

Resurrection

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Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0:00] Amen. When Paul preached in Athens, we're told that the Athenian scholars heard about the resurrection of the dead.

! Some of them sneered, but others said,! We want to hear you again on this subject. And I guess it's been pretty much like that ever since.

Some people have sneered and others said, well, tell us a bit more. So Paul asked a question that was as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago.

If it's preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead? The sneering of the skeptics is to be expected.

Resurrection can't happen, so obviously Christ was not raised. That was the objection in those days, and it's still the objection today. But a strange thing has happened more recently, that even within the confessing church, there are those who claim it didn't happen.

[1:11] Well, I say more recently, but of course it seems to have been true 2,000 years ago in Corinth. So perhaps I shouldn't say more recently. But it certainly surfaced again of late. People who claim that the resurrection didn't really happen.

I read a few years ago that the Anglican representative at the Vatican himself did not believe in a literal resurrection. He thought the disciples just felt he had been resurrected or something like that. My thought at the time was that that doesn't even make sense politically. The Catholics believe in resurrection. So Paul has been absolutely clear in making this point, and he makes it, as we've seen, at some length.

His point is that without the resurrection of Christ, Christianity makes no sense. If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you're still in your sins. And yet people claim somehow that the essence of Christianity is the teaching of Jesus on forgiveness and love and stuff like that, which is usually then edited to fit 21st century sensibilities.

[2:32] It seems that, after all, the post-modern mind, you can't forgive everybody, can you? Obviously you can't forgive TERFs or white imperialists or even politicians who may have made a mistake.

There's so little forgiveness around nowadays. And yet those who claim these claims about Jesus' teaching, say, go away, been told to sort of go away and read the New Testament.

Well, I have read the New Testament, and it doesn't read that way to me. Those who claim these, about Jesus' teaching appear actually not to have read what Jesus said.

So, for example, in Matthew 6, Jesus said, do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. But what's the point of that if we're never going to get access to that treasure? Or even clearer, when he was explaining a parable, the parable of the sower, Jesus answered, the one who sowed the good seed is the son of man.

[3:54] The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. Sorry, not the parable of the sower, it's the parable of the tares. Apologies. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.

The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the

fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

The son of man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine like sun in the kingdom of their father. Whoever has ears, let them hear. Of course, people start claiming that these words have been edited or misreported, but then the Christian label becomes merely an excuse for propagating your own ideas, doesn't it?

If you actually read the New Testament, if you actually read what Jesus said, it was quite clear that there will be a judgment and that, as he says here, the righteous will shine like sun in the kingdom of their father.

[5:09] In fact, it's not only Christian doctrine, but the whole understanding of the nature of mankind and indeed of the universe that hangs on this. Paul understood very well.

If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for many human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Of course, skepticism is not a new phenomenon. We read in Acts 17, in verse 35 here. And actually, of course, as healthy skepticism, it's quite a desirable thing. Faith is not based on ignoring the evidence.

As we're sometimes accused of being. Certain skepticism is a good thing to have, particularly when we're told something that might be a bit hard to believe about Christ's resurrection.

In fact, the ability of humans to believe the most implausible nonsense has been well demonstrated in recent years. Ever heard of QAnon? Or the idea that Bill Gates was injecting us all with microchips?

[6:18] It doesn't stand up to 10 minutes' thought, and yet people will believe it. People believe these scams when people ring up and say, you've won 10,000 pounds, or you had a charge of 10,000 pounds on your bank account or something.

People believe it. In fact, there was some interesting research, so I can't go into the details, but people believe narratives a lot more than our fellow creatures, even our close relatives like chimpanzees or intelligent animals like dogs.

I can't go into the details of how they checked this, but essentially they worked out a series of actions to gain a reward. And humans' children went through the whole process of the actions to get to the reward, whereas the dogs and the chimpanzees just cut to the chase and just opened the box to get to the reward.

But the humans seemed to think that the whole narrative was important. We say that's great, both our great strength and our great weakness, our strength that we have a much more complex view of the world, but a weakness means we're so easily deceived.

So it's right to be cautious about what you're told. What about this idea, for instance, that the voting machines in America were tampered with where it was broadcast on Fox News?

[7:48] This is in spite of the fact it's now found out the editors themselves admitted they didn't believe it. But why let the facts get in the way of a good narrative? It was good stuff to increase their ratings.

So they broadcast it anyway, even though they knew it wasn't true. It's right to be cautious about what you're told. That is precisely why the apostles go to such lengths to explain the eyewitness testimony and to insist that this is the literal truth, not some metaphor or parable.

We saw this, didn't we, at the end of John's Gospel when Doubting Thomas said, I must see for myself. We saw it with the catch of fish and Peter's restoration.

People needed to see this stuff in the real world to know that it was real. The other Gospel writers make the same point in different ways. And to the disciples, the resurrection came as an epiphany. Their lives were changed forever. They'd give up their lives to defend this truth. They wouldn't have done that if it was a scam, if they knew it was a scam. Who would do that for a fable?

[9:07] In Jewish law, a case was decided on the testimony of two or three witnesses. But Paul says, I can produce 500 witnesses. Go and ask them yourself if you're not convinced.

Well, of course, we can't actually do that. But instead, we have the written testimony and the undisputable historical evidence of the lives of the apostles and the first martyrs.

This small group of disciples turned the world on its head. They wouldn't have done that if they knew it was fake. So Paul gives us this carefully constructed argument. It needs to be carefully constructed. It was obviously written for people who were educated in Greek thought. So I make no apology for using four long words here.

I think there are four, basically four sections to this argument. And we can think of them in terms of four ologies. First of all, chronology.

[10:14] Christ's resurrection happened in space and time against the objection that it didn't really happen. And then we move on to theology. Those who say there is no resurrection or it doesn't really matter.

Of course, Paul is quite clear that it does matter. an ontology. I don't know, you may not know what ontology means, but ontology is the study of the way in which things exist, the nature of being. I'll say a bit more about that later. And certainly what we have here is an ontological argument. The objection he meets is that it isn't really real. It's kind of real, but not real in any absolute sense. It's really, it's what he's, the objectors are kind of saying here. And then he finishes with the doxology, the song of victory. But even that is there to meet an objection because some people say that, well, can't we ditch this doctrine of resurrection?

It's a bit of a problem. And Paul says, no, it's not a problem. It's a matter for praise. So let's examine these four sections in a bit more detail.

[11:25] So Paul first makes the point that this was real history wasn't some fable. It wasn't some picture language. It was in Christ's resurrection took place in space and time.

As I've already said, for humans, narrative is everything. Stories are how we understand the world. And as I said, it's what sets us apart from every other creature on this planet.

If you control the story, you control the truth, or at least our perception of the truth. Politicians and influencers and pressure groups understand this very well, don't they?

Hence we get these repeated attempts to rewrite history. In Victorian times, the narrative of the British Empire was that it was a glorious enterprise to spread civilization and democracy.

The narrative now seems to be as a dreadful imposition of Western power and values on the rest of the world. Which of those is the true narrative?

[12:28] Well, in reality, of course, it was both and neither. There's an aspect of both of those within it. Certainly the people who come here and complain about it do so because they're influenced by Western thought.

And yet, neither was the whole story. The actual truth is a subtle and complex thing as it usually is. And this is not all a bad thing, of course. If we are to achieve anything, we need a narrative to work to. And that's essentially what Bull is presenting us with here. We have to have a story to work to otherwise we'd spend our whole time mired in indecision and we'd never do anything.

The downside is that it leaves us open to exploitation. Control the story, as I said, and you control the truth. The ability of humans to believe absolute nonsense is demonstrated every day in our news media, isn't it?

Holocaust deniers, QAnon, arguments over vote-fixing, and a host of other conspiracy theories dominate our social discourse. Even those we consider mainstream are often based more on rhetoric than logic.

[13:51] The arguments over vaccination were based more on people's opinion than actual facts very often. And this has always been the case, of course.

It's just that rapid news media make it a lot quicker nowadays, but it's always been the case. The Romans had to proclaim that Caesar is lord.

That wasn't really a theological statement. Actually, the Roman Empire largely practiced religious toleration. It was rather a claim that the lordship of the emperor claimed primacy over competing religious narratives.

that the narrative of Rome was superior to the other narratives that people might have is really what was being claimed when people were required to say that Caesar is lord.

So Marxism controls discourse by a narrative of class struggle. But while control of the narrative has always been crucial, the modern information technology has exaggerated the bad side of this because we've splintered into a host of competing stories, haven't we, which don't communicate

with each other very much.

[15:08] If they do, it's mainly by means of waving banners and protests. And what about this new generation of AIs? They promote narrative rather than fact.

There have been demonstrated cases of this happening. That AIs lack even the basic human moral dislike of lying. And they've been known to make up facts to support their arguments.

So they're documented cases of this happening. That's what's really scary about AIs. Not that they'll suddenly decide to eliminate all humans, but that they may construct a narrative that is no foundation in truth at all.

So Paul understood the importance of the narrative as he reminds us in verse one. Why should we do all this instruction that he's been giving us in the previous chapters?

Why should the church take on board all this stuff about sexual morality and love and community behavior, which is what 1 Corinthians is all about? Why?

[16:15] Because of the gospel on which they stand. Not being an AI or a cynical journalist or a politician, Paul wants us to ensure that our gospel narrative passes two critical tests.

Firstly, it has to be based on real facts. Check your facts. And secondly, it has to make logical sense. That's the advice that we're given today, isn't it, about some sort of theory propounded.

Ask yourself two questions. Is it based on real facts and does it make sense? That's the advice today and it's precisely the advice that Paul was giving 2,000 years ago.

So, Christ's resurrection is not some pagan winterman fable of death and rebirth. It's not some internet meme, a virtual idea that's taken a life of its own but little connection with the truth.

And it's certainly not a constructed myth designed to give the church a sense of identity and purpose. Paul is insistent that the resurrection is a real event in real time that has real implications for real life.

[17:33] Jesus' resurrected body appeared to have powers that ours are denied but it existed in this physical universe. It didn't happen in some parallel time stream but it was embedded in everyday life.

He ate and drank and prepared a meal. He broke bread and talked with people face to face. There were 500 witnesses of this. It wasn't some weird group hallucination where there were a few people together.

There were 500 people spread out over time who witnessed the resurrection of Christ. It's not just a possible hallucination. He met with the disciples for an extended period and over several occasions. So skeptic... Excuse me. Let's go. Water. Water. Sorry.

Sceptics tell us that faith ignores the evidence. But Paul is making precisely the opposite argument here.

[18:42] There's plenty of evidence. He invites his hearers to go and talk to the witnesses. As I said we have their clearly recorded testimony and it has the ring of truth.

People have pointed out that even the fact that the eyewitness accounts are different enhances the sense of truth. Not detracts from it. What we have is eyewitness accounts.

If the apostles had sat down and worked out a story they would have got all their details consistent wouldn't they? But we have eyewitness accounts. People's different perceptions and recollections.

Yet all pointing to the same truth. And of course this truth is a truth that changes everything. It's a complete paradigm shift truth.

In our perception of reality. It's not faith in the sense of some debatable opinion but rather knowledge which redirects our whole life.

[19:42] Which is why Paul finishes his argument. Therefore my dear brother stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves to the work of the Lord.

Because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. But knowledge alone is not enough. To make it effective it has to be understood. The resurrection has to make sense in the real world. So Paul goes on to discuss the theology of it.

Not only is there good evidence for the Christ resurrection took place in real time and space. But it matters theologically.

Christian theology is always based not on philosophy but on history. God speaks in and through history. And if this link to history is lost the whole evidence of faith, edifice of faith, collapses like a house of cards.

[20:49] It no longer makes sense. And just to establish that point, notice the points that Paul makes in his argument. First of all he says that without the resurrection the gospel makes no sense.

Look at what he says in verse 14, the gospel is a lie and Paul is a liar, verse 15. 16 and 17, if Christ was not raised we wouldn't know that the sacrifice was accepted.

So without it your faith is useless. Verses 18 and also in 29, if Christ was not raised then those who are dead are lost.

Verse 10 in 29 talks about being baptised for the dead which is lots of people argued about but we won't go into that. It's just a bit of a red herring. And then in 19 in verses 30 to 32a work and suffering for the gospel is pointless if Christ is not raised.

So firstly without the resurrection the gospel makes no sense. Secondly without the resurrection history makes no sense.

[22:11] Of course he tells us in verse 20 that repetition of the historical resurrection of Christ is at the centre of history. It's the resurrection of Christ which makes sense of the whole of history.

Why does he say that? Well in 20 and 22 he talks about the end of the curse of Adam. 23 and 24 that was the beginning of human history. 23 and 24 Christ is the end and ruler of human history. 23 and 24. 24 and then 25 and 26 and also later in 54 to 56 he talks about death as the last enemy because we die and the Lord has not yet returned.

This all happens in history. In 27 and 28 God will be all in all as the end of history. So without the resurrection history makes no sense.

And finally of course he makes the point that without the resurrection morality makes no sense. Let us eat and drink and for tomorrow we die which is actually a quote from Isaiah 22 13.

[23:24] But again is what many Greek philosophers said. The Epicureans said essentially that there is no resurrection so only pleasure now matters.

Enlightened philosophers tried to talk about natural laws the basis of morality but history has proved them wrong. We just drift slowly into selfishness and self interest.

The best we get group interest and a lot of competing groups. My opinion becomes Lord. I worship my own opinion because I have nowhere else to look.

so then Paul moves on having said that without the theological arguments that without the resurrection the gospel makes no sense.

He then addresses a more sophisticated objection. Does the idea of resurrection actually have any meaning? Which is the real question in verse 35. What kind of resurrection is it?

[24:35] I say I use the word ontology to discuss this. I just can't think of a better word. It's not a word in common conversation I realise but it is actually the best word to describe this.

Ontology is the study of being. It discusses the sense in which things can be said to exist. And a common ontological mistake is to confuse what something is with what it is physically made of. There's an example in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. I think it's Edmund says in my world stars are made of hot hydrogen and actually the star he's met says that's not what they're made of. That's not what they are. It's just what they're made of. A car is made of plastic and metal. That's hardly an adequate description of what a car is.

Think about the Bible. The Bible was originally written as a handwritten scroll. You can go and see some of it in the British Museum. Not the original but some fairly early copies.

[25:40] So that's a Bible. This is a Bible, a printed word. It became possible with the mention of the printing press. But actually this is a Bible too.

you won't be able to see it but that's the Bible there. It has mere electronic existence.

I could I suppose, I don't have a copy myself but you can buy an audio book. I think it's Peter used to reading the Bible out loud as an audio book. So this Bible can exist in different forms but it's still the same thing, it's still the same Bible.

What it's made of is not really the crucial question. And yet you get this so often written as an objection nowadays, raised as an objection nowadays as it was then.

People say that the human spirit can't really exist because it's just made of bone and flesh and blood. That's not what it is, it's what it's made of.

[26:54] So how of course on the other hand the Bible or whatever it is we're talking about must be expressed in some physical form unless we're going to go to the platonic route of a world of ideals which maybe some of the Greeks at the time may have thought.

That things like straight lines and perfect spheres exist in some platonic abstract world of ideas and what we live on this world is only approximations to the truth.

But nowadays we don't tend to think that way. Platonism devalues the physical. But things do have a physical instantiation, they do exist in physical form, this Bible has to exist in some physical form. So instead Paul discusses the concept of a body and he makes two points. Firstly he makes the point that the seed and the plant are essentially the same entity but in a different physical form. This is 36 to 38. You plant the seed to get the plant and as we know nowadays of course the plant seed and the plant have the same DNA.

[28:24] The entity in a sense exists in the same it's essentially the same thing but exists in a different form. Secondly he makes the point that different kinds of body can exist in the same universe.

he says this in 39 to 41. Now at first enlightenment thought might have queried that. Is the body of humans and animals and fish really that difficult, different?

In fact actually Paul does go in to discuss this a bit later. But then he talks about heavenly bodies and of course in enlightenment physics we would have thought that the stars exist the same stuff as things in this world but of course they don't.

Stars are made of ionized plasma, hot ionized plasma. It's a different physical form, different physical material to what's in it, the bodies that exist on the world here.

And of course now the physicists tell us that most of the universe is made up of something called dark matter which we have no idea of the physical properties of at all. So yes there are different sorts of body that can coexist in the same physical universe.

[29:45] So to answer the original question to answer the same physical original question what kind of body will the resurrected have?

It's the question that his skeptics are asked in 42 to 50 and you could expand that a bit. I mean actually why would we want to be resurrected given the problems and limitations of our current bodies?

Resurrection of course is not just reanimation. Lazarus was reanimated but that's not the resurrection that he's talking about. Jesus' own body wasn't destroyed it was resurrected intact but for most of us that's not true.

As Job wrote after my sin has been destroyed yet in my flesh will I see God. What are those whose bodies have been destroyed by fire or eaten by animals or even eaten by cannibals for that matter? Are they without hope? In any case the chemicals of our bodies have probably been used by many people over the centuries and by many plants and animals as well.

[31:05] Like it says in the song an elkly born by a tat. If you're buried the worms will eat you and the ducks will eat the worms and you'll eat the ducks so you will have eaten granny. Who do these molecules belong to?

What are the toenails cut off? Are they going to be resurrected too? But Paul this is all just woolly thinking.

The key concept he raises is that of a body, a Greek soma. What exactly is a body? What is its ontology? What's the nature of its being? Is what he's really asking here.

And Paul's argument here is actually quite subtle. A body is a solid thing which constitutes the physical God given existence of an object. That's what he says in verse 38 essentially.

But nevertheless like our electronic Bibles a body can exist in different forms and yet still with the same thing. A body can be transformed, changed from one form to another by some process like the seed becoming a plant and yet it retains its essential nature.

[32:20] nature. And there are actually three overlapping ideas here. First of all as we already said he makes the point that a seed is transformed to a plant.

The death i.e. the burying of the seed is what initiates the transformation into the plant which is of course a much more spectacular thing to look at than the seed. The second idea in verses 44 to 50 I think is a bit harder to grasp part of the problems of translation.

The passage quoted is Genesis 2 7 where it says that God breathed into Adam and he became a living soul. But actually what it actually says in Genesis 2 7 is that he became a nefesh which is literally a creature that breathes.

God breathed into Adam and he became a creature that breathes. That's what it actually says.

Other creatures in this world which breathe can sometimes describe as a nefesh in history.

So God's image which is what of course the scripture is really talking about was embodied in a body that shares much in common with the other breathing creatures of the natural world.

[33:38] It's a body as Paul says made of dust in verses 47 and 48. It doesn't even translate well into Greek. It becomes a play in the word psyche.

which means both which means soul and pneuma which means both breath and spirit.

What's happened here? pneuma means both breath and spirit.

spirit. So what's the point Paul's making here? We share the divine image that was found in Adam, verse 49, but it became defaced.

And in any case, even if that hadn't happened, the body is certainly made of dust. not really a body suited for eternal life.

[34:52] The image of God found in Christ took on this dust body in the man Jesus, but it progresses through his death to a resurrected body. So Jesus' body becomes the prototype of the firstborn, to use the scriptures language, for a body more suited to the spiritual kingdom.

The point he's making is that the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable. So there has to be a transformation of our bodies, and yet it still remains essentially the same thing.

It's the point that Paul is making, of course. And then having talked about the kingdom, he picks up the kingdom theme. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, verse 50.

If you're invited to the coronation, my invite seems to have got lost in the post, but if you've been invited to the coronation, don't turn up in your old gardening clothes, because they won't let you in. You have to be suitably dressed. You have to arrive suitably dressed. We need a change of clothes, which is the transformation that Paul talks about in 52 and verses 52 and 54.

[35:59] The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, with garments suitable for the spiritual realm, for the spiritual kingdom. Okay, but now maybe you're left feeding this is all a bit strange, like super spiritual.

So Paul grounds us once again in space and time. Verses 52 to 55. Just as Jesus' resurrection took place in history, so our change will happen in history, not in some bizarre spiritual parallel universe, but in the history of this universe.

Jesus' resurrection really happened. It's the evidence that it's not all fantasy.

Abandon that and as Paul understood and as we can see, Christianity makes no sense at all. even without the fall, it seems that Adam would need to be transformed, but it was sin, of course, that made this transformation painful and dangerous.

Verse 55. Okay, Paul, I guess I follow your argument, but still, it's all a bit weird, isn't it?

[37:22] Do we really want our gospel to talk about the resurrection? Because there's always going to be people who are going to sneer at it. Wouldn't it be better just to push it one to one side and keep quiet on it, about it, and get on with our daily discipleship?

Absolutely not, says Paul. You've missed the point altogether if you say that. It's this doctrine of the resurrection, this fact of the resurrection, that makes discipleship worthwhile.

Unless God brings every deed into judgment, then life is utterly meaningless, as Ecclesiastes explains at great length. I love Ecclesiastes, as I've said recently. Meaningless, meaningless, it's all meaningless under the sun. Unless God brings every deed into judgment, it's all utterly meaningless. But it's not meaningless, because Christ has been raised. And every action has meaning because Christ has been raised. Whether it's doing your washing up or sending a rocket to Mars, every action has meaning when Christ has been raised.

[38:34] Christ, and yet in the kingdom no evil can be brought in. The wealth of the nations will be brought in, but nothing evil will enter it. That's what Revelation says. Life is not meaningless because Christ has been raised. And so our work is not in vain, verse 58. So don't ignore it, brothers and sisters. Crow about it. That's what Paul is saying. Crows make a lot of noise to wake people up. Cockles make a lot of noise to wake people up. I don't know whether the crow means about crows or cockles, but either way, wake people up with this doctrine. Don't ignore it. And the section really from verses 50 to 58 is the climax of this letter, although it's not the end of it. He finishes always with some personal matters. So there's actually one more transformation or one more way to talk about resurrection that we find in verses 55 to 57, where he's quoting Hosea 13 verse 14.

[39:46] That transformation is the victory of death to the victory of over death. The whole history has changed from the victory of death, which we found in Adam, to the victory over death, which we find in Christ.

So this is grounds for thanksgiving, not embarrassment. We shall all be changed or clothed in verse 54. We're told that we will all inherit life. All the problems and questions and confusions and defeats that the Corinthians and ourselves suffer will in the end be swallowed up in the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ. So I can't think of a better way to end this talk than to repeat what Paul himself says at the end of this section, verses 15 to verse 58. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. So as I say, it's a long and complicated passage, but that's the conclusion. That our labor is not in vain. Stand firm, brothers and sisters. So let's sing again.

[41:08] I'm going to say.