

# The resurrection and Monday morning

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[ 0 : 00 ] 1 Corinthians 16. Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey wherever I go.

For I do not want to see you now, just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

[ 1 : 14 ] When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord as I am, so let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, that it is not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. Now I urge you, brothers, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first in Echia, and that they had devoted themselves to the service of the saints.

Be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and labourer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Decaicus, that they are made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours.

Give recognition to such men. The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

[ 2 : 34 ] All the brothers send their greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. I, Paul, write these greetings with my own hand.

If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all.

In Christ Jesus. Amen. Well, do please turn to that reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 16. Heavenly Father, thank you for that reminder that the Lord Jesus is indeed coming.

He will return that great and glorious day. And we pray now as we look at your word together.

Please would you grant us understanding. Please would you help us to be attentive to it.

Such that we might be those who live our lives now. In the light of Jesus coming. And we ask it in his name. Amen.

[ 3 : 40 ] I want to ask a question this morning. And to start off by asking a question, which is this. What has work got to do with Christianity? What has work got to do with Christianity?

Now, I don't mean work in the narrow sense of the job that you do. If you're in full-time employment or if you're at home working. I mean more broadly. Work generally.

As in hard work. What has that got to do with Christianity? I guess some of us might respond by saying, well, actually, for me, my Christianity is really a bit of a relief from work and labor and all that kind of thing.

And I come to church for a rest. Kind of catch up with friends. Opportunity to switch off. And that kind of thing. Perhaps others might respond by saying, too right being a Christian is hard work.

I feel overburdened by church meetings. Overburdened by having to prepare growth groups or Sunday club or whatever. It just makes my life so busy. Or perhaps you're here looking on the Christian faith and actually your question is a slightly different one.

[ 4 : 52 ] Perhaps something like this. Why do you Christians allow your faith to shape your life in the way it does? In other words, why does your Christianity work you so hard?

Well, as I said, this is the last of our series of talks in 1 Corinthians. And what I want us to do this morning is to answer that question about work and Christianity in two different ways. First of all, by looking at the letter as a whole.

It's the overview of the whole letter. And then secondly, by narrowing down on that one chapter, which we had read, chapter 16. There's an outline on the back of the service sheet.

First of all, then, the big picture. And 1 Corinthians chapters 1 to 15. And turn back, if you will, to how the letter starts. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. 1 Corinthians 1 verse 2.

There's going to be a fair bit of page turning this morning. So make sure you've got your nimble fingers with you. Chapter 1 verse 2. To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.

[ 6 : 10 ] They are the church of God in Corinth. In Corinth, in Corinth, in so many ways, just like 21st century London, brash, impressive, cosmopolitan, arrogance. A city in which to be a Christian would have put you thoroughly outside the cultural mainstream.

Because of those who belong to Jesus, they've been sanctified, set apart, to serve Jesus Christ, as every Christian has, of course, wherever they live.

To serve Jesus Christ, 2 verse 2, is Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ. Lord in 1st century Corinth, just as much as he is today. Lord in 21st century London.

But what does it look like then to serve Jesus as Lord? Well, remember the words of the Lord Jesus himself. I put them on the outline, Mark chapter 8 verse 34.

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. The Christian life is a cross-shaped life. It's not about serving myself.

[ 7 : 15 ] It's about denying myself. And serving Jesus, who is Lord. Now, in a sense, that is simply the ABC of the Christian life.

The GCSE, the pre-GCSE of the Christian life. And yet, how easily we forget that. Indeed, how quickly the Corinthians seem to have forgotten it.

And therefore, throughout the letter, whatever the problems and issues are that the church in Corinth have raised, which the Apostle Paul then addresses, he brings them back to the cross and the implications of the cross.

Hence the table on the outline. In chapters 1 to 4, it seems they want a gospel message that sounds impressive. They want a church in form of ministry that looks impressive.

What does Paul say? Chapter 1 verse 18. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

[ 8 : 21 ] Verse 25. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. So, genuine Christian ministry looks weak and unimpressive in the eyes of this world.

But, it's in the gospel, this weak, unimpressive message, that God's power is truly demonstrated. In chapters 5 to 7, the issue, you'll remember, is sex, marriage, divorce.

And, once again, the Apostle Paul brings them back to the cross as he calls them to live distinctive lives. Chapter 5 verse 7.

Cleanse out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Later on, chapter 6 verse 11. And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.

[ 9 : 28 ] Jesus died for you. You've been forgiven. You're now in the right with God. You're now set apart to serve him. Or again, chapter 6 verse 19.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you are bought with a price.

So, glorify God in your body. You've been bought by God, purchased by the blood of Jesus. The Christian life is shaped by the cross.

Or what about the next section, chapters 8 to 10, in which you'll remember all the sort of issues of freedom and rights and idolatry, how we make decisions, all those kinds of things. Decisions which are best for the gospel. Well, once again, Paul reminds them of the implications of the cross, of who they are in Christ Jesus.

[10:24] So, chapter 10 verse 16 and 17, he writes, The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not our participation in the blood of Christ?

The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one body, we who are many are one body. For we all partake of the one bread.

We belong to Jesus. Therefore, he says in those chapters, flee idolatry. Use your freedom. To build up other Christian believers.

Or what about in their church meetings? That's the focus of chapters 11 to 14. Chapters in which the apostle Paul says, frankly, you Corinthians, it would be much better if you didn't meet on a Sunday. Your meetings are that awful.

So, just in case we're ever tempted to hold up the church in Corinth as a model church to follow. How does Paul address this me first, I'm better than you, selfish, me-centered church in Corinth?

[11:23] Well, again, he brings them back to the cross. Chapter 11, verse 23. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. The message of Jesus Christ, in other words, crucified on the cross for our sins, is not simply the message that we need to grasp in order to begin the Christian life and in order to receive forgiveness from Jesus.

No, it also then shapes the whole of the Christian life as we go on to follow Jesus. Yes. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Christian pastor in Germany who was executed by the Nazis, famously says, When Christ calls a man, he calls him to die.

When Christ calls a man, he calls him to die. The summons of Christ is to take up our cross to follow him. It is the path of self-denial, self-sacrifice, of death to self.

[12:45] And sadly, it is something which this church in Corinth seems to have forgotten. Something we too can so easily forget. And I suspect especially so in a place such as Dulwich, where all the pressure is on, isn't it, to fit in.

The pressure to look and appear successful, to look and appear to be impressive in the eyes of the world around us. And therefore, you see, in this proud, arrogant, me first church in Corinth, which thinks of itself as being and wants to be so powerful and impressive and strong and wise, which wants to fit in with the world around.

Paul writes and addresses the issues and the problems in the church by taking them time and time again back to the cross. So that they are shaped not by the world around them, but by the cross of Christ.

But I guess that raises the question, doesn't it? Well, why should they live like that? What's the motivation? Well, partly the cross, but also the resurrection. It's why the letter finishes, as we saw before Easter.

With a whole chapter, chapter 15, on the resurrection. And Paul writing chapter 15, not simply so I kind of tick the box mentally. Tick the box which says, do you believe in the resurrection?

[14:05] Yes, I tick that box, I believe in the resurrection. Not simply that, but actually so that we are shaped by the resurrection. Look on to chapter 15.

So that we don't live like the world lives. Chapter 15, verse 32. Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. But rather so that we live lives which are full of thankfulness and gratitude to the Lord Jesus. Chapter 15, verse 57. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. And lives not only full of thankfulness and gratitude, but lives which therefore abound in hard work. Coming back to our question at the start of the talk. Which abound in hard work and labor for the Lord Jesus who is risen and who is returning. 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.

That is the big picture answer to our question about what work has got to do with Christianity. The Christian life is cross-shaped, but lived in the anticipation and longing for the return of the Lord Jesus.

[15:30] It's challenging, isn't it? As we ask ourselves the question, what am I living for? Who am I living for? Am I simply living for this world, on this world's terms?

Or am I living to serve the Lord Jesus in anticipation of his glorious return at the end of time? But of course, it's also wonderfully liberating, isn't it?

Because it means that actually we don't have to get out of this life everything that we might want to get out of this life. Or everything that everyone else is trying to get out of this life.

It means I don't have to think that I always need to achieve my fullest or my best or my potential in this life. Because there is far greater to come.

I take it it's why those who follow Jesus are those who are willing to sacrifice things now. Because of the glorious news of the resurrection to come.

[16:32] I take it too, this is a great encouragement for those who we might call the service-weary Christian. And I take it that is all of us at some stage of the Christian life who become service-weary.

Why should I serve the Lord Jesus? Perhaps a particular area of ministry at church. Or perhaps just, you know, why should I be distinctive as a Christian at work or with friends or neighbours?

I take it that at some stage all of us become service-weary in that sense. Well, look to the cross. Look to the empty tomb.

Look forward to the final trumpet blast on the final day as the Lord Jesus returns. That's the big picture answer to our question.

What has work, labour, got to do with Christianity? Well, what about the nitty-gritty? The nitty-gritty answer comes in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

[17:31] Which I think help us to see something of what this mindset of abounding in the work of the Lord looks like in practice. It's not exhaustive. But it is why I've called this talk The Resurrection and Monday Morning.

As Paul helps us just in these sort of practical ways which he mentions in chapter 16. The whole range of different things. He helps us to approach these issues with the mindset of the resurrection. So, first of all, the resurrection and money. Chapter 16, verses 1 to 4. Now, concerning the collection for the saints. This, as I direct to the churches in Galatia, so you also are to do.

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper. So that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I'll send those whom you accredit by letter to carry or give to Jerusalem.

If it seems advisable that I should also go, they will accompany me. It's not very British, is it, really? We have, you know, verse 58, chapter 15, verse 58.

[18:37] It's the sort of lofty language of the lofty aspirations of abounding in the work of the Lord. Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. And I guess many of us would say, that sounds wonderful.

But then, bang, we're back down to earth, aren't we? And suddenly we talk about money. Not very British at all. But I guess it's another example of how, actually, the chapter headings in the Bible can be so unhelpful.

Because, you see, the chapter heading separates off, doesn't it, in our minds, giving ourselves abundantly to the work of the law, chapter 15, 58, from the passage of money, chapter 16, verse 1. So let's take the chapter heading out and just run the two verses together. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast and movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain, now concerning the collection for the saints.

The resurrection is to transform our attitudes to money. Part of the way we're to abound in the work of the Lord is financially. Now, Paul's instructions here, it's clear from verse 3, were for a particular collection for the church in Jerusalem.

[19:47] We'll say more about that in a while. But notice, nonetheless, the principles. Principle number one, that giving to the work of the gospel should be a priority. Verse 2, on the first day of every week, in a culture where people were paid daily or weekly, don't just wait, in other words, to see what's left over at the end of the week, but prioritize giving.

Set something aside. Store it up, first of all. Second principle, verse 2, our giving to the gospel should be in accordance with our income.

That little phrase, as he may prosper. Notice there's no mention here of giving 10%, a kind of flat rate, 10%, or tithing. That's the Old Testament principle, it's not the New Testament principle.

The New Testament principle is always one of generosity. We give generously, abundantly, in response to God's generosity and abundant kindness to us.

If you want to think a little bit more about what that looks like fleshed out, then 2 Corinthians chapter 8 would be a good place to go. Third principle, the giving is to be properly administered, verses 3 to 4, by the church in a way that is transparent to everyone, and which people are happy with.

[ 21 : 04 ] The resurrection of money. Here's the question then. What does your use of money say about your belief in the resurrection?

Does your use of money say that functionally, actually, you don't believe the resurrection is going to happen? Or does your use of money say you do believe the resurrection is going to happen, that all those who put their trust in Christ will be raised?

Are you investing your money in gospel ministry? Now, I guess if we were to divide this room in half, I guess some of us would be spenders and some of us would be savers.

We're not going to do this exercise, for obvious reasons. But it would be quite interesting, wouldn't it? If we said, okay, all the spenders, you go on that side of the room, and all the savers, you go on that side of the room.

But, of course, what Paul says here applies to the savers as well as the spenders. I think the great temptation for those who are savers is to think, well, you know, I don't wear kind of flashy designer clothes, or I don't kind of replace my car every three years, and all that kind of stuff.

[ 22 : 12 ] But, of course, if you're a saver, what you're already doing is you're simply saying, well, I don't want to spend my money today. I want to spend it tomorrow, or next year, or in 10 years' time, or 20 years' time, you see.

In other words, your idol is simply the idol of security, but it's just as worldly. So what Paul says here applies, perhaps most obviously, we might think, to the spenders, but actually it applies just as much to the savers, the resurrection and money.

Secondly, the resurrection and gospel partnership, because the language of partnership with others in the gospel comes throughout the chapter. Wonderfully so. It's there in verse 3, the collection for the church in Jerusalem.

It's marvelous, isn't it, really, that here is a Gentile Greek church in Greece, in Corinth, giving money to a Jewish church in Jerusalem.

The language of gospel partnership is there in verses 5 and 6. Paul's wanting to enlist the Corinthians on his journey, quite possibly as he plans to go to Rome.

[ 23 : 29 ] So a few years earlier, in 49 AD, the emperor Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome. That would have included any hopes of Paul going to Rome.

In AD 54, that emperor died. And so it may be that now Paul is making plans to go to Rome once again with the gospel, and he wants the Corinthian church to be in partnership with him.

And then again, verses 19 and 20, can you hear the sense of partnership in those verses? The churches of Asia send you greetings. That's not how we think of Asia, but Roman Asia, so Turkey. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings on the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Not partnership, of course, with any old church, but partnership with like-minded churches.

It's why our joint Good Friday service was such a great occasion. It's why our mission partnerships are important for them, but important for us just as much.

[ 24 : 36 ] Thirdly, the resurrection and decision-making. Let me read verses 8 and 9, and I want you to tell me what the surprise is. Okay, so look at verses 8 and 9 and tell me what is surprising.

But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Anything surprising? The adversaries, yeah. And therefore, what effect does the adversaries have on Paul?

He decides to stay, doesn't he? Verse 8. Because there is a wide door for effective gospel work. In other words, Paul doesn't see the opposition and take it as a sign that he should leave.

And presumably, it also means that a sense of peace is not the thing that guides his decision-making. In other words, he doesn't say to himself, look, there's opposition here. I don't really feel at peace about this.

[ 25 : 37 ] After all, who would? And therefore, I'm going to leave. Now, you see, what shapes his decision-making is not a sense of peace, but actually the opportunity for the gospel. Notice, nor does Paul go through the door, so to speak, simply because it's open.

Sometimes you hear Christians, don't you, say something like, you know, this door opens, and I took that as a sign of God's guidance that I should do this particular thing. Well, how do you know it's not Satan's door that he's opened?

How do you know it's not just the folly of your own conscience? No, the point about this particular door that is opened is the kind of door it is. It's not any old door.

It's a door, verse 9, for effective gospel work. That is the thing which determines whether or not Paul goes through this door or not. At the same time, notice verse 7, Paul knows that everything he does is under the sovereign rule of God who either opens doors or doesn't.

So how might this resurrection mindset help us abound in the work of the Lord? Well, perhaps at work you've been offered a new role, or perhaps you've been encouraged to apply for a new job.

[ 26 : 55 ] Well, what's best for the work of the gospel? The answer may be to stay where you are. It may be to move. But I take it that it's what's best for the gospel will trump other considerations.

Or making choices about school or university. That's a simile. Finally, the resurrection of what we value. Because the things that we value, the kind of people we value, the qualities we see in others that we like and appreciate, have a really big influence on us, don't they?

So it's pretty clear, I think, that the Corinthians valued what the world values. And so what the Apostle Paul is doing here, he's holding up alternative role models, if you like. Examples of what it looks like to be steadfast and movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

So verses 10 and 11, there's Timothy. He's not to be despised because, verse 10, he is doing the work, that work word again, the work of the Lord.

In verse 15, there's the household of Stephanas, who are devoted to the service of the saints, be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.

[ 28 : 14 ] These, as Paul, are the kinds of people who should be honored. Those who work and labor in the service of God's people and the gospel. And then verses 17 and 18, Stephanas, Fortunatus, Archaicus, they're mentioned as well.

Perhaps they were the ones who brought the Corinthians letter to Paul in the first place, and now they are taking Paul's letter back to the church in Corinth. Paul says they deserve recognition. They're examples of others to follow and emulate. Now, I know a number of us have read this book, but if you've never read this book, you must read it.

It's called Gospel Patrons, subtitle, People Who Generously Changed the World. And the whole point of this book, really, is to say, look, here's a whole series of people, we're given kind of mini portraits of them, who were successful in their lives and careers, that kind of thing.

They were high earners in a sense, but they had a great vision for the progress of the gospel, and they wanted to use their success in this world's terms for the sake of the gospel, to serve Jesus, not to serve themselves.

[ 29 : 28 ] That is a brilliant book. I know some of us have read it. Finally, verses 13 and 14, which bring us back, in a sense, to the heart of the letter, to a church that is in danger of not standing firm, to a church where love was certainly not the hallmark of the way in which they related to each other.

The apostle Paul says, verse 13, And again, it's that word love, which is at the heart of the last paragraph, isn't it?

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hands. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.

Our Lord, come. That necessary future focus on the return of the risen Jesus, if we are to live lives now that are shaped by the cross, if we are to give ourselves now to hard labor and work in the service of the Lord Jesus.

Why don't I pray? Why don't I pray? Why don't I pray? Why don't I pray? Our Lord, come. Come, Lord Jesus.

[ 30 : 56 ] Heavenly Father, we praise you for this glorious promise that the Lord Jesus will indeed return. We praise you for his resurrection. Thank you for the resurrection of all those who belong to Jesus.

And we pray, Heavenly Father, please would you forgive us where we simply live our Christian lives for ourselves. We pray that we would be those whose lives would be shaped and transformed by the cross, seeking to serve Jesus gladly, eagerly, abounding in the work of the Lord and doing so rejoicing and expectantly in the light of that final day.  
And we ask it in his name. Amen.