

The Resurrection Lord

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[0:00] We're going to read from verses 12 to 19 of 1 Corinthians 15. This is the Apostle Paul writing, and he says this.

! Our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead, but He did not raise Him if in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray, let's ask for God's help as we study this passage this morning.

[1:16] Gracious God and Heavenly Father, we look into Your Word coming for spiritual food, spiritual food that will nourish us, that will build up our hearts, our souls, and that will change us, that will make us more like Your Son, Jesus.

And so I pray that You would do that very thing this morning as we study the Bible together. Help us to see what's there. Help us to be changed by what we see. And we know that this is all a work of Your Holy Spirit.

It's a supernatural work. And so that's why we pray and we plead for this special mercy this morning. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Mantra you might hear from Christians as they talk about what it is that they believe.

There are lots of different ways you could sort of summarize the Christian faith. And probably maybe the simplest way you could summarize the Christian faith is to say Jesus is Lord. That's what we believe.

If you're a Christian, you believe Jesus is Lord. Now, if you consider that question and you make that claim, you say, well, Jesus is Lord, the natural question might come, well, is He Lord?

[2:26] Is He the Son of God? Does He deserve our undying allegiance? Because that's what it means. To say He is Lord is to say, well, I'm going to then take my entire life, I'm going to put it at His feet, and I'm going to submit to Him in my entirety.

Is He Lord? It would seem to me that He would have to do something very significant. to qualify to be Lord in that way. Something that unmistakably marks Him out as the King of the universe.

He can't just go around and say wise things. Lots of people in the past have done that. I've been known to say wise things occasionally. He can't just go around and be kind and compassionate.

Lots of people have done that in the past. He can't even go around and just do miracles because cultures around the world are full of stories of miracle workers in history past. He has to do, I think, something more.

Now Christians have contended for almost 2,000 years that He did do something more. He died, and then He rose again from the dead.

[3:37] And if it can be shown that He actually did that, well then we really, really have no choice but to say and to mean and to live, Jesus is Lord.

To have Him as Master over our entire lives. The disciple Thomas, he understood this. In John's Gospel, chapter 20 of John's Gospel, the resurrected Jesus appears to Thomas.

This is a few days after He's appeared to all the other disciples. Thomas has heard that Jesus is alive from the other disciples, but he wasn't there the first time, so he hasn't seen it himself.

And he initially refuses to believe. Now I know Thomas gets a pretty bad rap. People talk about doubting Thomas, but I actually think he's well within his rights. He's like, I haven't seen this. You're telling me some crazy stuff, and you want me to believe this. I need to see this for myself. Give me proof and I'll believe. So Jesus appears to him and says, touch my hands.

[4:44] See the holes. Touch my side. Put your hand in the hole in my side. See that it's really me. And then when Thomas does do that, and when Thomas does then get the proof, these are the first words that come out of Thomas' mouth.

My Lord and my God. My Lord and my God. Those should be the first words out of our mouths, out of our hearts, if Jesus really rose from the dead.

My Lord and my God. And so I want you to see two things this morning as we think about the resurrection. Number one, I want you to see that the resurrection must engage with your head, with your mind, your intellect.

And then number two, I want you to see that the resurrection must engage with your heart. So experientially, existentially, the resurrection must engage with your head and with your heart. So a little bit of background before we dive into these points.

This passage we read in 1 Corinthians 15, this section comes in a larger section where the Apostle Paul is talking about the resurrection and its importance for the gospel, the central message of the Christian faith.

[5:54] In fact, what he actually does at the beginning of this chapter is he unpacks exactly what the gospel is, what it is that Christians believe, that makes us Christian in the first place.

If you've got your Bible open there, you can look at verse 3, at the beginning of the chapter. He says, For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures, that he appeared to Cephas, that's Peter, and then to the twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

So you can kind of sketch out the contours of the gospel message there, from what he's saying. Christ died for our sins, he was buried, so he was really dead.

On the third day, he rose from the dead. Then he appeared to many different witnesses, and this was all according to the scriptures, as it was promised in the Old Testament. Now some in the city, in Corinth, ancient Corinth, didn't believe in bodily resurrection.

[7:16] Surprise. They didn't believe that people come back from the dead. In fact, it's evident from several different sources that many in the ancient world were not actually as superstitious as we may think they were.

We think, oh, we live today, we don't believe in superstitions, but back then they did. Back then they were just as skeptical about somebody saying, well, I've come alive again. Even amongst the Jews, this was disputed.

You have different schools of thought in first century Judaism around this. And it's really not different nowadays. I think you know that. I remember reading the transcript of a debate that took place a number of years ago between a man by the name of William Lane Craig, who's a very well-known, famous Christian apologist, and a man by the name of Bart Ehrman, who's probably one of the most famous skeptics of Christianity.

Was a former Christian, professor of New Testament, left the faith, and now writes a lot of books critiquing Christianity. And these two guys had a debate about the resurrection.

And I was reading this transcript, and the way these debates tended to happen, there are different versions of this, but basically the one guy will get up and he will speak for 20, 30 minutes.

[8:29] He'll have his say. The other guy will then get up and speak for 20 and 30 minutes, and then they will, after that, have a chance to have a rebuttal each, and then maybe they'll take question and answers from the floor after that.

And so William Lane Craig gets up and he starts like this, and I'm going to paraphrase what he says, but he basically says, I will set forth the evidence which suggests that the most probable accounting for the events recorded is that Jesus physically rose from the dead. And then he outlines the different points, what he's going to say, what evidence he sees in the text. Then he says this, he says, at the end, my interlocutor, Professor Ehrman, will not refute my evidence, but instead he will say that the reason why the resurrection is not a probable accounting for the events recorded is because the resurrection is a miracle which cannot by definition be objectively verified.

Bart Ehrman then spoke and went on to say and do exactly what William Lane Craig said he would do. You see, the stumbling block for Ehrman, regardless of the events in the text, in our ancient source material that point in a different direction, the stumbling block for him is that, well, miracles are coming to life again.

Well, they just, they can't be objectively proven. And therefore, the resurrection could never have taken place. And there must be an alternative fact for, an alternative explanation for the facts.

[10:11] So he's, he's basically saying this, he's saying, I don't disbelieve the resurrection because there aren't significant historical details that point to it. There are, and he would admit that. I disbelieve it because miracles don't happen.

At which point, he's really not making a historical observation anymore or a scientific statement. He's making a philosophical faith statement at that point. Clearly, there were people either in the church at Corinth or in the city at large in ancient Corinth that ridiculed the whole notion of somebody rising from the dead.

It was like that then, it's like that now today. And so Paul specifically tackles that in these verses, verses 12 to 19. So here's the, here's the first thing. The resurrection must engage with your head. Have a look down at verse 14.

Paul says, if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. Now his basic point there is pretty simple and that is that if Jesus didn't really rise from the dead in history, well then he and all the other apostles who are preaching this resurrection, well they're peddling a lie.

[11:33] They're bearing false testimony about this Christian gospel. To bring it to our time, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, well then this whole church thing is a sham. You should actually be, it's not really a beach day today, but out there doing something else rather than being in church this morning.

This whole thing is a sham. And see for Paul, this is an integrity issue. Either he did or he didn't rise from the dead. This is not just a nice story that we tell each other at Easter time and give chocolate eggs to each other.

It's a historical event. And if it's not, well then Paul says, well you've all been duped. You've all been had. Now the simple reason that he says this is because before this resurrection is something that impacts upon you sort of emotionally, spiritually, theologically, experientially, it actually needs to be wrestled with as an historical fact.

It needs to be thought about. Well did this actually happen? Use your mind. Use your head here. Now I can't unpack all of the evidence in favor of the historicity of the resurrection. I've done that before in other places.

I think we probably might have recordings of that on our website somewhere. But there actually are a few evidences we can glean just from this text. So let me say a few things about this. First thing is this.

[12:55] Several New Testament scholars have pointed out that this letter, 1 Corinthians, is one of the earliest letters written in the New Testament, written before the gospel accounts in the New Testament. It's written probably between 16 to 18 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So when Paul then says that the resurrected Jesus appeared to many eyewitnesses, like he says there at the very beginning, to 500 he says at one point, he's putting the credibility of this entire

letter on the line when he says something like that, when he makes a statement.

Because like he says, many of those witnesses are still living, which means you can go and ask them about it. You can go and have a conversation and say, well Paul said this thing. You were there.

Did it actually happen? You can check up on Paul's story. Now here we are almost 2,000 years later reading this letter. Which means, I think, that the credibility of the letter was never seriously called into question because the original readers of the letter continued to pass it on in those very communities, copied it multiple times.

Something that they would never ever have done if those witnesses weren't real. If those witnesses didn't exist. If Paul's claims had just kind of fallen flat.

[14:16] I mean, think about 18 years ago. It's not that long ago. You get to my age and older, 18 years feels like yesterday.

Like it just happened. I got married 18 years ago. If I said to you that one of the most memorable features of our wedding was not just how gorgeous my wife looked and continues to look or how charming my speech was, but one of the most memorable features of our wedding was the very distinct pig smell that wafted through the wedding venue all evening long, it would be pretty easy for you to check out whether that happened or not.

Because there were well over 100 people in that room at the time. More than 80% of them are still alive today. Even in our highly transient culture, like a city like Cape Town where people move away all the time, many of them actually still live in Cape Town today and you can go and ask them about that.

In fact, there might even be some here this morning sitting that you can go and ask about that. And if I was making up the pig smell, it would be pretty easy to find out if I was making it up or if I was telling the truth.

Paul couldn't just make stuff up with so many people around who were still alive from the time that it had happened and had been there and had seen it. He couldn't write this down and still maintain credibility if it wasn't true.

[15:42] But we know that Christianity at this period in that place just grew from strength to strength. It would have been the easiest thing to just find the people and say, did this happen? If they all said no, we would have died.

But it didn't die. It grew and it grew and it grew. That's the first thing to think about there. Second thing to notice here, another enormous piece of evidence, I think, in favor of the resurrection is that Paul says that he himself was a witness of the resurrected Jesus.

Now here's why this is huge. A lot of people will say, I'm really glad that your Christianity fulfills you. I'm really glad that it brings you meaning, that you believe in Jesus.

Just don't force your religion on other people, right? I'm glad that it's good for you and that you've got this thing going on with Jesus that's wonderful for you and for your own spiritual development and your own blessing. But don't force it on other people.

But for the Apostle Paul, this wasn't his experience at all. There's a place towards the very end of the book of Acts where Paul is now in trouble with the authorities and he's being brought before the procurator of Judea, a guy by the name of Portius Festus.

[16:57] There have been a number of baseless charges laid against him by the Jewish religious leaders. But Festus is a Roman and so he's a little bit confused by this whole situation.

He doesn't understand why the Jewish leaders want to kill Paul. He can't see why they want him dead. So what he does is he goes and he fetches a man by the name of King Agrippa who was the sort of the Jewish king of Judea.

He was an underlord under the Roman Empire at this point in time and an authority set under the higher authority of Rome. He was a descendant of King Herod and Portius Festus says look Agrippa you come sit in on this meeting listen to Paul's testimony and tell me exactly what's going on here so I know what to write down as I send Paul on to Caesar because he wants to appeal to Caesar.

I just have no idea how to make sense of this religious turmoil that's going on here. So Paul's given a chance to stand before this group now and to give an explanation for why the Jews want him dead.

And this is his explanation this is what he says he says look I was a Jew of Jews I have all the credentials I persecuted the Christians I wanted them dead I was zealous in my persecution but the resurrected Jesus appeared to me and he turned my world upside down.

[18:21] And so now I preach Jesus as the Messiah I preach him as the resurrected Messiah in fulfillment of what the prophet said in the Old Testament. Now the minute that he mentions Jesus physically rising from the dead Festus blurts out and he says Paul you're out of your mind you're crazy like we were having a proper legal disposition but you are clearly not fit to even talk to other human beings yet you're out of your mind he says your great learning has made you crazy at which point Paul then turns around and he says no no no I'm being completely reasonable and then he turns to Agrippa and he says you know that I'm being reasonable you know this you know what the prophet says because Agrippa knows the Jewish religion and you know what happened in Judea 26 odd years ago he actually says in the text he says it's not it's not as if all of this happened in a corner he's like you were there you see

Agrippa was a boy in Jerusalem at that time he would have been well aware of the stories of Jesus being resurrected he would have been acquainted with the facts he would have been acquainted with the upheaval that it caused in the society he would have known about the accounts of the eyewitnesses the empty tomb and that's Paul's precise point Paul is saying I didn't come to Jesus because he fulfilled me somehow like I had this Jesus shaped hole in my heart and then I came and I found Jesus that's not why I came to Jesus I was completely opposed to everything that Jesus stood for I hated him and I hated his followers I didn't believe because Jesus met all my needs I believed because I had to account for the empty tomb I believed because I had to account for the eyewitnesses I had to account for people willing to give their lives for this resurrected man and I had to account for him standing in front of me saying Saul

Saul why do you persecute me you see if Paul was here this morning with us and somebody said it's really good to have a faith that fulfills you and meets all of your needs it's really good to believe for that reason if somebody said that I think Paul would say that's nonsense it's absolute nonsense the reason you believe in Christianity is because Jesus rose from the dead in history almost 2000 years ago that's why you believe you've got to get your head around the resurrection Christianity is not a blind leap of faith into the dark hoping that there's some sort of cuddly God out there on the other side who's going to grab hold of you Christianity is belief that God has come into this world in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ that he lived the perfect life that he died for our sins and after three days he rose again to confirm that he really is the son of God who forgives sins that he really is Lord you either believe that or you don't and if you don't believe it in one sense don't waste your time here at church because we're all a bunch of frauds then peddling a false message testifying about a false

God and so the resurrection must engage your head secondly though the resurrection must engage your heart so look down at verse 16 Paul goes on and he says for if the dead are not raised then Christ has not been raised either and if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile you are still in your sins then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost if only for this life we have hope in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied here's the problem here is the downside of not having a resurrected Lord it's not just that we in the church are a bunch of frauds that would be bad enough the major downside is that if Christ is not raised there is no forgiveness of sins you are still in your sins he says see the resurrection is not just about history it's not just an amazing display of cosmic supernatural power it's also a statement very clear statement in fact

Paul I think spells out something of the statement later on at the very end of the chapter in verse 54 he says 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 where death is your victory where death is your sting the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but thanks be to God he gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ Christ went to the cross to pay for the sin of mankind to undo our brokenness to triumph over death and the resurrection well that's the confirmation that it worked that he achieved all of those things it's the crowning of all those achievements the resurrection is the confirmation that as the poet John Donne famously said one short sleep past we wake eternally and death shall be no more death thou shalt die and that's more

than history that's got to affect you at the heart level to know that it's gone it's dealt with it's confirmation of eternal hope to us the confirmation that Jesus has triumph and that that triumph has very real personal ramifications for you sitting here this morning as you look for those things as you look to get out from underneath the problem of death as you look for a hope that can sustain you in any sort of situation resurrection is the confirmation of that this

[24:41] Easter weekend time there's a lot of things that certain churches tend to do over and over again you see this kind of every single year and one of the things that often happens on Good Friday or on the week leading up to Good Friday is you see churches advertising that they're going to show Mel Gibson's The Passion 2004 movie very very gruesome and gory version of the last few moments of Christ's life now Mel Gibson has fairly interesting peculiar theology he's Roman Catholic but even as a Roman Catholic he's got some very interesting ideas that he sort of inserts into the storyline and so there's these interesting things that come up that if you go back and you read your gospels and you look at the last moments of Jesus' life you're going to say well that didn't happen or those people didn't appear or he didn't say this but there's one thing that he does insert into the story that doesn't happen in the gospels but theologically it's very poignant and it really brings out something of what is actually happening there's a scene where Jesus is walking through the crowded streets of

Jerusalem and he's carrying the cross and he's covered in blood and he stumbles and he falls and his mother is right there next to him and he turns to her and he says look mother I make all things new now that comes from Revelation Revelation 21 Gibson is taking those words and he's putting it back and it's theologically correct that is what Jesus is doing at the cross in that death in that chaos in that disorder he is making all things new cosmically and for each one of us and so the resurrection is the down payment it's when his death is turned into life we're now seeing the confirmation that all things will be made new it's our down payment to say he's triumphed he's achieved and so that hits you not just historically where we can watch a documentary about facts that lead up to improve the resurrection but that hits you at a heart level it engages not just your head but your heart so

C.S. Lewis wrote on his wife's epitaph on her gravestone Joy Davidman's gravestone he wrote this poem here the whole world stars water air and field and forest as they were reflected in a single mind like cast off clothes was left behind in ashes yet with hopes that she reborn from holy poverty in Lenten lands hereafter may resume them on her Easter day see the resurrection is the confirmation for us that there is an Easter day for us there's an Easter day coming for you and for me but Paul says if Christ is not raised you're still in your sin all things will not be made new and death will still triumph in the end in fact he says we are to be pitied more than anyone if we look to Christianity and to Jesus simply for this life if you look upon your faith as something that's going to kind of merely just ease you through the ups and downs of life then Paul says well you're to be pitied it's a tragedy he says and let me push you a little bit on this Paul is saying that if Christianity is nothing more than a cultural upbringing that you possess an ideological system that you sort of go to to inform your morality about how to live in this world a pick me up that you use to just sort of take the edge off of life if that's what you're using Christianity for if that's primarily what Christianity is to you then you are pitiful this morning Paul says you're pitiful he just doesn't leave room for that kind of Christianity it's very very black and white here in his mind either Jesus rose from the dead and that must grip your heart and change every single inch of you or he didn't and this whole Christian thing is a sham and so stop wasting your time there's no room in his mind for what is so prevalent around us today where people sort of just dip into Christianity when it's convenient for them it's all or it's nothing for him head and heart fully committed to

Jesus and his gospel or it's nothing and you know why he's so black and white you know why he goes from zero to 100% on this issue we go back and look at the beginning of the chapter verse 6 this is where he's explaining that gospel and he's talking about the different resurrection appearances in verse 6 he says after that he appeared that as Jesus appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time most of whom are still living though some have fallen asleep then he appeared to James then to all the apostles and last of all he appeared to me also as

to one abnormally born and then he gives commentary on himself for I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God but by the grace of God I am what I am and this grace to me was not without effect no I worked harder than all of them yet not I but the grace of God that was with me Paul was a murderer he was a wicked twisted man at one point covering that over with a religious veneer but he was broken and he was shameful

[30:27] I mean think about Paul in the early church we looked at this a couple of weeks ago in our series in the book of Acts but he's in a community now having become a Christian with the friends and the family members of the relatives of the people that he tried to kill that he did succeed in killing sometimes how do you face up to that how do you live in that community how do you recover from that but the resurrected Jesus came to him offered the gospel to him and he repented he repented of his sin and he embraced Christ's death on his behalf so that he would be completely forgiven of his sin and so the gospel allowed him to face up to it to face up to that reality to be accepted by the friends and the families of the people that he put to death the gospel allowed him to recover to save face so for

Paul this resurrection is so very dear to his heart it's his life it's his everything it's his statement it's a statement from God to him that says Paul you're a new man I know what you did in the past but you're a new man Paul I have paid the price for your sin you no longer have to pay and here is the confirmation and so Paul then later says if Christ is not raised you are still in your sins it's that important to him but now turn that around if if Christ is raised and you have trusted in him to save you well then you're not in your sins you're not in your sins and if you're not in your sins what are you in as the hymn says your life is hid with Christ on high you're in him that's what you're in and so when God looks upon you he doesn't he doesn't see sin he doesn't see brokenness he doesn't see your failures he sees

Christ he sees his radiant son because you are in him he doesn't see your record he sees Christ's record if Christ is risen you're not in your sins you're in him that's going to do something to you at the level of the heart again deep down so that you're changed you're a different person when you know that you can't keep living the same way when you know that Jesus has done that for you to the degree that you see that Christ has done that for you that the risen Lord has taken your sin away to the degree you see that and you save that and so this morning as you sit here and you listen to this sermon on Easter Sunday I don't know where each one of you stands with regards to Christianity but I do want to say this I'm convinced with the apostle Paul that Jesus died was buried that he was really dead and that on the third day he rose to life

I believe that he appeared to many many different eyewitnesses so many that Paul and the other apostles could never have preached the resurrection unless it actually happened I believe that in that death and resurrection Jesus paid for my sin he cleansed me he made me pure in the sight of God and I believe that if you come to him in faith this morning if you come trusting in his death and resurrection on your behalf then you too will be forgiven of your sins past present and future Jesus Christ is risen he is the risen Lord and so I want to say to you this morning if you've never come to him in faith come to him in faith this morning don't wait for something to change in your life repent and come to him now and if you have trusted in him if you're a believer this morning you trusted in the death and let it nourish your soul let it revive your spirit let it meet your deepest needs some of you are sometimes flirting around the very edges of the faith because you're worried about what really committing to

Jesus will mean for your life some of you have been Christians for a long time but you feel like you're stagnating or you're not growing and you're worried about what really committing to Jesus demands on you how it might challenge your world view how it might affect what you do with your time with your energy with your resources with your money and you can justify your sort of half hearted commitment to Jesus with all manner of things with all manner of legitimate concerns or the reason why I don't go to church as much as I should is because of this the reason I don't pray quite as much is because of this the reason I don't read my Bible quite as much is because of this all these legitimate concerns but I'm here to tell you this morning that if Jesus rose from the dead 2000 years ago then all those concerns are worthless in the end equation in fact they're worse than

worse they have the potential to be incredibly destructive to your life if

[35:56] Jesus rose! absolute no questions asked is Lord no single thing is too much then for him to demand of you and so I would say repent repent of those concerns your worries trust in him trust in the resurrected Lord for new life let him let him take you and let him make you into the new person that you're supposed to be let him mold you and shape you and make you into a person who is truly alive because Jesus Christ is alive let's pray together I have any father want you impress not just upon our heads and our minds but upon our hearts this morning the reality of our resurrected

Lord allow us to see that because Jesus is alive nothing is ever going to be the same again our lives now are totally and utterly dependent upon him and we live into true life the more we submit to him and we abandon life and we head towards death the more we ignore him and disobey him help us to see that this morning clearly Lord change and transform us by this good news of the resurrection Lord help us to see that our sins are taken away that we are we're in Christ we're hid in him his record is our record his life is our life I pray for any person this morning who's sitting and going I'm not sure if I've ever trusted in Jesus I pray that you would bring them to faith this morning in your great mercy you would open their eyes to see the truth of the gospel you would save them for the rest of us

Lord teach us how to dive deeper and deeper into submission to our resurrected Lord that we might truly experience life we ask this all for Christ's sake in his glory!