

Resurrection.....Really?'

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[0 : 0 0] very familiar passage, one that's often quoted from at funerals, thinking of the resurrection of Jesus and what the resurrection means. So, it's a very familiar passage. We're going to read the first 28 verses of 1 Corinthians 15. Paul is writing to a church in many ways. It was not an impressive church. They kept failing morally in so many ways, and in this area, they too struggled about the resurrection of the dead, and is there a resurrection, and what's it all about, almost shaking in their faith, just wondering, was there real hope that lay ahead? So, let's read together 1 Corinthians 15, reading from verse 1. Paul writes, and he says this, Now, brothers and sisters, 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 have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to

James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles. I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether then it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. But 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? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But if he did not raise him, in fact the dead are not raised. But if he did not raise him, in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

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.

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 to God the Father, after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

[3 : 50] For he must reign 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 everything has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son will be made subject to him who has put everything under him, so that Christ may be all in all. Let's finish our reading there.

We're going to stand and we're going to sing as we consider this passage together. It's an old song, you know this well. Because he lives, I confess tomorrow. So, let's stand and we'll sing together.

God sent his son. They called him Jesus. He came to love. He'll unforgiveness.

God sent his son. He lived and died. He took my pardon. An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

Because he lives. I'm not going to preach for very long this evening, maybe 15 or 20 minutes, but I do want to look at three important truths from this passage regarding the resurrection. But let's ask for the Lord's help as we seek to study this together. Father, as we come with your word open before us, we praise you for the joy of the resurrection. But Lord, that it's more than just a heartfelt thing. There is power, Lord, not only in the blood, but there's power in the resurrection. And we pray, Father, that as Paul said that he wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection, that we too would know not only that power that raised us to life when we became Christians, but perhaps even on a daily basis, something of that powerful resurrection made real in the lives of people today. So, Father, speak to us now from your word. Encourage us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[6 : 13] Amen. I'm sure as a Christian, if I asked you what is probably the most significant event in world history, you would probably say the death and resurrection of Jesus. But it's amazing if you ask historians or just a man in the street what he would say, looking back over the whole of history, what is probably the biggest achievements. It might not be that. In fact, here's a book that you'll find on Amazon, Terry O'Brien, A Hundred Great Events That Changed the World. Here is his contents page. It starts from, takes us back to 44 BC, the assassination of Julius Caesar was number one, or certainly the first thing chronologically. Then the crucifixion of Jesus, and then you move down to the 11th of May, 330, about 300 years later, the dedication of Constantinople, then the death of the prophet Muhammad, the signing of the Magna Carta, and so it goes on.

And it's amazing how if you look at a lot of world events that many secular folk will acknowledge Jesus. They will acknowledge the birth of Christianity and how Christians were then formed, and we did a lot of good in society. But it's amazing how many of them will mention Jesus as a historical figure. Many of them will mention his crucifixion, but not many of them mention his resurrection. And in some ways that that shouldn't surprise us because they probably don't believe it.

Can you imagine if they really believed that Jesus came, he died, all that he said came true, he died, he rose again, and that is a game changer. The simple truth is people will look at historical facts, but the resurrection of the dead, they don't really take seriously enough. They pay lip service to funerals. They don't really stop to think, do I really believe in the resurrection? But when their aunt dies, they'll come to a funeral, and they just hope that she's in a better place, and we're all going to go there. But do they really believe that Jesus rose from the dead? That's a very typical historical event list. There is another one that made me laugh. It doesn't start at Julius Caesar, 100 Events That Changed the World by Danny Ballen, in an article he wrote in 2022. Number one, man discovers the use of fire. He invents the bow and arrow. He's taking it back quite a bit.

The birth of agriculture. Man makes the round wheel. He really is. He's going to way back to, I had a thought the round wheel would have come before agriculture. Maybe not, I don't know.

The legendary pyramids and so forth. And he, the Roman Empire's born, Julius Caesar, that stuff. The foundation of Christianity, and then modern medicine. That's it. Christianity is just one amongst many religions. Probably worth mentioning, I better put it down, as one of the top hundred events. Once again, a failure to recognize that the importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, more than a historical figure, the Son of God. And it really is a massive game changer.

[9 : 42] The resurrection gives us hope. So, I want to look at three things very quickly this evening as we look at the resurrection. I've called the sermon, Resurrection Really? Did it really happen? And I want to look at three things. I want to look at the resurrection past, resurrection present, and the resurrection future. And I want to do that fairly quickly this evening. So, first of all, the resurrection then. What happened on that first resurrection? For most people, they probably don't take it seriously enough. Surely, it's a massive historical event. Somebody dies. Somebody rises back to life. And that is the birth of Christianity. It's not just that Jesus came and people believed in them and so forth. It is a game changer. If Jesus rose from the dead, what that tells us way back then is that Jesus' teaching should be listened to. He said, he prophesied that this would happen. It verifies his teaching. I must confess, I smile at BBC Verify every time I see this on the news now. You've got

BBC News and BBC Verify. And I just think, well, this is true, what we're saying. We've verified this. All the other news, you can take or leave it. It might not be true. But verify, we've verified this.

But when Jesus rose from the dead, it verifies his teaching. It shows us that he is the Son of God. Luke 18, he takes the 12 disciples aside. We are going to Jerusalem. Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles.

They will mock him, insult him, spit on him. They will flog him and kill him. And on the third day, he will rise again. Jesus said this. This was prophesied years ago. This is worth considering.

If Jesus rose from the dead, we need to take his claims seriously. Not just his prophecy about his death and resurrection, but his teaching, that he is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. Jesus is more than the real man. Let me read to you that well-known quote by C.S. Lewis. He says, I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him. I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say, C.S. Lewis said, a man who is merely a man, and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.

[12 : 44] You can shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about this being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. The thing that if somebody said the things that Jesus said and didn't rise from the dead, he would be a lunatic. He said he would die, he would rise again. If he did not rise again, you can disregard all his teachings. But because he rose again over 2,000 years ago, we listened to him as the Son of God. So the resurrection then verifies his teaching. It also shows that his sacrifice was accepted, that if he just died, and as a good moral example, that has no long-term benefits for mankind. But if he died, and he died in the place of sinners and rose again, that has benefits for you and me even today in 2024. Our sin has been dealt with even today, even our sins of tomorrow. It has massive repercussions.

That's why Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, right at the start, verse 3, he says, What I received, I passed on to you as of first importance. This is the most important thing. He mentions three things.

That Christ died for our sins. According to the Scriptures, he was buried, and thirdly, he was raised. These three things are of vital importance, because if not, then we are still in our sins. Our sins need to be atoned for. That's what Paul says in verse 17. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.

You're still in your sins. None of us have any sins forgiven. If Jesus did not rise, we are all still in our sins. But if Jesus has not risen from the dead, then those who fall asleep are lost. If he hasn't been raised from the dead, neither will you. Neither will your relatives who have professed faith years ago, been a member of a church for 20 years. If he did not rise, there is no resurrection from the dead.

Whereas he did, and this gives us hope, the resurrection all the way back then is the very center of our faith. Paul says, of first importance, he died, he rose again. And this is our faith. That's what he says right at verse 1. We read this, I want to remind you of the gospel, the good news I preach to you, which you received, and on which you take your stand. By this gospel you are saved, unless you believed in vain. This is the message that saves us. He died, he was buried, he rose again. That is the gospel. That is what we stand on this evening. We reaffirm this. If there's no resurrection, Paul says, we of all people are most to be pitied. Christians sometimes say that, don't we? Well, if there's no resurrection, and if it's not really true, we're trying to witness to somebody, well, it doesn't really matter. I've enjoyed it. I've lived a good life, and that's all that matters.

[15 : 59] That's not what Paul says. He says, if there's no resurrection, I've wasted my time. We are a bunch of the saddest folk on the planet. We have believed a lie. We've pinned our hopes on it. We've been bending everybody's ear that they too need to believe, because we'll be raised, and we'll stand before the judgment seat. That's not the case. If there's no resurrection, we are a bunch of sad people. We are to be pitied, Paul says. If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. But that's not the case, because Christ has indeed risen. What he says in verse 20, right after that, but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

The resurrection really did happen. That's why Paul says in verses 5, 6, 7, and 8, that he appeared to all these people, to Peter, to Cephas, to the twelve, to five hundred brothers and sisters at the same time, then to James, then to the apostles, last of all, to a big waster like Paul, he appeared to him.

So that is the resurrection then. That is the theological implications for us. If it never happened then, there is no hope for us today. But he did rise. Secondly, the resurrection now. It's one thing to say that this happened then. What does this mean for us now? Because of this, the power that raised Jesus, the Scriptures tell us the Father raised him back to life. That power that raised Jesus back to life through the Holy Spirit is the same power that's not only evident in Christ when it raised him back to life, that same power is available for us in Christ. Colossians 1.27 says this, To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery.

And he tells us what that mystery is, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. So Christ has not just been raised for us, he's raised in us. The power of Christ is in us, and this power is available to us.

That's why Paul says in Philippians 3.10, I want to know Christ, and most of us know Christ, if you're a Christian here, but do you want to know the power of his resurrection? It's not just something that was displayed 2,000 and odd years ago. It is power that's available today. I think of you, if you're from the Reformed tradition. Charismatics, from that stable of beliefs, they emphasize a lot the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 43] And sometimes you see dangers of that and being abused and so forth. And as Christians, we sometimes swing the opposite way. We say, well, we don't want to go there. We're just saved, justification by faith.

Let's just keep to the Reformed faith. But there is a power that is available to us, a real power to live the Christian life, to do mighty exploits for God. Let me read to you three quotes very quickly on this second point, and we'll finish on our third. Francis Schaeffer said this, Christianity is not just a mental assent that certain doctrines are true, not even that the right doctrines are true. This is only the beginning. This would be like a starving man sitting in front of great heaps of food and saying, I believe the food exists, I believe it is real, and yet never eating it. It is not enough merely to say, I am a Christian, and then in practice to live as if the present contact with the supernatural were something far off and strange. Many Christians, he says, I know, seem to act as though they come into contact with the supernatural just twice, once when they are justified and become a Christian, and once when they die. In other words, you stop everything in between. We don't know this power. So it says, some Christians seem to think that when they are born again, they become a self-contained battery unit, like a storage battery. From that time on, they have to go on their own pep, their own power until they die. This is wrong, he says. After we are justified once for all through faith in Christ, we are to live in the supernatural communion with the Lord every moment.

We are to be like lights plugged into an electric socket. The Bible makes it plain that our joy and spiritual power depend on a continuing relation to God. If we do not love and draw on the Lord as we should, the plug gets pulled out and the supernatural power and spiritual joy stops. Let me read to you Martin Lloyd-Jones as well. If you know Martin Lloyd-Jones, powerful preacher, doctrines of grace, just—and yet he always sought the power of the Holy Spirit. He says this, there is nothing vital or urgent in the religion and in the worship of such people, thinking about people who deny the power. They expect nothing, and they get nothing, and nothing happens to them.

They go to God's house, not with the idea of meeting with God, not with the idea of waiting upon Him. It never crosses their mind or enters into their hearts that something may happen in the service. No, we always do this on Sunday morning. It is our custom, it is our habit, it's the right thing to do. But the idea that God may suddenly visit His people and descend upon them, the whole thrill of being in the presence of God, sensing His nearness and His power, never even enters their imagination.

How often does this vital idea enter our minds that we are in the presence of the living God, that the Holy Spirit is in the church, and that we may feel the touch of His power? Is there not this appalling danger that we are just content because we have correct beliefs, and we have lost the life, the vital thing, the power, the thing that really makes worship worship, which is spirit and truth.

[22 : 12] I found these challenging to be reminded of that again, that our faith is not just in something that happened then, but our faith is in the power of the resurrection even today. Let me quote Don Carson, and with this we'll finish this point. Because some wings of the church have appealed to experience over again, and have talked glibly about poorly defined spirituality that is fundamentally divorced from the gospel. Some of us have overreacted and began or begin to view all mention of experience as suspicious at best, perverse at worst. This overreaction, he says, must cease. The scriptures themselves demand that we allow more place for experience than that. So that's the question.

Are we experiencing? Are you experiencing the power of the resurrection? Not just do you believe that it happened then, but are you experiencing the resurrection now? Finally, let's finish with resurrection. Future. Future. Future. The resurrection of Jesus was not the end. Not then, and even not now.

There is a resurrection still to come. Jesus has been given all power and all authority. He is with us to the very end. And Paul says what that end will look like in 1 Corinthians 15 24. Then the end will come, he says, when he, Jesus, hands the kingdom of God to God the Father. After he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power, he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Death still reigns. The hospital is still full of people. My friend who had brain surgery has been readmitted back into hospital again. And the hospital is still full. People will die this week. They will pass away even this evening. But there is a resurrection. There is a resurrection because Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection. He is—I love the word first fruits in the Bible. It's just the taste of what's to come. There will be first fruits and fruit growing on trees and wee bushes over the next few months beginning to show. That's the first fruits of what's about to come. The resurrection is not the last resurrection. It is but the beginning of a resurrection that will take place later on. It is but the first fruits. And Christ will return.

Christ will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. I wish I had time to look at Thessalonians. Those who are dead in Christ will rise first. If he came back tonight, those who are dead in Christ will rise before you. Well, they will meet him in the air. Then those of us who are left will rise.

There is a resurrection which is still to take place. When our bodies are reunited with our souls in heaven, which immediately go to be with the Lord on the day in which we die. But our bodies will be resurrected. That's why Paul writes in Thessalonians, we believe that Jesus died and rose again. So we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. He tells us to encourage each other with those words. But sad to say, there is a resurrection for everyone, not just Christians.

[25 : 48] Everyone will be raised back to life. So whether they write a book and a hundred events and do not include the resurrection, whether they believe it or not, doesn't matter. There will be a resurrection for this man, O'Brien. There will be a resurrection for all these people, for everyone, for members of your family. There will be a resurrection. Jesus says this, when the Son of Man comes in glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you are cursed into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. They will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. Those are serious, serious words, are they not? Daniel talks about the same thing. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. And then in the very last book of the Bible, Revelation, says here, nothing impure will ever enter it. This new city, the Lamb is its lamp, the glory of God gives its light, its gates will not be closed. And we're told that nothing impure will enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Jesus, sorry, Paul says in Acts 17, he says this to our culture, he preaches to Athens, and he says this, in the past God overlooked such ignorance. Now he commands all people everywhere to repent. He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. So because Christ has risen from the dead, if you're a Christian, your sins are forgiven. It's well with your soul. Because he's raised from the dead, that power is available to us. And because he's been raised from the dead, we too will be raised with him in glory. Everyone will be raised, some to everlasting life, some to everlasting contempt.

That's why Paul says at the beginning of this chapter, I want to remind you of the gospel I preach to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved.

Do you believe in the resurrection? It's such an important doctrine. It's such an important fact. Then, now, and in the future. May the Lord encourage us and challenge us in these things. We're going to sing a song. We might have sung this once before. I like this song. I love the lyrics of this song.

Christ, our hope in life and death. How many of you know this song? Good, there's a quartet. Yeah, there's four. We'll get by. We'll do this. We'll see. We'll see how we do with this. Might not be as good as the Usher Hall, but we're keen. We're keen. And we'll give it a bash, so we'll see how we do.

[29 : 14] We'll stand and we'll sing this together. Let's just close with a doxology right at the end of the book of Jude. To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. To the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Thank you, folks.

Thank you.

Thank you.