

## 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

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Preacher: Chris Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ] And we're back in 2 Corinthians here now for the next few moments. Where does the resurrection of Jesus Christ take you?

! Believe it and push the implications of it.! And where could you end up? And last Sunday, Palm Sunday, the BBC took a poll of Christians, apparently as many as 23% of those asked did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

So statistically, 1 in 4 people in church today don't believe it. I hope that's not the case here, I don't think it is. But if that is you tonight, and it may be, I hope you know that you cannot claim to be a Christian and not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

That is just bread and butter Christianity. So I hope you know that. But actually, I don't want to talk to those of you who are in that camp tonight.

I want to talk to the other 77%, if I can put it like that. Those of you who do believe it. And to push that belief. To see the implications of it.

[ 1 : 21 ] To see where the resurrection, when allowed to bloom in our minds and hearts, will take us. We're invited into the heart and mind of a man here, who has been led by God to follow the course that the resurrection of Jesus sets us all upon.

In the Apostle Paul, we see Easter living means Christian dying. Because Jesus lives, Paul can now afford to die for him.

Jesus is risen, so Paul can now afford to fall for Jesus' mission. And we're shown, this is our road also.

This is where the resurrection takes us. So just then, look at this servant of Jesus Christ here.

Firstly, in his dying. The dying.

Jesus is risen. Paul can afford to die. I don't know if you've read around these passages in 2 Corinthians recently.

[ 2 : 31 ] Maybe you have. But the more you do, actually, the more strange the Apostle Paul's life appears to us. He's a very unusual figure, isn't he? The more you read of him, the more contradictory his life seems.

There's joy mingled with sadness. There's power mixed with weakness. You've got the whole jars of clay thing, haven't you? And in his life, there is this unashamed presence of death.

He says in verse 11, 'We who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. Verse 10, he is carrying around in the body the death of Jesus.

Jesus. Sounds strange, doesn't it? Sounds like a sort of zombie movie or something. Paul is dying for Christ whilst he is living.

And this has been Paul's journey. Not dying of the body, necessarily, but dying of the self. His whole ministry is a sacrifice. It is a kind of dying, isn't it?

[ 3 : 37 ] If you look over to chapter 6, he's got a whole list of things there from verse 4. We commend ourselves in every way. And look at him dying here.

By great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours. It goes on and on, doesn't it? His life seems to be waning away here.

As he has fulfilled his commission in life, he has walked into a kind of death. Many, many times. He is a little mirror of Christ's death, isn't he?

This is him taking up his cross and following the Lord Jesus. And notice that his dying is to do specifically with his speaking.

This whole section in the letter is a description of his gospel-speaking ministry. Back at the beginning of chapter 4. He is talking about the ministry and it is all about the words.

[ 4 : 40 ] How they should preach the word. What they should do. What they shouldn't do. And right at the heart of our passage this evening is verse 13, isn't it? He mentions speech there.

We believe and so we also speak. So his dying happens because of his speaking. As he opens his mouth with the good news of the gospel in this rebellious world.

As he opens his mouth, the grave opens also to him. If Paul shut his mouth, his life would be easy. But speaking the truth for Paul is deadly. And we get that pattern all through the Acts of the Apostles, don't we?

Time and time and again the Apostles face death for their preaching. And ironically it is most deadly when they speak about the resurrection. I don't know if you've noticed that.

[ 5 : 39 ] That's the contentious issue in the book of Acts. Again and again the disciples face deadly experiences because of the resurrection message. And so whenever Paul walks into conversation about Jesus' life, he walks into a kind of death.

As he broaches the message of resurrection light, he approaches the very heart of darkness. Where he has to die to tell it.

And if that sounds a little bit weird, actually most of us, many of us have felt like that actually at some level. Speaking the gospel is a kind of dying.

And the overwhelming temptation is to avoid this dying. The overwhelming temptation is to grasp hold of life, isn't it? Because we feel that when we speak, a little part of us will have to die.

We might lose face. We might lose a friend. A conversation is a moment of decision. It's a life and death decision.

[ 6 : 52 ] Not just for our hearers, but for us also. When this gospel leaves my lips, it feels as if my life is drained away.

It hurts. There's nothing romantic about it, is that this is Christian dying. And faced with that decision, Paul chooses the little deaths to self.

The little deaths of comfort. The little deaths of physical suffering. His self passes away in some pain or another.

As he speaks, he chooses to die. On several occasions, Paul actually has to contemplate physical death, doesn't he? In his ministry.

So this is his dying. We've seen the what here, but how does Paul do this? Well, quite simply, he believes in resurrection.

[ 7 : 53 ] There is dying here because there is believing. So that's the second thing, the believing. Jesus is risen, so Paul can afford to die.

Now here's the how, and this is the kind of verses that I want us to focus on. Verse 13 and 14. Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke.

We also believe and so we also speak. Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus. And bring us with you into his presence.

Here is the power behind this life of dying. His conviction drives his conversation. Look at what he believes.

Or rather, whom he believes. He believes in him who raised the Lord Jesus, isn't it? Quite literally, verse 14. It could read something like, Knowing that the raising one of the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus.

[ 9 : 02 ] That's what he calls him. God the Father, the raising one. This is the one he believes in.

He believes in the God of the impossible. He is the God of life from the dead. Of something out of nothing. Of hope in hopelessness.

It's how he introduces the letter actually in chapter 1, verse 9. He calls him there, the God who raises the dead. This is his signature.

He calls him the God who gives life to the dead. In Romans 4. This is how his people recognise him. They all share what Paul calls here, the spirit of faith.

The disposition of faith of God's people towards him. And then there's a quote, isn't there, in verse 13. I believed and so I spoke.

[ 10 : 03 ] That's a quote from Psalm 116, which we read at the beginning of the service. And that psalm shows that God's people have always seen him in this way. God, the raiser of the dead.

Maybe read that psalm before you go to bed tonight. Psalm 116, there is a servant of God there, probably David, who gives out a cry for help in the midst of death.

Verse 3 of that psalm, Here is a believer who is dying for the sake of the gospel. He is dying, but he believes in God, raiser of the dead. And so he calls out to him, O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul. When the grave opens up in front of him, dying for God's cause, it is a hopeless situation.

He believes and calls upon the raiser of the dead. And when you start looking for this God, he is actually all over the Old Testament, isn't he?

[11:10] David elsewhere, Psalm 16, You will not abandon my soul to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. Job, I know that my Redeemer lives.

After my skin has been destroyed, I will see God. Isaiah, your dead will live, their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy.

The whole sweep of salvation history in the Old Testament is like a resurrection wave that builds up and builds up and builds up. And then it sweeps the world at the first Easter.

And it has swept the Apostle Paul off his feet. This has always been God the Father's thing.

Resurrection. He's been saying it to us for ages.

This is what I do. This is what I will do for you. So trust me. Trust me. He says through Hosea, I will ransom them from the power of the grave.

[12:16] I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O death, is your destruction? Trust me, says the God of the impossible. After all, the God of the possible is no God at all, is he?

When death feels as if it might be closing in on Paul, the need to grasp onto every ounce of life that he has, the threat of losing some particle of his existence when speaking, he hears God say, Trust me.

Even if his body goes down to Sheol, he will not let his Holy One see corruption. And what he could lose will be returned to him in the end.

As the famous missionary, Jim Elliot, said that famous line, isn't it? He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

This is whom he believes. So let's push this more. Imagine the difference it makes in the Christian life. If we were to tell ourselves this.

[13:28] Although speaking is dying, to be convinced of this, that God raises the dead. The blushing face needs convincing, doesn't it, that it is purposed to beam in resurrected glory.

The body demanding all kinds of comfort needs telling that its resurrection strength will far outweigh its present weakness. The mind that imagines and plots and worries and fills itself with anxiety, it needs retuning to the promises of a resurrecting heavenly father.

The pride that desperately avoids shame needs humbling and settling again with the prospect of sharing in glory with the saints in the resurrection.

The mouth that stays shut just to avoid any bitterness, any taste of death, needs loosening and opening with resurrection sweetness.

This is who he believes. Trust me. And so if we believe we can afford to die for the gospel, this is the spirit of faith of God's people.

[14:51] This is his believing. So God is raiser of the dead. That may be well, but how do you know he is raiser of the dead for you?

In the heat of the moment when you face death, will he do it for you? How can you be sure that you can be raised from the dead?

How can you know that you can afford to live the kind of deadly life that Paul leads? I see as well that whilst God is raiser of the dead, the conviction for Paul comes because God is raiser of, actually specifically verse 14 says, doesn't it, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus.

That is key. Why is that important? Well by describing Jesus' own resurrection, he is considering his own resurrection. Jesus' resurrection and Paul's resurrection are one.

they are united in one resurrection. Now I don't know if you saw, there's a deliberate timing mix up here and it's very confusing actually when you look at it in verse 14 that chronology is all over the place here.

[16:11] So Paul speaks about a past event that God who raised the Lord Jesus, that has happened, that's in the past and then he talks about a future event our resurrection and he joins them as one event, doesn't he?

How does that make sense? He says there, doesn't he, we will be raised with Jesus but Jesus has already been raised. This is slightly confusing. Now I think a really helpful way of getting around this is to think about his first fruits analogy that we thought about with the kids.

We grew tomatoes when I grew up or my parents grew tomatoes and we always looked forward to having these tomatoes, they were pretty good and when the first tomato came we would have a kind of ceremony, a family ceremony.

Dad would bring in the tomato, one of those mini ones, you know, tiny, fresh, new, ripe tomato, bring it into the kitchen. We all get around and surround this tomato tomato and Dad cuts it into five pieces for everyone.

We all get a bit of a taste. Dad made a big thing of it because it was the first tomato and it was the first tomato of one harvest of tomatoes. Special because it was the first of the same crop of following of many tomatoes.

[ 17 : 38 ] One harvest. because one first fruit had come, the rest would follow. And because Jesus has been raised, we, the rest, are going to be raised with him.

One resurrection. Because the head of the body has been raised, the body will naturally follow.

One resurrection. The Father has raised the Lord Jesus so everyone else attached to the vine will rise and the fruit will come.

Those joined to him by faith. So Paul specifically can afford to do this because he is merely an unripe fruit on the vine.

He is not just like Jesus in that he will be raised like Jesus where the apple doesn't fall far from the tree but he is on the same branch as Jesus.

[ 18 : 47 ] He is one and the same with Jesus in his resurrection. He is sharing the same sap of the Father's life. He is totally connected to him in his resurrection.

He is part of the body which will surely follow the head. So Paul knows he can afford this dying. Just think about what life would look like if the resurrection hadn't happened.

Without the resurrection of the head the body the church can only afford to sacrifice so much can't it? It can only afford to die so much that the sacrifice that we can make has limits if the head has not been raised.

The church actually should limit sacrifice as much as possible. No one should invade your personal comfort. Life should be bottled up and kept under lock and key and kept as closely to you as possible.

It should be gripped tightly. But the limits have been redefined and the empty tomb reminds Paul of his limits.

[ 20 : 02 ] The limits have been thrown out of the window. The tomb has now been reimagined. It is not a cul-de-sac. It is a through road. It is not the cellar but it's the hallway to the garden.

And so for Paul there are no limits to his dying. He can die for the gospel and he can afford to do it. So this is where the resurrection takes you.

You'll believe in your own resurrection only as much as you believe in his. One resurrection. And his convictions drive his conversation here.

So the dying, the believing. Thirdly and lastly the thanksgiving. The thanksgiving. Jesus is risen. Paul can afford to die.

Paul is a little mirror of the Lord Jesus Christ. He dies doesn't he in this ministry to bring life to others.

[ 21 : 08 ] Verse 12 Death is at work in us but life in you. And just notice the directions that this ministry takes in verse 15.

As Paul goes down in death grace extends outwards to others through the gospel and it touches more and more people which increases thanksgiving up to God giving him glory.

So just follow the arrows descending in death extending to more and more people increasing in thanksgiving to God's glory.

That's the direction of Paul's work. That's the direction of church life. Descending in dying extending and then increasing.

Roger Williams was a Puritan preacher of the 17th century and he went to the New World to escape from persecution in England and he lived a lifetime of ministering campaigning for the rights of Native Americans and in 1683 he died and was buried in a poor man's unmarked grave.

