

The Importance of Resurrection

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 October 2018

Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] You know, you Christians are really something. I really pity you Christians. Always running around with your good deeds, service and giving money, turning up to church each week.

Why do you bother? Why do you bother? Don't you know that when you die, you die? And all of this will be for nothing.

Why don't you just eat and drink and be merry like the rest of us? I really pity you. You gamers, don't you know you're giving up a perfectly good Sunday sleep in?

Why do you bother? I was talking to my friend Vijay. He's a Christian like you lot. He said that last week you had what he called a Thanksgiving Sunday where you all gave a gift and signed up to serve for another year.

Why do you bother? Now, it's me again. Don't worry. Back to me. See, my friend, he represents the world's way of thinking.

[1 : 13] He looks at all our sacrifice and service and he scratches his head. It doesn't make sense to him. He wonders why we bother.

And actually, I think, if we're honest, from time to time, we find ourselves agreeing with my friends, wondering and wishing we couldn't live the world's way instead.

Why do we bother with God's way, the way of love and sacrifice and service? Why do we bother? That's the question I put at the top of your handout.

Why do you bother? You see, every week in Corinth, Paul has told this arrogant church to give up something, to sacrifice, to serve for the sake of the church and other people.

And here's why they should bother. It's verse 58. Look over your page. Verse 58. It's the key verse in the whole book, I think.

[2 : 19] Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Paul is going to tell us why all the sacrifices will not be in vain, why they should bother. You can see this again. Verse 2 from our reading today.

Verse 2. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. And so here are the choices.

Hold firmly to the word, or else, otherwise, everything, all of this will be in vain. It will be for nothing. And I've put that choice at the top of your handout.

Hold fast to the gospel, or everything will be in vain. How would you like that? Imagine after decades and decades of giving and serving and sacrifice, thousands of dollars towards church ministry, countless Sunday services, to find out it was all for nothing.

[3 : 27] How would you like that? Paul says, either hold fast to the gospel, otherwise, that's what will happen. It will be for nothing. You see, this church, Corinth, they're about to throw away their Christianity, because some have begun to believe a lie.

Did you spot the lie in the reading? It's halfway through verse 12. How can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead?

You see, to depart from the gospel like that means that Christianity will be for nothing. Now, they are Corinth, we are Holy Trinity. We in this church would never admit or say that there is no resurrection from the dead.

But sometimes, sometimes, maybe, by the way we prioritize our lives, we show our hope is for this life alone.

Sometimes. And so, effectively, we are alongside the Corinthians, saying there is no resurrection from the dead. This is a really important passage. I think it's one of the most important in the New Testament.

[4 : 42] And so, please, there's a handout. Please use that and please keep the passage open. We're at point number one. I'll start reading from verse one. Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you've taken your stand.

By this gospel, you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. Paul is very frustrated with this church.

He says, I preached the gospel to you. You received it. You stood on it and it saved you. And verse two, here is the choice. You must hold firmly to it.

Otherwise, your salvation or everything you've believed will be in vain. And he gives them three reasons to hold fast, to hold firm. Verse three, for what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

You see, in our culture, we love the latest idea. But back in Corinth, ancient ideas were better. See, ancient ideas were tested through centuries of human experience and living and tested through debate.

[6 : 02] And even though Paul's message is about new events, Jesus' death and resurrection are ancient ideas, long established according to the Old Testament scriptures.

So Paul's gospel is ancient, hold fast. The second reason in verse five, and that he, Jesus, appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

You see, Paul preached that a dead man came back to life, which is obviously impossible. But he says, go and check. He points to more than 500 witnesses, most of whom are still alive.

Go check with them to see if I'm lying. You see, you cannot fake a resurrection within the lifetime of eyewitnesses. They can easily discredit you, which is why most stories start with once upon a time or a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

That's it. That's a Star Wars reference, everyone. Don't worry. Paul says, hold firmly to the gospel because it's ancient, because it's historically credible, and thirdly, because it really, really works.

[7 : 25] Verse 9, for I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. Do you remember that Paul used to be Saul?

And so how is it that the persecutor of the church, verse 9, became its hardest worker? Verse 10, what has happened to him in the middle?

The answer is verse 10, but by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. It works. No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

You see, trusting in the gospel is all it takes to save you. The gospel can make the worst persecutor the hardest worker for the church.

This is God's grace, his free gift of salvation. The apostles preached this message, and it turned the ancient world upside down, just as it turned Saul's life upside down, and he became Paul, and just as it happened at Corinth as well.

[8 : 34] Verse 11, whether then it is I or they, this is what we apostles preach, and this is what you, Corinthians, believed. You see, if you're not a Christian here today, this is the great tradition of the church, to preach God's grace.

Jesus died for our sins, he rose again to new life. If you believe this message, you too can have new life. like Jesus, like Paul.

And for everyone else, which is most of us, learn the example of the Corinthians. They used to believe the gospel, but now they believe this lie instead.

And so Paul, they believe that death has the final say. And so Paul says, here are the consequences for believing that. This is the second point.

verse 12, but if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, here's the lie, how could some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead? You see, if that's the case, you have to maximize everything in this life as though it were heaven.

[9 : 44] You see, no wonder the spiritually ambitious Corinthians were trying to get the best Bible teacher. We're trying to have the biggest share of the Lord's Supper.

were trying to have the most glamorous spiritual roles in church. And denying the resurrection, see, that's okay if you're an atheist, like my friend.

But if you're a Christian, it has terrible consequences. Verse 13, if there's no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. Jesus is still in a tomb somewhere in the ancient world. Verse 14, and if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are found to be false witnesses about God for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead, but he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised.

You see, if Jesus is still in a tomb because the dead are not raised, then verse 14, Paul's preaching is useless. Useless. And so is your faith, he says.

[10:48] Very strong language. But more than that, the New Testament is a lie because, verse 15, the apostles are found to be false witnesses.

The apostles wrote the New Testament. If they are liars, then let's cut away half of the Bible. The consequences get worse. Verse 17, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.

You are still in your sins. You see, my blood, my blood is not good enough to pay for my sins.

Maybe my blood could account for the teenage years, but not a lifetime of sin for me.

And so death wins over me and I stay in the ground because there's loads of sin not yet paid for.

But Jesus' blood, Jesus' blood is good enough to pay for all of our sins.

He rises because all sin has been atoned for and therefore death no longer has any power over Him.

You see, if Christ has not been raised because the dead are not raised, you better find another way to deal with your sin because trusting in Jesus, faith in Him is futile, says Paul.

[12:10] Enormous consequences. So Paul's gospel preaching is useless. The New Testament is a lie. Trusting in Jesus is futile. We are all still in our sins.

Verse 18, those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. All our loved ones who are Christians who have already died, they're still in the cemetery. You'll never see them again. They're lost.

It's no wonder that Paul says in verse 19, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we of all people most to be pitied. See, they're the Christian consequences, really significant.

But thankfully, the lie is a lie and that's because of point number three. I'll start reading from verse 21.

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. Then the end will come when Jesus hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

[13:17] For he must reign until he's put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. These verses, they're full of battle language. They speak of who has the final say in the universe, God or death.

You see, if Christ is not raised, then Adam's curse always has the final say and death would be the ultimate power in the universe.

But Jesus rises. Verse 20 says he's the first fruits. He's the proof that there is life after death and death does not win. Verse 25 says he puts all his enemies under his feet.

He even destroys death. Verse 26. And that means God can be all in all as verse 28 says. And that has amazing consequences for us too.

This is point four. I'm going to read from verse 30. And as for us, why do we, apostles, endanger ourselves every hour? You see, apart from being a liar and a dodgy preacher, if there's no resurrection, everything Paul risks is in vain.

[14:38] Constantly persecuted and beaten. He was imprisoned and opposed by the state because he kept insisting that Jesus was alive. Why would you bother, Paul?

There's that question at the top of the handout. Why do you bother? If you only have one life to live, why would you bother living like that? Paul agrees with that logic.

Verse 30. Why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day. Yes. Just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus, our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?

Why do I bother, says Paul? You see, Paul can give this life, give his life in dangerous service of the gospel because he'll have another life to come.

The resurrection makes sense of all his ridiculous sacrifices and risks. They suddenly don't look so ridiculous. And here is the main event for today.

[15:45] You see, if the dead are not raised, why would you use this one life, your only life, in service and sacrifice in the way of God's love.

Christianity is an awful life choice if there is no resurrection. We should all follow the world's way of me first, like Melbourne. We should follow the world's way like Corinth.

Paul suggests following the world's way like ancient Israel. Verse 32, if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. There's the lie again.

It was a quote from Isaiah, our first reading, Old Israel stopped living in light of the future and God's judgment. Eat and drink, tomorrow we die.

That could easily come out of the pages of any magazine on sale in Melbourne today. Paul says, when you live this way, you align yourself with God's wicked people whom he judged away into exile.

[16:51] It aligns you with this very naughty church, Corinth. But, but, if the dead are raised because Jesus really is alive, that changes how we approach everything in life.

So every week Paul rebuked the Corinthians. He told them to change and give up and sacrifice. If they hold fast to the gospel, they can devote their bodies to purity.

That was chapter five. They can be content with whatever relationship status they have. That's chapter seven. They can give up their rights to help weaker Christians, never eating meat again.

That was chapter eight. They can serve the church, not themselves. That's chapter twelve. They can pursue the way of love. That's chapter thirteen. They can use their gifts for others.

That was chapter fourteen. Why? Because they'll have another life to come. Do you see how this solves the problem in Corinth? If they hold fast to the gospel, if they're clear about a resurrected life, they can use this life in service and sacrifice of the church and others.

[18:10] Now let's apply this to ourselves. Last week was Thanksgiving Sunday where lots of people gave a financial gift and signed up to serve.

But many of us, all of us have given money to the church and served the church over our lifetimes. My friend asked the right question at the start. Why do you bother? Why do you bother?

If you hold fast to the gospel, you can give your money and your time and your service now. Why? Because you'll have another life to come.

If you give up on the gospel, if by next year you've just sort of walked away from Jesus, all of the money, all of the cash you've given to the church, all of the time you've spent, all of these Sunday morning sleep-ins you've given up will all be for nothing, in vain.

They are your choices. Hold fast fast, or it will all be in vain. Now, there are plenty of other clubs and societies in Melbourne that also donate and give and serve, but the difference is the limit, you see.

[19:26] The limit is everything. People who don't believe in the gospel have a limit to how much they can give. Why? Because they only have one life, this life.

And if they give more than their limit, we can rightly say to them, why do you bother? It will all be in vain. But Christians, Christians can give everything, everything, even their own lives.

Why? Because Jesus will give them another life, a better life, when he comes. Do you see how this makes sense of why a missionary would endanger their lives, would give up everything in this nice, Western culture, to go to a worse off place for the sake of the gospel?

They have another life to come. Now, I've talked about money and time. What about bigger things? Why would you bother risking a friendship to talk about Jesus?

Some people here have given up relationships to honour their parents, or maybe because the other person wasn't a believer? Why would you bother?

[20:40] Think of people in ministry, so Andrew Price and Tim, you all know Tim that works in the office. Andrew and Tim could run a small Eastern European Republic by themselves.

Right? I don't know if you know this, Christian ministry pays, the money is awful. Why would they bother to do that with all their skills and talents? You see, you can give up the time and money, the career, the paychecks, the esteem, the pride, anything you can think of that the church wants you to give or that Jesus asks of you, you can give it all.

Why? Because you have another life to come. We're planting a church at St. John's, aren't we?

Why would we bother to give up all the money and the effort that's going to require?

Why don't we just stay here in the mothership, nice and cushy and relaxed? You, we, the church, can give this next season towards a church plant, which is some work, because we'll have many more seasons, an eternity of seasons to come.

And actually, this is a really strong resource for when life devastates you as well. Think of the many ways in which life devastates or disappoints us. And for all of us, we'll have reasons.

[22 : 12] If you have another life to come, that will hold you and keep you firm through the devastation of this life. You see, people should look at, everyone out there should look at this church and say, why do you bother?

None of this makes sense to us. All your labouring is in vain, they should say. And from their perspective, they are right. Why? Because all they can see is one life, this life.

From where they sit, everything we do is for nothing. But if you hold firm to the gospel, you know that Jesus is alive, he will give you another life.

You see, the resurrection makes sense of why Christians sacrifice and serve and pursue the way of love. If we don't hold fast to the gospel, if we start believing my friend, if eat and drink and be merry starts to summarise our lives, then all of this will be in vain.

You should have slept in today. how would you like to get to the end of your lives and realise that all the money, all the time, all the sacrifice, all the service would be for nothing.

[23 : 36] And so Paul finishes with this warning, and I'm going to finish there as well. Verse 33, do not be misled. Don't be misled by out there, the culture out there.

bad company corrupts good character. Come back to your senses, he pleads. Stop sinning, for there are some who are ignorant of God.

Paul says this to their shame. And so let's pray. Father God, we thank you that you raised Jesus from the dead, that he is the first fruits of what will happen to us.

And thank you, therefore, Father, that if we hold fast to his word, that we will have another life to come, a better life, that makes all of the sacrifice and suffering and service and giving now worthwhile.

Please help us to hold fast to resurrection thinking, that it would make our sacrifice worthwhile. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.