

Why the Resurrection is Priority

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- [0 : 0 0] And if you were, so if you were here last week, you remember Corey spoke on the first few verses and Corey had a lot fewer verses than I have to talk about tonight.
- But the important thing is just to remember that there is, I'm going to offer one key theme in our passage tonight. But what Corey talked about last week was really helpful and it sets up this week because Torrey talked about how, and Paul talks about how, when Paul talks about the gospel, what's clear is that for Paul the gospel is not primarily a philosophy and it's not primarily a set of rules that we need to follow even though those things are related to the gospel.
- But the gospel by definition is good news. It's news. And Paul summarizes that news in the passages that we looked at last week in verse three where he says, Christ died for our sins in accordance with scripture.
- So Christ died, then he was buried, and on the third day he rose in accordance with scripture. Paul says that's the gospel that Jesus lived and he was buried.
- He died and then he rose again. And Paul would say, if you have a message about Christianity that doesn't include those three things, you may have a story, but what you don't have is the gospel.
- [1 : 1 8] And what you don't have is the truth of what actually happened 2000 years ago. And that becomes relevant for what Paul talks about in this passage tonight because what Paul says here is there were people in the Corinthian church and you see this in verse 12 who, as far as we can tell, and we can only read through the lines of what Paul says, there were people who believed in Jesus somehow.
- And yet they also believed that there was no such thing as a bodily resurrection. So in verse 12, Paul says, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?
- And this may sound bizarre to you. And to be honest, it sounds bizarre to me because it's totally understandable that an atheist, for instance, would say Jesus did not rise from the dead. That's consistent with their worldview.
- But it's confusing to imagine a situation where a believer in Jesus Christ would at the same time say, yes, I believe in him, but there is no bodily resurrection. And Paul is in this whole passage, the point of Paul is saying, do you understand what that would mean to believe in Jesus?
- And yet at the same time to not believe that one day all of us who believe in Christ will be raised in body from the dead. And so the theme of tonight, what Paul says is that the gospel itself and our hope in the gospel depends on the fact of the resurrection of the body.
- [2 : 4 9] And so all I want to do tonight is look through this passage and answer three questions. What do we lose without the resurrection? What does it mean that the resurrection is true?

And then finally, how does the resurrection shape this life for us? And you may be saying to yourself, as a Christian, I've never really struggled with whether the resurrection is true or not, it seems to go with the definition of Christianity.

And that's where I am too. I don't understand how you could believe in Jesus and not believe in the resurrection. But the way that this passage speaks to me and the way that I want to suggest that it might speak to all of us tonight, if you are Christians, is do we see, even if we believe in the resurrection, do we see the resurrection with the same level of importance that Paul does?

The way that Paul talks about the resurrection, he sounds like a man who, if the resurrection weren't true, his life would fall apart. And do we feel that same way?

And if not, why? So first in this passage, what do we lose without the resurrection? And you see this in verses 12 to 18, and these people have pushed a button with Paul.

[4 : 03] And you could say he goes on a tirade here, but it's also very logical. And he gives a bunch of if-then statements just to say, listen, if you are a Christian and you don't believe that the dead are raised, do you know what that means?

Do you know what the consequences of that belief would be? And so it's both logical, but it's also very personal because he's saying, don't you realize what these facts that you're suggesting would do, not just to the fact of the gospel, but to people like us who would put our hope in that.

And so he runs through a series of ifs. And the first one in verse 13, he says, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then not even Christ himself has been raised.

So when these people say they don't believe in the resurrection of the body, they mean that as a general statement. It's not about Jesus Christ himself. They're just saying, when any one of us die, we're not resurrected in the body.

And Paul is saying, like, if that's what you might call your metaphysics, then not even by that standard could Jesus Christ have been raised from the dead?

[5 : 10] And he said, if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then verse 14, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. And then he goes on and he says, in verse, it gets even worse, verse 15, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then what does that mean for our message?

It means we've been misrepresenting God. And then you think he's done with the tirade, that he's had it all out. And then he starts it up again in verse 16.

He says, he repeats himself. He says, if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. So he wants to make this point very clear that if you don't believe in a resurrection of the body, then the historical fact of Jesus Christ resurrection cannot be true.

And then he says again, if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is futile and you're still in your sins because what good does a man whose bones are rotting in the grave do for us who would place our hope in that man who's dead?

And then it gets even more personal. And he says in verse 18, if there's no resurrection from the dead, then even those who have fallen asleep before us, the people that we know and we love and who we know loved Jesus, they have perished and they're never coming back.

[6 : 27] And then last but not least in verse 19, he says, if in Christ we have hope in this life only, that is, if all Christianity does for us is what it does while our hearts are beating in this life, he says, then we of all people in this world are most to be pitied.

So when you were, if you step back and you say, what is it stake for Paul and whether the resurrection is true or not? And for Paul, it's everything, everything that he's based his life on and every hope that he has depends on the question of whether or not the dead can be raised from the dead.

And but if I could summarize those concerns in a different way that Paul has, there's something that Paul is getting at about a question that all of us have to face, which is this, if there's no resurrection from the dead, well, this is a statement, if there's no resurrection from the dead, then our gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ has no answer to the problem of death.

And not only does it not have an answer to the problem of death, it lies about the answer that it does have without the resurrection Christianity. It's not just not true.

It just doesn't make sense anymore. There was a one theologian who wrote about this passage in first Corinthians. And you know, when you read this passage, obviously what it's talking about is resurrection, but the theologian suggested that what what first Corinthians 15 is really about is not in the first place resurrection, but it's death.

[8 : 04] And part of his argument for that is just the sheer number of times that Paul says the words the dead in this passage. It's 11 times in this chapter and nine times right here.

And the point that the man was making is Christianity claims to have a response to death. And if it's response to death is not a resurrection from the dead, then it has no response to death.

And you know, if we can step back and think about all the world's religions and all the philosophies in the world, every religion and every philosophy that's worth its salt has something to say about death.

They don't all say that we'll be resurrected. And some of them may on the face of it seem very hopeless. They may respond to death by saying we need to accept death. You know, that's during this time period, one of the most popular philosophies was Epicureanism.

And at the end of this chapter, well, at the end of our passage, Paul says, if Christianity is not true, then what what is he says, then let us eat drink for tomorrow we die.

[9 : 10] Just a quote from Isaiah, but most people think that he's really pointing to Epicureanism, who were these people who said there is nothing after death. And therefore, the best thing that you can do with your life is is to make the most of it.

And you know, some people took that in direction of find all the pleasure that you can and some people had a more mature view of that. But basically the Epicurean said the meaning of life is whatever you can find here and there's nothing afterwards.

And Paul says, if there's no resurrection from the dead, that must be our motto too. And he's being somewhat sarcastic, but you can see what he's saying. And at least the Epicureans were honest enough to say what they believed and to face the fact of death.

But Paul has seen the resurrected Christ. So it's not just logic here. Paul has seen the resurrected Christ. This came to him in body.

And verse 26 of this passage, Paul says that the greatest enemy that we have is death. And in Jesus Christ, he saw with his own eyes an actual response to death, which is that it can be conquered and that there is one who has come who has conquered it.

[10 : 29] And Paul is saying, I have put all my hope on the belief that Jesus Christ really did rise from the dead because I saw it with my own eyes.

And because he's the only philosophy and the only religion that I have ever found that has looked death in the face and conquered it. And so Christians are people.

Paul saying, I have put all my cards on this fact of the resurrection. That's what Christians are people who say all of our hope is on this fact that we believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and that there is a resurrection of the dead.

You know, C.S. Lewis had this quote that you may have heard before where he says, Christianity if false is of no importance. And if it's true, it's of infinite importance.

And the only he says, and then he says, the only thing it cannot be as moderately important. And Paul is someone who would say, because Christianity is true, it's infinitely important.

[11 : 29] And if there were no resurrection from the dead, not only would it not be important, it would be pitiful. It would be worth pitying people who believed in it. So that's as much bad news as we'll take for a few moments.

That's what Paul says happens if the resurrection is not true. And then he moves on and he talks about what does it mean that the resurrection is true? And you see this in verse 20.

Paul says, so he presents this dystopian idea of how bad it would be if the resurrection weren't true. And then he says in verse 20, but in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

And then he talks about all the things that flow from the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead. And what's beautiful and interesting is, you know, of course, this would have made Paul very happy. But the news of the gospel isn't just to create a happy mood.

It actually changes history itself. And Paul presents the resurrection in the light of the whole narrative arc of human history and of scripture. And in verse 21, he says that when Adam first sinned, death entered into the world so that all of us carry around the weight of sin and death.

[12 : 40] And the way that he presents Jesus is a response to what has happened to all of us, which is that we've inherited Adam's sin and death and that all of us, well, all of us are going to die one day.

And Paul says here in verse 22, as in Adam all die, so all in Christ shall be made alive, shall be resurrected.

And that's a theological statement, but it's a theological statement that changes history. And what Paul is doing is he's saying, if you believe in Jesus Christ, and if you believe in Jesus Christ, then you are united to Jesus Christ.

And what that means is when you look in history and you consider the historical resurrection of Jesus, you can look and in some sense, you can see yourself in that resurrection.

Because just as 2000 years ago, Jesus lived and he died and he rose again. If you are united to Christ, then you, well, if you're now you are alive, one day you will die if Christ doesn't return before then.

[13 : 51] But one day, because you're united to Christ, just like him, you will rise from the dead or to put it more theologically accurately, you will be raised from the dead.

God will raise you up. And this is beautiful. I mean, Paul is really saying, look at Jesus and see your future because what happened to Jesus will happen to you.

And it could be you may die tomorrow. And it may be 10,000 years before God comes, before Jesus Christ returns.

And Paul is saying, even if that were true, the distance between your death and your resurrection is 10,000 years. Still, God would not forget you. And he will raise you up one day with as much joy and as much love as he raised his own son up with because you were united to him.

And there's a word that Paul uses to describe Jesus here. And he calls him the first fruits. He says that in verse 20. He says, Christ has been raised from the dead.

[14 : 56] Therefore he's the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. And you can probably infer, even if you've never been to a church before, what the term first fruits means. It has some sacrificial meaning, but it also just means it's the first part of a crop.

So when Paul calls Jesus the first fruits from the dead, what he's saying is, when you look at Jesus, you know that there's a much bigger harvest than what you're looking at.

And he's only the first part of it. And that means that Jesus' resurrection is not just a symbol of the fact that one day will be resurrected. It's actually evidence of it. So that you can actually contemplate Jesus' resurrection and say, that is the evidence that I have that one day, if I'm in Christ, I'll be resurrected.

Old Testament story, Noah. You remember when Noah was in the boat, the whole earth had been flooded. There was chaos all around.

And Noah has been in this boat for days and days and days. And there's no side of land. And towards the end of the rain, Noah begins sending out birds to look for some sign that land is ahead.

[16 : 12] And he keeps sending out birds and he never finds. The birds keep coming back with nothing. And then one day he sends out a dove and the dove comes back with what?

A single, freshly picked olive leaf. And it's the smallest thing from a little bird that who knows how far away it's flown.

But to Noah, that was everything because in that moment, Noah held in his hands the proof that safety was ahead and that his life was secure because there was land out there.

In that sense, that fig served as the first fruits of a hope that he knew that was ahead. And I thought of that story this week because it reminded me that we can think the same way about Jesus' resurrection.

When we see the resurrection, when we see that it happened historically, that's a sign to us that there is safety ahead for us, that there is life ahead for us.

[17 : 16] It's like, it's a sign from the future saying, this is what you have to expect in your future. One of the reasons that some people say that some of the Corinthians denied the resurrection is because they believe that it already happened, which is interesting because if you read your Bible sometimes, Paul talks about the Christian life as if we've already been resurrected.

So you can almost understand why they might think that. There's a passage in Corinthians, Colossians 3-1, where Paul looks at the believers and he says, you have been raised with Christ.

So you can see why they might say, well, haven't we already been resurrected? And the truth is, it's both and that God has already transformed us and he's raised us from the dead and he's given us a new heart.

But that's not the end of the story. And you could think about it like this. I heard this illustration that when you believe, when you put your faith in your hope in Christ, it's like you've been rescued from the water and you've been put on the boat.

And then one day you look forward to the chance when you'll finally make it to land. And that's when God reunites you to your body and you live forever with him.

[18 : 33] Paul is so sure of the resurrection that he won't even call it death, that Christians experience. What does he call it? He says in verse 20, he calls it sleep. And when I was back in Mississippi over Christmas break, I went and visited the graveyard of my ancestors.

And one of the most beautiful things was that in the graveyard, a lot of the headstones just put the name of the person, the dates that they lived, and then under it in place of where you might have something like rest in peace.

The quote on a lot of the gravestones was only sleeping. And we don't use that language a lot when we describe people who have passed away before us that they've, sometimes we'll say they've fallen asleep.

But it may sound too euphemistic. But Paul is saying the confidence that we have in the resurrection is so sure that even though we can call death the last enemy, and even though we can hate death and we can shout at it and we can say that we cannot wait for Jesus to destroy it, we can also say that death is just sleep.

Because one day we will wake up and we will rise and we will be in the presence of our Creator and have joy. So that's what Paul says about the fact that the resurrection is true.

[19 : 58] And then I want to close with this. How can the resurrection shape this life? And Paul gets to this at least implied in the last five verses.

And I need to take just one brief intermission because there's a passage in this, well there's a verse in this passage that's so strange that if I don't address it, I don't know, somebody here, surely one person's thought about it when I said it.

In verse 29, Paul says the weirdest thing. He says, otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead?

If the dead are not raised at all, why are people being baptized on their behalf? And that's a strange verse. It's one of the strangest verses in all the New Testament. And I just want to suggest to you one idea of what Paul might mean here, even though by one scholar's estimate there's 40 different interpretations of what this passage means.

Let me just give you one idea so that you can at least make sense of what's going on here. Some people have suggested that when the Corinthians were baptizing on behalf of the dead, what was happening was there were Christians who had died before they had had the chance to be baptized.

[21 : 13] And so the Corinthians thought it would be wise to baptize on their behalf. And so the obvious question is, well, aren't we baptizing on behalf of the dead? And just notice that Paul does not approve of that practice.

He doesn't approve or disapprove in the passage. We have no evidence of this happening in early Christianity. And the reason that Paul mentions it here is just to say, you people are doing this thing.

Why would you say the resurrection of the dead is not true if you're doing it? So if you want more information, I can email you some resources, but I just wanted to mention that.

Okay, so how does this change? How does the resurrection of the dead change this life? Well, it's personal here in the last few verses and in verse 30, he says, why if the resurrection of the dead is not true, why are we in danger every hour?

And then he says, I die every day. What do I gain if I fought with the beasts of Ephesus? If the debt or not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

[22 : 22] And if you know anything about Paul, you know that Paul's life was not easy. In the next letter that we have of Paul to the Corinthians, Paul gives this incredible list of all the things that he has gone through for the sake of the gospel.

He says things like he received 40 lashes five times. He was beaten with rods three times. He was stoned once, shipwrecked three times.

Danger from rivers, robbers, his own people. Danger from Gentiles. He lists all this out. In toil and hardship, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food and cold and exposure.

Paul is saying if there is no resurrection from the dead, the life that I have lived these past years makes no sense. Not only does it make no sense, it was worthless. It was pitiful.

And he says if there's no resurrection from the dead, the mildly response must be to eat and drink for tomorrow I die.

[23 : 23] But that idea of hopelessness at the idea that the resurrection is not true has an alternative in the life of Paul, which is this, that Paul can say if the resurrection of the dead is true, then all of these things I have been through, all of the pain and the suffering and the sorrow was worth it.

That's the assumption here, right? Is that Paul is saying because the resurrection of the dead is true, I can face all these trials in my life. And that's how the resurrection of the dead can change our present.

Is that it changes the way that we view every day of our lives. And it gives us hope that no matter what we face in this life, there's another one. There was an old man who preached at our church this morning, who was 58 years old.

His name was Derek Lamont. And Derek said, if I was 58, if I didn't believe in Christianity, I'd be falling apart. I'm paraphrasing what you said.

But his point was you come to the end of your life and the ability to make use of it. And its meaning grows dimmer and dimmer and dimmer.

[24 : 36] And yet if you believe in Jesus Christ and you believe that you'll be raised from the dead, there's a hope. Even in the last day of your life, there's a hope that your life has not even begun.

But there's more than that. Because if you believe in the resurrection of the dead, it doesn't just mean that you can be happy, that you'll live forever. It also means that in this life, you can give yourself away.

And you can take risks. Because you know that whatever you lose in this life will not be lost for good. And whatever you give away will be given back to you in eternity, or you'll receive more than you ever could have received here.

And Paul, the way that Paul described his own sacrifice, he says, I die every day. And you know, there are some people who are hard on their bodies and are hard on their discipline because they want to get better and better and better.

But Paul was hard on himself in such a way that he was giving himself away. His lifeblood was flowing out of him. And he knew that death was coming and it could come because of the gospel that he was spreading and he was saying, it would be okay to give up my life for the gospel.

[25 : 51] I don't have to hold that tightly because I know of the future hope that I have. There was an eerie scene in a TV show that I watched a long time ago called Band of Brothers, which is a World War II series that you may have seen.

And there was a young soldier who was, he was deathly afraid of battle. And he could not bring himself in one battle to get out of a ditch and go fight.

And a mentor comes to him in the dark of night once and tries to talk him through his fears and explain his fears to him. And this other soldier is the epitome of bravery.

And he looks at the young man and he says, you hid in that ditch. He was talking about him when he hid in the ditch. He said, you hid in that ditch because you think there's still hope.

And the soldier, Blythe was his name. He says, the only hope you have is to accept the fact that you're already dead. And the sooner you accept that, the sooner you'll be able to function as a soldier is supposed to function.

[26 : 56] All war depends on it. That was a very Epicurean explanation, but he was saying, his explanation for how to find bravery is accept the fact that your situation is hopeless.

And the sooner you can do that, the sooner you can make the most of what you have. The gospel comes to us and it says the exact opposite. It says, because you have hope, you can take risks and you can get out of the ditch and you can face your fears because you know that your future is secure.

And in the same way that he told this soldier, you must accept your death. Paul comes to us in this passage and he says, you must accept the resurrection.

And until we accept the resurrection, we will cling tightly to the things of this world and we will live in fear and we'll be afraid to give away our money and we'll be afraid to give away our time and we'll be afraid to give away our love.

But if we can believe in the resurrection and if we can place it at the center of our hearts like Paul does, then it doesn't just secure our future. It changes who we are today so that we can become more like Christ and we can live in the kind of hope that Paul has found.

[28 : 14] So one application tonight is tomorrow morning, think about the resurrection and just say to yourself, if this is true, how does this change the way that I live today?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we love your gospel and we could speak about it week after week and we will speak about it week after week and we'll never go tired of it because you've saved us, you've redeemed us, you've forgiven us for our sins and we pray that we would rejoice in our resurrection and that it would not be something that we forget about in our day to day lives but that it would motivate us and it would give us a security that only you can offer us.

We ask all this in your Son's name tonight. Amen.