

The Centrality of the Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and let us read it verse 20.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. We have been following for the last good while in John's Gospel the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, and the ascension of Jesus.

But the question we always have to ask ourselves, what does all this actually mean for us? Now as we know the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith.

And it is one of the key aspects, as we say, of the Christian faith that is constantly under attack. Both from without and even from within the church.

Because the Christian faith, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is really at the very heartbeat. It is kind of the pulse of the Christian faith.

[1 : 25] This day that we have, the Lord's day, is a reminder to us every Lord's day that Jesus rose from the dead. This is the day that the Lord has made.

This is the day that he rose from the dead. The dynamic, as has been said, of the Lord's resurrection is grounded in this very day.

Now as we know, Corinth was an amazing city. It was one of these cities, a very, a city of great culture. It was a city of great learning. It was a city where many of the great Greek philosophers were teaching.

And of course we know there were many, many great minds then. And of course so many varied philosophies. And as Paul came to Corinth and he began to teach, a lot of people listened to Paul's teaching.

A lot of people were, at times, impressed by Paul's teaching. But when he came to teach about the resurrection of Jesus, it tells us that quite a number burst out laughing.

[2 : 29] They started laughing. To them, this was ridiculous. They just weren't prepared. We read about this in Acts. They listened to him all the way through until he came to the resurrection.

And at that point, they began to laugh and to sort of make poor derision upon Paul as this was something that just couldn't at all happen.

But we know the reality of the resurrection. And that's what Paul is dealing with here. Because some of the philosophies, the Greek philosophies of the day, as so often happens, had become mingled in to the thinking of the church.

So that some people who were claiming to be Christians were also casting doubts upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why Paul in verse 12 says, Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

So this teaching that there was no resurrection amongst the Greek philosophers of that day, that particular philosophy had infiltrated into the church.

[3 : 47] So Paul is beginning to deal with this error that has come into the church where people are questioning how can there be? And they're saying there is no resurrection of the dead.

So Paul then, as Paul does, he works his way through this very thing. And he says, right, if there is no resurrection, then there is so much that has gone before that is rubbish.

That's basically what he's saying. Tells us in verse 14, if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain. And your faith is in vain.

Paul is saying, we've got it all wrong. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we are putting our trust in a dead Savior.

And if we're putting our trust in a dead Savior, then our faith is dead. Because in order for us to put our faith in someone, that someone has to be alive.

[4 : 50] That someone has to be real. So Paul is saying, if there is no resurrection of the dead, if Christ has not risen from the dead, then our preaching is in vain.

Our faith is in vain. I don't have faith, Paul is saying. Because I cannot have faith in someone who isn't. So this is something that is really fundamental to the whole thing.

And Paul, of course, knew what he was talking about. That's why Paul says, I know in whom I have believed. There was no force or no power anywhere, on earth or even in hell, that could convince Paul otherwise about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You've got to remember that Paul, previously Saul, was somebody who hated the very name of Jesus. We see today, and there's a global persecution of the Christian.

And the Christian church is suffering horrendously in many parts of this world. But there's nothing new under heaven. This has gone on, although there have been periods where it hasn't been as severe as at other periods.

[6 : 08] But just now, the number of Christians that are suffering, it's beyond almost belief. In Paul's day, or when he was Saul of Tarshish, Saul had that hatred that so many in this world today have against Christ and the Christian faith.

And in fact, it tells us in Acts of the Apostles that he hated the Christian church so much that his very breath was death. It tells us that he was breathing out slaughter to the Christians.

His whole life was committed to the destruction of the Christian faith. He so hated the very name of Jesus Christ.

And that's when we read about in Acts, Saul was on a mission of persecuting, bringing death and imprisonment to men and to women, that he was blinded by the light from heaven.

And where Jesus, out of time, this is where, this was one of the things to make an apostle. There were various factors, but one, they had to be an actual somebody who had seen the risen Savior.

[7 : 25] And that's why, had seen the risen Jesus. That's why Paul describes himself as an apostle out of time, because Jesus had ascended back to heaven.

In that 40 days between the resurrection of Jesus and the ascension, we were looking at that last week, how Jesus kept revealing himself over and over and over again.

And in that period, he was convincing the people, giving many proofs of his resurrection, and he was teaching the church. But it was only to his people he revealed himself.

Saul never saw him. And then he had ascended to heaven. But Saul met, or we'll put it better, Jesus met with Saul.

Jesus revealed himself as the risen Savior to Saul of Tarshish. And that's why he says that he was an apostle out of time, where he saw, and he met with Jesus.

[8 : 26] He saw the risen Savior after he had ascended to heaven. So that's why there was nobody anywhere who could ever convince Paul, you know, Jesus hasn't risen from the dead.

He would say, hey, I have seen him. He revealed himself to me. I fell down like one dead on the ground.

From the glory that is his, that he showed and revealed his authority and his dominion and his power, I heard his voice. I know him. And that's why so often as he went from church to church, he says, look, I know the one in whom I have believed.

I am persuaded of him. So that is why when you read the apostle's writing, there is this incredible authority in it. Because he is an eyewitness.

He is somebody who has personal experience. He knows exactly what he is talking about. And so Paul says, if there is, that's what in verse, if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

[9 : 37] Then he says in verse 15, we are even found to be misrepresenting God. What he is really saying is that we are telling lies. That's what he is saying.

We are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised.

So again, you see, that's actually a very serious thing. Because Paul is saying, if Jesus Christ has not risen from the dead, then we have been lying all the way along.

All the apostles have been telling lies. I've been telling lies. I've been trying to trick you. I've been trying to deceive you. It's not true.

So you see, it's an extraordinary thing for any person to say, there is no resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead. You see how, what a fearful lie this is, to say such a thing. [10:43] Because it's denying the whole person of Jesus Christ. Because one of the things that Jesus said about himself is, I am the truth.

And Jesus in his life, often told of how he was going to die and rise again. So not only is the apostle saying, I am a liar, he's actually saying, Jesus is a liar.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then he was telling lies when he was here. And that's why it's such an appalling thing for any person to say that Christ didn't rise from the dead.

So Paul is so emphatically showing how Jesus did rise from the dead. Again, when you think about how the early apostles suffered for their faith.

They were often imprisoned. They were beaten up. Do you think, for one moment, if they were preaching something that they didn't really believe.

[11:50] If they were just doing something that they were saying, well you know, I think this is some... Let's go and preach that Jesus rose from the dead.

Not very sure if he did or not, but let's preach that. If you were going to get leathered and beaten up and thrown into prison every time you did that and get stoned and bashed around.

Do you honestly think that you'd go back straight out of prison and do it all over again if you didn't really believe it? If you weren't convinced of the reality of it? These were men who were suffering constantly.

You read the testimony of the apostle Paul. It's quite extraordinary the number of beatings he had, the imprisonments he had. He was stoned. He was left for dead. They had beaten him so badly. What did he do? He got up once. He kind of recovered a bit. Went back in and started preaching all over again. Would he do that? If he didn't really believe it?

[12:50] If he didn't know the reality of it? And so the apostle is so emphatic about this. And then in verse 17 he says, If there is no resurrection then our faith is futile and we're still in our sins.

Because the resurrection of Jesus it's all part of. If we're told that he rose for our justification. So our salvation is tied into the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is saying, If Jesus didn't rise from the dead and there is no resurrection of the dead, we're still all under condemnation. There is no forgiveness.

There is no salvation from our sin. We are in an awful state. And then the apostle says, If, then in verse 19 he goes on to say, If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

What does the apostle mean by that? Well, I think it is quite simply, nobody has greater hope in this life than the Christian. Because when you think about it, one of the wonderful things about the Christian faith is, as we follow Jesus, we believe implicitly in what the word says.

[14:25] And the word holds out for us the most wonderful eternity. where there is set out before us, so you go to the book of Revelation, lots of other places in scripture, a state of everlasting life, where there's no death, no curse, no pain, no sorrow, where there is only joy, where there is fulfillment, where there is eternal satisfaction.

It holds out before us a world that we couldn't even dream about where it had not revealed to us. But Paul is saying, if there is no resurrection, then none of these things are true.

Forget it. It's all gone. Can you imagine the dashing of one's hopes if all of a sudden you were told, Do you know something? See, all these things you believed and hoped in, that actually it's not going to happen.

Can you imagine how you would feel? The dashing of all these hopes. But we know it's true. Our hope is founded in Jesus.

Again, to a certain extent, there's nobody who struggles more in this life than the Christian. Now, that doesn't mean, don't get me wrong, there are many, many people who aren't Christians, who have an awful lot, or have a very, very difficult, and a life that is filled with pain and sorrow and every kind of tragedy.

[15:55] But what I mean is, in the Christian faith, the very nature of the Christian faith is taking up the cross. It is denying self. Although it is a life full of joys, it is also a warfare.

And that is different to the non-Christian. The non-Christian is not engaged in that warfare, which is a conflict, which is a struggle. And that's what the apostle is saying.

You know, if in this life only we have hope in Christ, you know, we're actually to be pitied. If you're going to spend your life fighting your own, struggling with yourself, with all these struggles, with temptations, and who you are, and there's nothing, you're actually believing a lie, you are really to be pitied.

So that's really what the apostle is saying here. But we know that Jesus rose from the dead. So the apostle is then, he's very emphatic in verse 20.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

And really what the apostle is saying is because Jesus died and rose from the dead, so will you.

[17:16] And Paul describes it in the same way as we have to go back to the Old Testament and you think about the first fruits. Very simply what happened was, at the time of harvesting, whether it was grapes or whether it was barley or wheat or whatever, the old, in the time of the Old Testament, the Israelites, the first thing that they would do, supposing it was wheat or barley, they would put in the sickle and they would cut like a huge armful of this.

Before they would have any for themselves, they would bring this and they would present it before God. And they would thank God for what he had provided for them.

And they were also, by bringing just this first little part of the harvest, by doing this, they were saying, Lord, this is yours, but you have also given us, it's still there, this huge harvest to be gathered.

The first fruits was an indication that God was overruling everything, but that God had provided for them.

And they had just taken this little bit and this little bit was indicating all the rest that was to follow.

And that's how Jesus is a first fruit. He is first.

[18:47] And he has been given by God and given back to God. And he is an indication of what is to follow, of the huge harvest that is still to be, which includes those who have already fallen asleep.

Their bodies are still in the grave. You think of the likes of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob and all the patriarchs. Their souls are in glory, but their bodies are still under the power of death.

They're still in the grave. And there is still to be this massive resurrection of the dead. Jesus is the first fruits, but in the fullness of time, all the bodies will rise again.

And so that is what Paul is speaking about here. Now, of course, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we read about people who rose from the dead. Under the ministry of Elisha, under the ministry of Elijah, we see people being brought back from the dead.

Under the ministry of Jesus, you can think of Jairus' daughter, you can think of the widow's son during the funeral, you can think of Lazarus. They were raised from the dead.

[20:06] But they're rising from the dead, although it points to a certain extent to a resurrection, and Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. This was not a permanent resurrection. Because these people had to die again.

They had to go through the process of death again. And their bodies had to go under that, the power of death once more. But the resurrection that is spoken of here is a permanent resurrection. Just as Jesus' rising from the dead is permanent, so it will be for the church. And one of the great truths that the Bible teaches us is that while the most precious possession we have is our soul, and Jesus died for our soul, he didn't just die for our soul.

He died for our body as well. Sometimes we forget that. Jesus is the salvation that Jesus worked for us, governs every aspect of us.

our soul and our body. Now, Paul goes on to highlight exactly what is happening here, and he uses it with the example of Adam.

[21:20] And he says, For us by man came death. By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. You see, one man, right at the very beginning, Adam, stood for all of us.

He represented all of us. His one act caused the consequence of that act to be applied to every single person.

What he did, what he became, we inherited. That's why Jesus came. By his one act, by what he did, if we are found in him, then he, because we are in him, will also be released from the death of our body.

So, you know, it's one of the most wonderful ideas. Paul goes on to, it's a chapter that's really worth studying, because Paul goes on to show just exactly what happens.

The body at death, and we don't, we don't know, all we can follow in here is what the scripture shows us, but we believe it to be true. We don't know exactly what the body will be like when it rises from the dead.

[22 : 42] It'll be the same, but it'll be different. You see, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. That's what we're told. Right now, as we are, we cannot go directly into, something has to happen.

There will be a transformation. And certainly with the likes of Enoch and the likes of Elijah, who were taken straight up to heaven bodily, a transformation took place.

But Jesus shows us something of the resurrection, but we know that when he ascended, his body went through another process of what we believe glorification.

And so Jesus, as the mediator, who is now in heaven for us, representing us, that we will resemble Jesus as the Redeemer of his people.

It's an amazing thought. And Paul says, the only way I can liken it is that when you die, in a mysterious way, your body, although it disintegrates in the grave, is still, in an amazing way, there is a binding, there is some still union with Jesus.

[24 : 02] And Jesus will raise it up and he likens it to a seed being sown into the ground. You put a seed down into the ground and that seed dies. But from the seed grows up this plant.

Now the plant looks very different to the seed that you have. but it has come from that, that seed and that plant are the one. It's not another, that plant didn't come from something else.

It came from the seed. That seed became that plant. And that's what Paul is saying. That's exactly how it's going to be with our shells. We are sown in dishonor but raised in honor.

He goes on to talk about the amazing things that will happen. So it is the resurrection. Verse 42 of the dead. What is sown is perishable.

That's how our bodies perishes. What is raised is imperishable. It will never ever again be subject to disease or wasting or pain or any of these things.

[25 : 11] It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. It is sown a natural body.

It is raised a spiritual body. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust. The second man is from heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

So it goes on. You know, it's an amazing thought. And that Jesus did all that on the cross. His death and His resurrection is complete salvation.

We often just tend to think of saving our souls. Oh, where do we see the completed work? No wonder there will be endless praise and glory for what the Lord Jesus Christ has done.

And so you see how the resurrection of the dead is such an integral, vital, important truth to the Christian faith. And you can see why probably of all things, there are few things that are more attacked than the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 31] Because of that very fact that it is so fundamental, it is so vibrant to the Christian, it is so essential to the Christian, it is so, it so fills us with hope today that Jesus is the one who conquered death, conquered every enemy, and who has set us free.

Is today your hope centered in Jesus? Because if not, what, who else do you have or what else do you have?

Because life is, life, you strip away everything. else, what do we have? There is no message anywhere in the world as profound, as so full of hope, as so full of meaning as this.

May we all take this Jesus, trust him, rest in him, and have him for time and for eternity. Let us pray. Lord our God, we pray that we may lay hold upon these truths, wonderful truths which have set your people free.

And we pray that we may all rejoice in them and rest in them and know the fullness of this salvation, that Jesus Christ is the great Savior. We pray to be with us and to part us with your blessing.

[27 : 56] Rest a cup of tea in the hall afterwards and we give thanks for every goodness and mercy that we receive from you. Bless us, we pray, and forgive us our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're concluding in Psalm 16 from the Scottish Psalter. Psalm number 16 from the Scottish Psalter and the tune is St. Stephen.

We're going to sing from verse 8 to the end. Psalm 16 from verse 8 to the end.

It's from the Scottish Psalter. Before me still, that's on page 216, before me still, the Lord I set, so that he doth ever stand at my right hand, I shall not move it be.

Because of this my heart is gladdened, joy shall be expressed even by my glory, and my flesh in confidence shall rest. Because my soul and grave to dwell shall not be left by thee, nor wilt thou give thine holy one corruption to see, thou wilt me show the path of life, of joy as there is full store, before thy face, at thy right hand are pleasures evermore.

[29 : 27] To the tune, St. Stephen, these verses from 8 to the end, before me still, the Lord I set. before me shall the Lord I send it is so that he doth ever stand at my right hand I shall I shall not do with thee.

Because of this my heart is glad and joy shall be expressed in by my glory and my faith in confidential rest.

Because my soul in grave to dwell shall not be led by thee.

Now wilt thou hear thine only one corruption to see.

Thou wilt me show the path of life of joy there is to store before thy face at thy right hand precious seven more.

[31 : 34] Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.