

The Gospel of the Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Today was the day of communion, the Lord's Supper, where we have the symbols of the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus given for his people.

His death, his death upon the cross. Just a week ago, many in the Christian world were marking Easter.

Many take time, especially on Friday, to remember the Lord's death. But Sunday is the first day of the week, and it was on the first day of the week that everything changed.

We don't finish with the death of our Lord Jesus. And if we read through the account that Paul gives us in this chapter, we find indeed that with only the death of the Lord Jesus, faith gets us nowhere.

The gospel is the gospel that which Paul delivered as of first importance in verse 3, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and continues that he was buried, in other words, he was truly dead, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

[1 : 44] The full gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And with the special focus of this chapter, we might go so far as to say the gospel of the resurrection.

I want to take you here this evening to, in some way, even in the few hours that we've had together, to remember the full message and why it is that we rely upon the Lord Jesus.

And yes, I do want to, as it really, it is a skim, I guess, through the chapter, but there are three parts to it, I suggest, looking really from verse 1 to 11 as the gospel of the resurrection, the statement of it, or the gospel as a whole.

The gospel, from the following section, from verse 12 to 28, is along the lines of the significance and the power of the resurrection. And then from verse 35 to the end, is really the guarantee, I would say, of the resurrection in more ways than one.

Let me take you through it briefly this evening. Let me begin by setting it in its context.

[3 : 15] It would be good to be able to go to a Christian bookshop one day and buy a Bible that has no large numbers, because they distort, very often, our understanding of what the Bible is saying.

The big 15 that we have was not there originally, and we need to remember what has come before this. For several chapters before this, including chapter 11, that we took this morning to give instruction on the right use of the Lord's Supper, Paul has been speaking about how to behave rightly within church.

That's very much a summary caption of what's been going on. Church order. Order in church. The right ways of representing God and Christ in our behavior together.

And it's against that background where clearly there was a great deal of confusion that now Paul says, I would remind you of the gospel I preached to you. And in verse 3, I delivered it to you as of first importance.

You may well remember that as he was speaking about spiritual gifts in chapter 12, he turns at the end of the chapter, as we have it, and says, but I can show you a better way, and chapter 13 is that better way, the glorious way of love.

[4 : 45] And you have something similar here, where with all of those things unfolding, and with all of those concerns, and the dynamics or otherwise of church life together, Paul says, but for all that, this is what's first importance.

This is what should loom largest in your thinking. This is what should shed light on everything else that you and I do. That's why it looks like a change of subject.

But it's a change saying, come back here a minute. Come back. You've been going all those ways, and you're entangled. Come back here. Where do we need to begin? Where does our life come from?

What I received, I passed on to you, as first importance. And he does move, in due course, to focus especially on the resurrection.

That seems to be another question that they're dealing with in the church in Corinth, and should be. But this gospel, he's received it.

[6 : 02] It's been given. It's not contrived by man. He takes it as it stands, as it is, and he says in verse 11, whether it was I or they, so we preached, so you believed, the other apostles, whether it be in Corinth or around the churches, we've been preaching exactly the same thing.

It was passed, delivered to me, delivered to you, passed on to you. These three things, Christ died, Christ was buried, Christ was raised again.

It's a constant. This is the essential for the whole church that has been delivered to the saints.

And it becomes, therefore, more important than any question of prophecy or how we do it in the previous chapters. This is so important for all of us in today's generation as well.

We say that we need to do church in this way or that way, but how often are we remembering, how often are we reminding ourselves, how often are we getting the message out, this Christ, dead, buried, risen.

[7 : 24] I'm coming back to it shortly, but I can't help but come back to this, come to it just at the moment. Our first reading finished at verse 34. Some have no knowledge of God.

And I say it to your shame, Paul says. What is of first importance in all our thinking regarding our lives as Christians, in the fellowships of the church and beyond, outside?

Is this what's of first importance? Or have we seen it as in those few words, it seems so small, and so many other things that can entice us and occupy our attention.

It's just a few words. But this will more than occupy our attention if this is where we turn our attention.

Paul is saying this is what's of first importance. Every question about prophecy and intricacies in the ways that you're thinking, much as he said with love, you can have all of those things in their detail, but if you don't have love, you have nothing.

[8 : 42] If you don't have your reliance on this gospel, none of the rest makes any difference. It only takes us further away.

Everything we might make or have made as being important for a system of Christianity. How do they look in the light of this?

Whether it be personal, my personal Christianity, whether it be across a church or a congregation, how does it look in the light of this truth?

Christ died. The eternal Son of God died for my sins. Do I walk humbly with my God?

Christ was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures. Do I walk in confidence with my God? God, these are the things that Paul teases out.

[9 : 51] These are the things that we must be sure we hold fast. These are the things you received in which you stand and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preached to you so that faith is not in vain.

This is first importance. it's decisive for the way that we live our lives. I've reminded you of the content of this, his death, his burial.

It should be striking for us as well that it's in accordance with the scriptures. I've been very struck by this in relation, this account of resurrection in relation to one story that Jesus told that you would remember.

There was the rich man and Lazarus. And there was a discussion in the higher places shall we say. And the rich man is speaking with Abraham.

And eventually the rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to rise again amongst men to speak to his brothers and the man will be warned and they will hear and they will make a difference in their lives and they will be safe if a man rises from the dead and tells them.

[11 : 24] Do you remember what Jesus said? If they will not hear Moses and the prophets, the scriptures, even if man arises from the dead, they won't listen.

We have ample evidence for that. Christ has risen and people will not listen because we're not listening to the scriptures. They are not listening to the scriptures.

If they have Moses and the prophets, Paul is saying not just Christ died, not just that Christ was buried, not just that he was raised again, but it's according to the scriptures. The scriptures are, I'm more and more I come to this.

I just, what a magnificent gift God has given us, speaking to us. I don't use it as I should.

But according to the scriptures counts first, this is what God said. This is what God does. And he was seen by many.

[12 : 38] He goes on. He elaborates. He tells of the different stages of appearance. This is a testimony, an eyewitness account. There are those who are still alive.

In other words, if you don't believe me, go and ask them. 500 all at once. The only way 500 could see him all at once is if he is alive.

It's the only possible way. He lives. He was raised. And it was seen. This is the content of the gospel.

If we take these things away and take this resurrection away especially, what do we have? But we have this, we have this gospel, are we resting on it?

is this the foundation of our lives? As this particular section comes to a head, verse 11, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

[13 : 49] The note that is coming out through these verses, it's Paul's concern that the church in Corinth was letting go of these truths.

failing to keep them as first importance. So you believed. Will you keep that belief? Do you still believe? Are you holding fast?

Why let go now? the gospel, the gospel of the resurrection, the full gospel that leads us through to the risen Lord Jesus.

But to take it a little further, the significance of the gospel, as I would put it in the following section, where this question of the resurrection comes very much to the fore.

more. In verse 12, in the second part of verse 12, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? Now we see what's going on.

[14 : 54] Now we see what's the disruptive factor in the Corinthian church. This is the question or the assertion that was taking place. There is no resurrection of the dead. How can you say that?

Well, people say it, don't they? People still say it. They said it then, they say it now. Then was it perhaps because of some of the wild prophecies that were going on? I suspect it has perhaps more to do with the weight.

The church was under the impression, we see that again in Thessalonians, it seems to have been under the impression that when Christ said he was coming again, they were expecting it much sooner than this.

Well, it can't be true then that he rose again. because he's not coming again. That too, I think, would demonstrate the danger of relying on experience over against Scripture.

Scripture is the word of God. Christ himself said, I am coming. This resurrection was according to Scripture. People were not believing the word.

[16 : 04] God. But if I might say so, I think there's another danger with regard to the resurrection. Our weight has been longer than theirs.

And I fear that there are many times when we are firm theoretical or intellectual resurrectionists. We say, yes, Christ rose from the dead.

faith. But in practice, are we living it? Are we living by it? that's why this chapter is so vital.

The points that Paul is earnestly trying to get across. That we can say we believe something. But is that the foundation of our lives?

Is that the way we're living our lives? Expecting his return because he lives? Living with him as our Lord, our king, because he lives?

[17 : 09] Or are we in effect saying there is no resurrection of the dead? We say it in our words. Does our life bear it out?

You say there is no resurrection of the dead? But Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead. The proclamation that Paul makes here, it stands in stark contrast to a very common argument against the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The order in which men take this, he teases it out from verse 13, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And that's the direction many people take.

You can't have a resurrection from the dead. Why not? Because I haven't seen one? Therefore, Christ hasn't risen. resurrection doesn't happen.

Jesus didn't rise. Well, for a start, if we know our scriptures, the Old Testament, New Testament, I can think of three in both testaments that were raised from the dead, just off the top of my head.

[18 : 27] That's your homework to think about and look for. There were men raised from the dead. Yes, they were raised with the natural body and died again.

They did not have the spiritual body that Paul talks about a little further down. But Paul goes on to say, Jesus has been raised, so there is a resurrection from the dead, a completely different order.

There are many who will say, we can't have a resurrection. It doesn't happen. Scientists have been saying that. Philosophers have been saying that.

Skeptics have been saying that. They say it's not repeatable. But a scientist will tell you if you wait long enough, you'll be able to repeat something that's valid.

And we need to wait, and we'll find the resurrection most certainly is true. And all the more then, that we receive the witness of scripture, we receive the witness of these many who saw him alive.

[19 : 38] Jesus rose again. Paul is prepared, and we need to be prepared to acknowledge the implications, what it means if Christ didn't rise again, if he had not been raised.

Verse 14, it means that then that our preaching is vain. our, and your faith is in vain. If Christ has not risen, see how important this is.

If Jesus hasn't risen, I am as well to stop and walk away and find something else to do with my life. That's what Paul is saying, that's what I am saying. That's how significant it is.

I must bring to you the risen Lord Jesus. And so much more than that, if it's not just my preaching that is useless, your faith is useless. You put your trust in the Lord Jesus who has died for us, we spoke of that and enacted it this morning.

But if he isn't risen, all of that faith is empty too. You're still in your sins, verse 17.

[20 : 51] That's why the resurrection is an essential part of this gospel, the completing part of this gospel.

You're still in your sins. You're still in the death that sins bring. The Lord Jesus, when he died, he was fully expecting to rise again, to live again.

As he went to his death, he said to his disciples, I will not eat of this bread or drink of this cup until I eat it with you in the kingdom.

You eat and drink, remembering the Lord Jesus, proclaiming his death until he comes, because he lives. Therefore, we're not in our sins.

That's what he goes on to deal with when he says, from verse 20. Well, all of that, that's the objection, that's the misdirection that is abroad.

[22 : 00] Many will be lost as a result. But verse 20, for all that, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

The philosophies and the misdirected theology, you can say all you like, but the fact is, Christ has been raised from the dead.

The fact is, friends, that has been done. It is an event in history, human history. This Jesus has been raised. He died, but he's not dead.

If he was still dead, you are still in your sins, your faith is empty. But he has been raised. Don't worry. Rest upon him.

What does it mean that Christ has been raised further on in this section? It means that Christ now reigns. He is king. He is at work and the Lord has put all things under subjection to him.

[23 : 09] He is going on, finishing that work to finally conquer death, the great, the last enemy. He is going on, Hebrews chapter 4 through to 10, develops this of the high priest who is in the heavens, who's touched with our weaknesses, this man, Jesus.

It's in that section too that the new covenant we spoke of is developed further as well. In him, because he lives. He's in heaven with the Father, on the right hand of the Father as Psalm 110 spoke of, interceding, working in his kingdom, in this world, interceding for his people.

That's what it means that he's been raised again. Again, but it means other things too. He goes, comes back and asks the question, if the dead are not raised, from verse 29 down, why?

Why this? Why that? Why the next thing? And of himself, his own ministry, why would I do this if Christ was not living? The alternative is, in verse 32, if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

But don't be deceived. That's not the way it is. Christ is alive. And so be on guard. Wake up. Don't go on sinning.

[24 : 48] Be on guard against the live for today. Ignore God thinking of the world. that's what it brings, brings us down to this, that if we go and follow the ways that are around us, because we have not taken to heart, we are not applying, we are not living by the risen Lord Jesus, therefore some have no knowledge of God still.

It seems to be saying to me at least, that if we would remember, take hold of the truth that Christ is alive, there would be a very noticeable difference, to put it mildly.

shame. And it is to my shame. It's truly a glorious thing, but am I living my life by it?

Is that what's evident as I walk my days? the living, reigning Lord Jesus, that in him I have new life entirely?

Am I holding fast to that faith in him as living? I must go on, the remaining passage, the remaining section of the passage is speaking really of the guarantee of the resurrection, the guarantee that we have because Christ has risen.

[26 : 34] with what body do we rise again? And he elaborates on that, I'm not able to do so this evening.

He talks about the change, the drastic change, the newness that comes about, the old like a seed that is planted and you get something that is so different from that seed that brings forth fruit.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead that the time will come. Because he has risen, the time will come when he will raise his people. Those who are asleep, those who are alive, will all be changed, new life entirely.

Our bodies will be like his body, a spiritual body, if we have faith in the risen Lord Jesus. Death, you might say evil, swallowed up in victory.

This will be the great completion, the great victory. We know it because he is alive. All the changes that take place, that we should be made to bear, verse 49, the image of the man of heaven.

[27 : 54] We spoke in the past few days of the glory of the Son of God amongst men. the prophecy spoke of Jesus on the cross as the one who was marred more than any man, that we don't desire him, but you come to look at him, you come to believe in him because of his death, but also his resurrection.

He is the loveliest of all. God and you can bear that image by believing in him, died and risen, but only that way.

is that your faith to rest upon the risen, living Lord Jesus? And then Paul presents to us striking, penetrating, searching conclusion.

This is what I've given you. This is what I'm reminding you of. these are the things that are true. These are the things that are true of what has taken place.

He was raised. These are the things that are true of the present, what he is doing now. These are the things that are true of what is to come. Therefore, there's something you need to know.

[29 : 26] At the very end of the chapter, my beloved brothers, my beloved brothers, brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Don't move away. Don't let strange teaching tear you apart from the simple teaching of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's love. He gives us our present purpose. There's encouragement. There is an urging to diligence. There is a confidence.

Go about these things steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

not just your faith is not in vain, your labor is not in vain. If he's not risen, your faith is in vain. It is empty. It is purposeless.

[30 : 32] But he has risen, so you have every purpose. There's a complete turnaround. Here is the one who has overcome. He has victory over the grave of death, of sin.

He lives, he reigns. And as he is the Lord, as you serve him, as you work his work, as you work it in him, in his strength, living strength, it's not empty.

It's not pointless. I do think there are many times where, especially in our day, Christians might look back and think on the glory days of the past, you say, where is it going now?

And it's been a matter throughout history. Why do we go on? It's not in vain, because he's alive. It is very worthwhile.

Paul has a very poetic way of saying it. It's not in vain. Utterly worthwhile. So why, what do you do? You give yourself, you abound in the work of the Lord.

[31 : 46] God with its eternal consequences for you and for those, verse 34, who do have no knowledge of God.

These days we may have a sense in ourselves of a real personal blessing. I trust we do. I do.

But it has its purpose, which is not just my pleasure. It is on account of the one who died, giving himself for us, but lives again, who is my Lord and my Savior.

and he says there is labor to be done. It may be hard work, but it's worth it. It's one that will draw you on to abounding in him.

Let it be in him, in the light of the gospel, the pinnacle of the gospel being his resurrection. Death could not hold him.

[33 : 16] He would not decay in the grave, but he lives. He lives. And that's why we can still have communion with him and each other.

And so for this evening, may God bless his word, his word to us. May he lay hold of us by his spirit.