

The Resurrection of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I'm going to start by just reading four of those verses again, not because I'm leaving the others out, but there's just four. Verse 1, now I remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand. Then verses 3 and 4, for I delivered to you of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

And then verse 11, whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

And there's been so much in this book of Corinthians, this letter to the Corinthians, that's been difficult. But when you read this, when you just read these first 11 verses of chapter 15 on its own, you think, brilliant, great, at last. Because all the way through this book in Corinthians, there's a lot of things that just aren't right. And finally, it feels at the start of verse 15 that we're through that and we're on to nicer things. But there's just something about this letter to the Corinthians that I say, it's just not right. Because there's a problem that's never too far away. And it's a book that's full of lots of but's. And before we get to this chapter 15, you have lots of but's, lots of things that just aren't right. You know, we've had things about how to worship correctly because of the mistakes that they were making. You have things about speaking in tongues and how to show love by having them interpreted to those who don't understand.

We have things about the Lord's Supper and the way it's been abused. There's passages earlier about idols, about relationships and how they've been going wrong and maybe bad behavior in relationships as well. So this chapter 15, it's preceded by a whole series of but's, as I've called them. There are a whole series of things that just have gone wrong or aren't right. And you know what? I don't mind admitting it kind of wears you down. You just go through this, especially Colin and Kirk have had to preach the bulk of this. It must wear them down because it just never seems to get to a stage where it's okay. It's just a continual grind. And the first 11 verses of this chapter 15 just isn't like that. It's different. The gospel fundamentals are restated and they're confirmed. And it says, verse 1, in which you stand. And then verse 11, whether it was then, whether then it was I, Paul, or they, the apostles, so we preach and so you believed. This just feels like we're getting somewhere, finally. And maybe, as I say that, your spirits are going up. You think you're going to be in for a slightly easier night tonight and you're getting more enthusiasm. Well, I'm going to wreck it for you right now because I'm going to read verse 12 and 13. Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And it's maybe a subjective view, and I think people older and wiser and more educated than me may feel may have a different view, but I think this is possibly the low point of the whole book of 1 Corinthians. Now, whoever who's taking the service next week will have to deal with verse 12 and 13. But if there's one thing I do want to get across about what I'm doing tonight is that the problems this church were having and all the guidance that they were provided to help deal with them was not so much because of a lack of loyalty to their God, or maybe even a lack of a genuine faith, although there's clearly people involved who have no genuine faith.

[4 : 5 1] But it's dying more to a lack of knowledge and a confusion about what they actually believe. And the problem here is what was read out in verses 12 and 13 was they did not believe in resurrection.

And that's really dangerous. And why is it dangerous? Well, in a sentence or two, bear with me while I try and do this in a logical flow. The consequences, we all agree that we're sinful, and the consequences of our sin is death. And therefore, the only hope is a solution that involves resurrection.

But if we don't believe in resurrection, then Jesus was not resurrected. And if Jesus was not resurrected, then our faith has no basis. It would not be real. Everything we do in practice and all the effort that we're doing is pointless and a waste of everybody's time. So they were on dangerous ground when they said they didn't, when there was doubts or skepticism about the concept of resurrection in general. And when the last time I spoke, we were doing about chapter one, and there was this cultural, philosophical environment that they were in. And even with all the skilled philosophers they had, they just could not get their brain in place where they could accept the concept of resurrection.

They thought that they were smarter than that. They thought that they knew better. And I may, sorry for dipping back into my sort of philosophical background, but I may be doing a bit of misservice here. But as an example, he had this belief that the body imprisoned the soul, and when the body died, the soul was set free. And the logical consequence with that was that resurrection was a bad thing. And it helps explain Paul's refusal to engage in that way in this church, because at best engaging in that way would have been pointless, and at worst, as we see here, downright dangerous. And we still have that skepticism about resurrection in general.

Even with all our medical advancements, we can revive people whose heart has stopped, provided we get them quickly. But we can't revive people whose brain activity has stopped.

[7 : 30] And we can't resurrect people who are truly dead. And because of that, I think people just don't believe that resurrection is possible. And what that does here, and what it can do to us, it's possible that it creates some doubt. And if we have that doubt, the very basis of our faith is undermined. And this is the problem that Paul was trying to deal with here. And he did it in a way, as I've alluded to already, he did it in a way that just went back to basics. And I think he does three things that I want to pull out. They're all intermingled in the bit we read, but if I pull them out, then try and bring them back together at the end. Because the first two that he does deals with the resurrection of Christ. And the third thing he does is about the personal impact of these things on our faith. And if I take the first one, it's about the resurrection of Jesus. And he presents it as an historical fact. Because if there's no resurrection of Jesus, then there's no resurrection at all, and we have no hope. And I'm sure we know all the arguments, and we've heard them all amongst friends or on chat lines or in our communities or whatever. The people say, Jesus didn't rise from the dead. And they use arguments like he didn't really die. He was just unconscious for a day or two, and he came around later. They maybe use arguments like the tomb wasn't really empty, because the disciples went in and stole the body. Maybe they use arguments that the people who saw him, well, they didn't really see him. Maybe it was an illusion, a vision, or something brought about by an extreme desire to see Jesus again, or the emotional distress that they were in at the time after his crucifixion. And Paul deals with that. And the way he deals with it, as I've said, is that he takes the chronological outline of Jesus and his life.

And while he doesn't say it, there's an implicit understanding that God became man through Jesus Christ, and that Jesus was a real figure. And the reason why that happened was because Jesus had a purpose, and that purpose was to meet the demands of God's law, which none of us in this Corinthian church could never meet. But he's more explicit because he presents the resurrection of Christ as an historical fact. It was an historical fact that Jesus did die on the cross. Crowds witnessed the events leading up to that. Many people saw his crucifixion, and the people that saw it were from right across the social spectrum. There were people like family and friends and followers who were sympathetic to him. But note also it was things like Roman soldiers and Jewish religious leaders and other people who were indifferent to him, all agreeing that he was crucified.

It's an historical fact that Jesus died and was buried. We can know that his dead body was treated in much the same way as any other. Many people grieved for him. He was taken away, and he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and he was guarded by Roman soldiers. So when we take all these things, the tomb was an actual place that you can go and check, or they could have gone to check that it was there.

Joseph of Arimathea was not a sympathetic witness to this. He was a hostile one because he was one, because he was from the Jewish leadership who wanted Jesus dead and out of the picture. You could have spoken to the soldiers and the guards, again, who were hostile to Christianity at very best. So the likelihood that Jesus didn't die and was buried is just too far-fetched.

[12 : 00] It was an historical fact that the tomb was empty. Now, there's a cultural nuance here. I'm sorry, ladies, I don't want to offend you. I'm just talking about the historical nuance.

But the empty tomb was discovered by woman. And the reason for mentioning that is that woman's first-hand account was worth a lot less in these days than the first-hand account of a man. Yes, we know that's wrong, but that's the fact of life at this time. And the very fact that they were believed, and it was generally accepted that the tomb was empty, means that the evidence was very strong. It's also an historical fact that he appeared after he rose again, first to Cephas, then to the Twelve, then to the Five Hundred, many of whom who were still alive and could be spoken to to check that this is correct, then to James, then to the Apostles, and finally to Paul himself. And the strong overriding point is that the crucifixion is real. It is verifiable. It has loads of witnesses. I don't know if any of you have served in a jury. I've been in a jury three times in my life, two of which resulted in convictions. And witnesses were in single figures in this case. And the evidence in the two convictions was seen as very strong. Here we have hundreds of people who can verify that Jesus died, Jesus was buried, and Jesus was rose again, and Jesus appeared to them in person. So Paul, the first thing Paul is doing is saying that Christ's crucifixion is a real historical event. Now, people will always find reasons to doubt the resurrection. I went through some of them a few minutes ago, but the historical standards of evidence were so high that his resurrection is beyond any reasonable doubt. We have first-hand eyewitness accounts of hundreds of people, some sympathetic, some hostile, but all of which align.

Jesus' resurrection is a real historical fact, and therefore we must believe it. The second way I think Paul deals with this chapter is that he makes the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ central to the very gospel itself. And yes, the historical narrative is very important. It's an extraordinary event in history that has no genuine precedent or parallel. And for that reason, we should not be scared or shy away from using the historical evidence, both as a way to witness, but also as a way to rebut the false claims that we get that it never actually happened. But it's also a way that we can use to maintain our own faith or to grow the faith of ourselves and others. So yes, we should use it. But what the Bible does here is highlight that it's so much more than an historical text. There's a theological aspect which cannot be separated from this. And I think I said earlier that one of the things that we don't like to talk about is that somewhere along the line, we have to face our own mortality. And the typical thought process, and maybe at this time and certainly in the modern world, is that it's a fact of life. You know that old expression, two certain things, death and taxes. It's a fact of life. It's natural. We can't avoid it. So we just get on with it and we deal with it in whatever way that we can. But the biblical view is that death is not natural. The biblical view, because when man was first created, it was not, Adam and Eve didn't have to face death when they were first created. Their natural state was not to face death. But with Adam's sin, death was the judgment that we all since that time have had to face. And therefore, if you want to apply some logic again to this problem, if the consequences of our sin is death, then the solution to the problem must be something that's both powerful enough to overcome death and pay for the consequences of the cause of that which is our sin. So what is the solution? It is Christ's atoning death and is rising again from the dead.

[16:50] And you can see from what I've said why that is totally fundamental and why we cannot move, slip, dilute, or reject resurrection or the resurrection of Christ. Because without it, as I've said before, our faith would not be real. The hope we have is based on nothing and everything about our faith would be false. We would be the most deluded people living in the world today. But we know, as I said, that the resurrection is real. Paul gives us the historical basis for that. He gives us the theological importance of that. And I hope I've explained them well. He reminds them as well that the apostles and himself consistently agree on this and teach consistently on the same point. And finally, at the end of, I think, at the end of verse 3, in accordance with the Scriptures, in verse 4, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. And we know because the Bible tells us.

Again, at the start of Corinthians, when I was preaching, we talked about the sort of philosophical environment. I know I'm repeating myself, but they were into their dialogue, debate, and reasoning. That was their thing. That's what this society was known for. And they applied all their clever thought and came up and applied their best minds to the problem. And they ended up in a mess because they didn't believe in the resurrection and the resurrection of Christ. And sometimes simple is best.

And this is one of those cases where I think simple is best. We know that even if you don't want to get into the historical argument or the theological argument, we know that the death of Jesus and

his resurrection is true. And why do we know? Well, to quote an old children's hymn, because the Bible tells us so, don't overcomplicate your faith. Just accept what the Bible tells you. It will make your life so much easier.

And that's the second point, you know, that the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus is central to the gospel. Take that out and it all goes. And any compromise of that belief is dangerous and must be resisted at every course. And Paul, what he does here is give us the historical and theological basis of that.

[19 : 39] And the final thing I want to talk about tonight, maybe departs from that a little bit, because it tells us that all of this, it makes a difference. It makes a difference to your life. And Paul shows his own personal experience here.

He was the persecutor. His life mission was to destroy Christianity and all his followers. And sadly, he was very good at that. I'm not sure I truly appreciated this before, but Jesus appeared to him in person. And there's a couple of points of difference there, because all the other people that Jesus appeared to were his followers, his disciples, people on his side, if you'd like. But here, Jesus appeared to his enemy in person and changed him. And there's a very oblique reference here to one who was untimely born, and there's quite a distasteful interpretation of that, which I'm not going to go into. But I think the point he is making is that Jesus appeared to him and set him to work before he was ready to do it.

So he was no longer the change in Paul. He was no longer the persecutor, but he was the most probably extraordinary missionary ever lived. His success, his zeal, his ability, and his work ethic surpassed all others, including the apostles. And God used him to do mighty things, of which we're still benefiting from today. And how did that happen? It was the grace of God. It was the gospel at work in his life.

And the gospel changes people. It changed Paul. And it's changed you. Or if you haven't had faith, and you do in the future, it will change you too. And it affects all areas of your life.

It's about your past. Because if you have a faith today, it's about something that happened in your past. I know all our conversion experiences are different. Mine was at a certain point of time that I can identify. Some people I know had a conversion that was over a period of time. I know other people who can't point to a conversion experience at all. But whatever it is, they all happened in the past. The gospel also affects you now, because it's the foundation that you use to go through life. It's the thing that gives you the strength, the thing that gives you perseverance and patience. It's the thing that gives you clarity of thought of how to act and be in every situation that you face. But the gospel is something that also affects your future. Because we know that we have faith that the work necessary to pay for our sin has already been done. And if we know that, it changes us.

[22 : 36] Change Paul, and it can change you too. Like Paul, it can teach you to love for others because of the way that God loved you. You know, Colin was speaking about tongues and love a few weeks ago and how love really was the thing that was missing from the use of tongues.

It lifts the burden that you have of trying to pay for your own sin. And that is a burden. Some people just give up. Don't try. Some people try hard to be good. But the point of all those things is it's a pointless activity. And it's a terrible burden that people carry. And that burden will be lifted if you have that gospel. And with that burden lifted, it can give you a new freedom to live your life to the full. It gives you that vibrancy and energy and hard work to share your faith. It gives you that thing to grow your faith. It should give you that enthusiasm to try things that nobody else has tried, or to have that conversation that you've been avoiding for years and years.

Having that burden lifted gives you a new freedom to live life in a better and fuller way. It is the thing as well that gives comfort in the best times and the bad times, because we know that we have a Savior who loved us so much, who died for us, who took the punishment for our sins and loves us so much that he would do that. And the question then is, don't we all want to experience a life like that? Of course we do. We want to live our life to the full.

We want to have a vibrant and happy faith. We want to have a fulfilled life. We want to be useful in our Christian faith. But the danger is that if you reject part of the Bible, well then you'll miss out. You'll miss the blessing. It will be taken away from you. It will be hindered or using some old AV language, it'll be seen through a glass darkly. Everything becomes blurred and you miss the blessing.

[25 : 05] And these people, they missed the blessing because they didn't believe in one of the fundamentals of their Christian faith. It's heartbreaking. Don't be in that position tonight or any day.

Accept the Bible in its fullest, because that is the only way that you can fully have, that's the only way that your Christian experience can be full and complete and without all the problems that this church was having. Learn from their mistakes. Amen.