

Christ was raised

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Date: 24 April 2022

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[0 : 00] Dorothy, thank you. The question, I think, behind 1 Corinthians 15, or that we're going to think about in line with 1 Corinthians 15 is, are you wasting your life?

By being a Christian. Because time is short, we say, and life is precious. And you've only got one shot. We're born, we live, we grow, we fade, we die. There's no second chances. You can't go back and start again. This is it.

And being a Christian believer is a big thing. It's a massive life decision to follow Jesus. It shapes, it should shape what you do with your time and your cash and your everything. It takes effort and involvement to follow Jesus Christ.

The question is, are you wasting your one life by being a Christian? Could you imagine getting to the age of 90? None of us are there yet. Could you imagine getting there to the age of 90 and looking back over your life?

You decided to follow Jesus maybe when you were young. It cost you friendships. It was hard saying, I follow Jesus. Look back over your life. Think of the effort and the time. Think of the 2,000 church services you attended.

[1 : 27] Think of the Sunday school sessions you sweated over preparing. Think of the thousands of pounds over a lifetime that you gave and could have spent it on something else.

Think of the effort and time working through arguments and fallouts and splits in your church. Think of the praying and the worrying for your children as you battled hard to help them know God.

Think back over the decisions you took in your life. You turned your back on that relationship. You restricted your sexual experience. You refused to go along with society around you.

Think of the way. Sometimes you felt like an outsider whom people laughed at. Could you imagine the tragedy of getting to the age of 90 and looking back over your one life and realising it was a waste?

All of that Christian effort. Empty. Useless. All for nothing. It was a waste of time. Could you imagine that? In 1 Corinthians, open in front of us, the Apostle Paul is writing to a church family in Corinth, which is in modern day Greece.

[2 : 39] It's about 20 or 25 years after the death of Jesus. And a bunch of people in Corinth, in this confident, busy, multicultural Cambridge-like city, have put their faith in Jesus.

They said, we'll follow him. They're a church. They're a church. They're a church who've discovered themselves that the Christian life is really demanding. It means major change. Read through 1 Corinthians. Following Jesus challenges your pride.

It affects your sex life. It means you have to stand out in your culture. This strange bunch of people, your brothers and sisters, you're meant to love them and serve them and not yourself.

Not in theory, but these people here. And at the end of Paul's letter in 1 Corinthians 15, he wants to convince them and he wants to convince us that Christian effort is not a useless waste of time.

If you've got it open in front of you, please do. Please have it open. Through chapter 15, I'd love you to notice the language of useless and all for nothing and waste, which comes up again and again.

[3 : 51] At the end of verse 2, Paul says, otherwise you have believed in vain. In vain is uselessly. There's a way of once having believed that's just useless.

In verse 14, if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless. It's empty. And so is your faith, says Paul.

In verse 17, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. It's a total waste of time. Or in verse 19, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

What a pathetic waste being a Christian. It could be possible that our religion is in vain. It's useless.

It's futile. But, in 1 Corinthians 15, come now to verse 58 and the end of the chapter and the climax. Do you see this verse?

[4 : 58] Therefore, in the light of everything I've said in chapter 15, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. So, through chapter 15, Paul wants us to know, he wants to convince us that spending our one life believing in Jesus, with all the effort it means to follow him, is not in vain. It's not in vain. It is not an empty, useless waste of time to believe in Christ. It's not a waste of time to belong to St John's Orchard Park.

It's not a waste of time to take radical, costly decisions in your life to live for your Lord. But, rather, our useful faith will see us made fully alive for all eternity.

And that's where we're planning to go over these five Sunday mornings. For now, this morning, just come back to the beginning of the chapter, where in these first verses which Dorothy read to us, Paul wants to focus on what we believe.

[6 : 18] He wants to tell these Christian believers what's true. And he wants us to stand firm and believe it. Because what we believe shapes our lives undeniably.

So, here we go this morning. In verses 1 to 11, he says to this church family and us, Hold firmly to this. Christ was raised.

Let me read from the beginning, verses 1 and 2. Now, brothers and sisters, Christian church family, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on 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've believed in vain. So, a few years beforehand, Paul had turned up in Corinth, and he brought with him the gospel message.

He preached it. They received it. They took their stand on it. Yes, we believe this gospel. We're saved. Says Paul, that's right. But now I want to remind you.

[7 : 27] I want to go over it again. Why? Verse 2, Because by this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.

That is, it's no use saying, I believed the gospel a few years ago, or I believed when I was a child, but not so much anymore. You are only saved if you hold on firmly, if you go on believing the gospel message.

Otherwise, you've believed in vain. So right at the start of this amazing, encouraging chapter, there's danger and a warning for them and for us.

To those of us maybe with a long history of belief and church involvement and church attendance and serving in all sorts of ways, it's just a part of me, it's what I do. You're easily confident before God, of course.

I remember 15 or 20 years ago or so, I was leading a Christian summer camp for teenagers and I was in charge of it. And another leader came up and said to me, oh Chris, I could never see you give up being a Christian.

[8 : 41] Not you. Because you're a leader. And your faith is so strong. And I loved hearing that. I felt flattered.

But Paul says, you are saved if you hold on firmly. Because Paul knows, and it's just like this today all around our country and the world, that some people start off believing the gospel, but at some point they chuck it all in.

And that past belief is empty and useless. And they die unsaved. So what then is this gospel message to which you and I must hold firmly?

Here it is, verse 3. 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, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the 12.

What's the most important stuff? What's first order importance? The first order message is about Jesus, who came into the world as God's King, the Christ.

[10 : 01] What about him? First, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and he was buried. You must believe that.

This is the gospel. Crucified on a cross, he breathed his last, his heart stopped, Christ died.

He died for our sins, sacrificing himself in our place, on our behalf, for our sins, as Isaiah 53 said he would, and then he was buried.

This is first importance gospel. You must hold firmly to this. Which means that if, like some people today, you say, I don't like this Jesus dying for our sins in our place thing.

It sounds cruel and horrible, and I don't like... If you only believe Jesus died as an expression of God's love for his creation or something like that, Paul says you are not saved.

[11 : 12] This is first order, importance, that he was sacrificed for us in our place. First, he died for our sins and was buried, dead, in a tomb.

But now second, and this is Paul's chapter 15 focus, he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and he appeared.

having been dead, a corpse in a tomb, on Easter Sunday morning he was raised. In Psalm 16 verse 10 in the Old Testament, speaking about Jesus, King David had written, you will not abandon the Christ to the realm of the dead.

You will not let your faithful one see decay. And so on the third day, we celebrated it last Sunday, Christ was raised by God the Father to life.

Not as a ghost, not as a spirit, he was raised physically and bodily. The tomb was empty, still bearing the scars of the nails in his hands where they crucified him.

[12 : 27] this having been cold and dead man was raised, alive again, his heart beating as he stood and felt the sun on his face once more.

This is important, the miraculous bodily resurrection of Christ. Says Paul to these believers, this is the gospel message you must hold firmly to, Christ was raised.

It really happened in history 20 to 25 years ago if you're a Christian believer in Corinth hearing this letter read and Paul wants his hearers and us both to be absolutely convinced about this, that he rose bodily from the dead.

So important this. A few weeks ago I was loitering by the community centre waiting to go on a jog with some people who didn't turn up and I got chatting to a guy I know who works for the community council who enjoys giving me comments about Christianity.

He enjoys a good 10 minutes of kind of poking me and telling me what's wrong with the Christian faith. All those miracles, Chris, and the resurrection and stuff, it didn't happen.

[13 : 46] You know, Chris, those first century people, they just believe anything. They just believe anything. And I said to him, I'd like to say it to him more clearly now, it's just not true.

It's not true that those first century peasants just believed anything. When Paul was preaching in Athens a few years before writing this, he spoke about Jesus rising from the dead and they mocked him just as they do today.

These Corinthian Christians with their heads screwed on. They need to be convinced that Christ rose from the dead. And so do we. Well then, says Paul, listen to this.

1 Corinthians 15. Listen to the solid evidence for the resurrection. Christ appeared. He was seen. So check it out in verses 5 to 8. Look. He, Christ, was seen. He appeared to Cephas and then to the 12. After that, the risen Christ appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

[15 : 00] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. And last of all, he appeared to me also as to one abnormally born.

Says Paul, we saw him, we touched him, we ate with him. Go talk to the brothers and sisters who are still alive. Go knock on their doors and quiz them and ask them.

They will tell you. He was seen. He appeared. We saw him. And we need to understand what they're saying here.

If you go on the internet, you will find people saying very confidently that, well, these Christians, these first Christians, they were just hallucinating. They were just kind of seeing him.

But he wasn't really there. It was some kind of psychological delusion meeting a felt need. But honestly, that does not stand up to reasoning.

[16 : 04] Hallucinations are normally about expected events. None of the disciples expected to see Jesus again. They were fearful and doubting and uncertain.

The wrong psychological conditions for a hallucination. Hallucinations, visions, often happen over a long period, getting more or less. Jesus Christ appeared during 40 days and then not again.

To think of 500 people suffering from a collective hallucination at one time, very hard to imagine. Nothing like that has ever been documented in psychological and psychiatric literature.

This is not a hallucination. And were they to have just seen a vision of Jesus, none of that would lead to belief in his bodily resurrection.

No, not a vision. They touched him. They ate with him. They saw him and spoke to him 500 different times, different places. What we have here in the New Testament is solid evidence.

[17:19] As the Old Testament had predicted, he was raised. the tomb was empty. He was seen by independent witnesses.

They touched him, talked with him, ate with him, not a ghost. You can be absolutely sure of this. Jesus Christ, the King of all, raised bodily from the dead.

Says Paul, he even appeared to me, I who persecuted the church. And so, verse 11, at the end of this first section, whether then it is I or they, this is what we preach and this is what you believed.

Would you hold firmly to this? Christ was raised. I wonder whether these, in a sense, straightforward verses could be wonderfully strengthening for lots of us.

Maybe you openly doubt the Christian faith. You would not be alone. In a recent survey, a third of Church of England clergy doubt the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

[18:38] Maybe you're openly questioning. Maybe you secretly have nagging doubts about the Christian faith. I was brought up to believe it and this is what we talk about all the time, but really, maybe you're hiding those doubts from your family and you wonder if Christianity is really based on anything solid at all, or is it just something we all like to believe to make us feel better?

Now, now hear this this morning. Our faith is based on certain historical events. Jesus died. He was raised bodily. He was seen. You can believe this message. You can take your stand on this solid truth.

So believe in him, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, and hold on firmly. these first verses could be strengthening for us.

It may be though, on the other hand, that you hear the last 10 minutes or so talk of the evidence for the resurrection and you think to yourself, oh, yawn, yawn.

[19:52] Not this again. It's so basic. And I wonder if that's what the Corinthian Christians were feeling at this point. Yeah, yeah, yeah, we're okay.

We've believed this gospel, we're holding on firm, we've got absolutely no problems with the resurrection. And so what a rude shock verse 12 onwards is.

Look at this. To those who are certain they're holding firmly to Christ raised, Paul says, no, you're letting go by saying no resurrection of the dead.

That's verses 12 to 19. In verse 12, Paul arrows in on something these Christians were saying, some of them. But if it's preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, if that's what you hear in church on Sunday and it happened in history and you believe it, that's wonderful, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead.

Although they believed that Christ himself was raised bodily, they're saying at the same time that there is no resurrection of the dead.

[21:15] Yes, for Jesus all those years ago, I can believe that about him, but you and me and people whom we love, I can't really believe that we're going to be raised from the dead.

No, no, no, there is no resurrection of the dead. I wonder if we can understand this, just think about this with me. When I was 14, I thought I wanted to be a doctor, and so I got sent on work experience to a hospital in Cheltenham, where I used to live.

because I was 14, I couldn't be let loose on real patients and other reasons as well, and so the next best thing, so they thought, was for me to spend a week with the hospital porters, which I think gives you very, very little experience on what being a doctor is like.

And these porters in the hospital met me, a 14-year-old boy who wants to be a doctor, and they thought we're going to have a lot of fun with this lad. We'll show him what hospital life's about. I'm sorry Doug Williams isn't here this morning, I could ask him about it, he being a porter.

So what they got me to do was to walk miles and miles each day, sent from one end of the hospital to the other, carrying packages to people who hadn't asked for them, could you take this liver, it was a sausage, or something like that.

[22:37] They were winding me up. They took me into the corridors in the hospital and taught me karate. They got me driving the porter's van in the car park, aged 14. And, I'm pretty sure this would

not happen these days.

They had me help wheel a man on a bed from a ward down to the mortuary, aged 14. No risk assessment, no asking my parents or the teachers or anything.

Was this the first time I'd seen a dead body, they asked me, 14-year-old work experience boy. It was, as they lifted the sheet and showed me. And it felt unreal to see an actual corpse body, a slightly grey, cold-looking body, just still and dead in Cheltenham General Hospital.

Here's the question, what did I believe then about what happens to the dead? My gut response, nothing. Look at him.

You die, you rot, darkness, the end, surely. Resurrection? Could I ever imagine this man in Cheltenham General Hospital coming back to bodily life after death?

[23 : 55] Of course I couldn't. In the culture of Corinth back then, lots of people thought that when you die, your soul departs.

Freed from the prison of your body, somehow you float off, either to a murky world down below or a better place. But a new body after death?

No way. A man called Apollo in an old Greek play, once a man has died and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection.

Of course there isn't. And I suspect that what life was like in Corinth is what our culture says today as well. I'd love to think that you go to a better place.

Daddy is one of the stars there, looking down on you. There's a Christian-ish angle on this as well. After I've died, my long-term future is heaven, somewhere floaty and wispy, clouds maybe and light, where my soul goes for eternity and it's positive, but vague and things will be okay.

[25 : 13] Maybe that beyond death. But resurrection? I mean us, having died, physically and bodily raised like Jesus, our hearts beating once more as with new bodies we stand and feel the ground beneath our feet again.

Is that our future? I'm not sure I can believe that. It's wacky. Like for Jesus, I get that.

Yes, he was raised, we sing about it all the time, but there is no resurrection of the dead. That's crazy talk. God and if we were to say that, or even just to think that, Paul's response is, you haven't understood yet.

You haven't understood about the resurrection of Jesus and what that means for us, for our lives and our deaths. and in truth, you might find you're starting to let go of firm saving faith.

Why? Well, in verse 13 onwards, Paul says, okay, let's say there is no resurrection of the dead.

[26 : 38] Let's say there's no hope for man in mortuary in Cheltenham General Hospital ever. Let's say that you and I die and then we rot, end of, because dead people won't rise.

If that is true for us, then what? What does that mean? Let me read from verse 12. If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

Because if there's no resurrection of the dead, if you just can't believe the dead man in Cheltenham mortuary raised, if dead people rising is just too crazy for you, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ hasn't been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. And more than that, we're then found to be false witnesses about God because we've testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead, but he didn't raise him, if in fact the dead aren't raised.

Because if the dead aren't raised, then Christ has not been raised either. It goes back and forth, that doesn't it? Does this make sense? Either God can and does raise the dead, or he can't and he doesn't.

[28 : 00] If you sit here and say the dead are not raised, he can't do that, he doesn't do that, then Christ wasn't raised. And the gospel message is empty and the Christian faith is a pack of lies.

Or think of what it means for you and for me and our salvation. From verse 16 again, if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. What a waste of time trusting in a dead Jesus. forgiveness. You're still in your sins, there's no forgiveness.

And then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. Because just as Jesus remains dead and cursed, so it is for your mum who believed in Jesus and your grandfather.

They lived such a good faithful life, but now they're lost if there's no resurrection. And, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[29 : 08] Like, imagine, you give yourself to serving Jesus in this life, you put your hope in him until you die, and all your hope just goes away to nothing.

How pitiful. Were you to say there is no resurrection of the dead, when it seems just crazy, and unbelievable in the 21st century, to imagine that you and I ourselves might actually rise from the grave.

When you think, my soul in a floaty, wispy, better place, let me call it heaven, is good enough for me, Paul says to us, you're letting go.

You're starting to let go of firm, saving faith. faith. And so, finally, for this morning, what should we believe then?

Drawing things together this far in 1 Corinthians 15, what is it we are to believe and take our stand on and hold firmly to? First, hold firmly to this, Christ was raised.

[30 : 27] Believe in this and put your faith in him, this death defeating king and lord. Christ was raised and because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, you can and you must believe in the resurrection of the dead.

For having raised Christ from the dead, our God can and will raise you from the dead, you who have put your faith in him.

Final verse this morning, chapter 15, verse 20, Paul says, Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Jesus Christ, do you know this, is the first fruit. When the very first ripe pear! falls from the tree at harvest time, that first fruit dropping on the floor guarantees a bumper harvest crop.

There's more to come from those trees, there's baskets overflowing in good time, the first fruit falls, there is so much more to come. And Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as the first fruit of those who have fallen asleep in him.

[31 : 51] His past resurrection guarantees that the harvest is coming and that everyone who belongs to Jesus will also be raised bodily from the dead in good time on the final day.

My long-term future is not rotting in darkness. My long-term future is not a floaty, wispy, better place. because I believe that Christ was raised and so I believe in the resurrection of the dead. I will live my life whether it's another day or another 40 years and I will die and they will bury me or cremate me and in good time on the final day I will be raised from death and like the Lord Jesus Christ my saviour my new heart will beat in my new resurrection body as I stand one day in God's new creation that is my future because Christ has been raised and the resurrection of the dead is coming there is so much more to say about this in 1 Corinthians 15 we asked at the beginning it's our question for this next five weeks are you wasting your life are you wasting your life by being a Christian the Lord God says to us through these verses believing this gospel and living in the light of this resurrection from the dead gospel for sure is no empty useless waste of time it really isn't he has been raised the message is true our sins are forgiven when we die we are not lost and we have hope of a resurrection body beyond our lives right now and so

Paul will say to us hold firmly to Jesus Christ and give yourself fully to living for him and serving him because your labor for Jesus Christ is not in vain so live for him as you wait for the body that is to come let me lead us in a prayer together let's pray our father thank you for the first importance gospel message that your son Christ died for our sins was buried and that he was raised bodily from the dead defeating death thank you for the in history evidence of his resurrection thank you that your son

Jesus Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep thank you that the resurrection of the dead has come and will come through this one man Jesus Christ our father over these coming weeks please teach us please help us see and believe and feel the reality of resurrection not just of Christ but of us one day that we may grow as those who believe in him and live for him we ask in Jesus name amen