

What if Jesus did not rise?

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[0:00] Mobile phone provider offered me some free mini eggs.! I showed my code to one of the members of staff and they said, can't take it.

Too many codes have been claimed. The catch was I'd have to be one of the first 10,000 people to have gone in to claim the free mini eggs and apparently it was far too late.

They do say in life, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. And this felt like that for me.

Today, as we celebrate the resurrection, perhaps we wonder, is it too good to be true?

Resurrection feels quite unbelievable, doesn't it? We know that people just don't rise from the dead.

But this morning, we were helped to think of how we can trust that Jesus' resurrection is true.

We can believe that Jesus really did die. He really was buried and he really did rise again. We

heard about how there are witnesses to the resurrection.

[1:45] Over 500 witnesses, Paul says, at one time. And many were still alive that Paul wrote to you. To find out if these things were true, the Corinthians could go and ask them.

And if they were saying, no, we didn't, then Paul's argument would quickly fall.

We've thought about how it's trustworthy. But it's good to ask questions. It's good to make sure that we're certain of the things that we say are true.

And Paul wants to make sure the Corinthians are certain of the truth of the resurrection. Without the resurrection, that there would be no good news for them.

Why does he write this? Why does he write this chapter at the end of 1 Corinthians? Well, they're a church that are in a bit of a mess.

[2:54] A bit of a sorry state. Divided about all sorts of things.

Particularly secondary issues. Not so much gospel issues. But finally, after he's dealt with lots of the issues in the church, He gets to the gospel.

The important thing. The gospel which unites them together as believers. And he wants them to be very, very clear on this. There's many things that they could divide over.

But don't forget the gospel. You need to be really clear on this. I don't know if you've ever seen this sort of illustration.

About getting the big rocks in. So if you had some sand. Little stuff. And then some little rocks. Pebbles. And then some big rocks.

And tried to get them in a jar. And you put the sand in first. And then the little rocks. And then tried to put the big rocks in. You would struggle to get them in. But if you put the big rocks in first.

[3:57] Everything else can fit in. And that's sort of what Paul really wants to do with the Corinthians here. Put the big rocks in. Make sure you're clear on the big things.

That Jesus did die. That he was buried. And he really did rise again. And he wants them to be clear on this. Because there are some in the church that were saying there is no resurrection.

There were some in the church that said, yeah, Jesus died. He was buried. But there was no resurrection. They got rid of that. That's what Paul tells us in verse 12.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead. How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? After all, it sounds too good to be true.

People don't rise from the dead. And so Paul wants to play with this question for these next few verses that we're looking at. It feels like a rather clever way of sort of logically working your way through an argument.

[5:13] And as he does show, as he does work his way through this, he sort of shows the resurrection really is a vital big rock.

So let's work with Paul here. Let's follow his questions and see what we find. So first of all, if Christ has not been raised, then we won't be raised either.

If that first Easter Sunday that the women got to the tomb and put the spices on Jesus' body and then job done, stone rolled back over, left the tomb.

That would be tragic. Jesus would have been a liar. We've seen in Mark's gospel how he said three times in the gospel, I will die, but three days later, on the third day, I will rise again.

Not only that, but the disciples, they would have wasted three years of their life. They gave up so much for following Jesus.

[6:29] It would have been a waste of time if he just stayed in that tomb. And everyone who dies would never know a saviour who they can trust to bring them back to new and everlasting life.

There would be no hope among Christians. That's what Paul's saying. Let's read some of the verses. So verse 13. Paul says, If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

So if people were right in Corinth, if Christians didn't rise again in the future, then it's because Christ has never been raised.

We have no hope beyond the grave. Taking the Lord's Supper like we're doing this evening would be just a very simple memorial to a man that died.

It would be like the 11th of November when we wear poppies and remember those who have gone before, who have fought bravely for us, done extraordinary things, extraordinary sacrifices.

[7:33] But we don't get to that day and think they're all going to come back. If Jesus was not raised, that there would be no hope.

No hope of any future resurrection. So what we're doing here would be utterly pointless.

Secondly, Paul says, If Christ was not raised, our preaching and our faith would be pointless. So verse 14, he says that, If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. I would be out of a job. Phil would have wasted 50 years of ministry. Going out to do book table on London Road, handing out those flyers, that would have been a waste of time on Thursday. Running meal with a meaning, as we did again a few weeks ago, that would be a waste of time. Producing Easter flyers and posters and putting ads in local magazines, that would be a waste of our time, our money, our energy.

[8:52] So would our faith. Being here this evening would be a waste of our time. Reading the Bible day by day, it would be a waste of time.

Have no point to it if Christ was not raised. Our faith would have no solid ground to be built on. We'd be like that foolish builder that we reminded ourselves of this morning.

Building our life on dodgy foundations. Because we'd be trusting in a dead man. And that would have been, we've believed liars, verse 15.

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God. That's Paul saying, we would have been false witnesses about God, about the one we testify who raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. It'd be the biggest con in history. Thirdly, if Christ was not raised, our sins would not be forgiven.

[10:12] Our sins would not be forgiven. Verse 16. For if the dead are not raised, and Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.

You are still in your sins. Not only would our gatherings like this be pointless, but the biggest problem that all of us have had since the beginning of time, since Adam and Eve ate that fruit in the garden, our biggest problem of our sin, which cuts us away from God, that would have not been dealt with.

Good attempts by Jesus on Good Friday, but no goods. And because of our sin, we're subject to death and decay.

Sin's that deadly disease. And we know that the punishment for sin is an eternity without God, under his judgment, under his wrath, remaining under the curse of sin.

No hope. If Christ was never raised, we'd have no savior. We'd have nothing to sing about.

[11:36] And it gets worse. Verse 18. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. Those who have gone before us in the church, who we've known to put their faith in Christ, if Jesus was not being raised, they'd be lost.

There'd be no hope at all at a Christian funeral. Our grieving would be like the rest of the world, so sad and hopeless.

And finally, if Christ had not been raised, people should pity us. See that in verse 19. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we're of all people most to be pitied.

If we only hope in this dead man, knowing that there is nothing else because he remained dead, people can pity us.

They can say, you poor Christian people. We feel so sorry for you. You've been lied to. What you're doing is pointless.

[12:40] People can pity us. You believe those empty and hollow stories of that Jesus? Do we get Paul's point here?

Remove the resurrection, and it's like removing that base of the Jenga tower. It all topples over. The Christian faith topples over without the resurrection.

Christianity just cannot stand if it is only based on Jesus' death, death and burial. But this morning we have seen reliable truths.

The reliable truths of verse 3 and 4. For what I have received, 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 again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

And he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. So let's play again with some of Paul's statements.

[13:57] Let's reverse them round, and as we do so, we're going to see some wonderful treasure and find that we are the most blessed people.

So let's reverse it round. Firstly, Christ has been raised, and so will you.

Verse 13. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. But if there is resurrection of the dead, then Christ has been raised.

Because Christ has been raised, so will we. The sting of death gone.

Because Christ has been raised, we find he has transformed our lives, and we build our lives upon solid truths that don't just last for this life, but on for eternity.

[14:57] No more do we need to look at death and feel the uncertainty and fear. We will be raised, raised with Christ.

We can be confident of that because history shows us there is an empty tomb. History shows us that Jesus was laid in a grave, but then up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph, over his face.

Verse 52. Look at what we're looking for with T. Actually 51. 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 will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

For the perishable must clothe itself with imperishable, and the immortal with immortality. Wonderful things we have to look forward to.

[16:11] because of that first Easter Sunday, which really does change everything.

We can look forward to explore more of those verses over the next few weeks. We'll see exciting things.

But know this, Christ has been raised, and so will you. In the book, *The Case for Easter*, by Lee Strobel, who investigates whether he can believe the resurrection, he finds out all sorts of wonderful facts.

It's worth reading through, if you haven't already. And in the book, he sort of interviews lots of people who help him with his questions.

And he meets a guy in one of the chapters, a theologian, who spends his life writing and thinking about the resurrection. He's called Gary Habermas.

[17:25] And he had a really good conversation with him. And at the end, this is what happened in that conversation. Habermas rubbed his graying beard.

The quick fire cadence and the debater's edge to his voice were gone. No more quoting scholars. No more citing of scripture. No more building a case.

I had asked about the importance of the resurrection. And he decided to take a risk by describing what happened in 1995 when his wife, Debbie, slowly died of stomach cancer.

Caught off guard by the tenderness of the moment, all I could do was listen. I sat on our porch, he began, looking off to the side at nothing in particular.

He sighed deeply. Then went on. My wife was upstairs dying, except for a few weeks. She was home through it all.

[18:30] It was an awful time. This was the worst thing that could possibly happen to me. He turned and looked straight at me, but do you know what was amazing? My students would call me, not just one, but several of them, and say, at a time like this, aren't you glad about the resurrection?

Remember, this is a man who spent his life thinking about the resurrection, writing about it. Aren't you glad about the resurrection? As sober as those circumstances were, I had to smile for two reasons.

First, my students were trying to cheer me up with my own teaching, and second, it worked. As I would sit there, I'd picture Job, who went through all that terrible stuff, and questioned God. But then God turned the tables and asked him a few questions. I knew if God were to come to me, I'd ask only one question.

Lord, why is Debbie up there in bed dying? And I think God would respond by asking gently this one question, Gary, did I raise my son from the dead?

[19:54] I'd say, come on, Lord, I've written seven books on that topic. Of course, you raised your son from the dead. But I want to know about Debbie. I think he'd keep coming back to the same question.

Did I raise my son from the dead? Isn't that extraordinary? The hope that we can have in life and in death.

He went on and said, it was a horribly emotional time for me, but I couldn't get around the fact that the resurrection is the answer for her suffering. I still worried. I still wondered what I'd do raising four kids alone, but there wasn't a time when the truth of the resurrection didn't comfort me.

That's the difference, that knowing Christ has been raised, so will we, can make to us even in those hardest days. Secondly, Christ has been raised, and so we have a firm faith.

Verse 14, and if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found out to be false witnesses about God.

[21:17] But because Jesus has been raised, our preaching is not useless, and neither is our faith.

More than that, we're found to be true witnesses about God. Because Jesus rose, what we're doing together this evening is not useless.

We're hearing the word of life. And particularly, that preaching in view, I think, is speaking the gospel to people, which means that our evangelism isn't useless.

The book table on Thursday was not useless. We offer to the world something they cannot get anywhere else, not from a doctor, not from a psychiatrist, not from social media.

No, they cannot get it from anywhere else. We offer to the world certain solid hope in life and death. When we're in the midst of that worldwide pandemic, efforts were made to discover a vaccine in order to protect the world against COVID, in order to bring an end to restrictions.

[22:38] But imagine if those scientists kept that secret, kept that in the lab, too good for us to know about, too good for us to receive.

Then it would have been an even harder time, an even longer time. And with the gospel, you want to keep this as a secret, a hope that we have in life and death, the security we can know forever.

Telling others of the Lord Jesus, inviting them to church, inviting them to evangelistic things, it's not a waste of time. We can tell people with great confidence.

And not only that, but we ourselves find that we are building our lives on firm and solid truths. And if we ourselves didn't know this, then when those storms of life come, we'd have no firm foundation, would we?

Our faith would be futile, it would be in vain. So we hold on to the resurrection. We rejoice in it.
[23:58] We must make sure that this big rock of resurrection is in place and we don't move from it. Christ has been raised and that is a sure ground for our faith.

Thirdly, Christ has been raised and so our sins are forgiven. verse 17.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins. But Christ has been raised, your faith is not futile and you are no longer in your sins.

Your sin is no longer where your identity is. Sin, that incurable, deadly disease that we're trapped by have been forgiven because of the Lord Jesus, because his sacrifice for sins was accepted.

Romans 4, 25, he was delivered over to death for our sins and he was raised to life for our justification. That resurrection, that sacrifice, that's been accepted.

[25:13] It's full and sufficient for all time. No more, no other lamb needed. Jesus has done enough. We see that in the resurrection.

As we've been seeing on Sundays, Sunday mornings recently, we have a new relationship with sin and it's all because of this work of the Lord Jesus. It's all because we're united to Christ in his death and his resurrection which many of us saw a picture of in that baptism this morning.

We often focus rightly on the cross, on the sacrifice that Jesus made but let's never forget we're resurrection people. It would be futile without the resurrection.

resurrection. And it's why we can rejoice as we take this meal this evening. We remember the sobering events of Good Friday, the agonies of Calvary but we rejoice too because that wasn't the end, because his body which died in our place was risen again.

And finally, because Christ has been raised we don't need to be pitied. Verse 19, if only for this life we have hope in Christ we're of all people most to be pitied.

[26:55] but actually we have hope in Christ in this life and for the next and so we don't need your pity.

No pity, no, oh bless you for believing that lies. These are wonderful truths. Far from pity.

We're the most blessed people on earth. the resurrection is too good to be true if it didn't happen but we've reminded ourselves how true how certain they are.

We sometimes sing the line from that hymn solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's children know and hopefully as we've we've looked to these verses we see that we indeed have solid joys and lasting treasures.

This passage is like opening up a treasure chest of wonderful treasure that we find because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus has been raised we too will be raised.

[28:12] Because Jesus has been raised the preaching of the gospel is not a waste of breath. It's vital. We're offering life to a dying world. results. Because Jesus has been raised our faith is firm it's built on a solid rock.

It's built on the solid truths of the Son of God who's turned this world upside down. Because Jesus has been raised we're no longer trapped by sin but in Jesus we live in the freedom that he brings. Because Jesus has been raised we're not to be pitied for we've found the most wonderful treasure the most amazing blessing of life in the resurrected Son of God's.

Before we come to the Lord's Supper we're going to sing these trees together. I've never noticed this hymn before but it seems appropriate one to sing so hopefully we know the tune roughly because it picks up exactly on the words that we've sung.

If Christ has not been raised from death our faith would be in vain. So half the verse is sort of what Paul wrote originally and then the other half is the truths that we can then rest in because we know the answers.

[29:36] Phil do we know the tune for this? Yeah I think so. I'm just going to take this to face we don't. Fab.