

The Resurrection of the Lord

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] The Corinthian church was an imperfect church with a perfect Savior. It was imperfect in more ways than our church is imperfect. It was bewitched by celebrity preachers. It tolerated all kinds of sexual immorality. Gender distinctions were blurred, but economic distinctions were emphasized.

Its worship services were chaotic. No earthly church is perfect, but the church in Corinth was more imperfect than most. Now, there were some in the church who denied the physical resurrection of the body, as Campbell said last week. They had carried over from their pre-Christian days the idea of the immortality of the soul, but they denied the resurrection of the physical body.

Now, this was only a problem in the first century church in Corinth. It wasn't a problem in other churches. And yet, today, there are many preachers and professors in liberal churches who deny the physical resurrection of Christ. They say, no, no, no, he was not physically raised. It was only a spiritual resurrection. His dissolved body still rests in the ground somewhere in modern-day Israel. The physical resurrection of the body after death isn't something we think about very much, because for us, heaven is about the immortality of a man's soul. So, the body doesn't get a look in, right? But the Bible paints a picture of the new heavens and the new earth in which we who have faith in Jesus shall have new, glorified bodies. Evangelical piety historically has focused almost entirely upon the life of the soul to the neglect of the body. But the consistent teaching of the Bible is that both are important to God. As Campbell said last week, the denial of the physical resurrection of the dead was the worst imperfection of the church in Corinth. It was the worst, because it denied the essence of the gospel of the gospel which brings salvation to anyone who believes in Jesus. That's why the apostle devotes so much time, a whole chapter, refuting those who say that there is no physical resurrection from the dead. Our belief as Christians in the physical resurrection of the physically dead to new physical life is basic to our salvation. Without it, there's no gospel and no salvation.

Well, I want us to view these verses from 1 Corinthians 15, 12 through 34 this evening in three stages. In this passage, Paul is establishing the reality of the physical resurrection before moving on to discussing the nature of the resurrection body later in this chapter. We'll see that next week. First of all, from verse 12 to 19, if Christ is not raised, if Christ is not raised, then secondly, from verse 20 to 28, but Christ is raised. And then thirdly, in verse 29 through 34, because Christ is raised. In the Apostles' Creed, which all Christians everywhere at all times commonly believe, we say, I believe in the resurrection of the dead. But do we really? Do we really? Resurrection of the body even. First of all then, from verse 12 to 19, if Christ is not raised, if Christ is not raised, nearly the top of the Royal Mile in Edinburgh is a statue of one of Scotland's greatest ever philosophers, [4 : 29] David Hume. For all his brilliance, and he was brilliant, Hume was an enemy of the faith of the Bible, and especially when it came to the physical resurrection of Jesus. I really don't want to be unfair to him. But in essence, he said, dead men do not rise. Therefore, Christ did not rise.

Dead men do not rise from the dead. We've never seen such a thing before. Dead men do not rise from the dead. Therefore, Christ did not rise from the dead. He wasn't saying anything that some in the church in Corinth hadn't said 1,700 years previously. In verse 13, Paul states the issue. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. If dead men do not rise from the dead, then by consequence, Jesus did not rise from the dead. So, all the gospel accounts of the resurrection are mythical. These women didn't see an empty tomb. And what Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 15, 1 through 11, we saw this last week, is all fantasy and fiction. The death of Christ was the absolute end of his existence. Dead men don't rise from the dead. Therefore, Christ did not rise from the dead. And some of the Christians in Corinth believed that, and they taught that. But if Jesus did not rise physically from the dead, then at least two things follow

according to Paul in these verses.

First, our preachers are lying. And second, our gospel is empty. First, our preachers are lying. In verse 14, Paul begins his argument by saying, if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified about God that He raised Christ whom He did not raise if it's true that the dead are not raised.

[6 : 29] And when Paul talks there about our preaching, he's not speaking about preaching as a means of communication, but the message, the kerygma, that which is being preached. If Christ has not been raised, then what we say is in vain. Or as one commentator rephrases it, if the resurrection does not take place, then the whole thing here is a sham.

Furthermore, the apostle says, if Christ was not raised from the dead, then He, alongside the other apostles like Peter and John, are misrepresenting God. They are lying about God. The way Paul speaks here suggests that having preached the resurrection as a fact, he'll be held accountable by God for the lies he has told. So, throughout the book of Acts, when Peter and Paul preach the resurrection of Christ, they are deceiving their hearers. You know, you come to church tonight, but it's not the truth you're listening to. It's just lies and deceptions. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then all Christian preachers are liars, and they are duping us into believing the greatest lie in all history.

If Jesus was not raised from the dead, you cannot believe a word the apostles wrote, so you can't believe the Bible, and you cannot believe what is being preached.

And if our preachers are lying to us about the physicality of the resurrection, then what else are they lying to us about? If Jesus was not raised from the dead, there is nothing any Christian preacher can say which can be trusted. And we definitely cannot trust what the Bible says about anything. Is that really your experience of Christianity? That you cannot trust what the Bible says, and you cannot trust what preachers say? Maybe we should produce a new set of tracts in Crow Road Free Church to hand out to passersby in the street saying, do you want to hear a pack of lies?

Then come, hear what our minister says. But if Christ was not physically raised from the dead, that's all you're getting here in Crow Road Free Church. Our preachers are all lying.

[8 : 50] But secondly, our gospel is empty. Our gospel is empty. More serious than how we think about all our preachers is how we think about Christ. If Jesus was not physically raised, Paul argues in verse 17, your faith is futile. That word also can be translated empty. What's the point in a faith which is futile and empty? Might as well pack our bags and buy into Richard Dawkins' pointless atheism.

If Christ was not physically raised, then two things follow about the gospel. The first is this, we're still in our sins. Verse 17, if Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins.

The physical resurrection of Jesus, according to Paul in other places, was a sign of God's satisfaction in Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross. If Christ was not physically raised, it's a sign that God was not fully satisfied with Christ's offering of Himself for us. We would not be forgiven of our sin.

We would still be facing the condemnation of our sins on the day of judgment. If we are still in our sins and we face God's condemnation, then take to your bed and spend the rest of your life trembling in fear. Or adopt the strictures of another religion, which promotes a works-based method of reaching up to God. Because what's the point of a biblical Christianity without the physical resurrection of Jesus, if it cannot quiet our consciences and provide the forgiveness of our sins? It is useless. But secondly, if Jesus was not physically resurrected from the grave, then Paul argues in verse 18, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If 2,000 years ago, Jesus did not bodily rise from the tomb, all those Christians we loved but have died are forever gone. In the first century pagan world, death was ultimate. There was no life beyond death.

[11 : 15] But for Christians, because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, there was life beyond death. Therefore, that's why Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4.13, we do not grieve as those who have no hope.

Christianity was known for its inextinguishable hope of life beyond death. But if Christ did not physically rise from the dead, then Christianity was the same as all the other pagan religions of the day. There is no life beyond death, and the grave is the terminus of our existence.

We've spent our whole lives believing the lie that we shall see our loved ones again. If this is true, if there was no empty tomb, there is no point in biblical Christianity, for it cannot remove our fear of death. It is useless.

If the tomb of Jesus still contains the remains of His decayed body, there is no hope for any of us. And that's why Paul concludes this section by saying, if in this life we have hope in Christ only, we'll have all people most to be pitied.

In view of all that first century Christians suffered on account of their faith to Jesus, it's just not worth it. There are far more enjoyable ways to live than this.

[12 : 37] Dying for Jesus isn't worth it if there's no forgiveness of sins and no life eternal in Him. All our suffering is just plain useless.

Mr. Hume, your statue may be at the top of the Royal Mile, but if you're right, there's no point in calling yourself a Christian at all. Because if Christ is not raised from the dead physically, there's nothing to live for.

If Christ is not raised. Second from verse 20 to 28, but Christ is raised.

But Christ is raised. These first few words in verse 20 change everything. But now, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. The original language is even stronger.

But now, Christ stands risen from the dead. Paul uses a perfect tense, something that we don't use much in English, but which denotes something which happened in the past, but has present force.

[13 : 44] As if to say, Christ was raised from the dead, and He now continues in His risen state. But now.

The two most life-giving words in any language. But now. Pessimism and misery be gone. Hope and optimism replace them in the Christian perspective.

And all because, but now. Christ has been raised, and He remains risen. Just as in the previous section, there are two consequences of Jesus physically rising from the tomb on the third day.

The first is the death of death. The death of death. The 17th century English Puritan John Owen wrote a famous book called *The Death of Death and the Death of Christ*.

But in light of Paul's teaching in verses 20 through 23, perhaps we'd be better talking about the death of death in the resurrection of Christ. The death of death.

[14 : 53] The death of death and the resurrection of Christ. Paul says, For as by a man came death, by a man also has come the resurrection from the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Physical death came through the sin of the first man, Adam.

But physical resurrection came through Christ. Through Adam, physical death came into the experience of the human race.

They say that death is just a natural part of life, but they are wrong. We as human beings were not created to die but to live. That's why one of the reasons death for those who are left behind is such a painful experience.

But through the resurrection of Christ, there is life. By virtue of the empty tomb has come the resurrection of the dead. Paul talks of Jesus' resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

[16 : 00] The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, verse 20. Jesus was the first to rise. But by calling Jesus the first fruits, Paul is declaring that the resurrection of Jesus is proof of our future resurrection.

In Galatians chapter 2, something he wrote many years before this, Paul talked of how he had been crucified with Christ. And now in 1 Corinthians 15, he's telling us that he will be raised from the tomb with Christ.

Who rose from that empty tomb in the garden outside Jerusalem 2,000 years ago? Who rose from that tomb? Yes, Jesus did, of course.

But as we read in verse 23, we also who belong to him. We also who belong to him. I rose that day. His tomb, his rising.

But mine also. Who rose that day 2,000 years ago from that garden tomb outside Jerusalem? I did, the Apostle Paul says. You know, many people find graveyards quite scary places.

[17 : 09] I don't. I should, but I don't. I don't because I carry around in my mind a picture of what that graveyard would look like on the day of Christ's second coming.

From so many graves will appear the resurrection bodies of God's people. These graveyards will be transformed by the resurrection of Christ's people into places of light and life and joy.

You know, when I'm burying a Christian, I'm lowering them into a temporary resting place. That's not their eternal destiny.

That's a temporary place. I will see them again. And this time not in death, but in new glorified life.

The physical resurrection of Christ is the ultimate death of death.

But because Christ is raised, we also, from verse 24 to 28, have the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom of Christ.

[18:15] You know, sometimes the Apostle Paul can't help himself. He gets carried away by the sheer glory of the gospel of Christ. From verse 24 onwards, the ecstasy of Christ's resurrection kingdom is his ecstatic subject.

Having been raised from the dead, Christ has been crowned king and his divine reign begins. By his resurrection, he has destroyed every power and every authority.

All things having been placed under his feet. In the ancient world, when a king won a victory, he would drag the enemy king into his presence. And he would force that enemy king to bow before him.

And then he would place his feet upon the enemy king's neck. He would use that enemy king's neck as a footstool to demonstrate his complete superiority and his victory over them.

And in the same way, the physical resurrection of Jesus 2,000 years ago is the beginning of that victory. Paul quotes from Psalm 110, verse 1, The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies my footstool.

[19:29] This was one of Paul's favorite texts. He uses it often. Jesus uses it often. At the right hand of God at this very moment is King Jesus.

And through the preaching of the gospel, men and women are set free from the bondage of every dark spiritual authority and power. Spiritual death is losing its grip on us.

But then in verse 26, The last enemy to be destroyed is death. At that last day, physical death itself will be finally destroyed as those Christians rise from their graves to new and never dying life.

Christ the King was first to rise. And at the last day, He shall raise His people from their graves. In 1961, the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human being to travel into space.

In Vostok 1, he successfully completed one orbit of the Earth before returning safely. As his rocket was preparing for liftoff, Gagarin famously radioed ground control and said to them, Off we go.

[20:53] Goodbye. Until we meet soon, dear friends. When a Christian dies and is lowered into the grave, because of the resurrection of Jesus, her words mirror those of Yuri Gagarin all those years ago.

We can almost hear her say to us, Off we go. Goodbye. Until we meet soon, dear friends. On the cross and by His physical resurrection, Jesus has destroyed every power and authority.

He now reigns at God's right hand as King. There is in heaven's court a glorified human being, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, and He's on the throne of God.

And from there, He waits until the final day when His Father will once for all crush physical death.

As our glorified bodies rise from our graves, the triumph of Christ will be complete.

You know, Paul's pictures here, surely they cannot but give us a deep and never dying hope. My grave will not be my final resting place.

[22:14] I will only sleep there as I await the divine voice of my Master Jesus as He calls me home to Himself. Well, third and lastly, because Christ is raised, because Christ is raised, this last section contains one of the most controversial texts in the New Testament, namely, being baptized on behalf of the dead.

What does Paul mean by that? Among commentators, this is a mystery. We simply do not know with any certainty what Paul means by this, and I do not intend to speculate.

As the Apostle Peter will later say of Paul's writings, some are hard to understand. This is most definitely one of them. Maybe we'll come back and explore some options at a future date.

But from this last section, we want to examine what we do know with certainty. what Paul is telling us regarding the physicality of the resurrection of Jesus and how it should affect our perspective on our Christian lives today.

And he does so, again, in two directions. First of all, view your suffering differently. And secondly, view your lifestyle differently. View your suffering differently, first of all.

[23 : 41] Now, we talk about suffering for being a Christian, but the reality is that we don't really suffer like these early Christians did, and especially like Paul. He talks of himself as being in danger every hour, of dying every day, of fighting with beasts in Ephesus.

If a forensic pathologist was to examine the body of Paul, he'd report multiple and severe trauma, a battered body. Paul's mind, it would seem, also suffered greatly from the anxieties he faced on a daily basis.

So here's a man who has genuinely suffered for his faith in Jesus. All over the world today, our fellow Christians are suffering for their faith in Christ.

Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. Our brothers and sisters are beaten and imprisoned. They are tortured and executed, all because they have an inextinguishable hope in Christ and know that if they die, they shall rise to new life in Him.

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, such hope is empty and futile. They may as well ask the same question Paul does in verse 32.

[24 : 57] What do I gain? What do I gain from all my sufferings as a Christian? Whatever ways we have suffered for being Christians, if Jesus hasn't physically risen from the dead, it is all for nothing.

But because He has, we can now view our sufferings differently. Because He has been physically raised from the dead, all our sufferings for Him and on His account are more than worth it.

You know, serving Christ has broken many bodies and serving Christ has twisted many minds. We may well be a shell of what we could have been had we chosen an easier path.

But because Jesus has risen from the dead, we know that we also shall be raised with Him in glory. We have suffered with Him.

We have died with Him. And we shall be raised with Him. This broken body shall be transformed into the glory of the image of Christ Himself. this twisted mind shall be untangled and made new in the peace and joy of Jesus.

[26 : 09] As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, 17, this slight and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory that's beyond all comparison.

In light of the physical resurrection of our Lord, all our sufferings for Jesus are more than worth it. View your suffering differently.

But secondly, view your lifestyle differently. View your lifestyle differently. One of the things which made the denial of the resurrection so dangerous was that it allowed members of the church in Corinth to think that they could live any way they like and they would not be accountable for their actions.

If there is no resurrection, there will be no judgment. So as Paul says in verse 32, well let's eat and drink for tomorrow we die. We can sin freely without any fear that our sins will be judged by a holy God.

That's the way many in the world think. They indulge themselves in all kinds of sensual pleasures and justify themselves by saying, well you only live once.

[27 : 20] You may as well get as much pleasure out of this life as you can. Last Saturday, Catherine and I were in Edinburgh and there were 10,000 Irish rugby fans and on that particular night probably 9,999 were probably inebriated and outside a resurrection outside a restaurant next to Haymarket I was speaking to one of them and said, you've had a fair bit to drink tonight and he says, well you only live once.

There's a justification, right? We need to be careful about allowing that mindset to infect us as Christians.

It is too easy to forget that we will be held to account for our actions on the last day and it's even easier to absorb by cultural osmosis a mindset of you only live once.

But that's the way these church members of the church in Corinth thought. Paul quotes an ancient Greek playwright called Euripides bad company ruins good morals and he does so to warn the faithful Christians in Corinth to stay away from those in the church who deny the resurrection and live any way they like.

Rather than live any way we like sinning freely as though there were no ultimate accountability in light of the physical resurrection of Jesus Paul says do not go on sinning verse 34.

[28 : 47] The new heavens and the new earth shall be a place where righteousness shall dwell and sin shall be no more. I hope God willing that Catherine and myself will be going on holiday to Tenerife this May and in light of this I want to learn some Spanish I feel so ignorant when I go there

I don't know any Spanish and they can all speak English and I want to make sure that I've bought some sun protection lotion so I don't turn red like a beetroot I want to be ready in light of our future resurrection to the holiness of glory we want to get rid of sin in our lives now and to pursue holiness now to pursue a lifestyle different from those who live only for the pleasures of today what a marvelous reality Paul paints for us if Christ is risen from the dead then through faith in him all our sins are forgiven and we have the sure and certain hope of eternal life where as we'll discover next week our physical bodies will be glorified and raised imperishable whatever this life holds for us now being with Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth will be a million times better than this so even now let's rededicate ourselves to living for him and in so doing though in the meantime! we shall remain an imperfect church we shall enjoy a perfect saviour Amen