

EASTER DAY - The Hope of Resurrection Pt 2 - The Reason for Living

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Date: 31 March 2013

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- [0 : 00] have had a fascination with life after death. So take the Egyptians, for example. They had a very elaborate view of what it meant, what life would entail after death.
- And I guess the pyramids are testimony to that because that's meant to be the warehouse of all the paraphernalia that the pharaoh would take with him into the afterlife.
- The same goes for the Chinese. So many of you would have heard about the terracotta army in China with the first emperor of China. And it was the same thing.
- These were meant to be stuff that would accompany him after death. And there's thousands and thousands of these terracotta figures.
- But I guess both these sort of illustrate that it was life after death, but it was much of the same of what had happened in this life. For us, Carrie Packer famously said, after he came back from four minutes of being clinically dead, that there was nothing there.
- [1 : 11] Well, we as Christians have to defer and disagree with Carrie Packer because we believe that there is life after death. And last week, when we looked at the first part of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul used Jesus as the specific example of the fact that humans do rise from the dead, that there is a resurrection from the dead.
- And he proved that that was a historical fact. And for more of that, just to let you know that on May the 12th, we're going to have another talk on that. And if you need more details, there are some flyers on that.
- But that's a key fact for us as Christians, because without Jesus dying and rising to life, then none of what we talk about tonight will actually have any relevance.
- Well, this week, we're going to look at the passage that has been just read, and there are three sections which is in your outlines. And we're going to look at life and death, firstly, in creation, then life and death with humanity, and then thirdly, what happens to life and death at Christ's coming, his second coming.
- So if you have your outline there as well, hopefully that would help you to follow. Well, Paul begins by sort of putting the questions that the Corinthians had about their difficulty believing the resurrection into two sort of questions.
- [2 : 34] And so he says in verse 35, But someone will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? And Paul's response was, How foolish.
- Don't you see? What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And when you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.
- And so Paul makes two points here. The first one is that life only happens after death. So look at the plant, look at the seed. The seed actually has to be sown, as it were buried, put into the ground, before it can come to life.

And I suppose when we look at, on the macro level, around us in nature, we see some of that happening as well, don't we? So we have, for example, bushfires, terrible as they are, sort of wiping out national parks, bringing death, but then straight after, we see new life coming as a result of that.

Same as with seasons, I guess, where we see a tree with leaves. There's a picture of death there over winter, but then coming spring, coming back to life again.

[3 : 52] And so Paul is saying, if you look at creation, you will see that there is such a thing as life after death. And then the second thing he says that, is that the body is not like the seed.

That is, we don't plant the body, we plant the seed, and the body is nothing like the seed. And that's what we read in verse 37. So here's a little quiz of seeds, those of you.

First picture. Anyone can guess what seed this is? Mustard. Well done. There you go.

And that's the mustard tree. And a rather wintry. Okay, second one. I think there are many varieties of this, so this must be just maybe one variety of that particular fruit.

You can raise your hands and shout it out. No? Okay. It's actually the apple tree. It looks very different close up, I have to say.

[4 : 50] Now let's do it in reverse. I'm going to give you a big tree now. The cedar tree. Okay, and I wouldn't ask you to guess what it is, but here's what the seed looks like. Now I want you to notice some of the common, what is the common thread between all these three trees?

The first is that the tree is very different from the seed, right? And the second is that the trees themselves are very different to each other.

And so that's what Paul goes on to say in verse 38. But God gives it a body as he's determined. And to each kind of seed, he gives it its own body. And then Paul goes on to say, well, we've looked at the plants.

Let's now look at the animal world. And then to the heavenly bodies. So verse 39, he says, not all flesh, not all animals or creatures with flesh, not all flesh is the same.

People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, and fish another. Same principle. They're all flesh, but yet God gives them different bodies.

[5 : 57] And then in verse 40, there are also heavenly bodies, and there are earthly bodies. But the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.

The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another, and the stars another. And the stars between them differ from each other in splendor. Now, Paul's, so don't get too technical with all the physics here.

We know that the sun is a star and all that kind of stuff. But he's saying, just look up at the sky and see that God has actually created all these heavenly bodies, and each of them have a different kind of body and a different kind of splendor.

And in fact, if you go back to Genesis chapter 1, and we won't do that tonight, you will see that these exact objects that Paul has just described are the very same ones that are used in Genesis 1.

And so I think what Paul is saying is that the God of creation who created all this variety, a variety in bodies, is going to be the same God of the resurrection.

[7 : 02] He's going to be the same God of the new resurrection. And if he's capable of creating bodies of such variety, then you shouldn't be surprised that when it comes to the human being, there might be a difference between the human body you have now and the one that you will have on the day of resurrection.

And so that leads straight on into verse 42, and also with our second section, life and death with humanity. And Paul says, having explained all that, he says in verse 42, so will it be with the resurrection of the dead.

That is what he's saying is whatever is true of life and death in creation, in the physical world, will also be true with humanity as between the old and the new creation.

And so the two things that we've discussed already, that there is a sowing and death before life, before raising up, firstly, and then secondly, that there will be different types of bodies also apply to humanity.

We too will have to die before we can rise again to new life. And secondly, the body that we have will be very different to the body that we will have, is the body that we will, will be different to the body that we will have at the resurrection.

[8 : 24] So we are sown one way and raised another. And so Paul goes on in those next few verses from 42 to 44 to say that the body is sown perishable, it's sown in dishonor, it's sown in weakness, and we can all identify with that.

But we will then, on that day, be raised imperishable, in glory, in power. And so the slide here clearly divides the two.

And the one Paul calls the natural body and the other Paul calls the spiritual body. Now, we have to be very clear what Paul is saying here.

He does not say that the spiritual body, he's not talking about the body or spirit without a body. A lot of people think, oh, a spiritual body means a bodiless spirit. But that would make nonsense of his old argument about the resurrection of the dead.

No, instead what he's saying is that the spiritual body is the body which is enlivened by the spirit. And so the spiritual body will still have physical form. It will still have a body.

[9 : 30] And then Paul goes on to say, in verse 44, the second part, if there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. That is what he's saying is that if you can see a body with the natural right now, then you should be able to also experience a body when Christ comes again and we are resurrected.

That is part of the way God has made creation. The body is not in and of itself something to be ashamed of. It is actually a good thing. And then he says, well, the two prime examples of the natural and the spiritual body is the first and the last Adam.

And that's where we go on to the next few verses from 45 to 50. So, obviously, the first Adam is the first Adam, the one that was in the Garden of Eden.

But the last Adam is Jesus. And again, we have another slide here showing the two differences, the differences between the first Adam and the second. So, the first Adam was natural, a living being, the first man.

He's of the dust of the earth and so he's an earthly man. And the last Adam is spiritual. He's a life-giving spirit. He's the second man.

[10 : 48] He's of heaven and therefore he's a heavenly man. And Paul goes on to say that those who are of the first Adam will bear the characteristics of the first Adam.

They will bear the image of the first Adam. And likewise, those who are of the last Adam will bear the characteristics of the second or the last Adam. All of us are part of the first Adam by virtue of procreation.

And so, we experience everything that the first Adam would have and everyone else since. And so, we experience weakness, sickness, we are at risk of dying and we grow old.

And Paul says here now in verse 46 that all of us needs to go through this verse before we can attain to the spiritual body.

So, verse 46, he says, let me find it, the spiritual did not come first but the natural and after that the spiritual. So, there is a sequence in history.

[11 : 57] It happened in history as with the first Adam literally coming first and then Jesus coming afterwards. But all of us too will at first experience the natural before we experience the spiritual.

And even Jesus, Jesus had to suffer and face death before he came into his spiritual body. So, even for Jesus, the natural body came first and the spiritual after him.

And this, he actually said of himself in the Gospel of John chapter 12 verses 24 and 25. He says, very truly I tell you unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

And Jesus here is not only talking about himself, but he is also talking about each and every one of us. See those last words there? Anyone who loves their life will lose it while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[13 : 09] And so that's similar to what Paul is saying that death must come first. Only those people who believe in Jesus will be given the life that he gives, the life-giving spirit.

And believing in Jesus is in a sense a first step towards dying. It is giving our lives over to someone else. It is giving our dreams, what we want in our lives, over to somebody else.

It is a form of death. And so it is only by losing our lives, Jesus says, that we will keep it for eternity. For Paul says in verse 50, mere natural bodies will not inherit the kingdom of God.

I declare to you, Paul says, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit imperishable. That is, if you only have your natural bodies, you will not enter the kingdom of God.

You need to be given life through the spirit in order to be able to receive the spiritual body that comes when Jesus comes again. So, a lot of times we look at our own bodies and we look at some of the beautiful people in this world and we are envious of them, aren't we?

[14 : 30] That's some of them there. Sheldon was there because he's got beautiful brains. But, as I say with the title, these are just seeds and we are just seeds.

The full bodies, the glorious bodies that we will have is like the tree that will come. It's going to be nothing compared to the seeds that are up here, beautiful as they are and beautiful as we are just in our natural bodies.

But there is a day coming when we will, as it were, sprout from that seed and take on this glorious body that God has prepared for us.

And on that day, we'll be wondering why they are voted the top 10 prettiest people or whatever in the world. Which is now where Paul gets to in his third section.

He describes and he gives us a mystery, an inkling of that day when Jesus does come again and that is the moment at which we will inherit our bodies.

[15 : 36] Now, I call this the Handel's Messiah section because every time I read it, I feel like, you know, saying or singing, listen, I tell you a mystery.

But I'm not going to keep going so I'm just going to read it. And besides, I'm not a bass, I'm just a baritone. So let me read it for you and if you have in your own imagination the tune of Messiah going in the background, that's fine as well.

Well, verse 51, listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will be changed in a flesh, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the day it will be raised, imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

[16 : 47] Notice a few things about this passage. In verse 53, notice that Paul says that the perishable must clothe itself in the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

This is something that not only may happen, but must happen. It must come to pass because of what Jesus has already done on the cross. We have victory over death.

On that day, if you go back to verse 26, it talks about death as the last enemy. The last enemy will be defeated. And that's why he can say death has been swallowed up in victory.

That Isaiah reading that we had tonight talked about death as a shroud or cover that enfolds all of us. And until this day, continues to cover and enshroud all of us.

But on that day, that sheet, as it were, would be lifted and we will have victory over death forever. We've already seen that happen for Jesus, who is the first fruits of the resurrection.

[17 : 55] resurrection. But our day will come. And so, that being the case, we can actually thumb our noses at death, which is what Paul does in verse 56.

He says, where, oh death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting? It's gone. Death no longer has a hold over us. We don't need to fear death.

The sting of death, in verse 56, the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. Paul elsewhere talks about the wages of sin being death. That is, the punishment of sin is death.

But the reverse is also true. That is, that if we fear death, death still has its sting over us. And what that does is that it motivates us or causes us to fall into sin because of that.

It makes us self-centered, selfish, work for self-preservation and loving ourselves rather than loving God and others. And that causes us then to disobey the law, whether it's God's law as revealed in the Bible or for those who have not read the Bible, their own conscience, which is their moral law.

[19 : 14] We feel like we need to live up to our hopes and our dreams before we die. And that causes us to live for ourselves rather than for God.

But if we don't have the fear of death over us anymore, then we can give ourselves to the work of the Lord, which is what the last verse says, verse 58.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord. Because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Because we have victory over death, Paul says that we can give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. Give ourselves fully, give ourselves over abundantly, always towards the work of the Lord.

Because we have a hope beyond life, we don't have to live for this life only. Paul himself says in another letter, he says, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

[20 : 20] And he's got to that point in his life where to him, life or death was indifferent. Either way, it was a win-win situation for him. And so it is with us who believe in Jesus.

Jesus, yes, there are times we want to continue to live, but particularly if we have children or we want to still provide for them. But either way, if we face death, it is merely going to be the gateway or the pathway towards everlasting life.

This verse here is the main application for the whole chapter. That is, if we believe the resurrection because it is true, then therefore, we will be able to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

Now, some of you might ask, what is the work of the Lord? I think if you read the context and particularly if you read the next chapter, the work of the Lord is actually primarily the work of the gospel.

Paul himself says in verse 10 of chapter 16 that he is doing the work of the Lord as is Timothy. So I think what Paul means here primarily is that the work of the Lord is the work of the gospel, the work of living out, preaching the gospel, but not only preaching the gospel, but living out the gospel.

[21 : 40] That is, if you are a Christian and the gospel has got hold of you, how does that change the way you live? How do you live in light of that? How do you live in light of the new creation, the fact that the kingdom of God is coming?

Well, that is a good question to ask ourselves, isn't it? Because a lot of times we do what we think is work, but we wonder whether it is the work of the Lord.

And I think what this verse says here is that if we live in light of the gospel, then all the work that we do, not just preaching the gospel, but everything else that flows from it is the work of the Lord.

And so, even for example, cleaning the toilet and doing the laundry, if done in light of the gospel, is work that is for the Lord.

There's a very, I think I found it on the website, but there's a popular thing going around which says, what are the hundred things you want to do before you die? The top hundred things you want to do before you die.

[22 : 46] And if you look at that list, you would see, you know, we've got to go to Acapulco or whatever, or we've got to climb the Eiffel Tower, we've got to have that dinner at Bully, the number one restaurant in the world.

That's what the world says are the hundred things they need to do before they die. But I wonder, if we asked ourselves, what are the top, well, let's not have a hundred, what are the top three things that we should be doing before we die?

I wonder whether we would have a slightly different list. I know too that for a lot of us, we do do the work of the Lord, but sometimes we feel that it may be all in vain.

Christian ministry particularly can be discouraging. People may not want to know the Lord. You spend so much time and invested so much energy into someone and then they turn their back on God.

We ourselves are sinful. We try hard to kick a certain habit or get rid of a certain sin and we don't seem to be able to be victorious over it.

[23 : 58] But here is Paul's encouragement in verse 58 that to say that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. And no matter what the results we may see in this life, it is not going to be in vain.

I'll end tonight as I did last night with another story but it's not going to be a children's story. It's a story that was written by Tolkien. Tolkien, many of you know, would have wrote the Lord of the Rings trilogy and much, much more.

And many of you know that he actually took a number of decades to do it. He had to create all the civilizations that he was actually going to write the novel about. And there came a time, I think it was during World War II, where he got really frustrated with his work.

He didn't seem to be going anywhere. And he didn't think that he could actually finish writing the Lord of the Rings. And so he wrote this story called Leaf by Nigel. I'm not sure if any of you have read it.

It's 12 pages long so I won't read it all but I'll summarize it for you. Well, Nigel, as the story goes, was a painter. And what he really wanted to paint was a tree.

[25 : 06] And he had the picture of that tree in his mind's eye and he knew that he needed to paint this tree before he went on his journey. Now, in Tolkien's language, the journey is actually the journey of death.

So he needed to paint this tree before he died. Now, the problem with Nigel was that, as his name suggests, Nigel was a finicky kind of guy. He was a procrastinator. You know, someone who does things and then read us something.

And so he would paint this tree or paint this leaf and then he said, oh, it's not good and he'll start again. And he's the kind of guy that would get distracted by things and unless everything was just right, he didn't feel he could paint the leaf or the tree.

The other two things about Nigel was that he felt that he was a better painter of leaves than of trees. So he would be good at the leaf but he never would be able to seem to progress beyond that to the tree.

And the third thing about Nigel was that he was a kind-hearted person. And so he would get, as it were, distracted by all the kind things he needed to do in this life.

[26 : 15] He would have, for example, someone calling on him and asking him to cook a dinner for him or whatever, or go down the street to pick something up. And being a kind-hearted kind of guy, he would drop his painting and then come towards it.

Well, one night, it was a cold night and it was raining, he got a knock from the door from his neighbor called Parrish. That's all very interesting names, but Parrish. And Parrish said his wife wasn't well and needed Nigel to go down and pick up stuff to help Parrish and his wife.

And so Nigel dutifully did that and it was cold and it was raining and as a result he fell sick. And so he was sick and couldn't keep on painting. And as he was sick, a driver comes along and driver is the one that takes him on his journey.

Driver comes and said that it was time for Nigel to go on this journey. And so Nigel was really sad because there he was, he saw his solitary leaf and he knew that he needed to go on his journey.

And so he was very sad and he left on his journey. And after he left on his journey, people came and tidied up his house and they found this leaf and they thought, oh, what the heck is this? It's just a leaf.

[27 : 26] And all they did was they took the leaf down, the picture of the leaf, and they put it up in a local museum in a dark and quiet corner. And so his work wasn't really seen by many people.

stuck in the corner of one of the smaller museums in the world. But the story does not end there because Nigel goes on his journey and as he goes on his journey, he arrives at the place that he's meant to be.

And as he does, he hears two voices. The first is justice, the severe voice, which says that Nigel wasted so much of his time and accomplished so little.

But the other gentle voice, though it was not so soft, seemed to be mercy. And he counters that Nigel has chosen to sacrifice for others, knowing what he was doing.

As a reward, when Nigel gets to the outskirts of the heavenly country, something catches his eye. He runs to it, and there it is. Before him stood the tree.

[28 : 34] His tree. Finished. It's leaves opening, its branches growing, and bending in the wind that Nigel had so often felt or guessed, and yet had so often failed to catch.

He gazed at the tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide. It is a gift, he said. Well, friends, all of us are, as it were, just living in a shadow of what we will eventually live when we get to the heavenly country.

And so it may be that we've just been painting leaves, doing that work for the Lord, and seemingly frustrated by it, but one day we will get to the heavenly country, and there before us will be the tree.

Let's pray. Amen.