

The resurrection and Christian distinctiveness

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 00] The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies. Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power in holy garments. From the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours.

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord is at your right hand.

He will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses. He will shatter chiefs over the wide earth.

He will drink from the brook by the way. Therefore he will lift up his head. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

[1 : 13] For I delivered to you as 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 that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, for it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

[2 : 19] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And 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 testify about God, that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For as by one man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order.

Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

[3 : 33] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.

But when it says all things are put in subjection, it is plain that he is accepted, who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him, who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptised on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised on their behalf? Why are we in danger every hour?

I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die every day. What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus, if the dead are not raised?

Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.

[4 : 45] For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. Well, I wonder if you know the story of George Mallory.

He was the first British mountaineer who, in June 1924, attempted to climb Mount Everest. And he would have been the first person ever to reach the summit, although, tragically, he never returned. However, 75 years later, in 1999, his body was discovered, preserved in the ice. There were broken bones. There was a hole in his head.

But the one thing they couldn't work out was whether he had been ascending the summit when his accident, whatever it was, happened, or whether he was descending the summit. In other words, had he made it to the top or not?

Had he conquered Everest? Well, it was his son, John, who settled the matter and said this, If you conquer Everest, you come back alive. My father did not come back alive.

[5 : 48] Therefore, we cannot say he conquered Everest. Well, the great truth at the heart of 1 Corinthians 15 is that Jesus Christ has conquered death, the proof of which is that he did come back alive.

Have a look again at verses 3 and 4. For I delivered to you, as 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.

But here's the big question. What difference does that make? Because although the future resurrection is a wonderful thing to look forward to, the Apostle Paul does not simply write this chapter to give us assurance about the future, although it does that, but rather to change our lives now, to change our lives today, to change our lives tomorrow.

It's how the chapter finishes. Those who were here last week will remember chapter 15, verse 58. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

You may be here this morning, and you're wondering whether the Christian life is worth it, whether following Jesus is worth it. Perhaps you're struggling as a Christian.

[7 : 18] Maybe you're here this morning, and you're looking into the Christian faith. Is it worth starting the Christian faith? Well, the key is grasping the implications of the resurrection for now.

Now, the structure of the passage is easy to follow. The first half begins, verse 13, if you look at it. But if there is no resurrection of the dead, it seems the Christians in Corinth, while they believe that Jesus himself had been raised from the dead, they didn't believe that those who follow Jesus will also be raised.

Verse 12. Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? And so this first paragraph considers the implications if there is no resurrection.

The second half begins, verse 20, but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, and that paragraph considers the implications if indeed Christ has been raised.

And the final section looks at the implications. You'll see there's an outline on the back of the service sheet. First of all, if Christ has not been raised, verse 13, but if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

[8 : 33] And Paul's point here is clear. We cannot divorce the resurrection of Jesus on the one hand from, on the other hand, the resurrection of those who follow Jesus.

In other words, if resurrection per se is impossible, then it must follow that Jesus himself wasn't raised from the dead either. Now, Paul's already shown us in verses 1 to 11, the evidence for the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

Do listen to last week's talk online if you missed it. But for a moment, what Paul's doing here is he's running with a premise and says, okay, let's just for a moment think. Let's consider the implications if indeed there was, there is no resurrection at all.

Firstly, the implications for the work of the apostles. The apostles, those who Jesus himself chose to be with him, he taught them, he trained them, he entrusted the writing of the New Testament to them.

We can see it's the apostles that Paul has in view here because in verses 9 to 11, he's made the point that he himself was a genuine apostle. And he concludes verse 11, whether then it was I or

they, the other apostles, so we, all the apostles, preach and so you Corinthians believe.

[9 : 48] So what does he say, verse 14? And 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.

For if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised. If there's no such thing as resurrection, if it's an impossibility, then the work of the apostles who wrote the New Testament is based on lies.

They were false witnesses, verse 15. The resurrection would be the greatest alternative fact that anyone would ever come up with. Besides, God couldn't do something that cannot happen if in fact the resurrection is an impossibility.

The whole thing would be a hoax. Jesus' bones must be buried somewhere. And if the apostles were liars, then of course the whole of the New Testament collapses because they were the ones who oversaw the writing of the New Testament.

So that is the implication for the work of the apostles. If there is no resurrection, the whole foundations for the New Testament collapses and is destroyed.

[11 : 10] Which brings us to the second consequence, verses 17 to 19, the implications for the faith of the Christian. If there is no resurrection, faith in Jesus is futile.

It is a complete waste of time. Verse 17, If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. That word futile is often used in the New Testament for the worship of idols, of things that don't exist.

In other words, if there is no resurrection, you might as well worship a block of wood or a lump of stone instead. Christian faith would be futile because verse 17, the past wouldn't have been dealt with.

You are still in your sins. In other words, on the judgment day, those who have lived following Jesus Christ, trusting in Jesus Christ, on the assumption that on that final day, they'll be demonstrated to have been forgiven through his death.

They'll discover that they have been cruelly mistaken and face only the wrath of God. What's more, verse 18, Christian faith would be futile in the future.

[12 : 22] Those who have fallen asleep, who have died already as Christians, will be proven to have been lost for eternity. Mourning relatives who perhaps have found great comfort in the resurrection are deluded.

It is all a cruel hoax. The philosopher Bertrand Drussell would have been quite right when he said, when I rot, I die.

What's more, Christian faith would be futile in the present, verse 19, if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The Christian is duke. Making sacrifices in the present all for the sake of a dead Jesus and a non-existent future.

Can we see the force of Paul's argument? Paul takes us right to the edge, doesn't he? He takes us right to the precipice, forces us to look over the precipice and to see the reality if there is no resurrection.

[13 : 31] It's bizarre, isn't it? We live in a culture which is trying to run away as quickly as it can from its Christian roots and its Christian heritage and yet still wants to insist in the reality of life after death.

So people will say, well, Aunt Ethel, she's finally at peace. At peace, she's passed away. As if she's kind of moved on to some tropical paradise somewhere. Or, you know, someone else at their funeral, we're told, John lived the gulf and now he's gone to the great golf club in the sky.

Now let's be clear, says Paul, if there is no resurrection, then death is indeed the end. Secondly, if Christ has been raised, verses 20 to 28, where Paul shows how Jesus' resurrection overturns death and then guarantees the resurrection of those who trust in him.

And the big idea of this paragraph, if you look at it, is there in verse 20 and it's that phrase, the first fruits, verse 20. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Imagine if you're on holiday, it's early July, it's wonderfully hot, you're walking through a field of corn, most of which is not yet ripe, the corn is still green. But there's one particular corner of the field which perhaps is particularly well drained and gets more sunshine than the rest of the fields and there you spot a little patch of corn that is already ripe.

[15:06] Now you could pick one of those ears of corn, you could hold it in your hands, you could regard it as the first fruits. In other words, the same process that has made that corn ripe and brought it to the stage where it is ripe, the same process of sunshine and sunlight, exactly the same process over the next few weeks will make the whole field ripe.

That grain of corn is the first fruits. And that is Paul's point here about Jesus' resurrection. He is the first fruits, the same process that brought him back from the dead will bring back from the dead all those who are in him.

It is the proof that death has an exit door out the other side. Which is why in verse 20 Paul describes death for the Christian as being merely falling asleep.

That is reality, not the kind of euphemism that you hear at funerals. It is reality for those who are in Christ. Jesus, who is the Lord of all, will say, wake up and the dead will be raised.

Now you say, how could those who wrote the New Testament be so sure of this? Well, because they had seen Jesus doing it. They had seen him raise people simply with the words get up, raise dead people get up and they are brought back to life.

[16:34] It is easy, you see, for Jesus to raise the dead as it is for us simply to say to someone one morning, wake up, it is time to get up. Well, the explanation comes in verses 21 and 22.

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

What Paul is saying here is, he is saying, look, it is as if there are two human races to which we can belong. One, which he calls Adam, the first man, and it is the human race to which all of us naturally belong, just like Adam, each one of us naturally rejects God and rejects his good and loving rule.

After all, what had God said to Adam in the garden of Eden? Genesis 2.17 on the outline, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

that's what happened to Adam and it's as if the whole of humanity is subsequently following Adam in one long procession that ends up in death.

[17:51] But there's also a second human race Paul talks about, so to speak, in verses 21 and 22 and it's those who he calls being in Christ. And it's as if the risen Jesus cuts across that first procession and draws out from that first procession all those who listen to his call.

He then forms another procession, another line of people who he leads through the resurrection to eternal life. Because Jesus' resurrection in history guarantees the resurrection of those who are in him and belong to him.

And then verses 23 to 28 Paul explains the order in which that will happen. Because I guess we're bound up with the question, well, if those who trust in Jesus are going to be raised, when's it going to happen?

And the key thing in verses 23 to 28 is that the resurrection of Jesus sets in place a whole series of events through history which inevitably lead up to the very end, the very end of time.

It's as if the resurrection has triggered and guaranteed the final events in the history of the world. I came across a letter a while back by the author Evelyn Wall, written in 1942, who described an incident while he was staying with Lord Glasgow at his impressive country estate.

[19:20] The local army regiment had offered to blow up an old tree stump for Lord Glasgow and promised that he wouldn't destroy his prized plantation of new young trees next to it.

Unfortunately, instead of packing the tree stump with seven and a half pounds of explosive, they packed it with 75 pounds of explosive. And Evelyn Wall describes marvelously in this letter what then happened.

So they lit the fuse and waited for the explosion and presently the tree, instead of falling quietly sideways, rose 50 feet into the air, taking with it half an acre of soil and the whole of the young plantation.

Lord Glasgow was so upset he walked in silence back to his castle. And when they came to the turn of the drive inside of his castle, what should they find but that every pane of glass in the building was broken?

So Lord Glasgow gave out a little cry and ran to hide his emotion in the lavatory, very English, and there he pulled the chain. When he pulled the chain, the entire ceiling, loosened by the explosion, fell on his head.

[20 : 25] Once the fuse was lit, an inexorable series of consequences. Well, it is the same on a far grander scale, says the Apostle Paul, with the resurrection.

So let's look at the events in order. First, verse 23, Jesus himself is raised. But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then it's his coming, those who belong to Christ.

His coming, standard New Testament language for the second coming, on that day, those who belong to him will experience the same resurrection he has experienced. And then verse 24, then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and every power.

here is the end of time, not a separate event from the return of Jesus, but happening at the same time. Notice everything that is opposed to Jesus' rule, his enemies will be destroyed.

Then, verses 25 and 26, his enemies, even death itself, will be destroyed. Now, I take it, the picture in these verses would have been very familiar to anyone living in the Roman Empire in the first century AD, just as a Roman emperor might send his leading general to subdue a rebellious province or territory and to restore order, to restore the rule and authority of the emperor.

[22 : 02] So here is God sending Jesus, who by his resurrection has been established as the mighty king and ruler, which we read about in Psalm 110.

he sends Jesus to restore final order in the whole of his creation for the glory of God and for the good of creation, the new creation.

Verses 24 to 28 are extraordinary. The apostle Paul uses the word all or every ten times. Every rule, every authority, all power, all his enemies, all things.

In other words, God will finish the job which he has begun, the job that's been set in motion by the death and resurrection of Jesus. He will bring in the new creation.

It's how verse 28 finishes, that God may be all in all. He will reign supreme over all that is evil, over all that is opposed to him, over every corner of his world.

[23 : 14] And that is a wonderful thing and especially a wonderful thing to be remembered in the light of the terror and evil we have seen in London this last week. The point is simple.

If Jesus was raised from the dead, he guarantees the future resurrection of all those who belong to him and he sets in motion the final chapters of the history of the world.

Completely unstoppable. So then, what are the implications? Well, what are the implications first of all if Christ was not raised?

Well, becoming a Christian is pointless. Verse 29, otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? if the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

Now, it's difficult, I think, to work out what precisely is meant by this concept of being baptized on behalf of the dead. It may be a roundabout way of saying being baptized so you can participate in eternal life with Christians who have already died.

[24 : 21] But it's clearly something, isn't it, to do with becoming a Christian, receiving the benefits of eternal life. But of course, if there's no resurrection, that is a complete waste of time.

Just as serving Jesus is a complete waste of time. Verse 32, if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Now, in a sentence, that is the 21st century Western secular worldview, isn't it? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Make the most of today. that's the most important thing. It means, of course, that life is ultimately meaningless. Look at the newspaper, turn to the obituaries, here are worthy people who have achieved things in this life, worthy things perhaps, but if there's no resurrection, then the obituary has to finish, but ultimately their life is meaningless.

Now, it's not, of course, because Jesus teaches that after death there is resurrection and there is a judgment, but Paul's argument is this, if you don't believe in resurrection, are you willing to live with the consequences of what you do believe?

[25 : 43] But the only life worth living is life which says what's most important is today. Live for pleasure, eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

There's no resurrection, that is what life is reduced to. And of course the day will come when you'll no longer be able to say, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we'll die.

The disillusionment and faded dreams of old age, a society in which only the young, the fit and the beautiful matter, where the old and frail are dispensable and invisible.

What do you say, what about if Christ was raised? Verse 33, do not be deceived, bad company ruins good morals.

Wake up from your drunken stupor as is right and do not go on sinning, for some have no knowledge of God, I say this to your shame. Paul's point here I think is simple, it is that if you belong to Jesus, then don't be like the world.

[26 : 59] Don't be like those who are simply living for today, eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. It's why I've called this talk the resurrection and Christian distinctiveness.

You see, for many in Corinth, reading this, this whole chapter, chapter 15, would have been a rebuke. verse 33, don't be deceived.

Verse 34, don't go on sinning. They were a thoroughly worldly church. They need to wake up, verse 34, as may some of us.

Perhaps it may be what happens at teenage parties, for others it may be the mindset that says, well, you know, the most important thing is academic success and career advancement.

That's what matters most. Because, of course, every day you and I are bombarded, aren't we, with the message that we have to make the most of this life.

[28 : 00] That we've got to reach our potential because tomorrow we die. Therefore, I've got to reach my potential today. That's the message which we're bombarded with all the time.

But we don't. It's actually wonderfully liberating, of course, and no more so than in the workplace. You don't have to achieve your potential at work.

That's pretty liberating, isn't it? You don't have to go back to work once your maternity leave has finished. That's pretty liberating as well, isn't it? Now, there may be good reasons to go back to work, but the fact that everyone else is doing it is a bad reason.

Because everyone else is simply living for today. You don't have to have the perfect home. That's pretty liberating as well. And positively, of course, it means that we are freed and liberated from chasing after everything this world chases after today.

It means we are freed and liberated to serve the risen Jesus. Verse 30, just like the apostle Paul, why am I in danger every hour?

[29 : 14] I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die every day. What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts of Ephesus if the dead are not raised?

You see, there are some, I hope many of us here this morning, for whom actually this chapter is a real encouragement. Perhaps you have made costly decisions about the use of your time.

And your priorities in order to serve Jesus. Perhaps like Paul, verse 31, you said no to serving yourself and you said yes to serving Jesus. Perhaps like Paul, verse 30, you put yourself on the line.

Perhaps like Paul, verse 32, you found yourself being opposed, all for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps you turned your back on particular areas of sin.

Or perhaps you have made lifestyle decisions and deliberately so because you're wanting to live distinctively for Jesus rather than simply following the world.

[30 : 21] Because you have grasped deeply and profoundly that actually the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. Now that means that giving ourselves to serving Jesus in a costly, committed, consistent way actually is the logical way in which to live our lives.

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