

He Is Risen

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 July 2024

Preacher: Donald Smith

- [0 : 0 0] Well, I had something of a moral conundrum yesterday. It was first thing in the morning, and I was sitting in the living room, and I found myself asking an unbelievable question. Can I put the heating on in July? I decided regretfully that the answer was no, and spent the morning of 6th of July shivering inside.
- There are some questions that you cannot quite believe you are asking yourself. Well, Paul had just such a question in verse 12 of this chapter, and it is a much more serious one, even than having to turn the heating up in the middle of summer.
- Paul could not believe he was asking of the Corinthians in verse 12, how can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead?
- How can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead? It was a question that seemed to almost dumbfound him, but it is exactly the question some members of the Corinthian church were asking.
- [1 : 2 2] I wonder, how big a deal do you think such a question is? Is it that big a deal?
- So long as they still believe Jesus died for their sins, so long as they still talk about him and tell others about Jesus too? Isn't that enough? Will that not do?
- Well, Paul answers that question emphatically this evening. I think you can probably guess where he's going to go, but it is a question we need to have a good answer to.
- Both for the sake of our own faith, and as we were thinking a little bit this morning, in order, this is why the Corinthians needed to hear it, in order to withstand the false teaching that will, that will come our way in one guise or another.
- You see the warning there he gives them at the end of that section we read. Verse 33 says, do not be misled. The implication, isn't it, is that they were being misled.
- [2 : 3 0] Yes. Something was happening in Corinth. False teaching was settling in, and it was specifically on the topic of the resurrection.
- I think there are two sides, aren't there, from which this central truth of Christian faith will usually be attacked. It's hard to be sure exactly where the problems in Corinth are arising from, perhaps from both of them.
- On the one side, perhaps one we're more familiar with, was that the accusation that the resurrection is simply impossible.
- Okay? It cannot happen. Perhaps most commonly we'd hear that from an atheist. Now, that accusation, I think, is more easily withstood than the other one, which we'll come to in a moment.
- Because, first of all, we are, aren't we? We are coming from two completely different viewpoints there. If we believe in a God who is all-powerful, of course resurrection is possible.
- [3 : 4 2] And that is exactly who we believe in. If someone doesn't believe in God, it shouldn't surprise us, should they, that if they have doubts about its possibility.

But our differences are far more fundamental than the question of the resurrection. But the other side from which the resurrection will be attacked is the suggestion, not so much that it is not possible, but that it is not desirable.

And this, I think, is far more pervasive than we might realize. It is a much subtler and much more Christian-sounding position, even though it is not Christian and it is not sound.

It was called something called Gnosticism back then. I'm not sure it has a catch-all title today, but it certainly is present on many forms.

And to put it in its simplest terms, right, it goes something like this. Spiritual is good. Physical is bad.

[4 : 52] That's a really simplistic overview. But that takes on many guises. Here's some examples. People who consider their true self trapped in a body they don't want to be in.

That is a Gnostic belief. Something trapped within us that needs to be freed from the constraints of the physical body. Or perhaps the belief that people are fundamentally good inside.

But are corrupted by the external world. Perhaps people are not held responsible for their actions.

Because they are simply products of their societies. Anything where you believe your true self is buried somewhere within you.

And that if you are released from the manifold constraints of this world, of society, of your body. Seeing the physical flesh not as something that will one day be redeemed.

[5 : 59] But that is something we aim to be rid of from its constraints. That is what the church in Corinth were hearing in their world.

That is how they were, I think, being misled. And I don't think it takes too much work, does it, to draw the parallels to our time. But the end result, whatever exactly they were hearing, was a church that was starting to have doubts.

Not about Jesus' ministry, not about his death for their sins, not about his ascension into heaven. But about his bodily resurrection. So that some were left thinking, surely coming back to life should be a spiritual thing.

Not a physical thing. Doesn't that sound more pure? Perhaps others were wondering if there can really be a coming resurrection at all. Well, the Bible, and so God, disagrees with both those positions.

In the strongest possible terms. We saw earlier this morning in verses 5 to 8, how Paul establishes the fact of the resurrection, didn't he? Remember when he lists all those witnesses that Jesus appeared to.

[7 : 20] What he wants to do here in these verses is show us the importance of the resurrection. Why this is not just an optional extra to Christian belief.

And why we must believe. We must believe in a bodily resurrection, not just spiritual renewal. There are things as Christians we can disagree on and still work together for the sake of the gospel.

This, Paul says, this is not one of them. And he begins by showing us that, by taking us through a fairly straightforward process of elimination in verses 12 to 19.

We're just going to follow Paul's argument here by breaking it up into two halves. The points you'll see on your sheet aren't exactly catchy. It's because I want to capture the fullness of Paul's points in them.

If you wanted something simpler to get your head around, you could think of it simply in terms of the resurrection. What would we lose without it? And what do we gain with it?

[8 : 31] Those are really the points in a nutshell this evening. What would we lose without it? What do we gain with it? So first of all, what do we lose?

If there is no resurrection, most significantly, Paul says, Christ has not been raised.

Just look there at verse 13 with me. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Paul is saying to the Corinthians, do you realize what you are suggesting here? The Corinthians saw in the future their afterlife was a merely spiritual one.

The problem was they did not see the logical consequences of their belief in a purely spiritual afterlife. Because the Bible is clear, isn't it?

[9 : 34] The Bible is clear that we will be made like Jesus. We will be made like Jesus. And if our eternity is not a physical one, then neither is Jesus.

And if Jesus is not embodied, then his body remains in the grave. Again, we might wonder, is that such a big deal?

Well, here are three ways that a non-bodily resurrection of Christ would leave our faith in tatters. First, if Christ had not been raised, our faith is futile.

See that in verse 14. If Christ has not been raised, Paul says, our preaching is useless. And so is your faith.

Those are strong words, aren't they? But they help to capture the seriousness of the issue here. He speaks so plainly because the outcome of our faith is tied to the bodily resurrection of Christ.

[10 : 47] Because we are united to him through faith, whatever happens to the person of Christ happens also to us. If there is no resurrection, the person of Christ remains in the grave.

What hope does that offer us? When we go to the grave ourselves. Here's how Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians 4. He says, Our hope of life beyond death is dependent on our risen Jesus.

No resurrection. No hope. No hope. No point in our faith. Secondly, our witness, verse 15, becomes false.

More than that, Paul writes, 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.

If the Corinthians were right, they were implicitly accusing every single one of the apostles of bearing false witness about God. There's a couple of points worth drawing out here from what Paul says about their witness.

[12 : 17] If we do not believe in the risen Jesus, then we need to know that there is no other Jesus for us to believe in. Every gospel account, every account in Acts, every account in the epistles, every eyewitness testimony that we have about Jesus, Jesus, affirms his bodily resurrection.

There is no merely spiritual Jesus in the Bible. He does not exist. If that is your belief, you have no one in Jesus' time standing with you.

There were only two positions. They either completely denied his resurrection, that he was dead, body and soul, or they affirmed it.

He was alive, both body and soul. That is part of what I think Paul is saying here. He said, you either, you either stand with the chief priests who denied everything completely, or with the apostles.

Either Jesus remained in the grave, body and soul, or Jesus was raised, body and soul, and so will we be.

[13 : 39] Those are your choices. There is no other. And one of those choices, remarkably given what happened, is much more believable than the other.

Because the chief priests, they had skinned the game. It was in their interest to deny the resurrection. It would have made their life much easier if Jesus was to remain dead.

So it's hardly surprising that's what they argue for. The apostles, their life would also have been much easier in a very real way if Jesus remained dead.

Because their continued belief in the resurrected Christ proved to be a death sentence for each and every one of them. They would die defending what they saw and touched.

They were willing to die defending the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. If you are unsure about the historicity of the resurrection, ask yourself, would you?

[15 : 01] Would you have died an excruciating death defending what you knew to be a lie? I can guarantee the answer would be the same for the apostles.

But they knew what they saw. And they, every one of them, would rather go to the grave than deny it.

Because what they saw gave them absolute confidence that going to the grave was not the end. They knew it.

They were certain of it because they had seen it and touched it. If Christ were dead, their and our witness would be false.

But all the evidence suggests otherwise. And then thirdly, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our sin remains.

[15 : 59] If Jesus did not rise from the dead, our sin remains. We rightly associate Jesus' death with our sins being covered.

But look at what Paul says plainly in verse 17. If there is no resurrection, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins.

Again, I think there's two reasons behind what he's saying here. If there is no resurrection, as we've just seen, it calls him to the question, doesn't it? The reliability of the witnesses who proclaim this gospel.

Can we really believe anything they are saying? But also, if there was no resurrection, it would call into question the righteousness of Christ.

Because God would be unjust to leave a righteous man in the grave. Because of God's justice, he cannot do that.

[17 : 13] If Jesus remained dead, he therefore must not be righteous. Which means our sins were never covered because Jesus was not good enough to be an atoning sacrifice.

But the bodily resurrection of Jesus confirms his righteousness and so assures us that his death did indeed cover the cost of our sin.

Remove the resurrection. Then you also remove any and all confidence in Christ's sacrifice. So, to summarize, what do you lose if you lose the resurrection?

You lose everything, don't you? Christ would remain dead. Our faith would be futile.

It would be foolish. And it would be false. Our sin would remain with us just as our Savior would remain in the grave.

[18 : 27] So, to deny the resurrection is, put it quite simply, to destroy the Christian faith. Just look at how strongly Paul speaks in verse 19.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. To be a Christian who denies the resurrection is the most pitiable thing of all.

That would be quite a solemn place to end. But it is not the end. Because there is a resurrection.

Isn't there? That is Paul's triumphal announcement in verse 20. It says, let us abandon the foolish hopelessness of a resurrectionless faith.

Why? Because Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. Raised as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. The resurrection turns a hopeless faith into a hope-filled faith.

[19 : 46] And because there is a resurrection, there is a Christ, a King, who reigns on a throne over all. Because there is a resurrection, Jesus reigns. It's what we were thinking about in the Apostles' Creed this morning.

That he who humbled himself to death on a cross, God has raised to the highest place. He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

And look at verse 25 and 26 to see what Christ does with his sovereign power. for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. His reign is one that will crush all his enemies. And his greatest enemy is our greatest enemy.

It is everyone's greatest enemy. Jesus' bodily resurrection proclaimed his power over death itself. It held no power over him.

[20 : 50] And it is that power, knowing it is Christ who reigns over death, that gives us hope too. Knowing that death cannot be the end because there is something, there is someone with even more authority than the grave.

He will defeat every one of his enemies as he reigns and death itself will be destroyed. So we see, don't we, because there is a resurrection, Christ reigns.

And because Christ reigns, we have a hope that is certain and we have purpose in our suffering. Let's just see quickly how Paul draws both of these things out.

Remember, we said earlier that when we believe in Christ, we are united to him. That means whatever is true of Jesus in his humanity becomes true of us too.

But instead of that being a hopeless proposition if he remained in the grave, the opposite is now true. Because he is righteous, we are righteous. Because he died to sin, we die to sin.

[22 : 04] Because he was raised from the dead, we will be raised from the dead. He is the first fruits as it, his resurrection is only the beginning of life coming from death.

If it happened to Christ and we are in him, it will happen to us too. Look at verse 22 and 23. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

But each in turn, Christ the first fruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him. You will rise again when Jesus returns, body and soul to life with him.

I wonder what you imagine the new creation to be like. There's a lot of things about it that we don't know or certainly can't know for certain.

But here's two things I can guarantee. First, it will be so unbelievably wonderful that you will have to pinch yourself to make sure it's real.

[23 : 29] And secondly, you will be able to pinch yourself. We're going to be thinking more about this in the next section next week, but let me bring you back to where we began.

And the temptation to think of heaven as a sort of spiritual realm, it is much more prevalent, isn't it? And we'd like to admit, as if it's all, and we can so easily think this because it's in so many places in popular culture, as if it's all sort of floating in the clouds and just gently singing kumbaya to one another.

But the heavenly Bible promises is a whole new creation. And it is a new creation in which your body the body you are sitting in right now will be renewed, made perfect, resurrected.

So you will be able to pinch yourself. That is the certain hope that awaits us. It's that very fact that left Thomas marveling as he faced the real body of the risen Lord.

A body brought back to life. and he is just the first of many to follow him. We're going to get onto the application of that next time because it should change how we use our bodies now.

[25 : 03] But for the moment, just dwell on that glorious thought. what awaits you, brothers and sisters, in the future is not some abstract realm that we cannot comprehend or imagine.

What awaits you in Christ is your body and soul made perfect to be enjoyed and used to glorify God just as it was designed to be.

Working in perfect harmony with the new creation where we will dwell forever and ever. We'll get more into that next time, next Sunday morning.

But there is something else Paul gives us to hold on to here too. Because there is a resurrection, our suffering in the present has purpose.

There is another life to come and so when Christ calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him, he is not saying make yourself needlessly miserable.

[26 : 18] He is saying the suffering that comes with following him is so so worth it because it is the guarantee of something far better to come.

It is simply following the path he follows and that is what we will do if we are united to him by faith.

If we want to know the life he has now in heaven, we follow the life he lived on earth. Paul knew that better than anyone. he suffered much and if there was no resurrection, if this life was all there was, that would have been pointless, pointless pain.

But knowing that it is not the end, what he suffers for the sake of the gospel, he knows is well worth it. I'm guessing if you look at verse 32, our suffering is not quite the same as Paul's.

If it is, I really want to hear from you after the service. But our suffering for the sake of the gospel is more likely, isn't it, to be the cold shoulder of a friend, perhaps being the butt of the jokes from a few colleagues at work, maybe even being unable to work in careers we would otherwise want to.

[27 : 42] Whatever it is, one thing can be said with certainty, it will be worth it. Whatever you must suffer now for the sake of the gospel will be worth it.

Living for Christ will leave you living a less comfortable life now. But thinking of it like putting all you have in a long-term savings account that guarantees a thousand percent return one day in the future.

You don't know exactly when that day will be. And it will mean you cannot live as comfortably as you could have otherwise. But you do so, don't you? You do so knowing that the long-term return will immeasurably outweigh the short-term consequence.

To remove the resurrection is to remove the guarantee and we would be needlessly depriving ourselves of present comforts. That's why Paul says at the end of verse 32, if the dead are not raised, why not just make the most of life today?

That would be the best approach. That would be the best way to use your body if this life was all there was for it. But it is not.

[29 : 06] And because it is not, whatever suffering our bodies must go through is not without meaning. It doesn't mean we'll know all the answers to all our questions about it, but we know that when we suffer for the sake of the gospel, we suffer as Christ suffered.

And so we can be equally assured that we will rise again just as he rose again as the firstborn of many brothers and sisters.

So how important is the resurrection to our faith? Well, it is everything, because without it we have nothing.

Our faith would be futile, our witness would be false, our sin would remain, and our future would be hopeless. But praise be to the God and Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For in his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never spoil, perish, or fade.

[30 : 27] And it's kept in heaven for you. In this, we can, and get to greatly rejoice.

Let us pray before we sing our closing hymn together. Father, we thank you that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

We thank you that our faith is not futile, because he reigns in heaven. We thank you that we have hope of life everlasting, both body and soul, because Jesus was the first fruit of many brothers and sisters.

We rejoice that we have been born again into a living hope through his resurrection and into an inheritance that can never spoil, perish, or fade. Father, we give you thanks and praise that that is what you have done for us, and we pray that you would keep us from being misled, hold us fast to your truth, that we might rejoice in you and rightly serve you with all that we have for all of our days.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.