

The Importance of Resurrection

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- [0 : 0 0] Why do you bother? 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 a Thanksgiving Sunday where you all gave a gift, financial gift, and you signed up to serve for another year.
- Why do you bother? Now, it's me again. Don't worry. It's me again. I am Vijay.
- See, my friend, he represents the world's way of thinking. He looks at all our sacrifice and service and giving and he scratches his head. It doesn't make sense, he says.
- Why do we bother, he wonders. But if we're honest, if I'm honest, at times I find myself agreeing with my friends and wondering why we bother, why we don't live according to the world's way.
- [1 : 0 9] Why do we bother with God's way? God's way, pursuing love, sacrifice, and service. Why do we bother?
- And that's the question I've put at the top of your handout. Why do we bother? And similarly, in Corinth, every week in Corinth, as we've been looking at this church, every week Paul has told them to give up something or sacrifice something or do this or do that for the sake of others and the church.
- Why do they bother? And here is why. It's the key verse in the whole letter, I think. It's in verse 58 across the page. Can you see it?
- Verse 58. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. 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.
- And so Paul today is going to tell them why everything, all their labor and sacrifice will not be in vain. Have a look at verse 2 from our passage.
- [2 : 1 9] Verse 2. Similar kind of idea. By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you. Otherwise, otherwise you have believed in vain.
- And so here are the choices. You can hold fast to the gospel or it will all be in vain. There are your choices. Hold fast or it will all be in vain.
- And I've put that at the top of your handout. Two choices. Imagine how you would feel after a lifetime of donating cash to church ministry.
- Thousands of dollars. Decades of laboring in the church. Countless services on a Sunday. To find out it was all for nothing.
- All in vain. Either hold fast to the gospel or else that's what will happen. It will all be for nothing. You see, this church, this church, Corinth, they're about to throw away their Christianity because some there have begun to believe a lie.
- [3 : 2 3] Did you spot the lie? It's halfway through verse 12. How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? You see, to depart from the gospel like that means that Christianity will be for nothing.

Now, they are Corinth and we are Holy Trinity. So let's be clear. And no one in this church would ever say that there's no resurrection. But maybe, maybe, sometimes, by the way we prioritize our lives and our stuff, we show that we are living for this life alone.

And so, effectively, we are alongside Corinth saying there is no resurrection from the dead. This is, I think this is among the most important passages in the New Testament. And so, really important for us today.

And you've got a handout and I'm at point one. Let me read from verse one, chapter 15, verse one. Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and in 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 naughty church.

[4 : 44] 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. Hold firmly to it or else, otherwise, your salvation, everything you believe will be in vain.

And so, he gives them three quick reasons why they should hold firm. So, first reason, verse three. For what I received, I passed on to you as a 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 Melbourne, in Melbourne, we love the latest idea. We love the latest thing.

But in ancient, back in Corinth, ancient ideas were better. You see, an ancient idea can be tested through centuries of human experience and rigorous debate.

And even though Paul's preaching is about new events, Jesus' death and resurrection were ancient ideas, long established according to the Old Testament scriptures.

[5 : 54] And so, Paul's gospel is ancient, so hold fast. Second reason, verse five, and that he 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 has come back to life, which is obviously ridiculous and impossible. But then he says, right, there are 500 witnesses, more than 500 witnesses, most of whom are still alive.

Go and check with them. You see, you cannot fake a resurrection within the lifetime of an eyewitness. They can easily discredit you, which is why any good story starts with once upon a time or a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

That's a Star Wars reference for anyone who doesn't know. Paul says, hold firmly to the gospel because it's ancient, because it's historically credible, and thirdly, because it really works.

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. Do you remember that Paul used to be Saul?

[7 : 16] Do you remember that? And so how did the persecutor of the church, verse 9, end up becoming its hardest worker?

Verse 10, how did that happen? And in the middle, verse 10, but by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

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. It's all it takes to take the worst persecutor of the church and make him its hardest worker.

This is the message, Jesus' death and resurrection, this is the message that the apostles preached and it turned the ancient world upside down, just as it turned Saul's life upside down.

He became Paul, and just as it turned Corinth upside down. Verse 11, whether then it is I or they, this is what we apostles preach and this is what you Corinthians believed.

[8 : 23] If you're not a Christian here today, which will be about a dozen or more of us, this is the great tradition of the church to preach the gospel. Jesus died for our sins, he rose to new life.

If we believe that message, we too can rise to new life, just like Jesus, just like Paul. And for everyone else who's already a Christian, which is most of us, learn the example of the Corinthians.

They used to believe the gospel, but now something else has crept in. They are believing a lie. They believe now that death has the final say.

And so Paul shows the consequences for their faith to believe that. This is point two. Verse 12, but if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, here's the lie, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

You see, if that's the case, what you have to do is maximize everything in this life as though it were heaven. You have to create heaven on earth if this is all there is.

[9 : 33] You see, no wonder the spiritually ambitious Corinthians were fighting over the best Bible teachers. No wonder they were fighting each other for the biggest share of the Lord's Supper or trying to get the most glamorous spiritual gift on a Sunday.

And denying the resurrection, that's fine 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. See, Jesus is still in a tomb somewhere in the ancient world.

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.

[10 : 36] It's all useless. And so is your faith. It's very strong language. Useless. But more than that, the New Testament is all a lie.

Why? Verse 15, because the apostles were found to be false witnesses or liars. The apostles wrote the New Testament. The testimony of Jesus risen is what makes it up.

It's all a lie. 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 all my sins. Maybe my blood could account for the teenage years.

Maybe not, actually. But my blood is not good enough to pay for a lifetime of my sin. And so, death would defeat me because there's lots of my sin unatoned for.

[11 : 41] My slate would not be clean. But Jesus' blood is good enough for my sin, for all sins. He rises because there's no more sin left to atone for.

That's why he comes alive. Death has no power over him. You see, if Christ has not been raised because the dead are not raised, you have to figure out another solution to your sin because trusting in Jesus, Paul says, that's futile.

Your faith is futile. Enormous consequences. And so, Paul's gospel preaching is useless. The New Testament is a lie. Trusting in Jesus is futile.

We're all still in our sins. Verse 18, those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. All your loved ones who are Christians, who have died, they're all gone. They're lost for it.

They're still in the ground. It is no wonder that Paul says in verse 19, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[12 : 48] They are the Christian consequences if dead people don't come back to life. Very serious. But thankfully, thankfully the lie is just a lie because of point three.

I'm going to be briefer here because of time. And I realized on point three it says comic consequences. It should say cosmic consequences. There's nothing comic about what has happened here, but anyway.

Cosmic consequences. Let me read 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's destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he's put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. These verses seem a bit cryptic. They're all full of battle language. Words like destroyed and dominion, reigning and enemies.

[13 : 51] the battle it's talking about is a battle, a cosmic battle between God and death. God versus death. You see, if Christ has not been raised, then Adam's curse always wins.

Always wins. Even for Jesus, he is not strong enough to defeat death. And then death would be the ultimate power in the universe. But when he rises, because he's the first fruits, the evidence of a resurrection, if you like, he puts all enemies under his feet, verse 25.

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

This is point four. verse 30. And as for us, why do we 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.

Constantly persecuted and beaten, opposed by the state and thrown in jail, because Paul kept insisting that Jesus was alive.

[15 : 15] He would not shut up about it. Why would you bother doing that? Says my friend. If you've only got one life to live, Paul agrees with the logic, verse 30.

Why do we endanger ourselves every hour? Verse 31. 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? He asks. And here's the answer. Paul can give his life in dangerous service of the gospel because he has another life to come, because Jesus rose from the grave.

The resurrection makes sense of why his laboring in the Lord is not in vain. salvation. And this is the main event for today.

You see, if the dead are not raised, why would you use your only life, this life, your only life, in sacrifice and service and the way of love for other people?

[16 : 25] Christianity is an awful, awful life choice if you've got one life. We should follow the world's way, like Melbourne, me first. We should follow the world's way, like Corinth.

Paul says you should even follow the world's way, like ancient Israel. Verse 32, if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

That was our first reading. It's a quote from Isaiah. You see, old Israel stopped living in light of the future, in light of God's coming judgment.

They thought it was better to eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. And that is the same lie, and that same lie you could get from any magazine or newspaper in Australia today, I reckon.

Paul says, when you live that way, it aligns you with God's wicked people, whom he exiled in judgment. It aligns you with this naughty church, Corinth, who are in danger of throwing their Christianity away.

[17 : 28] Hold fast, or it will all be in vain. Bear your choices. Jesus. But, but, if the dead are raised, and Jesus is alive, that changes how you approach everything in this world.

So, in Corinthians, every single week, Paul has told the Corinthians to do this, or do that, or change this, or sacrifice that, every week. So, if they hold fast to the gospel, they can devote their bodies to purity.

That's chapter 5. They can be content with whatever their relationship status is. Chapter 7. They can give up their rights to help weaker brothers and never eat meat again.

That's chapters 8 to 9. They can serve the church, not themselves. Chapter 12. They can pursue the way of love. Chapter 13.

They can use their gifts for others. Chapter 14. Why? Because they'll have another life to come. And so, their labor in the Lord will not be in vain.

[18 : 40] Do you see how this passage solves the problems of Corinth? The resurrection makes sense of why any Christian would sacrifice anything for the sake of the gospel.

Why we would sacrifice and serve and pursue the way of love because there's another life to come. So, let's apply this to ourselves. Last week was Thanksgiving Sunday and we were all invited to give a one-off financial gift or to sign up to serve for the new year.

Everyone here has probably given money to the church over their lifetimes or served the church in some way over their 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 now, give your time and energy and service now because you have another life to come.

If you abandon the gospel next year or the year after or later on in life, if you abandon the gospel, all of that cash, all of that time, all of those Sunday sleep-ins are all for nothing, all in vain.

[19 : 54] They're the two choices because this life will be all you have. Paul says you can use this life in sacrifice and service because you've got another life to come.

Now, there are plenty of secular clubs and societies and groups out there where people donate and give and sacrifice. These things are not unique to Christianity.

Plenty of footy clubs and clubs like that do the same thing. But the difference is the limit. The limit is everything. You see, people who don't hold fast to the gospel, i.e.

people out there, people who don't hold fast to the gospel have a limit on how much they can give and serve and donate. Why? Because they've only got one life, remember?

If they give more, if they give in a way that makes their one life uncomfortable, we can rightly ask the question, why do you bother? That's the right question. Why do you bother?

[20 : 54] It's all going to be in vain for you. But the Christian, the Christian person can give everything, everything, everything of everything.

Why? Even their own lives, because they're holding fast to Jesus and he will give them another life, a better life, when he returns.

Doesn't this make sense of why a missionary would give up everything in Melbourne to serve in a far-off place and potentially put their lives in danger? Doesn't that make sense of why they would do something so absurd?

So we talked about money and time. What about bigger things? Why would you bother risking a friendship to talk about Jesus? You know it's probably going to end a friendship.

Why would you bother taking that risk? What about career? There are so many ways in which a Christian ethic will limit your career.

[21 : 54] So many ways. Whether it's hours you spend, the honesty, coming home to spend time with your family, all these sorts of things. There are so many ways that a Christian ethic will limit you at work.

Why don't you aim for the top? Why do you bother living like that? I think about people in ministry. ministry. So I'll name three of them.

So Candice over there, Andrew Moody over there, Tim. Do you know Tim Walker, our church manager? All three of them could probably run a small Eastern European Republic by themselves.

They're so capable. Why would they bother to give that up in service of the gospel? It is absurd, isn't it?

If you only have one life, it makes no sense. We are planting a church in St. John's, mainly from this congregation. It's a big undertaking.

[22 : 54] It's going to require money, people, like Dave said before, families are uprooting from the comfort of the mothership to go over to St. John's, where they're all going to have to work twice as hard as we do.

Why would you bother giving up a season of life to devote to a church plant when you can stay here in the mothership and hide in the numbers and hide in the masses?

Why would you bother to do that? You can give this life because you've got another life, says Paul. See, we could do this for any, I could go all day. You could give this for anything, career, friendships, relationships, time, Sunday mornings, anything.

You can serve Jesus in a million different ways even if it costs you your life. Why? Because you have another life to come.

Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits. This is actually a tremendous resource when life devastates you as well. So we won't say it now, but all the many ways life disappoints and devastates people.

[24 : 01] If you hold firm to the gospel, you will get another life. And that will carry you through the despair of this life.

It's a powerful resource, this new creation, resurrection thinking. My old teacher in London, he used to get up 15 minutes earlier each day, set his alarm, and he'd spend 15 minutes every day just thinking about resurrection and the new creation because it's such a powerful resource.

You see, people out there, they should look at us in here and they should scratch their head. They should look at all our sacrifice and service and giving and they should say, what is wrong?

Why do you bother? It doesn't make sense. And they are right. Because from their point of view, all they can see is one life.

It doesn't make sense. But if you hold on to the gospel, Jesus will give you another life to come. Here it is again.

[25 : 04] The resurrection makes sense of every sacrifice any Christian makes for the sake of the gospel because they have another life. The resurrection proves that all of our labors for the Lord will not be in vain.

And so, as we finish, if we don't hold fast to the gospel, if we start believing my friends, if eat and drink for tomorrow we die, starts to summarize our lives, then everything will have been in vain.

Your whole Christian lives will have been in vain. You should have just slept in today, is the answer. How would you like to get to the end of your lives and have all of it be for nothing?

And so, Paul finishes with this warning, and I'm going to finish here as well. Verse 33, Do not be misled. Do not be misled. It's a lie, says Paul.

Bad company corrupts good character. He says, come back to your senses. Come back. Stop sinning, for there are some who are ignorant of God.

[26 : 13] And Paul says this to their shame. So I'm going to pray. Father God, we thank you that Jesus is the first fruits that he did rise.

from the dead. And that because he rose, we will rise if we hold fast. Father, please help us to hold fast to the gospel, even if we've heard it a million times.

Please, would we sacrifice and serve and give, knowing we have another life to come. Thank you that your resurrection makes sense of why we would sacrifice and serve.

Please help us keep this resurrection thinking in our minds. Would it change how we live? In Jesus' name. Amen.