

Hope that is Not Human

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[0 : 0 0] Last Thursday, as I was lying in a CT machine, having my head scanned, I started to daydream.

See, I've been having lots of headaches lately, and so the doctor sent me off to get some tests, and I'm sure she didn't really think there was anything majorly wrong, but she just had to cover all the bases. So I'm lying on this bed that kind of moves back into the big round scanner, and it seemed to be taking much longer than I expected.

And out of the corner of my eye, I could see the technicians, the radiographers behind their little window, moving about and talking to each other. And so I'm starting to freak out a little.

And I'm thinking, oh, my gosh. Imagine if the reason why this is taking so long is that they've actually found something, and they want to scan that bit again just to make sure.

And maybe they've called in other people for a second opinion. They're like, oh, my goodness, have a look at this. Can you see what I see? Probably only about five minutes have gone past by this stage, but, you know, I'm starting to work myself up into a bit of a frenzy.

[1 : 1 7] And so I think, okay, okay, if something actually is wrong, what will I do? And so I think, okay, well, if I'm actually sick, it could be a great opportunity to witness to my friends and relatives who don't know Jesus.

I'll be really calm and serene about the whole thing, and they'll see how wonderfully, peacefully I'm taking it all, and they'll think, wow, God must really be helping her, and they'll become Christians.

And so this is about the seven-minute mark, and I'm lying there thinking about all my friends becoming Christians and how wonderful it's going to be. And then I suddenly thought, hang on a second.

There's nothing in the way that I act now, normally, that would indicate to me that I would be a gracious and calm and peaceful patient if I were diagnosed with something serious.

I mean, I rant and rave if the supermarket doesn't stock my favourite organic milk. I cry like four times a week in a good month. I'm thinking there is no way that I could be this peaceful, inspirational witness to Jesus in that situation, except for one thing.

[2 : 5 3] If I had a sure and absolutely certain hope that there is a real and better life to come, I would have to be absolutely certain that this life is not all there is.

And so as they move me out of the scanner, that's what I'm thinking to myself. Can I be that certain?

Now, of course, my daydreaming and the way I shared it with you is a bit melodramatic and a bit silly and actually it's a very serious topic because for all of us, death will look us in the face one day.

Many of us might have looked it in the face through the experience of another, through the illness of another, through the death of another. If we haven't yet, we will.

It's an inevitable fact of life. It's like our shadow in this world. It's with us wherever we go. And just like a shadow, it's the most beautiful things in life, the brightest things in life that show up death for the dark tragedy that it really is.

[4 : 27] The best things in life, families, marriages, friendships, are all torn apart by death. The selfless works of doctors, great leaders, missionaries, are all cut short by death.

The profound contributions of writers, of scientists, of theologians, are all left incomplete because of death.

The goodness and beauty of simple everyday acts, of hospitality, of care, of hard work, of listening, they are cut off when death comes along.

And I think if death ever seems like it's insignificant to us, it's only because the goodness and value of life have been minimised.

But when we see life for how good it is, then we see death for how awful it is. And yet it hangs over us, each one of us.

[5 : 40] But how can we go on? How can we face this life with peace and with hope?

How can we have that absolute certainty? How can we have a true hope? Not that hope that some of Naomi's students had very eloquently expressed.

Not something that you just really want to happen. Not just wishful thinking. No, what we want is a real and tangible hope. Something that goes beyond our human capacity for coping or compromise or for looking on the bright side or for sweeping under the carpet, for euphemisms, for false security.

No, we want a real and tangible hope. Something on which we can stand. How can we have a certainty that there is life after death?

Well, 1 Corinthians 15 verse 20 says this. But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have died.

[7 : 03] And so, friends, what we're going to be reflecting on tonight is that we can have certainty that there is resurrection life after death because the firstfruits, the firstfruits of that harvest have already appeared.

One man has already done it. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Now, we heard last week about how the reality of Jesus' resurrection is eminently trustworthy and defensible.

He really died. He was really buried. And on the third day, the tomb was empty. Then the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples, including Paul, who wrote this letter, and their lives were transformed.

Furthermore, Jesus appeared to more than 500 people. And all of that happened in accordance with the scriptures, God's word, which had predicted it centuries before.

But we also heard how if you deny the possibility of bodily resurrection, you deny the resurrection of Jesus and you lose all those things that Naomi reminded us of as we began our service.

[8 : 21] The trustworthiness of the apostles and their message, the purpose of faith, the forgiveness of sins, hope for life beyond the grave.

If there's no resurrection of the dead, all those things, you might remember, fade from the picture. But, Paul says in verse 20, but, Jesus Christ is raised from the dead and so we know that the harvest of life eternal that we long for is coming and it's guaranteed because the first of that grain has already been collected and it's like it's been shown to us.

Just like on a farm, not that I know a lot about farms, but just like I imagine on a farm, once the first parts of the crop have ripened, then you know the rest of it is going to follow.

Now, the Jews had, some of the Jews had a hope that people would be resurrected at the end of time. But this man, Jesus, he's been resurrected early, if you like.

He's popped up in the middle of history. And so, Paul is saying it's a historical fact that the first fruits have ripened, they have been harvested, Christ has been raised, and so the rest will definitely come.

[10 : 01] It's only a matter of time. Or in other words, the end of the story has been written.

All we have to do is read to the end. We can have confidence that it will take place. And so, I think as we have a look at this passage further, Paul is actually trying to give us confidence in the resurrection of the dead, in our life in Jesus, by explaining to us God's big story.

I think that the reason that we as Christians sometimes are not too sure of our future is because we've tried to stick on, if you like, this little bit about Jesus, death and resurrection.

We stick on the Easter thing to our normal worldview, what the rest of our culture thinks. We've tried to add it on, like something to make the engine run faster or smoother.

We've just tried to tack something on. But Paul is saying, no, no. If you want to have real confidence, actually you need to have a whole new engine, a whole new worldview.

[11 : 34] You need to understand humans' place in God's big story. You need to understand the whole purpose. the whole purpose of God's history and of why Jesus came.

And I think sometimes we can, even as Christians, focus not on that big story but on our own little stories. My story starts, you know, maybe with my birth or my grandparents' birth and it goes along and the best parts, the chapter headings are at those milestones in life, you know, graduation from school and marriage or career, first house, you know, but Paul is saying, read this, understand that that is not your story.

That might be great but it is so much less than what God has actually created human beings for. And so we read in verse 21 and 22, for since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being.

For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. Christ. When God's story for us began, it did not include death.

Humans were created to be God's image to creation, to rule the world under him and to live forever in perfect relationship with him.

[13 : 22] yet because of the rebellion of the first humans, Adam and Eve, when they questioned God's command and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, death entered the scene.

Humans brought death upon themselves, since death came through a human being, Paul says, because sin against God carries the consequences of death.

Now each of us who have been born since then, have now become part of this subplot in the story of Adam and Eve.

We are their children, we inherit the consequences of their actions and we follow in their footsteps. We rebel against God and even when we turn to Christ, we must still experience death because we live in a fallen world.

God's big story for humanity was never going to be thwarted. Sometimes we think, oh, well it's must up because of Adam and Eve and death came in and so the whole thing, it's all over.

[14 : 37] But God's big story was never, is never, has never been thwarted. humans were meant to obey him and so they will, starting with Jesus Christ.

Humans were meant to rule under him and so they will, starting with Jesus Christ. Humans were meant to live with him forever and so they will, starting with the man Jesus Christ.

Christ has become what we were always meant to be. And so Paul can write, since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being, this perfect God man, Jesus Christ.

And so Paul reminds us that those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who are adopted into him, can now become part of the original story again, in Christ.

And so he writes, for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order, Christ the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

[16 : 09] we can be part of the original story again when we belong to Christ. Now if you were here last week, you might remember that the Corinthians seemed to have a problem with the timing of what was promised in the gospel.

They had a tendency, if you're looking in your Bibles, they had a tendency to stop at verse 22. For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. Yep, that's us.

We have it. We've got it all now. They tended to think that they had received payment in full rather than understanding that there was first fruits and then the full harvest to come.

But Paul is saying, yes, he does say in other parts, we share in the resurrection life now, yes, but we are not resurrected as we will be.

when we are resurrected, we will be changed. You won't look like you do now. We'll have new resurrection bodies.

[17 : 13] And we'll learn about that in the next couple of weeks. But what Paul tells them here is that the timing of the story is really important. There's an order to it.

Christ, the first fruits, to give us confidence that we'll be resurrected too. And then when Jesus comes again, we will see the continuation of our story as God means it to be.

We will be resurrected and live forever. The reason why there is an order to it is because to complete God's story for us, as it was meant to be, Jesus must reign as God and man to bring all God's enemies under God's dominion again.

That's why Paul goes on to write in verses 24 to 27, then comes the end when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power.

For he must reign, he, Jesus, 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.

[18 : 31] So the purpose of the reign of the risen Lord Jesus is to defeat all the enemies that have defaced, oppressed, and spoiled God's magnificent world and his human creatures in particular.

world. This makes complete sense, complete sense when we know about God's plan for humanity from the beginning of time. Jesus is going to be what we were supposed to be, the obedient, perfect ruler under God.

He's going to be that for us. And so he is going to reign until all of God's enemies are destroyed. and the last enemy, the worst of the enemies, as we talked about earlier, that demolisher of relationships, that robber of potential, that destroyer of life in all its goodness, death, that last enemy will be destroyed.

it. When Jesus returns, he will complete the battle that he started in his death and resurrection. He'll destroy death once and for all, the dead will be raised, and those who are in Christ will live with God forever.

But it has not been accomplished yet. I mean, none of us would argue with that, would we? We just need to look around to know that God's enemies are still hard at work.

[20 : 10] But that needn't shake our confidence either, because it is part of this story. It's always been, as Paul quotes from Psalm 110, that, quote, he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

And Psalm 8, talking about humans, God made them a little lower than the angels and put everything under their feet. That was the plan from the beginning, and that is what Jesus is working out now, and so we can have confidence that this big story is coming to its end, and that God is going to be glorified just as he was always planning to be.

And so Paul continues, that's a lot of subjections, but what it means is that Jesus is the perfect human, as we've been talking about, as well as the Son of God.

He's been obedient to God in death. He has been vindicated by being raised to life so that he can be the first human to live forever. He's reigning and will eventually be ruler over everything, over sickness, natural disasters, evil and death.

He will be Lord of all. But as the perfect human and obedient Son, Jesus will hand over all glory, all power, all rule to God, placing himself, although he is equal with God, placing himself under the rule of God, so that God will be all in all.

[22 : 18] Now that sounds like a little, a strange kind of mystical saying, God all in all. Does that mean everything at the end of the story disappears and God is just kind of everywhere? No, it means that God will be ruling perfectly everywhere.

He will be glorified perfectly everywhere, including through us. He will be worshipped perfectly everywhere, including through us, which is what he designed us for right at the beginning.

And so when we who are in Christ are resurrected, we know that Jesus will defeat all the enemies and that we will live forever in God's presence as he is all in all.

Well, we could stop there and it would be great, it would be a wonderful sermon. But Paul knows that for some of the Corinthians, perhaps like for some of us, big theology just sometimes goes straight over the head or just doesn't hit the mark.

So he wants to drive home the necessity of the resurrection with three further arguments. And they're called, if you like a bit of Latin, ad hominem and ad hoc arguments.

[23 : 37] Now, that's just technical terms for saying they're not theological arguments. They're arguments that are appealing to the person, to the emotion, and they're arguments that Paul is using from his experience at the time to apply directly to this experience.

You'll see what I mean as we read them. So, 1 Corinthians 15, 29 says, otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead?

If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? Now, this is a very confusing verse. I think it's confusing for me.

Maybe you've understood it straight away. But I think that the reason I needed to say they're ad hominem and ad hoc, they're arguments that aren't theological, is because Paul is using a situation here that seems to be going on in Corinth.

He's not saying this is right. He's not drawing theology from it. He's saying, look at what you are doing and see that it contradicts what you are saying.

[24 : 51] You're absurd, in other words. And so, we don't exactly know what was going on. The plain sense of the text seems to say that some of the Corinthian Christians were having themselves baptized in the name of someone who had died, so that they could give that person who had died the benefits of what baptism gains for the believer now.

That seems to be the plain text of it, the plain sense of what the text says. And we know that that's a very strange practice. Mormons do something like it, and it is not anywhere founded in scripture.

we know that people must turn to Christ and live, not be baptized on somebody else's behalf. There are other ideas that people have of what it means.

Perhaps it means that the Corinthians themselves were being baptized with a view to seeing their dead relatives again. The Greek isn't quite as clear as how the NRSV has translated it, so receive baptism on behalf of the dead.

It's just like baptized for the dead. So it could be that they're thinking of their dead relatives, hoping to see them again, and so they are being baptized as Christians.

[26 : 26] But whatever is happening, Paul is saying it's based on the fact that there's resurrection reality, there's hope of life after death. And how can you guys say that there's no resurrection of the dead if you're doing something like this?

It's just crazy. But even more crazy were the risks that Paul and his fellow workers were taking every day for the gospel. So he writes in verse 30, why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour?

I die every day. That is as certain brothers and sisters as my boasting of you, a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it?

If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. So in this, Paul has come to where we started today and where we ended last week.

He's saying, well, what use are mere human hopes in the struggles of life? what use our euphemisms, our positive thinking, our superficial security?

[27 : 42] And what is the point of giving it all up, of metaphorically fighting the wild animals, those that are opposed to the gospel?

What's the point of all of that if there is no resurrection? death? And all that there is, is our small individual story, the one that starts with my birth and has those chapters of the milestones of my life until it ends in death.

death? If that's all there is, if there's no bigger human story, if there is no bigger God story, then we may as well maximise what we've got here today because death could stare us in the face any minute and when it does, it's all gone.

so we may as well simply eat and drink, that is, live for pleasure, for tomorrow we may die. It might be crude pleasure seeking like what you see on Big Brother, it might be sophisticated, living the good life like what you see on Frasier or something, or it may even be based on good old-fashioned family values, and I couldn't think of a TV show to go without.

But whatever you think is the good life, if there is no resurrection, you may as well live it up, because tomorrow it may be gone.

[29 : 16] And so, as we finish, Paul has begun to draw out an important point. Theology matters in how you live, and bad theology makes for bad Christian living.

The big story that God has for us, and that we take our place in again as we believe in Christ, that has consequences for how we live out our everyday life.

The resurrection of Christ should transform us. God is we do have a hope for God. We do have a hope for the future. We do have a certain hope for the future.

And so, I think we don't have to get our kicks from what the world has to offer. We don't have to live for pleasure as though pleasure were the only good that we can hope for.

instead, we can live the life that Christ, the perfect human, modelled for us. We can start to try and live that life, even though at times it is extremely costly and painful.

[30 : 33] it can be embarrassing. It can mean that we are not able to live the good life that we might want to live because we are giving up careers.

We are not earning as much money as we could. We are putting other things as our priorities. But we can do that if we know that this life is not all there is.

We can do that. And yet, if we aren't certain, if we have just tried to, I think, tack on the death and resurrection of Jesus to our culture's worldview and we keep that mindset, if we haven't understood the full scope of God's history, it is possible for us as Christians to fall into lifestyles that look more like eat and drink than the hope of glory in our hearts.

And so, that is why Paul writes at the end of this section, verses 33 and 34, do not do not be deceived.

Bad company ruins good morals. Come to a sober and right mind and sin no more. For some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

[32 : 01] God you see, the Corinthians were super spiritual, they had the experience of it all and yet because they still maintained a lot of their culture's worldview that said that the body was unspiritual, no good, some of them were living the most outrageously immoral lives.

I mean, you read the start of 1 Corinthians and you just the mind boggles at how a church could exist with people who were going to prostitutes, a man who was having an affair with his father's wife.

It's just outrageous. But this is what has flown on from the fact that the Corinthians have been taught by this bad company that there is no resurrection of the dead bodily and that our bodies don't matter now.

In fact, in God's story, humans and human bodies are very special. Human beings were created to be God's image bearers on this earth.

And so we live now not only as his image bearers but also as the temple of the Holy Spirit. And so Paul says sin no more.

[33 : 26] Think on the resurrection. Think on this great story that you are a part of. Have a certain hope and sin no more.

And so perhaps that is a call for us. Perhaps it is a call for us to do a bit of daydreaming ourselves and to think, do I have that hope? What do I turn to in times of trouble?

what do I turn to when life looks not so certain? What have I based my life upon and do I have God's big story in my heart?

Because friends, Christ is raised, Christ has been raised, the first fruits of those who belong to him.

Amen.