

Does the Resurrection Matter?

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

Date: 07 May 2000

Preacher: Paul Barker

- [0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of May 2000. The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled, Does the Resurrection Matter?
- and is from 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 12 to 19. As you can see it's going to be a long sermon.
- When I was little I was told by my mother that when you die your soul goes to heaven. And the implication of that view which is I think very common is that somehow the physical body is not really that important.
- That when we die it's our spirit or our soul or something non-physical inside us that lives on and is immortal. And that that in the end is what is the essence of a person and that that in the end is what is important about a person.
- It's not unlike views of say reincarnation that in effect are saying that there is some spirit, soul, inner non-physical being that is you, your essence.
- [1 : 23] And that in a reincarnation view that inner non-physical being or soul or spirit will get planted in a frog or something else, a lucky frog, and in another life.
- And it's not unlike what a lot of people consider to be like nirvana or heaven as some sort of ethereal spirit sort of dwelling like the Philadelphia cheese ad on TV.
- Just sort of white clouds and non-real people floating around. Even agnostics and I guess people who call themselves atheists at funerals like to even say or claim or hope or believe or wish for that somehow the spirit of a person lives on somewhere.
- Even if they don't know where. And there are lots of modern films that pick up that idea that somebody's died and somehow the ghost, like in the film Ghost or the spirit of a person, comes back like a truly madly deeply and sixth sense and things like that.
- But we don't have to look too far from home to find that sort of view being suggested. Every Easter, and this has not been an exception, there are those who claim to be Christians, often theologians or leaders of the Christian church, who deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
- [2 : 44] They say that in effect, resurrection is about a spiritual existence. The body didn't rise, but the real Jesus is alive. His spirit is alive and that that is what matters.
- And that's the experience that the disciples had, but they couldn't understand it and comprehend it, so they talked about it in terms of physical resurrection. And such people would say that you don't need to believe a bodily resurrection of Jesus in order to be a Christian.
- It's not really that essential as a doctrine in the Christian faith. We have to ask the question, is such a fuss about the bodily resurrection of Jesus really important?
- Is the fuss that's being made a bit of hot air? Does it really matter that Jesus rose from the dead? Aren't we quibbling about trivial points, or at least non-central, central or non-essential points?
- I mean, who needs a resurrection of Jesus' body in order for their spirit to keep on living after death? Well, the view that the soul lives forever is an old view.

[3 : 58] It's thoroughly not a Christian view. It's Greek. They say it derives from Plato. And the church in Corinth was a church in a Greek city, in a Greek culture, in the midst of a Greek philosophy.

Those people who became Christians in Corinth under St. Paul's ministry in the early 50s AD would have all believed in the immortality of the soul.

That when you die, the physical body just rots in the grave and the soul lives forever. In fact, for them, the idea of the resurrection of a body would have been almost abhorrent and certainly most unusual.

Greeks believed that because the body just rotted in the grave when you died, either you deny the body now as a way of preparing for the spirit life beyond, so you become a Stoic, somebody who doesn't indulge the body, somebody who denies oneself, or you go to the opposite extreme and say, well, the body's actually very temporary.

It doesn't matter what we do with it. We might as well indulge it. And so you eat and drink and be merry because tomorrow you might die and not have to worry about your body and your cholesterol anyway. So some Christians in Corinth had kept on some sort of view that there wasn't such a thing as the resurrection of the dead.

[5 : 24] They are the ones that Paul is mentioning at the beginning of this passage in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 12. If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead?

All that's happening here is that people who had a Greek worldview have become Christians, but they've carried over at least this aspect of their Greek worldview into their Christian faith, that there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead.

In these verses, in this paragraph, Paul applies a fairly relentless and ruthless logic to expose the folly of such a view. And it's an important lesson for us to learn as well.

Paul begins by saying, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, and he is proclaimed as raised from the dead, as we heard last week and the first bit of this chapter tells us, that's irrefutable.

There are enough evidence, enough evidence and enough witnesses to show us that Christ is raised from the dead. Then, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

[6 : 26] Probably what's going on here is that they've carried over a Greek worldview that says there's no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, yes, but they haven't tried to mesh it with the fact that Jesus is risen.

Paul is showing the inconsistency in their minds. It's a good warning here for us as Christians that we're actually meant to be people who use our minds in our faith and think through what we believe and why.

But he then goes on with the hypothetical. Let's suppose that you're right, that there's no resurrection of the dead. What's the consequence of such a view?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, he says in verse 13, then Christ is not being raised. That is, he wouldn't be an exception to your rule. So what?

Big deal. Does that matter? Yes, Paul says. Because if Christ has not been raised, he says in verse 14, two things hold.

[7 : 31] Our proclamation is in vain and your faith is in vain. Paul and the other apostles have been preaching that Jesus was risen from the dead.

We saw that last week in the first verses of this chapter. That would be in vain, a waste of time if Jesus wasn't risen. But not only that, the Corinthians have believed in that.

Paul made that clear at the beginning of the chapter. So their faith is in vain because it's grounded in a lie. Now Paul takes each of those two things in turn.

Firstly, his own preaching or proclamation being in vain. He elaborates on that in verse 15. We, the apostles and the preachers of the gospel, are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified of God that he raised Christ whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

That is, he's saying we've been preaching a gospel of resurrection. In effect, what we've been doing is accusing God of doing something that he didn't do. That is, we've been accusing God of raising Jesus from the dead but if he didn't do it, we've been misrepresenting God.

[8 : 42] We've been telling a lie about God. So preaching the resurrection and preaching the gospel is a lie. It's in vain. But then of course for the Corinthians who believed it, they've believed in vain.

They've believed that God's done something that he didn't do. Raised Jesus from the dead. Now maybe Paul's overstating his case here.

Maybe this is a point of rhetoric that he's actually gone a bit too far about the resurrection to try and counter a view out this way. Is he overstating the case that the resurrection is so important and so central?

I mean really, can you really say that without the resurrection Christianity is totally in vain? Isn't the cross where sin is atoned for after all? Does it really matter what happened to Jesus' body after it died on the cross?

If our sins are atoned for on the cross and Jesus said it is finished before he died, then does it matter that he rose from the dead? Atonement's there, forgiveness therefore, reconciliation, maybe it doesn't really matter.

[9 : 51] Is anything really lost if the resurrection is untrue? I mean the teaching of Jesus generally is very worthwhile, isn't it? There's lots of very profound things there that are worth pondering.

There are lots of good moral standards, certainly very attractive ethically. It doesn't actually matter that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, does it? Because it's nice to know that we should love our neighbour and we can follow the things that Jesus taught us and resurrection is actually quite superfluous to Christian faith.

And after all, the other miracles that Jesus did, we might believe in some of them or a few or one or two and they're quite attractive, quite stunning really. It doesn't actually matter that he didn't rise from the dead, does it?

Who's right? St. Paul, when he says without resurrection Christian faith is absolutely in vain, empty, nothing? Or those people who think that resurrection is sort of like an optional extra, not really that important?

Well, Paul elaborates on the Corinthians' faith being in vain in verse 17 and 18 and 19. He resumes his point at the beginning of verse 17 when he says if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.

[11 : 12] Different word this time from the first one. The first one was empty. This is to mean ineffective, doesn't actually achieve or accomplish anything. It's fruitless.

It's frustrated. Doesn't produce results. And he gives two examples, the living and the dead. What does it mean for the living if their faith is futile because Jesus didn't rise from the dead?

He says about them in verse 17 at the end, you are still in your sins. How does that work? Isn't it the cross that takes away sins?

So where does the resurrection fit? If Jesus was not risen, either of two things or both are the cause of that.

Either he isn't sinless and perfect or God did not accept or God did not accept his death as a sacrifice for the atonement of sin.

[12 : 16] Either way, if Jesus didn't rise, the death or cross of Christ does not bring forgiveness. And either way, we remain in sin if he did not die, if he did not rise.

And the same thing for those who are dead. Paul describes those in verse 18, but notice that he says it's those who've died in Christ. That is, he's singling out Christian dead.

Where are they after they die if Jesus did not rise? Are they in a spirit, non-physical, heavenly realm?

Are they in some purgatory? No, he says, they perished. Can't get more blunt than that, can you? If Jesus did not rise, they perished.

Death, you see, keeps its sting. If Jesus didn't rise, death leads to destruction and perishing because the sting of sin is not being drawn by Jesus.

[13 : 33] Now, Paul's theology about the resurrection here is very important. The resurrection is not just a declaration but a demonstration and even a sense a completion of the effectiveness of the cross for our forgiveness.

It is essential if the cross is to take away our sins, if we are to be reconciled to God, if we are to become God's friends rather than his enemies, if we are to be guaranteed a future with God, Jesus had to rise bodily from the grave.

If you deny the resurrection, you deny the cross as well. Now, let me illustrate the point. I have a friend who is very fussy about what he eats and over the years when we go to different places, restaurants to eat, we'll look at the menu and it wouldn't be unusual for my friend to look at the menu and say, well, I'd quite like the chicken but it comes with mashed potato and I don't like mashed potato.

And I quite like the vegetables that go with the lamb but that's a roast potato and I prefer French fries but the French fries come with the beef and I don't really fancy beef. And I've been in places where he'll, in effect, ask the waiter or waitress, can I have the chicken but with the French fries and the vegetables that go with the lamb?

And usually, the answer is no. It's not a smorgasbord restaurant, you see. You can't just walk down the aisle and think, oh, a bit of chicken, I'll have that. Oh, the French fries, I'll have that. I like those vegetables, I'll have that.

[15 : 06] I'm happy now. It's a proper restaurant. You get a package deal, in effect. If you want the chicken, you get the mashed potato and those vegetables. If you want the beef, you can get the French fries but some other vegetables or salad or something and if you want the lamb, then you get a roast potato but you get nice vegetables.

Package deal. Christian faith is like a package deal. You can't just pick and choose which bits you're going to have. You can't leave out bits and think the rest of it will stand.

Imagine being a top chef and being told by the waiter that some crazy guy has just said he wants to destroy your menu and have the wrong potatoes with the wrong meat and the wrong vegetables.

Not sure that you'd be all that happy. Christian truth is like that. It's a package deal. Let me give it as a model on the overhead. Three models.

Very often people think Christian faith is like that. One circle is the resurrection, a circle is the cross, a circle is Christian ethics and judgment and we'll pick and choose which ones we want and if we rub out a circle there, it doesn't actually matter all that much because we're left with the main lot.

[16 : 19] Model 2 is a bit better. Model 2 has got the circles all interconnected as you can see. It's telling us that there's actually a relationship between let's say one circle is the resurrection and another circle is the cross.

That's the point we've been making so far. But even then, that model is still weak because you could still take a circle out and the rest of the things could sort of hang together.

Christian truth is actually best modeled by model 3 on this diagram. It's a circle. It's integrated. You can't take any bit out of it and keep it as a circle. If it's a line that's tied up, it'll just fall apart.

If it's some sort of material circle and you chop a wedge out, it's not going to work. Christian truth's like that. Take out the resurrection and the rest of it doesn't work.

Take out the cross, the rest of it doesn't work. Take out the judgment of Jesus, the rest of it doesn't work. Take out any essential piece of Christian faith and the rest of it falls to smithereens.

[17 : 20] It's an integrated whole. Philosophically, it's saying that truth is a unity and Christian truth is. Deny one bit of central doctrine of the Christian faith.

That's like a row of dominoes. Flick one over and all the rest will fall down in a line. Now let's explore this for a minute with the issue here of the resurrection.

Thanks, Vaughan. If Jesus is not raised from the dead, Paul has said in verse 14, our proclamation and your faith are, the word is here in our English translation, in vain, but literally it means empty, contentless.

Imagine that Christian faith is a box. It's full of content. But imagine, I couldn't find an empty tomb.

But imagine I had an empty tomb and I took out the empty tomb or the resurrection or some symbol of the resurrection. You could say, well there's a lot of other stuff that's left in the box here. It's all quite valid and substantial.

[18 : 34] But the thing is, it's a little bit like a magician's trick where you pull a hanky out of the pocket and you actually find that there's another hanky and another one and another one and you've got this long line of handkerchiefs. They're all connected.

Pull out one, they all come out. So let's see how that works with the key essentials of Christian faith. I've already said that if the resurrection of Jesus from the dead did not happen, then the cross is in vain.

The cross is nothing. So we get rid of the cross. It comes out. Don't worry I'm going to put all this. If Jesus is dead, then there's no life after death.

Paul made that clear for those who are perishing. So there's no future beyond the grave. And if he's dead, he's not coming back again because he's just a rotting corpse.

He can't come back. And if he's not coming back again, then there's no judgment. And if there's no judgment, then actually there's no Christian ethics, is there?

[19 : 37] Because if God doesn't judge us, then I might as well go and do what I like. And I would. Because there's lots of things I'd much rather do sometimes than be an obedient Christian.

But if God's not going to judge me because Jesus is dead and therefore he's not coming back to judge, then I don't think I'd be held back much longer. But what else falls?

If Jesus didn't rise, then the Bible is untrue. You could rip out virtually every page of the New Testament, more or less, that refers to the resurrection.

There wouldn't be a lot of the New Testament left. But if the New Testament isn't true, then how do we know that the Old Testament is? The whole Bible goes, you see.

There's no Bible left in Christian faith if the resurrection didn't happen. And what else? Prayer. Well, we can still pray to God, can't we?

[20 : 41] He's in heaven. But no, Jesus taught us to pray and the New Testament teaches us that when we pray, we pray to the Father through the Son. We don't pray through a rotting corpse.

We pray to God the Father through Jesus because he's risen and he's alive and he's at the right hand of God the Father. If I pray to God the Father through a rotting corpse of Jesus, I don't think he's going to pass on many messages.

Prayer is a waste of time. So we'd be able to get rid of the Anglican prayer book, which some people might be pleased about, but on other grounds. But there's not much left in the Anglican prayer book, huge though this is, if Jesus is not risen from the dead.

What else do we do in church? We sing hymns and songs. Here's a hymn book. What and what we can sing if Jesus isn't risen from the dead? This day, this is the first one I opened at, this day above all days glad hymns of triumph ring, lift every heart to love and praise and every voice to sing for Jesus.

That was actually the first one, randomly opened. I'll tear it out. Tear that one out. And that one out. He lives. That one out. Throughout all our days we'll sing the praise.

[21 : 52] No, we can't do that because he's dead. There aren't many hymns left, you see. There aren't many modern songs left, although some of them are so wishy-washy they probably stay. But there aren't many left if Jesus is not risen from the dead.

Now we've already heard that our proclamation is in vain. I wouldn't have a job to do. So we'd have to get rid of Christian ministers. Well, this is the sort of symbol of Christian ministry. Why bother anymore if he's not risen from the dead?

We wouldn't bother sending missionaries overseas because there's nothing for them to proclaim. So Peter and Elspeth and Stephen might as well stay at home and live it up being a chemist or something else.

What about Christian sacraments? Most of us will have been baptized. either as adults or infants. A bit of water sprinkled on you or plunged deep into the waters so that you're baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Meaningless, isn't it, if he didn't rise from the dead? You wouldn't want to just be baptized into his death. He's rotting. So we get rid of baptism.

[23 : 03] There's the bowl that we use for our font. The Lord's Supper we're going to celebrate. It's a commemoration of Jesus' death. That must be safe, surely.

But no. The words that we sometimes say indicate that we are proclaiming Jesus' death until he comes. If he's dead, he's not coming. The event is meaningless.

And of course, a sacrament of the death of Jesus is nonsense. If Jesus' death didn't take away sins which it didn't if he didn't rise from the dead. So we get rid of the loaf of bread and the bottle of wine.

I'll go home and drink later on. And what about church? Well, we could still come to church because it's great fun, isn't it? And it doesn't really matter that Jesus didn't rise from the dead.

We can have fun on a Sunday at seven o'clock. There's nothing better to do. But you see, there'd be no church. The church is the body of Christ and I don't want to be part of a rotting corpse.

[23 : 58] The church is a part of the living body of Christ. There's no church if he's still dead. Couldn't find a symbol of the church but the best one I thought is a symbol of the church was a collection plate because that's what we always do.

Why bother? And even if you could argue that a church could stay, we couldn't be Holy Trinity because if Jesus is dead he's not part of the Trinity. And the spirit of Jesus would also be dead.

So we could have a church that's called the church of the father in Doncaster but that probably is a bit bizarre so we wouldn't bother. And what about heaven?

There's no heaven, is there, if he's remained dead? You can imagine what I've got is a symbol of heaven. A rich man being. You see how they're all connected?

Now what's left at the end of all that? It's empty. Faith is empty. Faith is in vain. It's literally the word that's used in verse 14.

[25 : 04] There's nothing left. The resurrection you see is essential to Christian faith. Take out the resurrection, there's nothing left. There's nothing left.

So Paul says at the end of the paragraph, if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

That is, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then all we're doing in effect is living for this life. And of all people, Christians are to be pitied.

Because Christians are people who deny themselves in this life for the sake of heaven and for the sake of Christ. Paul will give his own example in a few verses time in this chapter.

He is to be pitied if Jesus isn't risen from the dead. We are to be pitied if Jesus isn't risen from the dead. Our world goes on and indulges itself and lives for today disregarding tomorrow.

[26 : 11] But we don't or shouldn't because Christians are to live with our sights set on heaven and the expectation of Jesus' return and judgment day.

That will mean we forsake the fleeting pleasures of sin, that we deny ourselves here and now, that we don't eat and drink and be merry, but we live for the sake of Jesus and the gospel.

What pitiable people we are if he didn't rise. What a waste of time our lives would be if he didn't rise from the dead.

Those Christians who play down or sideline or dismiss the bodily resurrection of Jesus are playing a very dangerous game. It's a stupid game philosophically because they don't see the connections between all the things in Christian faith.

It's disastrous for public relations as well, of course. But they think that they're trying to make Christianity more acceptable to our world. But in the end all they're offering is an empty box.

[27 : 21] And I think our world is looking for something more than that. But because Jesus is risen, as verses 1 to 11 of this chapter made clear, irrefutable evidence the appearance of Jesus before several, many, several hundred people over the course of seven weeks or so, an empty tomb, changed lives, spirit-filled lives, the evidence is overwhelming for the resurrection more than any other ancient event in history by far.

Because Jesus rose, Christian faith is not empty, it's not futile, it's effective and it's powerful and it is worth living and it is worth living for Jesus' sake.

It is worth denying ourselves for Jesus' sake. It is worth putting the gospel first in our life for Jesus' sake. That's not in vain. It's the resurrection of Jesus that keeps me being Christian.

in 1985 I had glandular fever and in bed for some days and a few weeks really and at some point of that I was quite depressed and I imagined giving up the Christian faith.

In my tiredness I thought I don't know why I'm going to bother anymore and the one thing that kept me going as a Christian then as it does today is the certain and sure knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[28 : 55] See I'm not a Christian because I like church hymns and music. I'm not a Christian because I've got nothing better to do on a Sunday. I'm not a Christian because I can't work out what other job is going to pay me as well as being a Christian minister.

Ha ha ha. I'm not a Christian because I like the people I meet at church. All of those things may be true I'm not saying I dislike you. My point is that I'm not a Christian for that reason.

I'm a Christian because Jesus rose from the dead and that's why I am and have been and in God's grace will be for the rest of my life.

That's why St Paul was a Christian. That's why St Paul preached the gospel. That's why St Paul endured hardship for the gospel's sake. That's why he denied himself many ways in his life because of the resurrection of Jesus.

It is why the Corinthians were Christian because they believed the gospel and it is why we are or should be and it is also why our faith is not in vain.

[30 : 05] the about who .

This was the God's sake. If we touch it on the wall, then we don't the devil .