

The Hope of Resurrection Pt 1

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[0 : 00] Well, it's been really good for me trying to prepare these couple of sermons on this chapter, and in fact, quite moving as I've read through some of the later part of the chapter.

In fact, I've been, those of you would know, some of you classically inclined, I've turned on the Messiah, and most of you would know that Handel's actually written two or three songs, which are actually literally taken out from the last part of this chapter.

But we'll get to that next week. This week, we are in the first part of 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and if you could leave your Bibles open and your outline in front of you, that might help. Well, we're all quite familiar with Easter traditions.

The two most familiar ones are hot cross buns and Easter eggs. Both of these traditions, of course, date back quite a long way and have been handed out over many generations.

The origin of the hot cross bun, of course, is not hard to work out. The cross on that symbolizes the crucifixion of Jesus. And according to history, I don't know because I wasn't there, the practice dates back to sort of the late 1600s, where the buns were spiced with fruit, dried fruit, by monks, I think, and called Good Friday buns.

[1 : 18] And traditionally, hot cross buns were only eaten on Good Friday. Nowadays, of course, we eat it long before and long after Easter.

I think I saw some in the Woolworths supermarket in February. As for Easter eggs, originally what they were meant to symbolize was new birth, as eggs do, and there were duck or chicken eggs which were decorated.

Now, nowadays, you're never going to find an Easter egg which is a duck or a chicken egg. Instead, all they are are chocolate eggs. But believe it or not, Cadbury first came up with them in the year 1875.

So it's been going on for quite a while. Well, tonight we're going to look at another great tradition that has been handed down to us. But instead of evolving over time, this is a tradition that Paul wants us to hand on without tampering with.

So he says in verse 3 that what he's going to tell the people of Corinth is that this is a matter of first importance. Now, what is this tradition? Well, it's none other than the gospel.

[2 : 26] Now, you get a sense that Paul views this gospel in very important terms because by the verbs that he applies to it. So when we read in the first two verses, he says, Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and to which you have 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. So the gospel is this sort of precious thing that Paul has carefully received and then is now handing on to others through his preaching.

It's almost like a master craftsman, perhaps something like a violin maker, who patiently teaches the apprentice how to make the violin. But he's handing out things that he's been taught for many generations and he wants the apprentice to take hold of it and then do the same as he has done and not try and sort of tamper with the tradition.

Paul also goes on to tell them that it's not good enough for them just to believe. They needed to hold firmly to it until the end. Otherwise, he says, they have believed in vain.

So there is this unbroken chain where Paul, at the very start, receives the gospel and then passes it on through his preaching and he wants the Corinthians to stand firm in it and then to hold firmly in it.

[3 : 55] So there's using the feet and the hands and then, by implication, hand it down to the next generation. And by doing that, they will be saved. Well, the next question then we need to ask is, what is this gospel that Paul is talking about?

And it's quite surprising today, if you ask people what the gospel is, that you could possibly get quite a wide range of answers. So some people might say, well, it's anything in the first four books of the New Testament.

Those are the gospels, so it's whatever is in there. No, others say, no, it's related to what is building God's kingdom. You know, what Jesus did, building God's kingdom.

Some people are so afraid to try and define it that they say, well, it's anything that's in the Bible. So it's the entire Bible. Well, it's sort of not very helpful when you do that, because when you say something's everything, it sort of means nothing as well.

But I guess if we wanted to know the answer, it's actually quite clear in these verses that we've got here tonight. So in verses 3 to 8, Paul actually spells out quite clearly what the gospel is.

[5 : 01] And in a nutshell, the gospel is about the historic death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So there may be a lot of other things that you might want to put into the gospel or flows out from the gospel.

But first and foremost, the gospel is about these two historic events, the two most significant events in history. You see, Christianity is not just built on a set of interesting ideas or concepts.

It's not about just a way of living. No, the Christian faith is founded on two concrete historical facts. It is about a God who has intervened into history through his son in order to save it.

And saving by Jesus going to the cross, dying and rising from the dead. And so in this creed, we see from verses 3 to 8, Paul sets out not only what the content of the gospel is, but he goes on then to prove that these things happen.

So I've got a slide up there where you can see how first he states the first fact, the historical fact that Jesus died. And then he says it's according to scripture because it's something that's God's plan.

[6 : 16] It's not an accident. And then when he says that Jesus was buried, what he's trying to do is that he's saying this proves that Jesus really died. And if you look actually at all the four gospels, they all talk about the fact that Jesus was buried.

And then he goes on to the other one, which is that he rose again after the third day, again, according to scriptures. And then he goes on to list all these appearances that Jesus made.

And to first Cephas, then the 12th, then to 500, and then lastly to Paul. So what Paul is saying with that is that, well, Jesus did really rise from the dead because there are still witnesses that are alive that you can talk to if you don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

And what's more, some of these witnesses are actually apostles, people who have been given the task of handing down the gospel. who are preaching and convincing you that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead.

And one of which is Paul himself. So Paul is saying to the people, to the church in Corinth, I am one of those witnesses. And I'm telling you that Jesus did rise from the dead.

[7 : 33] Now, Paul will return shortly to the question of resurrection, because obviously there were some people who doubted it. But first, he wants to then explain the significance of these events. And he does this through his own testimony.

It is the gospel, the good news for Paul, because it has transformed his life. Jesus' death and resurrection aren't just historical facts that are of intellectual interest, but they were life-changing moments in history, touching profoundly the lives of those who believe in him.

So for Paul, what the death and resurrection of Jesus displays most clearly is the grace of God. And so in the space of three verses from 9 to 11, Paul mentions God's grace three times.

And so we read, for I am the least of the apostles, and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

Nor I worked harder than anyone or all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Paul says here, in the space of three verses, that even though he was a persecutor of God's church, and therefore should have been the last person to receive God's grace and forgiveness, and who knows how many people he actually put to death because of his zealousness, Paul is amazed that now he finds himself as one of Christ's apostles, a messenger of the very gospel that he himself once killed people for.

[9 : 17] And at the heart of this message is a God who sent his son, the one he loves above all else, to set free those who oppose him. Those five words in the creed, if we go back to verse 3, Christ died for our sins, that is what it means for God's grace to be displayed for us.

That defines what God's grace is. And most of you would know this acronym, the G-R-A-C-E, is actually, some people have said, it's God's riches at Christ's expense.

And that's exactly what it is, isn't it? That Christ died so that we can experience God's forgiveness. Friends, most of us would know what the power of God's forgiveness is.

Actually, most of us would know what it means to be forgiven. We just need to think back at our own experiences of forgiveness, how it has the power to bring such healing to others, and to bring restoration of broken relationships.

Well, if that's what happens with human forgiveness, how much more with God's forgiveness? That when we know we are forgiven, even after all the wrong things we've done before God, even though we realize how deeply flawed we still are, and yet we know that God loves us and forgives us, how powerful is that in terms of transforming our lives?

[10 : 48] It is only God's grace that can set us free from the burdens of our past. So you just have to look at Paul. You know, in one sense, there was no need for him to pretend.

He still knew that he was the least of the apostles because of what he'd done. Elsewhere, he says, Christ died for sinners, of which I am the chief of sinners.

And he says, I am what I am. You know, I don't make any boasts or any claims to being worthy to be a disciple. But because of God's grace, he's able to serve God wholeheartedly, without having to doubt himself, without having to ask himself, am I good enough to be an apostle?

And that's the same for us. If we're still asking the question, am I good enough for God? Or am I good enough to serve him? Then I'm afraid we haven't really understood what God's grace means.

We haven't really understood the grace that is shown on the cross. Because the truth is, none of us are good enough. And we will never be. But the more amazing truth is, we don't need to be, because of what Jesus has done.

[12:01] Because of God's forgiveness of us, through Jesus. Now, all this is amazing truth, only, only if Jesus did rise from the dead.

The gospel is good news, only if Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. And so this is what Paul now turns to, for the rest of the chapter, actually.

We read from verses 12 and 13, that perhaps the church, or some in the church, had started to doubt whether anyone could rise from the dead. Maybe they were influenced by the dominant worldview in Corinth by the Greeks at the time.

Even in verse 33, it suggests that some of them might be hanging out with bad company and were having their morals corrupted or their beliefs corrupted as a result of that. Now, I have to say, we shouldn't sort of read our modern worldview into these ideas of the resurrection.

I don't think the church at the time would have thought that there was no life after death. I think the Greeks thought that, you know, there was life after that, although it was sort of a shadowy type of existence, a sort of bodiless soul that sort of existed somewhere out there.

[13:21] But nevertheless, most of them could not fathom how it was that having died, people could rise from the dead again. And I guess it's not hard to imagine because apart from Jesus, no one actually has come back from the dead.

So in one sense, it was sort of something that was not easy to believe. But for Paul, Paul says that they needed to hang on to this belief because the ramifications of them of not believing it was huge.

Because he says in verse 14 and onwards, if there is no bodily resurrection, then it didn't happen to Jesus either. And if that were the case, it would totally undermine the basis for the Christian faith.

If it didn't happen, then Jesus did not die for our sins. His resurrection was proof that his death was a valid death.

And if he did not rise from the dead, then, well, everything else is futile. Your faith is futile. Paul's preaching is futile. We even make God out to be a liar.

[14:33] And therefore, if we have only hope in this life, then it is of all people we are to be most pitied. So what Paul presents in the rest of the chapter, actually, to verses 34, are two opposing scenarios.

He asks the question, did Jesus rise from the dead? And if the answer is no, then as I've said, verses 14 to 19 apply, and what's more, verses 29 to 34 apply as well.

But if it's yes, then the logic in verses 20 to 28 applies. There are only two alternatives. It's Paul's own version of two ways to live.

See, I like Paul. I like the way that he's so rational, and he actually takes things true to his logical conclusion. So after having said that our faith is futile, and his preaching is futile, he goes on to verse 29 and says, well, you know, what's the point?

Verse 29, now, if there is no resurrection, what will those who do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?

[15:47] I face death every day, yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained?

If the dead are not raised, well, let us eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow we die. So Paul is actually taking the fact of the resurrection to its logical conclusion.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, and you are still dead in your sins, and there's only this life to worry about, then let's not pretending about trying to do good, trying to save the world, you know, save the whales, whatever, let's just eat, drink, and be merry, because that's all we have in this life.

And you know, I guess when we look out at the world, at society, that is the predominant philosophy in our society. Many of the people I used to work with had this approach to life, and they were actually honest enough to say so, whereas a lot of people pretend that there is no resurrection, but there's somehow still some value in being moral.

And so what they pursue are the pleasures of life, sex, shopping, fine food, holidays, beautiful houses, and fast cars. And they do it ostentatiously, without making any apologies, because they're applying this, yes, let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

[17:19] Now, I have to say that I can actually, I mean, I will, because I believe in the resurrection, I will never go down that route, but I can actually see the logic of it. It makes sense.

And so if ever there was a day I stopped believing in the resurrection of Jesus, then I will be out of here in a flash. I'll go straight down to the dealership, the Mercedes dealership, and I'll get myself one of these convertibles.

Of course, with money I don't have, so I'll be coming to you for a handout. But rest be assured, I will believe in the resurrection, and which is what Paul gets to on the other hand, which is coming back, let's move back to verses 20 to 28, that on the other hand, if Jesus was indeed raised from the dead, then life is not just about the here and now.

Something of eternal significance is happening to us and to the world. This is God's grand plan in verses 20 to 28. If Christ was raised from the dead, then Paul says, he is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, those who have died.

That's verse 21. Well, let me read the rest. For since, but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

[18:40] For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn, Christ, the firstfruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him.

Then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom of God, the kingdom to God, the Father, after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

For he must reign until he has put all things, until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for he has put everything under his feet.

Now when it says that everything has been put under his feet, it is clear that he does not include God himself who put everything under Christ. And when he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him so that God may be all in all.

What we see here then is God's grand plan and what this grand plan is, shows us, is that Jesus is a glimpse of this new creation. And in and through Jesus, the new creation is actually taking shape even now.

[19:51] It is invisible to the naked eye. It is only visible by faith. But those who believe in him, when we believe him, come under, his dominion into this new creation.

We are part of his kingdom. And one day when he comes again, everything else will be put under his feet. First Jesus, then us, when he comes again, and then everything else.

Every dominion and authority and power, including death, which is the last thing and which is the only thing that in one sense hangs over us, even those of us who believe, all that will be put under Christ and then Christ himself would hand that over to the Father.

So, I used to grow up thinking or being taught that salvation was about being saved and then somehow being plucked out of this world and taken to heaven one day.

You know, I think it's a Jimmy Greaves song or Jimmy Reeves song, the one that says, this world is not my home, I'm just passing through. If heaven's not my home, oh Lord, what will I do? You guys might be too young for that.

[21:00] But anyway, my mom used to sing a lot. But that's not the picture of salvation in these verses or indeed in the rest of the Bible, is it? It's not the only picture of salvation.

Instead, the picture here is of salvation coming into this world through Jesus' conquest and transforming this world or renewing this world in the new creation.

Some of you would have read The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis and, you know, I've seen the movie. I've read the book as well. I've seen the movie. But most of you would be familiar that when the four children go first into Narnia, they come into Narnia which is filled with winter by the White Witch and it's bleak and it's cold and it's white.

And then what happens is when Aslan, the lion, dies and he comes back from the dead, the first thing he does is he breathes on those human figures that had been, what do you call it?

Cryogenically frozen and they thaw out. And that's a similar picture with what is being described here that when Jesus comes and we are the ones who believe in him, it's as if God has, Jesus has, by the Spirit, breathed into us and we have thawed out.

[22:15] But the thing is that one day, the rest of creation will be thawed out as well. And we are the, as it were, Jesus is the first fruits but we are the first of those to come into this where we are alive, we're not frozen.

So this is the same picture and this is the beautiful picture of what's going to happen to creation. It's not about being taken out of this world but of God coming into this world and renewing creation. So I think the question we need to ask ourselves for those who have not put their faith in Jesus or still doubting the resurrection is not whether we will submit to Jesus or not.

I think the real question is when will we do it? Will we do it now, willingly, wholeheartedly, joyfully, experiencing God's grace or will we do it when he comes again, when all dominion and power and authority will be put under him and that includes each and every one of us when we are forced to, when we are doing it under the judgment of God rather than the grace of God.

So I want to say again that if you have not settled the question of Jesus' resurrection in your mind, then let me urge you to do it. This is the key question to answer as far as the Christian faith is concerned because it determines whether Jesus did die for our sins or not and it determines whether we have a hope for our own resurrection.

So that's why we're running the series that we're doing, Believe Incredible Truth. And on the third week is the question that we will ask is can we believe the resurrection? We're going to consider not just this chapter but the rest of the Gospels as well, the evidence for Jesus' resurrection, that we can believe in it not through blind faith only, not through blind faith but through faith because there is credible evidence to lead us to believe that Jesus did rise from the dead.

[24:20] But if, however, you have believed that Jesus has risen from the dead, then let me urge you to continue to hold firmly to that truth, to hold firmly to the Gospel.

If you're a Bible study leader or a teacher of God's Word, then keep coming back to the Gospel, keep teaching it, keep reminding others of it. Tell and retell the story of God's grace in history.

We mustn't get sick of hearing about it. And we need to keep preaching it to each other week in, week out, over and over again when we pray for each other, when we counsel each other. Keep coming back to this Gospel, this great truth.

And if ever you find me or anyone else in this church stop preaching the Gospel, then please pull us up on it. Tell us that you want to hear it. over and over again.

I have two girls who like to be read. And one of the things about reading children's stories is they sometimes catch on to one book that they love.

[25 : 23] And they just want to hear it over and over and over again. One of the books that my younger daughter, Lauren, loves is this one. Have you got it?

Guess How Much I Love You. Some of you would know there's actually a children's program on it. And so in this story you've got two rabbits. One's called Big Nut Brown Hair, I think.

And the other one's Little Nut Brown Hair. And Big Nut Brown Hair would tell Little Nut Brown Hair, Guess How Much I Love You. And so they'll go to and fro and one would say, Oh, I love you to that tree and back.

And then the other one would go, No, no, no. I'll love you to that pond way over there and back. And then eventually they keep going and going. And then finally Little Nut Brown Hair says, and that's the end of the story, I love you to the moon and back.

And so my daughter loves this. And after we finish telling it, she'll ask me, or I'll ask her, Guess How Much I Love You. And we'll do our own little version and, you know, all the way to the kitchen and back and the toilet and back and forth.

[26 : 23] And then we'll keep going. But that's what it is with the gospel, isn't it? That we want to keep retelling the stories about how much God loves us.

That the story you want to, the question we want to ask each other is, Guess How Much God Loves You. And the answer is, all the way to the cross and the resurrection and no back, I don't think.

No, that's just it. So keep telling the gospel because it is on that that our hope is founded. Let's pray. Dear God, we thank you for the gospel and we thank you that you have indeed sent your son into history to show us how much you love us by dying on the cross for our sins and then showing that it was all worth it by raising him up from the dead.

And so, Lord, help us to ponder this as we lead up to Easter. Help us not to grow tired of it, but to encourage each other, particularly if we are feeling a bit down and despondent in life, to see that because of the gospel, we have hope.

We have hope that transcends whatever disappointment, whatever struggles that we now have currently because of what's going to happen to us when you come again, when your son comes again.

[27 : 41] We ask this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.