

Christ Has Risen!

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Preacher: David Parker

[0 : 00] If you can turn again back to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15. And we might be roving around parts of this chapter, but I think chapter 15, verse 12 is a good text just to hang this sermon on, but if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

I guess for many people today, the idea of the resurrection comes across to them as a fairy story, a myth.

And yet billions, notice what I said, billions of Christians across our world will have been and perhaps still are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because I don't know if you know, but nearly a third of the world population are deemed Christian. Indeed, probably something like four-fifths of the world population have some kind of belief in the supernatural.

But as I say, Western culture, it might be the case that for many of those people, it sounds a bit like a fairy story, a myth.

[1 : 46] So, for those of us who believe and place our hope in the resurrection of Jesus, are we to be pitied? Paul said somewhere, I think, in the New Testament, always be ready to give a reason for the hope that you have.

If somebody out in Crow Road or Dumbarton Road there, here in Partick, asked you, what's your reason for this hope that you apparently have that Jesus rose from the dead?

In Christianity, we will meet different objections.

I've come across several objections over my lifetime in living as a Christian.

For example, one objection is that no matter what argument you try to bring to believers, they will always fall back on their faith.

[3 : 07] No amount of evidence can possibly count against it. As we think this Easter of the resurrection, I want to do two things.

The first thing I want to talk about, I'm calling resurrection matters. And the word matters there has got a double edge to it.

It really does matter because it's important. And what are the kind of things that we can say about the resurrection? And the second thing that I want to explore is reasons for the resurrection.

When we go back here to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 12 there, I don't know if the first time you read that, was there any surprise for you?

And notice how Paul is debating or arguing here. He's not arguing from the point of view and saying, Jesus Christ has risen, therefore there must be a resurrection of the dead.

[4 : 26] He's actually saying, if you, if, notice he uses the word if, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ hasn't risen.

In other words, he's proposing something, he's putting forward a conditional proposition, and he's accepting that if were that proposition to be true, could it be shown to be true, it would follow logically that Christ could never have risen from the dead.

For if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? Do you not know what you're saying?

If I could just explain this, that at the time of Jesus, there was a belief among many people that there would be, in the end times, a resurrection of the dead.

Not everybody believed it. You know that from your own Bible, your New Testament. Sadducees didn't believe it, but Pharisees certainly believed it. And you remember when Jesus raised Lazarus, and Martha said to him, I know that he'll rise again in the last day.

[5 : 58] What you see stunned people is that that last day came with Jesus. And Paul goes on to say, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

So if that possibly were true, what I'm wanting to do here in using these statements of Paul, I'm wanting you to go away tonight recognizing the absolute necessity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I'm wanting you to go away to realize that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is indispensable for the existence of Christianity.

It's indispensable for your salvation and my salvation. Even, in other words, if Jesus had lived that life he lived and had died on the cross with no resurrection, Paul spells it out very, very vividly and very, very clearly.

What he's doing is he's taking that proposition and he's saying, here are the consequences that would flow from that proposition were it to be true.

[7 : 17] One, if it is the case that there's no resurrection, and you hear that today, people will say that, I don't believe there's any resurrection of the dead. When you die, that's it. And in Greek culture, and this church, remember, was populated by many that had been converted from that Greek culture.

You know, the ancient Greeks in their cosmology believed that matter was eternal. I'm not here to talk about any science thing, but I can tell you when the Big Bang Theory arrived, many Christians were jubilant and waving flags because it indicated that the universe had a date in time.

But here is Paul saying, some of you are saying there is no resurrection of the dead. Do you not understand that that would mean not even Christ has been raised?

Do you not understand Do you not understand that if that is the case, our preaching is useless? Because, you know what it tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, that the early missionaries of Christianity went about and here was their message, Jesus and the resurrection.

And therefore, Paul says, if there is no such a thing as the resurrection of the dead, one, Christ hasn't been raised, two, our preaching is useless, and three, so is your faith.

[8 : 52] Don't think that the resurrection is some sort of tag-on. Don't think that it is something that is, that's wonderful that that happened.

Of course, it's wonderful that that happened. It's utterly indispensable for biblical Christianity. more than that, says Paul, and I prefer the NIV, that's why I've got my NIV out here, Paul says, we are found to be false witnesses, liars, about God.

Notice how he puts it, and the other thing I want you to notice about the resurrection, every reference, far as I am aware, to the resurrection, tells us it's God who raised Christ.

Every reference tells us it's God who raised Christ from among the dead, and that's so important. That's always the phrase that's used, that Christ has been raised from the dead, and this is what makes this momentous.

And Paul, that is why Paul started his letter here, his chapter here at 15, by reminding them of the gospel that they had heard and received, and reminding them that Paul didn't invent this gospel, that Paul actually received this gospel from people that were closer to the time that Christ was still alive.

[10 : 30] What I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died. He really did die. He was a man, and he died.

No trickery, nothing phony, he died. And Paul says, therefore, if your proposition were to be true, we would be found to be liars, because we've been witnessing that God raised up Jesus Christ. And he also said that, and if Christ hasn't been raised, your faith is futile, you're still in your sins. Note that last phrase, you're still in your sins.

Because I know, and I'm not saying it's wrong, I know that we think of the death of Christ, and we think my sin, or the bliss of this glorious grace and all that.

It's Paul that's saying it, not me. If Christ hadn't been raised, you would still be in your sins. Why is that?

[11 : 41] Because the cross and the resurrection are two sides of a single coin. And they need each other.

If Jesus had not been raised, it would have pointed to that he was a martyr, that he was a good person, and that shame how he ended up.

if Christ had been raised, but hadn't gone a journey seeing that he was our sacrifice for sins, then that resurrection would have been a novel sort of event.

Use some other words, but just call it a novel event. it's the fact it is the Lamb of God, it's the fact that it is our sin bearer that has been raised that makes all the difference.

Because it is God stamping his approval on our Redeemer's work. God now, Paul is, Paul doesn't believe this proposition for a nanosecond, but he's trying to get them to see the crucial, critical importance of the resurrection.

[13 : 22] He's trying to get it across to them, if you deny the resurrection, in whatever way you deny it, you throw away the whole Christian edifice. that's why I said my first point is resurrection matters.

I want to go on to my second point now, reasons for faith. And the first reason is the empty tomb. now, obviously, the empty tomb, in and of itself, does not prove the resurrection. You'll know that in the end of Matthew's gospel, the Jewish priests got together and said, right, we'll be problem here. Apparently, the body of Jesus has disappeared. answered, what we'll do, I'll tell you what we could do, guys, give the soldiers some money and say to the soldiers that their disciples, his disciples came and stole the body away and we'll keep it all quiet, okay?

That's exactly what it tells us in the New Testament. In other words, there could be many reasons for an empty tomb, notwithstanding that I take on board what Nate shared with us today about the weight of the garments that his body was wrapped in.

[15 : 00] But the empty tomb is utterly essential, of course, to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ. Let's put it this way, if his body was still there, the game is up.

So, shall we say, the risen Christ presupposes the empty tomb? The record of the empty tomb is in all four Gospels.

Now, there's four accounts of Jesus in the New Testament called Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These people wrote their Gospels at different times and under different conditions, but every single one of them records the empty tomb.

Secondly, it was women who initially testified that the tomb was empty. You can read all of this yourself. You don't need to take my word for it. And, of course, women in Jesus' day didn't have any legal status in terms of testimony in a court of law.

There is not the slightest trace in any of the Gospels that the claim of the empty tomb was disputed. In other words, these priests didn't say, let's check this out, and there's his body there, and they disputed it.

[16 : 34] Nobody disputed it. Absolutely nobody. To silence the early preaching regarding Jesus and the resurrection, all that was needed was to produce the body.

If the body had been produced, the Easter faith would have been strangled at birth. History declares otherwise.

Otherwise, you know, the Bible tells us that you and I are in a kind of spiritual tomb, and that we need to be resurrected spiritually so that we can be brought back home to God.

The second reason, the disciples saw Christ, you heard what Paul said there? He said, he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, after that he appeared to more than five hundred people at the same time, most of whom are still living.

I said the empty tomb is not enough, and seeing Christ allied to the empty tomb is a robust piece of evidence.

[18 : 19] The empty tomb did not lead to any change in the disciples. In fact, when they heard about the empty tomb, they initially said of the women, honestly, you're talking nonsense.

They were not predisposed to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Remember the story of the two that were walking along the Emmaus road? And you can imagine them, I can imagine them, and they're walking along and they're saying, we had hoped that he was going to be the Messiah, and we had hoped that he was going to set up the kingdom.

Okay, they might have had a wrong idea about the Messiah, and a wrong idea about the kingdom that he was going to inaugurate, true enough, but nonetheless, there they are, dejected, defeated, and in despair.

Are these sightings of Jesus believable? And if we can just, you don't need to turn it up, I'll turn it up for you, in Luke chapter 24, verse 11, just what I said to you there, but they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

And in verse 21 of Luke 24, but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. We had hoped.

[20 : 16] They only came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus gradually and even with reticence. Remember Peter? Sorry, Thomas, the one that we know as doubting Thomas?

I will not believe unless I see him. Some of them even doubted. This fascinates me right up to the very end.

For example, in Matthew's gospel, at the very end of Matthew's gospel, then the disciples went to Galilee.

These are the closing remarks in Matthew's gospel. To the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

Eh? Say that again. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

[21 : 19] What am I saying? I'm saying that the account of those sightings bear the hallmark of truth, rather than collusion.

May I ask, have you seen Jesus? Not physically. have you seen this wonderful, triumphant Savior? Christianity is not primarily about being a member of a church. It's about coming to see the beauty, the loveliness, and the greatness of Jesus Christ.

Christ. So, the first two reasons, the empty tomb and the disciples seeing Jesus, as I said, go together, they are inseparable.

What about my third reason? That is the extraordinary transformation of the disciples. disciples? The empty tomb, the encounters with Jesus, and then the extraordinary transformation of the disciples.

[22 : 45] And the question that's being asked here is, what best explains the remarkable change and transformation in those disciples, bearing in mind, that they were in the grip of fear and despair?

We saw that, we had hoped. The question then becomes this, what made this little band of despairing, dejected, disbelieving disciples mutate into a fearless believing army of bold witnesses in the streets of Jerusalem?

what best explains this phenomenon, this transformation? There's a well-known Christian philosopher, I say well-known, but he's well-known to people who are interested in philosophy called Richard Swinburne.

And Richard Swinburne talks about probability in terms of knowledge, and he talks about explanatory force. That certain things, it's not like scientific empiricism or something like that, where proof is made up of a demonstration or sight or whatever it might be, but there's many, many other things that don't fall into that category.

So the phrase that Swinburne uses is explanatory force. What took those disciples, remember this, and all of this I'm not making up, you can read it yourself, were locked in a room for fear of the Jewish authorities?

[24 : 28] Dead scared. What made them get out of that locked room into the streets of Jerusalem to boldly proclaim, he is risen, he is risen?

You know, even those who question the resurrection, they accept that the disciples come to believe that Jesus had risen, they at least give them that.

They may not believe that he had, but they say, these guys definitely must have believed it. There's no other explanation that has the force to fit the facts. Surely the truth is, they had seen the risen Lord.

nothing short of such an encounter can do justice to the facts, the physical facts of the empty tomb, the belief they had seen Jesus Christ.

Surely this is the best explanation of their transformation. And remember this, the origin and the expansion of Christianity, even at the very beginning, was predicated upon Jesus and the resurrection.

[25 : 43] my final reason. When I say my final reason, we're scratching the surface. And all of these reasons can be debated and opposed. In fact, if there's anybody here who wants to speak to me about any of these reasons or make any comment or disagree, I'm very, very happy to be engaged in that kind of conversation.

But the fourth reason is the existence of the Christian church. this message of Jesus and the resurrection was proclaimed with great boldness and forthrightness.

If Jesus hadn't risen, if his body was still lying dead somewhere, why was it not discovered? God, why did someone not give the game up? Because had that happened, Christianity would never have been born.

Could it be that truth is stranger than fiction? could it be that he had indeed risen and has ascended to be with God the Father?

[27 : 07] Could it be that he is indeed the first fruits of a new redeemed humanity and world? I just want to pause on that one and say just a wee bit more about that.

Could it be that Jesus is the first fruits of a new redeemed humanity and world? Notice what Paul said in verse 20 of chapter 15.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. You know, this is spring. My wife and I like walking and as we walk around the fields and the nice places in Ayrshire that we walk around, we can see the buds coming through.

We can see the shoots. We can see the first fruits. What Paul is saying, yes, you thought that the resurrection of the dead was reserved only for the end time, but Jesus is the first fruits of this resurrection of the dead.

[28 : 23] the harvest is to come, especially on his return, and especially when he calls everyone, and especially his own, from that sleep of death to be with him, embodied to be with him forever and ever.

could it be that he'll come back one day to wind up this entombed world and complete and consummate his kingdom of redeemed humanity?

Could it be that he's making a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness? is there a better explanation of the known facts?

We've only explored some of those reasons to show that we are able to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

he is not here, he is risen. May our hearts rejoice in this glorious, indispensable truth.

[29 : 45] Amen.