, it is necessary to believe. Here's an objection. You say this is very heavy duty. You might say from the culture I come from, we believe in science, we believe in technology. I've never ever had to think about Jesus being raised physically from the dead.

And my answer is, it is heavy duty stuff. It might well be for you a journey. It might be something that you're just beginning to think about. And perhaps you need to think about it again.

[22:14] And ask God to show you what's what. And yep, give that time, but keep going on the journey. It's a key thing.

So to understand what God is saying, so to receive his message, as to have faith in the Christ who died for our sins according to the scriptures, who was buried and raised from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures.

Here's a second objection, or sort of comment. Well, I do believe it. Everybody in my culture believes in the resurrection of Jesus. But it doesn't actually have much impact on my life.

I'm sure there are cultures in which that's the case. Yeah, everybody knows Jesus is risen from the dead. But it doesn't change anything. And I think I would come back to the smoking damages your health and the exercise is beneficial.

If you really believed it, you'd do something about it. If you really believed it, that is such a powerful truth. There would certainly be things in your life that this challenges, that this changes, that you have to fall in line with, and perhaps the challenge for you is to start doing something about it.

[23:36] I mean, coming to church is one good thing. There's lots more to it than that. So, my third question. Is it at all relevant, helpful, useful, profitable to believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

Or is it one of these things of just private faith? Okay, some, you know, or let me be careful what I say. You may believe that such and such a diet is very helpful, you know, beetroot diet or something like that.

You've seen it on the internet. And the rest of us who are not particularly keen on a beetroot diet might say, well, I'm so pleased that works for you. But please don't ask me to go on a beetroot diet. It's just a thing for you. Or we might say faith. Well, that's a sort of airy, fairy thing. Is that the sort of thing that this faith in the resurrection is? Now, coming back to 1 Corinthians 15.

Paul does not at all think that this faith in the resurrection is a sort of wispy, take it or leave it, it might work for you sort of thing.

[24:48] For him, this is something strong and powerful. So in 15 verse 2, he says, by this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preach, otherwise you have believed in vain.

Otherwise you have believed in vain. Now, just think about those words. He's saying that there is such a thing as faith which is in vain.

Faith which is inadequate, faith in the wrong thing, faith in something that won't work. And that's a vain faith. Vain not meaning conceited, but vain meaning empty, pointless, useless, futile.

Does nothing. And Paul is keen to say, this gospel faith is not faith in vain. Yeah? This gospel faith is not faith in vain.

And he wants to emphasize that. He says it again in verse 14. He says, if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.

[25:57] If there is no resurrection, then the stuff that we're all saying is just a load of words, and this faith is one of those faiths that's empty, pointless, useless.

And he says, but it isn't. If I believed for a moment, says Paul, that my preaching was in vain, I would stop doing it. If I believed for a moment that our faith was in vain, then I'd stop believing it. But it isn't vain preaching, and it isn't vain believing. It's powerful preaching, and powerful believing. So what does he say in verse 16?

If the dead are not raised, which is what the Greeks believed in those days, no such thing as resurrection. If the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised, because his resurrection would be one of the cases in view.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. Those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are more to be pitied than all men.

[27:08] He says that this is how relevant it is, because if we're wrong on this, then Christian faith is futile. We are so pleased and grateful that our sins are forgiven.

But he says, but if we've got this wrong, there's no forgiveness. Hasn't happened. We take enormous comfort in knowing that when we lay a believer who has died in the grave, we will see them again.

We take great comfort in that. And he says, but if this isn't right, there's no such comfort. And if, verse 19, if for this life only we have hope in Christ, we are more to be pitied than all men. Christians are investing their whole lives on the outcome of the resurrection in the future, resurrection of all his people and that we will see him face to face and that will make it all worthwhile.

He says, if that doesn't happen, then what a load of losers we are. We could have been spending our time in a much, in a far different way.

[28:37] As he says, we could have been eating and drinking for tomorrow we die. We would have had a completely different outlook on life. The outlook we have is because we believe in the resurrection.

So he strongly says, this is not vain and useless and unprofitable.

So he says, what have I got here? Verse 42. So will it be with the resurrection from the dead. I've got lost on my verses. Verse 58, he's going to say, your labor is fruitful.

Your labor in the Lord is not in vain. And in verse 56, he's going to say, sin is dealt with in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[29:45] We're not unforgiven, but forgiven. And he's going to say in verse 52, this is the verse that says, in a flash we will all be changed.

So death is not the end. There is this mysterious and mind-blowing future beyond death when we will all be changed.

In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, the trumpet will sound and we will be raised immortal. He says, absolutely is not irrelevant, pointless, but it is powerful, fruitful, life-transforming now because it will be cosmos-transforming in the future.

And he says, I mean, he raises the possibility that Christians are just idiots, more to be pitied than all men, but he says, we're not. We're not more to be pitied than all men.

By God's grace, this is the place to invest life. on the basis of Jesus Christ, his cross and his resurrection, this is the way to live.

[31:04] This is the only way to live. This is the only route from this world of sin and death into a life of deathlessness, righteousness, immortality, glory.

He says, that's the only way and this is the way and he's not ashamed of it. So just to spell that out a little bit more, here's some other points of relevance.

It puts believers and disciples into a relationship with a person who is living and responding. So just to think about prayer, when we pray, if somebody walked into a prayer meeting as people sometimes do and saw what we were doing, they would think, well, what are they doing?

They're talking, depending on the attitude of the head, either to the floor or to the chair opposite or perhaps even to the ceiling but that's all that you can see but the resurrection says, actually, there's a living person on the end of that prayer, the other end of that prayer.

There's a risen saviour who hears us and responds to us. So Christianity is not a philosophy. It's not an observance.

[32:27] It's a friendship. It's a relationship. Number two, it gives us a positive basis to hope for the future and actually there's lots of things that work that way on the sort of small scale.

Exams. so you're willing to not go out in the evening and to turn off Netflix and to stay in all day studying because you know that when the exam comes and you get the qualification you want, it will be worth it.

And women are prepared to go through pregnancy and childbirth. Imagine, guys, who would volunteer to do that? Nine months and all the stuff at the end.

Oh, goodness. To go through that for the sake of having a baby. Women are prepared to go through this. We're very pleased, aren't we? Grateful to our own mums for being willing to do that. But the labour is worth it for the end result and all sorts of things like that. And the Christian life is like that.

[33:37] The thing that makes it worthwhile is what will be in the end. We have got to understand that because our present, all the things we put effort into now, by God's grace, we may see encouragements, we may see results, or we may not.

but it's still worth it. Not necessarily on what is achieved now, but our eyes are on the future. We do it for, does it say, is this the one that says, well done, good and faithful servant behind the loudspeaker?

Does it say that on there? Let me have a look. Enter into the joy of thy Lord. Yeah. Wouldn't it be great to hear the Lord say that? God, you know, you've worked and worked and worked.

I'm sure there are people who've been faithful missionaries and you've seen two converts in your whole life but the Lord says, that's absolutely fine. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Wouldn't it be worth it to hear him say that at the end? Enter into the joy of your Lord. Thirdly, it assures us objectively that the experiences of the Christian life are not, are now, are based outside ourselves in something that is true for God and not just true for us.

[35:00] Well, I don't know whether you have this experience, I do.

Sometimes I'm full of the joy of the Lord when it's a sunny day when I've slept well and I've had a nice meal and then sometimes when I haven't slept well and it's rainy, I feel low, spiritually low.

I think, well actually, that's just me going up and down. Maybe I'm the only one that feels like that but that's how I sometimes feel. And is it just me or is there a person on the end of the relationship in heaven?

And this says, no, Phil, it's not just you. There is someone on the end of the telephone at the other end. It is a real relationship.

You're not just kidding yourself because look back at the empty tomb Jesus rose from the dead. It's a real thing. Prayer is real. Answers are real. The Christian life is real.

All these things, forgiveness, newness of spiritual life, devotion, the worship of Jesus, a new ethical direction, long-term meaning and purpose in life, knowing that I personally really do matter to God.

[36:15] I'll just say that one again. Knowing that I really do personally matter to God. all those things are sealed up in the resurrection.

They're promises that Christ brings, the risen Christ brings to us. It is real. It is worth it. It is me, says Jesus.

And one day it will be changed and different and fulfilled and wonderful. would you like to be in on that?

If you're a Christian, I think you're probably saying yes. And if you're not sure about what a Christian is, I'd like you to say yes. I'd like you to say this is actually what I came to church to find out about.

This is what I've really always wanted. Now my eyes are opened. Just show me how I can get this. Jesus will do that.

[37:18] Don't stop until you've got it. And Paul says the key to it is this message, this gospel, this good news. He says that is the key to it. This message as he said, which you received and on which you've taken your stand.

By this gospel you are saved. If you hold firmly to the word I preach to you, this is it. I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that he appeared to the twelve.

This is the gospel. By this you are saved if you hold on to it firmly to the end. Here's how he ends the chapter. I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

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 shall sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will all be changed.

[38:51] And his application point is, therefore, dear brothers, stand firm, let nothing move you. Keep reading your Bible. Keep praying.

Keep coming to church. Keep speaking up for the Lord when you have the opportunity. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. Let's sing together.