

# Of First Importance - The Resurrection

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Preacher: The Rt. Rev. Mike Hill

[ 0 : 00 ] Why don't we pray together? Our gracious Father, we pray that as we open your word, you would illuminate our minds and our hearts.

And Father, we pray that we may live in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. And we pray these things in his name.

Amen. And talking of things that, people missing things that are important, I love that story that was in the newspapers just this last week of this very kindly lady who thought she saw a hedgehog at the roadside, picked it up, put it in a box and gave it some milk, although it wasn't in a mood to drink milk apparently.

And she took it to the vet. The vet took it out of the box only to discover that actually it wasn't a hedgehog, it was the bobble of somebody's bobble hat she picked up and put in a box.

We know that, and as I said, sometimes it's just trivial stuff that we miss that's important. But sometimes things are really important.

[ 1 : 23 ] And I want to suggest to you today that maybe the important, the most important fact in the whole of Scripture, we may not see as important as in fact it is.

In 1 Corinthians 15, we have one of the earliest texts in the New Testament. It was written pretty, within 20 years very likely, of Jesus' ascension into heaven.

And what the verses we read talked to us about is what the theologian C.H. Dodd called the kerygma.

That is the first expression of actually what the gospel, what the good news of Jesus Christ actually is. And you can read it there, and I shall read some of it to you now.

So, this is really important. So, Paul writes this, for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance.

[ 2 : 36 ] This, for believers, is not, you know, some kind of random set of verses that we might casually like to kind of gently take note of.

No, this is of first importance, and it was handed down. And in the church today, we're a little less clear as to what that might look like.

What are the truths that have been handed down to us? Well, somebody asked me that question, I would say, the truths are included here in 1 Corinthians 15, the kerygma.

I received what I passed on to you as first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Christ died for my sin and for your sin.

According to scripture, there is nothing that you could do that God couldn't forgive apart from the idea of sinning against the Holy Spirit.

[ 3 : 33 ] That is refusing to accept what God has shown to be true. Sometimes I think, as somebody who's been brought up in and around evangelical churches, we rather treat the resurrection as if it was just a kind of nice end to a rather promising story.

We don't get that the resurrection is absolutely basic to the whole gospel, the whole good news about Jesus Christ.

Tony Campolo wrote a book some years ago. It was called *It's Friday and Sunday's Coming*. And his point was that too often we Christians, particularly if I may say so, Christians who regard themselves as biblical Christians, live in the shadow of the cross rather than the light of the resurrection.

That was Campolo's very point. And so, I need to ask you this morning, do you live the risen life or do you live something less than that?

Let me say that again. Do you live the risen life or do you live something less? Say more about this when I come to the conclusion of what I want to say to you this morning.

[ 5 : 08 ] But what the resurrection means is we have the hope not just of heaven and that would be a promise enough, wouldn't it? But we have the promise that through the resurrection we may never lose hope that we might rise above our problems in this life in order that we might live the risen life.

So I want to say to you three things this morning about this passage. Firstly, the resurrection is fundamental to our confession of the Christian faith and our salvation.

In Romans chapter 10 and verse 9 we read this. If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

It's that simple but it's that profound. If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

That must be either the most stupendous lie ever written or the most important truth ever written.

Interesting that Paul says there believe in your heart and many of us in the 21st century actually think that it would be more important that we would believe in our heads.

[ 6 : 51 ] But of course within Judaism round about the time Jesus was around and before the heart was thought not just to be the seat of the emotions incidentally together with the bowels but also the seat of our intellect.

So when Paul says believe in your heart he's appealing not only to what we feel but to what we think. If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead.

One of the things that's fascinated me is that people who are far smarter than me and have much more forensic minds than I do have sat down to disprove the resurrection of Christ the most famous of which was a guy called Frank Morrison.

Frank Morrison was a silk a queen's counselor a barrister who decided he would write a book that would charter without any doubts that Jesus never rose from the dead.

ended up believing when he looked at the evidence that Jesus is alive. Lee Strobel atheist legal correspondent of the Chicago Tribune he disbelieved everything and was very aggressive about his hatred of the Bible till his wife Leslie started to go to church and eventually gave her life to Christ and Lee noticed such a change in his wife that he thought he better go along to the same church and find out what was happening and there he gave his life to Christ and is now a Christian apologist his book The Case for Christ is one of the most significant books you could read.

[ 9 : 00 ] Listen if if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead if he wasn't raised from the dead would we be here today?

Would we be here even if in our own minds we're a little shaky about did this really happen? Would we be here today if the truth that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 had not been done for us?

Let me remind you of those words for what I received I passed on to you as of first importance. I thank God for the saints in the church I don't just mean those who appear in stained glass windows St. Paul as far as St. Paul is concerned if you're a disciple of Jesus Christ you are a saint you're a saint not sure I'd want to see any stained glass that you appeared in but you're a saint and I'm grateful that before me went men and women who trusted Christ often in the most adverse conditions they remained faithful to God and received his promise some of the finest minds in human history and let me just say to you that you may have read that Richard Dawkins now that well-known Oxford atheist is now reported that he describes himself as a cultural

Christian cultural Christian what he thinks is right it's just I mean I find this harder to believe than I find the resurrection to be honest but he believes that cultural Christianity what he means by that is he'd be horrified if all our cathedrals and churches disappeared but he's very glad that Christian attendance in churches is declining in numbers you see that won't do will it you see you either believe the resurrection or all you're doing is following a kind of ethic or trying your best to follow an ethical code if the resurrection isn't true there is no hope for us I'm glad that the saints handed on what was of first importance throughout history to people like us if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved could Jesus be Lord without the resurrection what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord is not just to sing a hymn about it or say a prayer about it what it means is to bring your life under the lordship of Jesus Christ to take yourself off the throne of your existence and put Christ there that he may be your friend may be your guide and will be your saviour but will be your Lord on Easter Easter tide we celebrate that Jesus is alive if there were no resurrection then I suspect that Jesus would be just registered in history as somebody who generally did good people like a bit like Nelson Mandela or Gandhi and of course you can go and see their graves today without the resurrection every claim

that Jesus made about himself would be invalidated confess with your mouth  
[ 12 : 56 ] Jesus is Lord I wonder if there are people in church this morning who want a saviour they want to be saved from the consequences of their sin but aren't quite so sure whether they want Jesus as Lord maybe today in this church the Holy Spirit might whisper to you that you might confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead second thing I want to say to you is and one of my home group reminded me of this in a text on Easter morning the resurrection changes everything as I've said without the resurrection the story of Jesus would just be a story that ended up going no place 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 14 the great apostle writes these words if Christ is not raised from the dead we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe it's hard to believe isn't it that Paul himself could ever think of a circumstance where he wouldn't have anything to say if Christ is not raised from the dead we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe the resurrection changes everything the apostles ministry that started the whole movement of

Christianity after the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus that whole movement would just have collapsed when you look in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 verse 24 very early on chapter 3 verse 15 chapter 4 verse 10 chapter 15 verse 31 every time one of the apostles addresses a crowd of people they're very keen to affirm Jesus is raised from the dead the passage we had read this morning we're reminded that 500 people at one time saw Jesus historians of the church Josephus Eusebius Irenaeus people like this all reference the physical resurrection of Jesus the resurrection changes everything it takes our darkness and transforms it into light it takes my hopelessness and turns it into hope it takes my problems and doesn't necessarily eradicate them but helps me to rise above them without the resurrection people today and people throughout history would just have been duped by a funny idea let me say from my own point of view I remember George Carey told me one day about a man called Willie Sutton who was a famous bank robber in the USA and somebody said to him he was being arrested for an armed robbery for the umpteenth time and he's going to a police car and the journalists are there with those big flash gun cameras that they used to have back in the 1920s somebody shouted Mr. Sutton why do you keep robbing banks Willie Sutton just said because that's where the money is why am I a Christian because I believe that's where truth is and because I believe the only way I can make sense of this mess that we've created in this world is through faith in Jesus Christ the only hope I can have in the face of these terrible problems that we have right now overwhelming problems problems that a lot of people are sitting down in despair over saying we have no way of solving this I believe faith in Jesus Christ will see us home not just in when we die but in this life as well the final thing I need to say to you is the resurrection means hope sometimes Christians in our past have made the Christian faith sound like it to use that phrase pie in the sky when you die of course the resurrection has an impact on our physical death it means that when you die you will not face a brick wall but you will face a gateway into something better something so better you can't begin to imagine it there is no analogy no allegory that human being can tell which describe exactly what it will be like to be in the presence of God for eternity if you read the book of revelation through especially the chapters four to the end you will read there of a writer who is desperate to try and find the right kind of language to describe the realities of God but of course he fails because he has a finite mind and God is infinite night look

[ 19 : 08 ] I don't want anybody to leave this church this morning without understanding how significant how important how basic how fundamental the resurrection is to why we're here to why in a few moments time we'll celebrate the Holy Communion together but of course the resurrection isn't just hope that when we die we will be received into heaven it's also about spiritual death the Bible teaches us that without God as revealed in Jesus Christ in our lives we are spiritually dead in Ephesians Paul writes about this chapter 2 in the first verses of chapter 2 Paul writes for this very very graphically when he talks about what we were like before we knew Christ just listen to this it's not my idea this is

Paul writing as for you as for you you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient all of us lived among them says Paul at one time gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath what the gospel will do for you is it will save you not only from your own sin but it will save you from the wrath of God try and persuade me that that is not important I

don't know what you make of the resurrection I've tried to make the case to you this morning that it is the most significant truth in human history maybe some of you struggle with it because you are intellectually proud or you're ignorant

Paul says we need to believe in our hearts we need to trust God and if you want a working definition of faith I think faith is taking God at his word and then living as though you believe it you believe that word I hope today there may be those of you who've not quite envisioned the significance and importance of the resurrection might think again that those of you who are in grave doubt as to whether or not God's salvation is yours might think again as Paul said to end that reading we had an amazing statement which surely breathes hope to all us having meditated on the kerygma the gospel

Paul then says by the grace of God by the grace of God I am what I am can you say that my friend wouldn't you love to say that by the grace of God not by my effort not by my confusion not by my intellectual superiority and pride but by the grace of God I am what I am may that grace this morning be poured out into your hearts that you may know that Jesus is alive and he's got a plan for your life and that he loves you and that he longs to see that plan fulfilled in you and through you why don't we pray Lord I pray for anybody in the house this morning who probably fits the description of cultural

Christian rather than faithful disciple and Lord I ask that in your grace and your mercy and in the power of your spirit their eyes might be opened that they may behold you the risen Jesus Father I pray for anyone in the house who feels bound down by the problems that they experience in their lives Lord may the truth of the resurrection touch their hearts Lord that they might rise above their problems and Lord we ask that as your people you would help us not just to enjoy the shadow of your cross but Lord to rejoice in the light of your resurrection so

[ 24 : 50 ] Father would you please come this morning surprise us by your presence and Lord by your word and we pray these things in Jesus name and the people who agreed said together Amen