

Easter Sunday service

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 1 to 34. 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.

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 toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

[1 : 1 9] 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 there is no resurrection of the dead?

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 testified 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 also have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, 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 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.

[2 : 3 3] 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.

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 baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Why am I 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?

[3 : 46] 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, for some have no knowledge of God.

I say this to your shame. But someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? You foolish person. What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead.

[5 : 03] What is sown is perishable. What is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power.

It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, the first man, Adam, became a living being.

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust.

The second man is from heaven, as was the man of dust. So also are all those who are of the dust. And as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[6 : 13] Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable.

And we shall be changed, for this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written.

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

Thank you, Nick and Judy, for reading the passage so clearly to us. Let me pray for us before we look at 1 Corinthians 15 together. Father God, we thank you so much that you speak to us clearly in your word, the Bible.

[7 : 26] We praise you for this glorious passage on the resurrection and ask that you'd speak to us now about it. Please would you assure us in the truth of the resurrection.

Please would you assure us in the implications of the resurrection for us today. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, happy Easter, everybody.

And as we can see, we don't really have a greeting to come back at that. Have you thought it was a bit strange? Say Merry Christmas and all the rest of it, but we don't do it at Easter time. Merry Easter doesn't quite have the same ring to it. But in some churches on Easter Day, the minister from the front says, Christ is risen.

And the congregation respond, he is risen indeed. So let's try it. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Not bad.

Some of you may still be asleep. But nobody was asleep when this very greeting rang out in an auditorium in Kiev in 1930. Stories told of Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, who addressed a huge assembly on the subject of atheism.

[8 : 38] And this man, Nikolai, was one of the most powerful men on earth at the time. A member of the Politburo, I'm told. A current editor of the Soviet newspaper Prada.

A Russian communist leader. And addressing the crowd in Kiev, he started hurling as much artillery as possible as he could at Christianity. Insult, argument, proof against it.

An hour later, he was finished and he looked out to what he thought was the smoldering ashes of men's faith. Are there any questions? He demanded. Do you have any questions?

Any retorts? And there was deafening silence across the auditorium until one man just stumbled up and approached the platform, mounted the lectern, standing by this powerful communist leader.

And he said, Christ is risen. And en masse, the crowd arose and responded, He is risen indeed.

[9 : 41] Well, it's this sort of confidence in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that God wants all of us to have this morning as we look at 1 Corinthians 15 together. Confidence admits hostility.

Confidence that the resurrection is true. It did happen. Confidence of the implications. The history changing, death defeating, life transforming implications of the resurrection.

We're going to have time only to focus in on verses 1 to 22, but I will refer to other verses throughout 1 Corinthians 15. Well, let's start with the fact of the resurrection.

Jesus is risen. It's true. And we're looking here at verses 1 to 11 as the Apostle Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth that Jesus really did rise bodily from the dead.

Let me just say that this is probably not new ground for a lot of us. We have covered some of this in our Da Vinci Code talks a couple of years ago. But given our current climate today, with Da Vinci Codes, with God Delusions, with God Ain't Great books, in our current climate where belief in the miraculous is scorned, isn't it, by society's idolatry of science as the explanation of all things, we need to be clear as Christians on what we believe and why we believe it.

[11 : 06] So we need to be reminded that belief in the resurrection is rational, it is logical, it is consistent with the evidence. And these verses will reassure us of that, I hope.

Okay, so there are three historical facts that Paul reminds the Corinthians of in these verses, the missing body in the tomb, the hundreds of eyewitness sightings, the radically changed life of the Apostle Paul.

So let's start with the missing body, verse three. 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.

So it's a fact of history that Jesus Christ died on a cross by the orders of Pontius Pilate. We read of the soldiers ramming a spear through his side to check that he is dead.

Only then is he taken down, wrapped up in linen cloths, buried in a tomb. Jesus was definitely dead and buried. Yet three days later, Mary Magdalene, Mary Salome, come to Jesus' body, come to the tomb to anoint his body, but the body of Jesus is no longer there.

[12 : 24] It's gone. The large stone in front of the tomb has gone. The Roman guards who were put there specifically to stop people from stealing the body, they have gone. And all that is left are these linen cloths that he'd been wrapped in.

Where's the body gone? If someone had stole it, why leave the linen cloths behind? If there were grave robbers, how did they get past the Roman soldiers? If it was the Roman authorities, the Jewish authorities stealing the body, why didn't they just produce it as soon as Christianity took off?

And it'd all be stopped in its tracks. What happened to the body? It was a mystery back then. It's still a mystery today. 2,000 years later, no one has ever found the bones of Jesus Christ.

Still missing to this day. A fact. But what about the disciples? Surely they, of all people, are the prime suspects for stealing the body.

Close to Jesus. Missing him. Sad. Maybe they've stolen the body. Well, anticipating this question, Paul continues in verse 5 with this second historical fact concerning the resurrection.

[13 : 32] And that is that over 500 people saw Jesus risen and alive. So let me read verse 5 to you. And that he appeared to Cephas, that's Peter, then to the 12, then he appeared to more than 500 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. So not only do we have the missing body, now we have 500 witnesses all testifying that they have seen Jesus risen from the dead.

Think we've stolen the bodies? Says the disciples. Go speak to any one of these 500 people. They say they've seen Jesus alive now. We've not stolen the body, Jesus has risen.

If you just had the eyewitness accounts, I suppose you could say they're hallucinating. If you just had the empty tomb, the missing body, perhaps you could say it was stolen.

But here you've got both of them together, the missing body and the eyewitness sightings. Well at this point we might still think that it is all just made up.

[14 : 50] One big conspiracy, yeah the disciples nicked the body and then they tricked these or 500 people all got together, they're all lying. So I'm just massive conspiracy around Jesus' disappearance.

But then in verses 8 to 10, Paul continues and gives his third historical fact. A fact of history which I suggest demolishes the theory of a conspiracy or it being a myth.

So look at verse 8. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he, Jesus, 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 though 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. So for the third historical fact, Paul turns to himself. The miraculous turnaround in his own life.

[16 : 05] Paul says in verse 9, he's unworthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God. You see, Paul hated Christians. His name back then was Saul. He thought that all this talk of Jesus risen from the dead was delusional, was a conspiracy, a myth.

He went around throwing Christian men and women in prison. He approved of Stephen's stoning. Paul hated Christians. He hated Jesus Christ. He wanted to wipe Christianity off the face of the planet.

See, unlike the disciples who might have had an interest in stealing the body or fabricating some story, Paul was not upset that Jesus had died. He was delighted that Jesus had died.

He thought he was a blasphemer and he certainly wanted to keep it that way. This is who the apostle Paul was before. Saul, the Christ-hater.

And yet here we read of this same person now preaching that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Verse 10, he's working harder than any of the apostles in spreading the message of Jesus risen from the dead across the world.

[17 : 10] Now, how can that be? How do you explain this sudden turnaround in his life from absolute Christ-hater to committed Christ-lover?

The disciples stealing the body? A massive conspiracy? I mean, you're right, as if Paul would have been taken in by this for a second. Paul would have had them thrown in prison as soon as the disciples of the 500 opened their mouths about Jesus.

As we've seen, he hated this Christian sect. He was out to destroy it, not to join it. What happened? Which explanation most makes sense of the facts?

The most logical explanation? The one that runs with the evidence, even if we're uncomfortable where it leads? is it not that Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead?

That Paul saw him risen and had his life transformed by him? Well, it's these three historical facts which the skeptic has to deal with, has to come up with a credible, rational explanation which takes account of the missing body and the hundreds of eyewitness sightings and the miraculous turnaround in the life of the Apostle Paul.

[18 : 40] I was recently skimming through Bertrand Russell's Why I'm Not a Christian to see how he responds to the historical facts surrounding Jesus and this is from the first chapter Why I'm Not a Christian at page 12.

And here I may say that one is not concerned with the historical question. Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all and if he did, we do not know anything about him so that I'm not concerned with the historical question.

And that's it. I'm not making that up. Have a look afterwards. I mean, to be honest, in the beginning of the chapter it is quite interesting sort of talking about different philosophical arguments but as you're reading it and thinking, okay, get to Jesus, get to his life, get to his death, get to his resurrection and he just disses it out of hand.

Just ignores it. Now, if you want a definition of blind faith, there it is. One of the most celebrated thinkers of the past century simply ducking the issue.

I'm not interested. It's as sophisticated as the argument gets. Now, I do not mean this in any mocking way. It is incredibly sad to read something like that and for people to be taken in by it.

[20 : 03] And I give you this example to bolster our faith as Christians, to show how strong the case is for the resurrection and how weak arguments are against it.

Such you are left just not wanting to deal with it. As Christians, we have got nothing to fear when we're explaining our faith to others. Ours is the faith which is based on these real historical facts.

Ours is the faith which takes the evidence and runs with it. You could say to that end, our faith is scientific. So be confident. The missing body, the hundreds of high witnesses, the changed life of the apostle Paul.

God wants us to be confident in our faith. Confident as we share our faith with others. So Jesus is risen, it's true.

Secondly, Jesus is risen and it matters. Interestingly, the New Testament is not as concerned with proving the resurrection itself as it is much more concerned than showing what the implications of the resurrection are, what the resurrection proves.

[21 : 22] And this is where the truth of the resurrection which we've just looked at gets really exciting for us because in verses 12 to 22, Paul explains the death defeating, this life transforming implications of the resurrection for us who trust in Christ.

actually, Paul does start off in the negative showing it the other way around, how much is at stake if the resurrection is not true.

He does it this way because some people within the church at Corinth were saying that Jesus hadn't risen bodily from the dead and he's trying to show the folly of their thinking by spelling out the devastating implications of that.

So let me go through first with the negative and then we'll flip it around to the positive. Verse 14, and if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is in vain and if Christ has not been raised your faith is in vain.

Verse 15, if Christ has not been raised we are even found to be misrepresenting God. Continues verse 17, and if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

[22 : 36] verse 18, if Christ has not been raised those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. Verse 19, at the end we are of all people most to be pitied if Christ has not been raised.

Well there's no doubt what the implications are if Jesus didn't rise from the dead it makes a pretty depressing reading. Simply put, no resurrection means no gospel. You pull out the resurrection card and the house of the gospel of cards comes tumbling down.

But as we've just seen in the first point Jesus is risen the resurrection is true praise God which Paul affirms in verse 20 but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

And if Christ has risen from the dead it means we can reverse all those statements from before. Yes if Christ has not been raised our preaching is in vain but he has. which means our preaching is not in vain it's the truth.

If Christ has been raised our faith is well founded. We are faithfully representing God. If Christ has been raised we're no longer in our sins we are forgiven. Those who have fallen asleep that is died being Christian have not perished if Christ has been raised they are with him now.

[23 : 55] If Christ has been raised we are of all people to be most envied not pitied. Because of the resurrection everything we saw on Good Friday from Mark 14 is true.

Am I loved by God? Is my future on judgment day secure? Do I belong to God? Yes, yes, yes. The resurrection it's God's declaration that Jesus' sacrificial death has worked.

It's his stamp of approval. No more sin to pay for. No more wrath to bear. No more guilt remains. And so God raises Jesus triumphant.

Triumphant from the grave. Lord of all. Sin and death defeated. Forgiveness of sins secured. It is a marvellous thing. sin and death but actually what Paul wants us to really grasp from these verses is that what is true of Jesus in his resurrection rising bodily from the dead will one day be true for all of us who trust in him.

That is what Paul means in verse 20 by that phrase first fruits. Jesus Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. This is an agricultural term as the first fruits of the ripening crop come up and you taste it it shows what the rest of the harvest will be like.

[25 : 23] And in the same way the risen Jesus Christ shows what the rest of his body the church will one day be like. and that is to have this perfect eternal resurrection body and life.

And so momentous an event is this for the human race the apostle Paul compares it with Adam another human being who had a major impact on humanity but for all the wrong reasons.

So look at verse 21. 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.

Can you see what Paul's doing here? He's referring all the way back to Adam the head of humanity and he's reminding that because of Adam's rebellion against God turning his back on God in the garden of Eden the whole human race was subjugated to death kicked out of the garden of Eden and we can see the evidence of this death all around us everyone in this world dies no one can escape death it's been the case for every human being born into this world since Adam as in Adam all die but Paul's saying look now in Jesus Christ that's all changed now there's a head of a new humanity because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead death couldn't hold him he's triumphant over it new resurrection life life which will not end life which verse 42 described as imperishable a body of glory and of power when Jesus rose from the dead he rose immortal never to die again yes in Adam all die but now in Christ all should be made alive this is what it means by the first fruits the first fruits of a new humanity and it's no exaggeration to say that in the resurrection

Paul sees this event of cosmic proportions the shattering of history the curse of death broken new imperishable resurrection life this is our certain future if we trust in Christ people want to know if there's life after death what's it like look at Jesus Christ here's a picture a window into the future for those who trust in him this is the fourth place this is the first fruits of the perfect sin free suffering free evil free lives all of us will one day enjoy if we know and love the Lord Jesus again it is a wonderful thing just flick over the pages to verses 54 to 57 as Paul here describes a song we will all be singing on the day we die in Christ when the perishable verse 54 puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality then shall come to pass the saying that is written death is swallowed up in victory oh death where is your victory oh death where is your sting this is what we'll be singing as soon as we breathe our last breath on this earth and God raises us to new life new resurrection bodies new lungs we'll sing as we've never sung before where oh death is your victory where oh death is your sting because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ death has lost its sting there there's a story of a family who were driving down the west coast of America they were on holiday it was a beautiful day it was really sunny and shining they were all very happy it was a very peaceful and joyous occasion in the car a couple of parents and kids in the back and the boy just winds down the window for a moment just to get his head out get the cool air rushing in his hair and at that moment a bee got caught into the car and was buzzing around the daughter and sort of the atmosphere of joy and peace and calm just totally evaporated and there was real fear and panic because the girl was allergic to bee stings and knowing that they were far from a doctor or far from a hospital she knew she was in serious trouble and at this point the dad knowing the danger she was in just moves his hand around and tries to grab the bee when it was resting on the ceiling and he holds on to the bee until it stings him knowing that bees can only sting once and then lets the bee go and then he turns to his daughter and says don't worry sweetie it's all okay you're safe the bee the bee's lost its sting and you can imagine at that point suddenly the fear goes the panic goes

[30 : 42] I'm obviously very thankful for her dad for removing the bee's sting because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ death has lost its sting we've got nothing to fear Jesus has won us the victory we can have great confidence in the future no matter what tomorrow holds no matter what happens to us in this life this resurrection life we see in Jesus will one day be ours he's the first fruits just as Jesus Christ he died he rose to new life so we too one day will die and rise again to this imperishable glorious resurrection life death is not the end and it's something this world this scientific world this secular world can only dream of but we say with Paul thanks be to God because he gives us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ this is what we celebrate this Easter weekend death defeated

Christ risen Lord of all a certain future Christ is risen he is risen indeed let's pray Father God we praise you for raising Jesus Christ from the dead on that first Easter morning we praise you for reminding us this morning of these truths of the evidence behind it these three historical facts thanks for the great confidence that it gives us as Christians confidence in our faith it's not futile confidence in our standing before you no longer in sins but loved forgiven accepted by you and great confidence for the future for just as Jesus rose to new resurrection life so we can have great confidence that we too will as we trust in you we thank and praise you for it in Jesus name Amen Amen O Adrián

Amen Amen Amen