

But He Was Raised

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's read Scripture together. We're going to read from 1 Corinthians 15, verses 12 to 34. That he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised.
- For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 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 have perished.
- If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.
- The firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.
- But each in his own order. Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule and every authority and every power.
- [1 : 3 1] For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.
- But when it says all things are put in subjection, it is plain that he is accepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.
- Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Why are we in danger every hour?
- I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die every day. What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?
- If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning.
- [2 : 3 8] For some have no knowledge of God, and I say this to your shame. This is God's holy word. We are, for three weeks, looking at this chapter, 1 Corinthians 15. This is week two in the run-up to Easter.
- And this chapter is Paul's argument for the resurrection of Jesus. And it's a formal argument. So we didn't touch on this last week, but if you were paying attention there, you might have noticed that this takes the shape of a philosophical argument.
- So Paul is writing to Corinthians in what we now call Greece, and it's Greek culture. And so they were very, very used to very formal arguments.
- And Paul here is giving a very formal argument. And so if you go back through it, you can see, you can notice a lot of if. So if this is the case, then this must be the case. If this is not true, then that couldn't be true.

Right? And he goes back and forth through that very formal, very philosophical, highly intelligible. And so the section we are in is called the refutation in formal logic. The first section we looked at last week where he says this is what the gospel is.

[3 : 45] It's the history of Jesus. That's the premise. So he's saying this is what everybody agrees on, Corinthian. I preached this to you. You said you believed it. The basic premises have been laid down.

But now it's time for the refutation. And we learn why he has to refute, why he has to give this counter argument. And it's in verse 12. So in verse 12 he says, If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, why are some of you saying there is no resurrection?

So what is Paul coming to refute in this section? He's saying that there are people in Corinth who are suggesting that even after Paul said, I saw the physical Jesus alive, and so did 500 other people at least.

He's saying, but some of you in Corinth are saying, yeah, I believe in Christianity, but I don't believe that Jesus Christ is actually physically alive. So that's what he has to refute. That's the refutation.

So he's going to give us his counter argument against that, and then he's going to say, but then if he has been raised from the dead, this is what that means. And so that's the very clear two sections.

[4 : 50] Now, that means that the Corinthians, though they heard the gospel, though they said they believed it, some of them are still very stuck in a pagan worldview.

And a pagan worldview comes from, in this time, Epicurean philosophy and Stoic philosophy and all sorts of worldviews cultivated by what we call cult religion of the time.

And in all these, there's different views of the afterlife. And so in Epicureanism and Stoicism, there's an idea that maybe there is no afterlife at all. So you die, you're dead.

Contemporary scientism might suggest something like that, right? But for others, there is an afterlife, but it's not physical. It's only spiritual. So the main Greek view is that the afterlife is nothing but spiritual, nothing but ethereal.

There's no physical body, right? And then we learn later in the chapter that some people were even saying that actually, yeah, the resurrection is real, but it's already happened. So we say as modern people, what, how could the resurrection already happen?

[5 : 53] But what they meant by that was the resurrection is something that happens inside of you. It's inner life transformation. So when you believe in Jesus, there's a resurrection that takes place in your soul.

So they were saying the resurrection is not physical, but it has already taken place. So as soon as you believe, you are resurrected from the inside out, right? And the past five or six sermons, I don't know who started this, but it has been said twice already in the last two sermons, that we're on a streak of quoting German intellectuals from the 19th to 20th century.

So I thought, far be it from me to break such a wonderful streak, so I will not break it. Rudolf Bultmann, 20th century, New Testament scholar in Germany.

He said this about Easter. He said, Easter is not about the rising of Jesus from the dead. It's about the rising of faith in the inner life in the first Christians from the deadly moment of the crucifixion.

So Bultmann said, like the Corinthians, some of the Corinthians said that the resurrection is not about physical, a physical resurrection from the dead, not about that. It's about this inner life transformation that occurs within you.

[7 : 09] And these apostles and these disciples had seen the crucifixion. It was horrific. Their master murdered, but they experienced resurrection because they all of a sudden said, even though he's dead, I can still believe in him.

Bultmann says that's resurrection. And some of the Corinthians are saying that. So Paul says, does the resurrection transform your inner life? Yes, absolutely.

But in 1 Corinthians 15, he says, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about something physical, something real life history. That's the core to the gospel. Now, Tom Wright, a retired professor from St. Andrews, he wrote a 700-page book about this chapter.

All right? And I say that just to say, we're not going to cover everything. Okay? And at the beginning of Tom Wright's book on this chapter, he says, I wish I had enough pages to cover everything in this chapter.

Okay? So we can only get the biggest ideas across today and leave it. Every single clause has so much in this argument. But let me just give you the two big ideas.

[8 : 19] And the two big ideas are just this, that Paul says, first, the deadly consequences of denying the physical resurrection of Jesus. What does it cost if you deny the resurrection of Jesus physically?

And then he turns and says, but he was raised. And so here is the transformative reality of the fact that he actually is alive. So those two things. The problem if you deny it, but the beauty when you see it's true.

The power. All right? So first, the problem if you deny it. Now, if you look at verse 13, he says, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

So that is what we call an argument from the universal to the particular. So he says, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is dead.

He's not raised. Right? So what is he doing? He's saying, if you believe Corinthian or a 21st century person, if there is no such thing as resurrection, then that means Christ was never raised.

[9 : 22] Right? The universal to the particular. Yeah? And so one of the things that that verse does for us today is it shows us that we've got to be aware of a very untrue, a false view that we have as 21st century people of first century people, of people from the pre-modern world.

And that's the idea that people in the first century were so gullible that they believed people could rise from the dead. And Paul says here in verse 13 that people in Corinth in the first century are saying, Jesus obviously is not alive because there is no such thing as resurrection from the dead.

Right? So in the 21st century, sometimes as modern people, we look back and think these pre-modern people, the only reason they believe this is because they were gullible. And they haven't yet come to the claims of modern science.

But as modern people, we know that the science is very clear. The science is very clear. People die and they don't come back. Right? Decay does not reverse in that way.

And what this helps us to see is we have to avoid any sense of chronological snobbery. Because the science was pretty clear in the first century as well. Right?

[10 : 41] One out of one people that died did not come back from the dead. And so we didn't, you know, modern science has helped us see this so much. No. We've always known, everybody knows that nobody comes back from the dead.

And we see here that that's exactly what Corinthians were saying. And we know that even Jewish believers were saying the same thing. The Sadducees in the Gospels did not believe in resurrection. They said resurrection is impossible.

The only afterlife there is is a spiritual afterlife. And you see what Paul is saying? Yes. The science is clear. One out of one people never come back from the dead.

Which is why this will convert you in your seats. That's the point. Because this is so consistent, it happened.

Therefore, this will change you in your seat. It will convert you on the spot. And you think about what Paul is saying if you back up to verse 8 and following when he says, Think about my life. Paul did not believe in Jesus.

[11 : 45] He did not follow Jesus. He did not believe in the resurrection. Not at all. And in fact, if you think about his life a little bit deeper, you realize that his whole well-being was wrapped up in denying the resurrection.

So, he made his money by denying the resurrection. His identity was to hate the Christian world and to ultimately seek the death of anybody who believed in it.

Right? His whole identity. His well-being. You know, Paul had a life plan like we all like to talk about today. And he had mapped it out really well. And as a young man, he was very successful. And his whole success depended on killing Christians.

He's saying, People don't come back from the dead, but I saw him. And it changed my life. It converted me on the spot. I gave my life away to him. That's exactly the point.

That's the point. And so, we can't come and say something very silly like, Well, first century people were gullible. Paul's saying, I wasn't gullible. I didn't believe it for a second. But then I saw him.

[12 : 43] And 500 people I know about saw him as well. And even more than that saw him. This will change you in your seats. It's not an issue of faith versus science.

The science has always been clear enough. Everybody's always understood the science. What is this? This is an issue of worldview. So, what is Paul saying? He's saying, You need a new worldview. You need to be willing to say, If God exists and he actually made the world, then I can believe that he has the power to act into the world by raising somebody from the dead.

It's not an issue of faith versus science. It's just, Do you believe in God? If you believe in God, then of course God has the power to raise people from the dead. He's God. He made us. He can do it. Now, the rest of Paul's argument in this first section is actually talking to people in Corinth and to us today through God's word, to anybody who says, I'm a Christian on the one hand, but denies the physical resurrection of Jesus on the other hand.

That's really what the rest of the section's about. So, that's directly the people that he's thinking about here. And so, what does he say? Look, he says, First century Corinthian, If you say, I'm a Christian, but I don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead physically, he says, Your faith is empty.

It's futile. It's vain. It's vacuous. My preaching is absolutely pointless. He says in verse 15, We, we and the apostles, we all preach that God raised Jesus from the dead.

[14 : 11] And what you've done by denying that is you're saying, God himself is a liar. We've misrepresented him. He's talking there about something broader. He's saying in the whole Old Testament, it was all about the moment of the resurrection, the crucifixion and the resurrection.

And we've been going around teaching the Old Testament saying, Look, the Old Testament shows that this was always the point. But if it's not, if it hasn't happened, then we've made God's entire word to be empty.

You see what he's saying there? He's saying, If Jesus is not raised from the dead, you need to go find a different God. Martin Luther said, If Jesus Christ is still dead, if you can find his bones in Israel, God is not God.

It's that big. It's that serious. The consequences are that big. And so he wants to say, Look, the forgiveness of sins and the power of the gospel is so wrapped up in this reality that if you take away the resurrection, you don't have the forgiveness of sins.

And all the people that have professed faith in Christ and have died in Corinth, they are dead in their sins. They've gone to deal with the Lord. No, God is not God if this has not happened.

[15 : 17] What do we learn here? We learn this and we'll move on. The gospel is not good news if Jesus Christ is still dead. He's saying that the resurrection has such basicity, if I could use that word, basicity to the Christian message.

You can't get underneath it. It's rock bottom. And so he's saying that progressive Christianity, as we call it today, has always been around. It was around in the first century. It's still around with us today.

And he's saying progressive Christianity is misnamed. Progressive Christianity, the idea that you can be a Christian but deny the physical resurrection of Jesus is not Christianity at all.

Progressive Christianity is sub-Christian. It lacks the basicity of the gospel message. Without the physical resurrection of Jesus, there is no good news. We're still dead in our sins and our trespasses.

And as one commentator puts it, if progressive Christianity saws off the tree branch that it sits upon, right? If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then all you have is mere religion.

[16 : 24] This is just mere religion. And religion is a lame hobby. Yeah. Yaroslav Pelikan, the Yale historian from the 20th century, he says about this chapter, he says what Paul is saying is that if Christ was not raised, nothing else matters.

But, secondly, he was raised from the dead. That's what Paul says here in the second half from verse 20. In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

And so here he gives you, let me give you three realities, three things this means for you if you believe this, if you know that this is real life history. This will change you today.

This will bring, if you're not a Christian, this, this, what I'm about to say, this has the power to bring conversion into your life. It can change you right here, right today. If you are a Christian, it has, what Paul tells us here, has the power to transform you right now in the 21st century, 2025.

And he tells us three things. I can only treat them in the most cursory way because of time. But the first thing he says is that when you realize the resurrection is real life history, what it offers to you is hope when you are facing death.

[17 : 42] That's the first big thing I think Paul wants to tell us. Now, all, every single one of us today, we are facing death right now. So facing death is not something that we will do when we're older.

Facing death is today. Facing death is right now. All of us are standing in the face of death at any moment, right? And Paul says here in verse 22, in Adam, all of us have died.

All of us do die because of Adam. So also in Christ, all shall be made alive. Now there he's doing this thing where he's connecting you, every single one of us, to the first man, Adam.

He's saying there is a deep connection between you and the first man. That the first human that ever came into this world was a representative for all of humanity. As modern Western individualist as we are, we struggle very much with this.

We do not want to be willing to say what this man did matters for me so many years later. But most societies in world history never had a problem with this. Most societies have had a communitarian mindset and have understood that people represent others.

[18 : 50] And we know this to be true in so many ways, right? If a president, if a prime minister declares war, you go to war, right?

If the prime minister says, if the parliament says, we are going to war tomorrow, then our nation, our society has gone to war. They represent us. And in the same way, before God, Adam represented us all.

We are deeply connected to him so that when he chose death instead of life, he's saying there's a deep connection there. We all die. But when the second Adam, but when the second Adam faced death that we deserved and disrupted that death by coming back to life, he also represented us.

And so he's saying that there's this deep connection. We call it Adam Christology. This deep connection between us and Adam and us and Christ as Christians. I've used this illustration here before.

I'll come back to it. I think it's helpful. If you're married, you probably have a joint credit card with your spouse. It's good to have that. You build your credit a bit, right?

[19 : 54] You have a joint credit card. And if your spouse goes and spends so much money on Amazon, so much money on shopping on Princess Street and right out here on the Royal Mile, and the debt collector comes to your door and knocks on your door and says you owe thousands upon thousands and it's time to pay, you say, I didn't spend any of that money.

And what does the debt collector say? It does not matter. Your name is on the account. Legally, you spent every penny. So you might have not made a single transaction, but it's your debt.

You see, we know that there's such a thing as legal connection that leads to a representative, you know, even think about it like this. The debt collector comes to your door and says, you owe so much money.

You say, there's no way I could owe that money. And he says, oh, you do. You're legally connected. But then what do you do? You say, look, I didn't spend any of that money myself, but I will pay every penny of it because I love them.

And you pay it. And you know what? They didn't pay a dime. They didn't pay, they spent it all, but they didn't pay any of it back. You paid every penny, but guess what?

[21 : 13] They're debt free. And in the same way, he's saying, in Adam, his debt became your debt and boy, have we accrued some debt in our lives. But in Christ, though he didn't earn the debt, he paid every penny of it and now you're free too.

And so he's saying, when Jesus rose from the dead, you were made alive. Now here's the takeaway, here's the application. If you are a believer today, if you say today, I know Jesus Christ lives and I follow him, don't miss that what Paul's saying here and what Paul says in other parts of the gospel, of his letters, is you today are alive.

You today have been made a new creation. Don't miss the reality of your sainthood. You are alive. You have been made new. You are a new creation. It doesn't just start at the end of history when your physical body is raised from the dead.

You, the second fruit. He, the first fruit. No, but right now, the resurrection does matter because you are spiritually made alive from this very moment, from the very moment of his resurrection.

It's true of you. You're a saint. You're beloved. You're adopted. You're part of his family. It has changed. Life is different. You are not who you used to be, but by the grace of God, you can say, today I am what I am.

[22 : 32] Things have changed really and truly. Sainthood is actually real. The first Adam was given wonderful life by God and he traded it for death.

The second Adam, the very author of life, he traded his life for the death we deserved so that we could have his life. We're deeply connected and that means that because Jesus Christ was physically raised from the dead, you shall be too.

Everything that's true of him is now true of you. The second thing Paul says to us, Christian friend, transformative power here, the second thing he says is in the face of death now because of that, you can say, God shall be all in all.

So in verse 28, that's how he ends this refutation, this argument. He says, when all things are subjected to God, the Son himself subjected to God the Father, then God shall be all in all.

Now, what is he saying when he says God shall be all in all? Another way to translate it, that is, one day, when this all wraps up, God shall be everything to everyone.

[23 : 46] God shall be all in all. That means he will be everything to everyone, meaning all that God is and all that God has done throughout world history will be visible to everyone. He's saying, so he has raised Christ in the middle of history, but right now, verses 24 to 28 are saying, right now, it doesn't feel that way because he's writing to a Corinthian church who's underneath the power of the empire.

And in the first century, the empire, the emperor called himself the pater patriae, meaning, I am the father, the holy father of the fatherland. So, in other words, the emperor in that time saw himself as the divine father over the people.

And he's saying, but you've got to understand when you look at the weakness of Christ at the cross and the power of God in the resurrection, God is going to subject every single power underneath the kingship of Jesus.

And I know that right now it doesn't feel that way exactly. You don't feel like every single power over you in your life is underneath the kingship of Jesus. You look at political leaders like they were doing in the first century and saying they see themselves as divine.

And he's saying, no, look, you've got to be patient. We know that we have the first fruits of the spirit. We wait for the resurrection of the body with patience. One day, every power will be subjected visibly and Christ, God, will be everything to everyone.

[25 : 14] Everybody will see it. What was made true at the middle of history will come true at the end of history and every power, every demon, Satan himself, and then he says, and even the last enemy, death, will be subjected to his reign.

It will die and he will be king. Now that is, that is why in verse 29 he says something that sounds to us very strange as Protestant readers.

He says, is that not why Paul says some of you are being baptized on behalf of the dead? What does he mean by that? It sounds as if he's saying something like a person who's alive today can seek baptism and help a person who's already died achieve something in the next life.

So some way that the sacrament of baptism becomes powerful to somebody who might have already died. But the overwhelming majority view today in scholarship of this is something very different and it requires us to change the translation just a little bit and it says this is why some of you have been baptized for the sake of the dead or because of what happened with the dead.

That's a way to translate it and so let me give you a quote. This is Anthony Thistleton one really important contemporary commentator quoting from a woman named Maria Rader who wrote a whole book about this sentence in 1955.

[26 : 38] Okay and I'm pretty convinced about what she thought about it. This is what she says what Paul is saying here is part of his argument for why the resurrection is so powerful for us when we face death.

And this is what she says the death of Christians in Corinth in the first century led to the conversion of many people that saw them die. Okay he says in the first instance when it says for the sake of the dead on behalf of the dead people in the first century saw Christians dying especially Christian relatives and a sweet mother would hold the hand of her son at her deathbed and say I believed in Christ I will see Christ today come with me turn to Jesus believe in the truth of the resurrection and we will be together.

And so it says this is why many of you in Corinth have been baptized for the sake of the dead or because you saw the dead you saw the people facing death even some of them murdered for their faith you saw them say I will hold fast to the claim that Jesus Christ is alive not dead and I know that my Redeemer lives I'll see him will you not come and see him with me?

And so many of you have turned and said I want to be baptized because you saw the strength of people's faith when they face death. Now that gives us the application doesn't it?

He's saying when you see somebody have you seen somebody face death with the hope of Christ? And he's saying when you see somebody face death with the hope of Christ and they say I don't want to die I hate death death is the last enemy but today I know my Redeemer lives and I want I want you to know that too.

[28 : 24] He's saying that's a powerful witness and you can say if you believe that you can look at death and say you are the last enemy you are evil I hate you there's no celebration in this there's nothing to celebrate in death no not at all and yet at the same time death where is thy sting?

You can say in the face of death I hate you and the lower you lay me the higher he'll raise me and he's saying that's what it means people are being baptized because they saw people die in the faith and they wanted the same thing they wanted the hope of that type of transformation and so finally this leads us to the third thing final thing and I'll close with this Paul says at the end of this passage from verse 31 he says look this this has to change you today that's what he says you can't friend look you can't walk away today without asking yourself did Jesus Christ rise from the dead or not physically if he did it has to it means everything and if he didn't it means everything right and that's what Paul concludes with he says from verse 31 why would I die every single day if this were not true so he's writing here from Ephesus and in verse 31 he says why would I go to the beasts in Ephesus every day if this were not real if I were lying and he's probably not talking there about going to literal gladiatorial games where he confronts lions and stuff he's saying that

I'm in Ephesus right now preaching this message and people are trying to kill me and every day I wake up and I think what is the point what is the point of dying to my pleasures and desires every day and going to face my death at the hands of these Ephesians leaders if this were not real in other words he's saying what is the point Christian of doing religion and dying to yourself every day every Sunday by waking up earlier than you want to and coming here if Christ has not been raised from the dead what's the point that's the question he's asking and this time it was very common that gladiators on the night before they were going to have to go into the gladiatorial arena in the Colosseum in Rome for instance it was very common they believed in only a spiritual afterlife no physical afterlife and so the norm was if you're a gladiator and you're fighting the tigers tomorrow on the night before you enjoy the pleasures of the physical life to their maximal degree because you think my physical life is over and that's what he's referencing here he quotes Menander a Greek poet and says what does Menander say eat, live, be merry tomorrow you're going to die if there is no physical resurrection then you might as well stop doing religion and maximize the pleasures of this life and he says but if Christ has been raised from the dead there is a reason to die to yourself every single day and say

I exist to live for him we could put it this way in the first half of the argument Paul said if Christ has not been raised if Christ is dead nothing else matters and in the second half of the argument he says if Christ has been raised nothing else matters let us pray Father would you take this message and transform us in our seats would you bring somebody today who doesn't yet know the power of the resurrection to see the wonder of the son of God raised from the dead in the middle of history for the forgiveness of all sins and I pray for many many Christians here today that we Lord would give our lives away that we would say that we would say this is why I die to self Lord help us to die to self and live for Christ

Lord we say today because you were raised nothing else matters let that be the confession of our hearts because you live we can face tomorrow because you live all fear is gone because you live we know you hold the future and life is worth the living because you live so that's our prayer that's our song right now we pray it in Jesus name Amen