

# 1 Corinthians 15

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Date: 30 June 2015

Preacher: Adam Wilson

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Great, well thank you for coming again. It's good to see faces that were here last week come again. It's always good when you put people off.! What we're doing at this last two weeks is firstly we looked at the incarnation. So last time we talked about how God, the creator of the universe, stepped into the world that he has made and came face to face with his creatures, leaving it without doubt what kind of God there is. And the one true God is the God of the Bible.

But this week what we're looking at is something a little bit different. We're looking at an event in history. An event in history that is so crucial that if it didn't happen churches everywhere should shut up shop and Christians around the world should bin their Bibles.

Because if they are following Jesus, they are wasting their time because he is not the God that he claimed to be. This event at which the message of the Bible hangs on is so important that if it didn't happen, look at what Paul says in our passage.

He says that our faith, the Christian faith is in vain, verse 14. As Christians we misrepresent God, verse 15, that our faith is futile because it doesn't actually do the thing that it claims to do.

And that's in verse 17. And if, well, if you're not a Christian here this morning, well then you have to look at the Christians in this room and you have to look at the church. And you have to look at the church.

[ 2 : 0 0 ] Really, really, really, in a way that could be touched, seen, heard, the walking, talking Jesus came back from the dead. And without it, without the resurrection, do not kid yourselves, there is no Christianity.

Without the historical fact of this Christian faith, Christianity is a waste of time. There might be some people sat here, I definitely used to be one of them, who used to think you could separate out facts and faith.

Or maybe even going stronger, you don't just separate them out, but they're actually diametrically opposed. But this little child, I just want to briefly show you that they're not opposed.

And instead, the historical fact of Jesus rising from the dead substantiates the claims of Christianity, giving real hope in the face of difficulty and even death.

And as a result, it nullifies all of the claims, all of the religious claims, to giving hope in the face of death. And even to those who say they're of no faith, it even gets rid of that too.

[ 3 : 1 0 ] You see, if it is a fact that Jesus really rose from the dead, then what he said about God, what he said about us, what he said about life now and life after death, is really true.

He is the God of the universe, come down to save sinners. And we must humbly bow the knee to him, knowing that he will raise us up in times of difficulty.

Now, you might be sceptical. You might be sceptical about our resurrection. And that's okay.

Because what we're going to do is we're going to divide our time into two. First, we're going to think about, can you really trust the historical fact of this resurrection from 1 Corinthians 15?

And then second, we're going to briefly conclude about thinking about the implications of it. So firstly, the historical fact of the reality of the resurrection. Again, I'm not pretending to be able to have every answer to every single one of your objections.

Even though I do think there's a good answer to every single one of your objections. But what I want to demonstrate is that even from this text, there is enough reason to put your confidence in the historical fact of the resurrection.

[ 4 : 1 8 ] So, four big things from this passage that gives us evidence for the resurrection. And we're going to do a bit of a whirlwind defense. But here's the first of four headings. A perfect plan.

A perfect plan. The coming of God in the person of Jesus, his birth, life, death, even his resurrection, had all been promised beforehand. It had all been promised.

In all these pages, just before the coming of Jesus, it had been promised in great detail. I don't know if you noticed when we read the passage, but it's there in verse 3, and it's also in verse 4, that little phrase that comes up.

According to the scriptures. According to the scriptures. And what Paul is trying to do, for his readers of his letter, is he's trying to get across this idea that the resurrection from the dead isn't something that comes out of the blue.

It isn't something that they go, oh, oh, well fancy that. Now instead, this is something that God's people has eagerly awaited for thousands of years. Why eagerly awaited?

[ 5 : 18 ] Well, because God has promised it. Jesus in Luke 24, one of the gospel records of his life, says that the whole Bible is about him. And he's not just talking a bit about the bits since he's come.

He's talking about every page. Jesus dying, being buried, raised from the dead, has been promised. And now here is Jesus in the flesh, fulfilling all that God said he would.

Come in human form. So the first piece of evidence is the whole rest of the Bible. Read it. If you've not read it before, or maybe you're still sceptical about the Bible itself, come and talk to me, or maybe Stuart, and we'd be happy to read through with you and point to you all the places that point forward to the coming of Jesus, and particularly his resurrection.

It's all part of that plan. But the second heading is that there is a wealth of witness. We've got a perfect plan. But we've also got a wealth of witnesses.

Let's just look down at verse 5. Paul tells us that, from verse 5 onwards, that after the resurrection, after Jesus had bodily, physically raised from the dead, he appeared to loads of individuals, and then to crowds of hundreds of people.

[ 6 : 36 ] Huge crowds that bear witness to Jesus physically raising. Now, what Paul is doing, again, is really remarkable. Because this is not something you would do if you were making it up.

He gives the names of individuals, prominent figures, who would have been able to be tracked down and found, to check if this really happened. But he says these people are all still alive.

At the time of his letters being published and passed around, these people are living in your neighborhood. Are living in your neighborhood. And you can go and ask.

Your doubts about this claim will be verified by their witness. The evidence is there for everyone to investigate. Legends, myths, they're created in distant lands over centuries.

But discrediting those myths and legends is easy, isn't it? But it's difficult, when you've got the event right here, right then, to create a myth and a legend about it, because you have so many people to nullify the claim.

[ 7 : 43 ] Just think for a moment. Imagine 500 people in a court of law, each of them taking the stand, bearing witness to an event they've seen. And as each person comes up, not hearing the previous person's testimony, but each of these testimonies building and corroborating the event that's occurred, until you're just left without any doubt, that the event being described must have occurred.

All of these witnesses testifying to the same event. That's what we have with the resurrection. Witness after witness testifying to the reality of this man, really dying before them, and really raising and being seen among them.

But for a moment, let's say you're even more sceptical than I am. Let's assume that you're so sceptical that you think that the written records of these eyewitness accounts aren't good enough.

That they're not good enough. That they're all false. Again, I want to propose to you a question. With an event so well publicised, with an event so colossal in its time, don't you think that it would be reasonable that one historian, one eyewitness, one anti-Christian would record at the time that they'd seen the dead body of Jesus, or present the dead body of Jesus?

But no one does. No one has. Tom Anderson, the former president of the California Trial Lawyers Association, that are a fun group of guys, he says, the silence of history is deafening when it comes to the testimony against the resurrection.

[ 9 : 28 ] Do you hear that? The silence of history is deafening when it comes to the testimony against the resurrection. Because we've got all these witnesses for the resurrection, and none against.

But we don't just have a wealth of witnesses, then we have a bunch of transformed teachers. It's recorded in the Gospels that when Jesus was on trial, and being crucified, everyone fled.

All of his followers disappeared. There was no one stood by him. And yet, and yet, ten out of the eleven original apostles died as martyrs, believing Christ rose from the dead.

So what accounts for that transformation? transformation? This transformation of these cowards bumbling around into men willing to die for their message.

Would you be willing to die for what you knew was a lie? The Apostle Paul, look at verse nine. He confesses that he was a great persecutor of the church.

[10:36] I persecuted the church of God. And then, you know, when you think his job was to kill Christians, to crush Christianity, and then suddenly, having witnessed the resurrected Jesus, his life is transformed, turn around, to becoming the church's greatest missionary.

Even says, I worked harder than anyone to preach this message of the resurrection to people. Do you know what? There must be fairly significant spiritual grounds, wasn't there, for such a spiritual U-turn.

But finally, we come to the last heading. And I apologise, we've had great alliteration, I was very proud of that. You know, the perfect plan, you know, a wealth of witnesses, and transformed teachers.

But now, I don't have an alliteration, it's just an empty tomb. An empty tomb. What are you going to do with the facts of the empty tomb? You know, people will try and explain it away with all sorts of theories, saying he didn't really die, he just went unconscious, and then regained consciousness after being beaten and tortured, nailed to a cross, a spear put in his side, and then he could move the stone.

Or that people stole the body. The Romans stole it, or the disciples stole it. Or, all of these different people could have potentially stolen the body in order to do away with this unrest.

[12:00] But in order to get rid of Christianity, to get rid of it, all you needed to do was present Jesus, his dead body, and Christianity would have been gone. But no one does it. Do you know what?

Paul is writing to a bunch of Christians who are struggling with the resurrection. He's writing to give them confidence that Jesus really did rise from the dead. To give them confidence that if he rises from the dead, so will all those who believe in him.

And he does it. The grounds of him doing it is pointing to the empty tomb. The tomb's empty. For thousands of years, people have been trying to say, no, it's not.

But still, no one can wrestle with this problem. I'm not expecting from 1 Corinthians 15 to engage in all of your objections and give all the answers.

But hopefully you can see why millions of people down the ages have looked at the historical fact of the resurrection. And although they don't know everything, God has given enough to say, you can trust me.

[13:06] God has given enough to say there is credible reason to believe in this historical fact. And because of that historical fact, he says, Joel, there is absolute and complete confidence that you can come to Jesus bowing the knee, knowing he will raise you up in times of difficulty.

Because Jesus is all that he claimed to be. Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the God of the universe come down in human form that he might take the place of sinners like us.

He has power over your scariest enemy, the grave. Your death ruins everything, doesn't it? My pastor in America, he once was at a wedding and he said, all marriages end in tragedy.

Rachel, I hope that's not the only life of your wedding. But it's true, isn't it? There's nothing harder than saying goodbye to a loved one. And that's where the rubber hits the road, isn't it?

And this is our conclusion, hope in the face of difficulty. Jesus in John 11, he turns to all those witnessing.

[14:32] He says, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall live even if he dies. what does he mean by that?

Well, he's saying that the eternal life is found through Jesus Christ alone. Or to put it in the words of our passage in verse 17 and 18, he's saying that our sin and rebellion against God, our living in God's world, our way, has a penalty.

not just of physical death, but of eternal death, separated from and condemned by the life-giving God. And in the words of verse 18, they've perished.

Outside of knowing him, they've perished. But because God came in human form and lived perfectly where we failed and then willingly came under the condemnation of death we deserved in

order to deal with our sin, only to rise from the dead three days later, physically, well, that reveals that there is more to life in the here and now.

That there is eternity beyond death where those who come to Jesus will be raised to life. Raised to life with God forever.

[15:54] Not in some abstract, airy, fairy, spiritual world, but in a real, touchable, tasteable, new heavens and new earth where we can rejoice in the presence of the living God for all eternity.

And the thing is, only Jesus can offer this kind of hope. Any religion that contradicts Jesus and what he's saying here is a lie.

They are unqualified to make those claims. Because the resurrection proves Jesus to be right and therefore everything contradicting him is wrong.

Just think about it. Buddha, he's dead. Gandhi is dead. All the great scientists through history, they're dead.

Mohammed is dead. why would you trust any of them and their teaching to get you through death when they can't get through it themselves? None of them are qualified to take you through death and out the other side.

[17:00] They may have some good teachings, some nice things to say, but none of them have the credentials to warrant your faith and trust when the rubber hits the road on that final day.

Because it's only Jesus who's been through death and come out the other side. And it's only him who can take you through it.

Just, Paul writes later in this letter, maybe you want to flick over the page, but in verse 54 of chapter 15, he says, Joel, in Jesus, death has been swallowed up in victory.

Physical death is not the end. Eternal life with our Lord awaits all those who trust him because Jesus conquered death. I'm going to finish with just this simple situation which many of you have been in, I'm sure, and many of you have witnessed.

Imagine there's a patient in a hospital bed. You don't have to imagine that you've probably been by that bedside. And they're probably a friend or a family member.

[18:10] And you there by their bedside and you witness friends coming in. Friends of different religions and different ideologies walking in to kind of give their last words to their friend.

The atheist walks in and he says, bad luck. The universe is just made up of atoms bouncing into each other. It's just blind, pitiless, indifference.

The universe neither knows nor cares. then leaves. And the Muslim walks in and he says, well, don't grumble about this because it's the almighty will of Allah who wills both good and ill.

And then leaves. And then the Hindu walks in and goes, you must have some secret sin going on because what goes around comes around and karma rules. and then leaves.

And then the Buddhist walks in and gives some nice mantra but it doesn't really do anything to solve the problem. And then in walks a Christian and they say, do you know what?

[19:19] God hates this. God hates this so much. God hates death and he hates difficulty. He hates witnessing his people struggle so much that he came in history to swallow up sin and death for all those who would look to him by dying on his cross.

And then gloriously rising from the dead. This is awful. And I've got nothing to give. But Jesus has got real eternal hope.

And then we pray. Let's pray.