

What if there is no Resurrection?

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Happy Easter. Normally, we would preach through about resurrection from the Easter story, but instead we're going to tackle it from a slightly different angle. We're going to think about resurrection from 1 Corinthians 15, which Joy read to us. And let me begin by asking you, what do you think happens when you die? What is your version of afterlife? Let me tell you the Bible's view. So Jesus will return and he will resurrect every dead Christian and give them new bodies. He will then take all Christians to a new creation, a new earth. Death itself will be no more and Jesus will rule over everyone and everything. And God will finally be the most important person to everyone everywhere. He will be all things in all places, all in all. And if you're paying attention when Joy read, you'll realize that all I did there was borrow from verse 23 to 28 of our passage. And so how does the Bible's view of afterlife compare with your own? For those of you out there who are atheists, maybe you reject the whole idea. And so when you die, you die and there are the perfect afterlife. So for them it's the pearly gates, it's souls flying free away on some sort of journey. And that is what the Corinthians in this passage thought. They were an extraordinary church, if by extraordinary we mean extraordinarily messed up. Their idea, it's halfway through verse 12, you should have one of these. It's halfway through verse 12.

How can some of you say that there's no resurrection of the dead? Meaning they didn't believe in a physical bodily resurrection. To them bodily resurrection was gross and unspiritual. What do you think?

We're all going to be corpses walking around like some zombie apocalypse? They prefer the idea of souls flying free, not bodies coming back to life. But what if they're right and there is no bodily resurrection? What if the atheists are right and when it's over, it's over. We stay in the ground. Because let's face it, on Easter Sunday, we're essentially celebrating that a human being came back to life after three days of being dead. And Paul says, if there is no resurrection of the dead, that idea is like a nuclear bomb under all of Christianity. And so this is our first point.

So look at the passage, verse 13 to 19. I've tried to split up the passage in its different arguments. Verse 13 to 19 is a logic chain. They are pillars of Christianity that topple over if our bodies stay in the ground. Walk through the logic with me. Verse 13, if there's no resurrection of the dead, then Jesus can't have been raised either. Verse 14, if Christ has not been raised, then the apostles' testimony, the preaching, the New Testament, is useless. And so is your faith. More than that, verse 15, the apostles are false witnesses. They lied about God and what he has done.

[3 : 36] If that was too fast for you, Paul repeats the logic chain again. Verse 16, if the dead are not bodily raised, then Christ has not been bodily raised either. And that means the Easter story is rubbish.

So verse 17, trusting Jesus with your afterlife, that faith is futile. He can't help you. He's still dead himself. And that means he's dying on Good Friday to atone for our sins. That didn't work. It wasn't enough to satisfy God for all the wrong that we have done. So you're still in your sins. And not just us. Verse 18, all Christians who've died before, they are lost because they will stay in the ground. Verse 19, the apostles who endured so much to follow Jesus, they are most to be pitied. Do you see how many vital Christian pillars topple over if there is no resurrection of the dead? See, lots of people want to debunk Christianity and prove how stupid we all are.

But the scandals in the church, God and suffering, how hopeless some ministers are, none of that has stopped us. We are all still here. This room is still full. Paul says, if you really want to blow up Christianity, attack the Bible's view of afterlife. Verse 13, if there is no bodily resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Jesus is still in the ground, that first Easter Sunday, that is a nuclear bomb under all of Christianity. It means the most meaningful thing today is about chocolate eggs. Everything else, says Paul, is useless, false, deceptive, futile, unhelpful, lost,

and a pitiful way of life. You see how important the resurrection is?

And for the Christians in the room, we believe in resurrection, don't we? We believe that Jesus came back to life. But is the Bible's version of afterlife what you were hoping for? Like the Corinthians, do you prefer the idea of heaven where our souls fly free on some journey? Maybe you're disappointed by the idea of another body on another earth, because on this earth, it's your body that has really let you down. You see, hips and heart, knees and nose, eyes and ears, muscles, memory, mental health. Maybe it's your body that has limited all you could have been. And what you were really looking forward to was your soul and your mind finally being unshackled and set free. Verse 20 to 23 is Paul's attempt to prove the link between what happened to Jesus and what will happen to you. This is our second point.

To make his point, Paul takes us back to Genesis 3, during the time of Adam, when, verse 21 says, death came through a man. You see, God made the world, he made Adam, and he put him in charge of that world. But in Genesis 3, death arrived because Adam did not want to serve God.

[7:04] He wanted to be God. Verse 21, death came through a man. You see, we tend to think of dying as frail and human, but rising is God-like and Christ-like and spiritual and holy, but not here. By a man, we die. That's Adam. By a man, Jesus, we're made alive. Verse 21, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. If that's too quick for you, Paul repeats the logic again. Verse 22, for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. It's a parallel cause and effect.

Since the time of Genesis 3, all people die. That's pretty straightforward. That is the sign that you are born of Adam. When there's tragedy on the news, when we visit someone in hospital, when we go to the funeral of a loved one, that is the legacy of Adam. This week, I finally got glasses for the first time, and I'm too afraid to wear them in front of you. So you all look like blurry blobs.

My eyes are getting weaker. It's the symptom of a body on its way to death. Let's be honest. And if you're over 30, isn't that the easiest thing in the world to believe?

Slow or sudden, if you feel your body declining, you are born of Adam. Death is the family trait he has passed down through the generations into your declining body.

But just as sure as through one man death, so, verse 22, all in Christ will be made alive. It's a parallel certainty between two men, Adam and Christ. And the key illustration is there in verse 20.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. And the illustration goes like this. In springtime, the farmer tastes the first apple. And the apple tells him what the rest of the crop will be like. That first fruit, it's a taster. It's a sample of a harvest to come. And the Corinthians in our passage, they are terrible farmers because they believe in Jesus that he came back to life, but they think he's the only one and it will never happen again. And that is as impossible and as ignorant as a farmer tasting the first apple of the season and saying, do you know what? I think this apple is the only one and there'll be no other apples after me, even though behind him is an orchard full and bursting with fruit.

[10:07] Verse 20 and 23, Jesus is the first apple, Christ the first fruits. Then when he comes, those who belong to him. See, Jesus is part one of a crop of human beings that God will raise from the dead, not as a separate harvest, but part of the same harvest. His resurrection body, that is a taster, a sample, a first fruit of what comes next in us. And here is the relationship between Jesus and us in the room. It is guaranteed for all Christians because we have a real link to him. Verse 18, those who have fallen asleep in Christ. Verse 22, so in Christ will all be made alive. Verse 23, those who belong to him.

If Jesus is risen from the dead, it is impossible and ignorant that it will not happen to you as well.

The first fruit idea that is the crucial link between what happens on Easter Sunday to Jesus and what will certainly happen to you in the afterlife. Verse 22, for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. It's a parallel cause and effect. And Paul takes this parallel of Adam and Jesus way beyond just a body. He takes it in fact to a whole new creation. We don't have time this morning to go through the verses, but verse 24 to 28 are a parallel of the first creation account in Genesis.

They speak of a new kingdom, a new world, but this time rightly ordered. So God is on top, then under him, a man called Jesus.

And unlike the first man, Adam, Jesus is happy to bow the knee and serve God. Unlike Adam, Jesus rightly squashes and gets rid of all rebellion. And so unlike Adam, there is no death in this new kingdom.

And if you like, verse 20 to 28 is a Bible overview. First creation, new creation. First Adam, second Adam, first Genesis, new Genesis. Do you believe that you will get a new body?

That if it happened to Jesus, it's impossible, ignorant that it will not happen to you as well? If you're not a Christian here in the room and there'll be a few, do you believe in the future that Jesus wants to include you in? In our remaining verses today, I want to move from believing to testing, testing how much you believe this to be true. This is our last point.

[13 : 14] Look at verse 29. In verse 29, it talks about an ancient religious practice of being baptized for the dead. And we're not exactly sure what that means. But either way, Paul hits them with the inconsistency of it. If you don't believe Christians will get new bodies, then lots of your religious practices are pointless. And here is some religious practices of ours that are pointless too, if there is no resurrection. So stop praying and reading the Bible at funerals. Stop singing songs about Jesus ruling because he's still in the ground. Stop singing songs and talking about Jesus returning because you won't be there when it happens. Easter Sunday, that is a lie. So you all should have gone for brunch and slept in this morning. If you don't believe in resurrection, many of our religious practices are pointless. They make no sense. It's a test of our consistency. If you don't believe in resurrection, think about full-time Christian ministry. So Paul, the apostles, why would they choose the life of an apostle? Verse 30, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? If there's no resurrection, verse 32, why would you face death every day or fight wild beasts in Ephesus?

with no more than human hopes. Why would you do that? Think about mission partners. Lots of our mission partners, they risk life and limb if they're exposed in the country they're working in. How dangerously inconsistent if there is no resurrection. Our AFES student missionaries on the university campus, they're going to be a part of the university. They're going to be a part of the university.

Jeff, front row, he's a chaplain at one of the local high schools. Their salaries are what they can raise. They're very low compared to how clever and talented they are. Humanly speaking, why on earth would you limit yourself like that? For us Christians in the room, if the dead are not raised, why would you use your only life in service and sacrifice of God and his people? God's standards are such a high bar. The Christian life is so costly. What do we gain if on top of the regular problems of life, we also try to add following Jesus as well. How ridiculously inconsistent of us. And Paul agrees in verse 32, if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Isn't that logical?

I wonder if you think life in Melbourne is best described as eat and drink for tomorrow we die. We might turn our noses up at a sort of motto like that, but at least they're being consistent.

If you're not a follower of Jesus, maybe you've sampled that sort of life before and you're exhausted by how sort of dead end it is. You need to know that Jesus is returning, that he will rule over everything and be crowned God's king for all to see. You too can be part of that future if you put your trust in him. It won't be futile, but a far better way of life than eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Verse 34, Paul says, come back to your sense as you ought and stop sinning.

[16 : 51] You see, Paul can give his life in the dangerous service of an apostle because he has another life to come. The missionaries, the gospel workers, they can risk life and limb and low salaries because they have another future to look forward to. Andrew Price, he's skulking in the back there.

Andrew's going on holidays for four weeks. In love, if I see him on the grounds, I'll set the dogs on him. He needs to rest, doesn't he? And rest is good, but he can push his body to certain limits because he will get another body when Jesus returns. Do you see how this works? For us Christians in the rooms, there are so many ways that living for Jesus will cost us something in this life, will require us to discipline and self-control these bodies. It might mean giving up on a financial security to follow Jesus. It might mean selling your holiday house so you can be at church for eight more weeks of the year. It might mean foregoing a relationship or a friendship that is toxic to your godliness.

It will definitely mean disciplining these bodies from the urges of anger and impatience, sexual immorality, gossip, all those sorts of things. All these things are huge and costly, but if you believe that you'll rise again in Jesus, at least you're being consistent.

A few weeks ago, we talked about loving your enemies. If there's no resurrection of the dead, you would not give 1% of one of your days, not one iota of your emotional energy to loving your enemies, to blessing them, to doing good for them. You would not do that if this was your only life. It's too inconsistent. Unless you believed, you have another life to come. The resurrection of Jesus makes sense of Christian sacrifice and service in this life.

[19 : 05] At the moment in our church, there are lots of people struggling with life and their bodies. The glorious truth of Easter is that Jesus is alive. If we're in him, it's impossible that you won't get a new body too, like his glorious one. It's not pitiful, it's not in vain to give this life in sacrifice and service of God and his people, because we know for sure, we're certain that the dead will rise and we belong to him. You need to know that Jesus rose again and that he has a new body waiting for you in the new creation. And so I want to wish you a happy Easter.

And I can do that because Jesus is alive. So let me pray. Father God, we praise you that Jesus is not dead, but alive. And if we put our trust in him, that our bodies will be made alive and glorious like his. And Father, please help us to believe this deep down.

Help us to believe it so that we're willing to sacrifice and serve you even when it's costly in this life. Thank you that the resurrection makes sense of all the ways we give things up for Jesus.

And when it's tough, Father, please keep our eyes on that day when he returns and raises us up to new life in a new creation. Please, will we know this deep down in Jesus' name. Amen.