

1 Corinthians 15

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[0 : 00] Let us pray as we turn to God's Word. Our good Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

In Jesus' name, amen. If you would, turn back to 1 Corinthians 15 if you closed your Bibles. Christ Jesus was a corpse.

He was dead. His body was absolutely lifeless. And if He had not been raised from the dead, out of the corpses, our faith would be in vain.

It would be empty. Our faith would be like mist that simply will disappear. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, our faith is futile.

It's worthless. It's meaningless. There's no purpose for it. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then we are still in our sins. We still bear them and we will bear what comes from the Holy God for our sins if He has not raised from the dead.

[1 : 32] In fact, and I know this is very tender, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then those who have fallen asleep, they're lost.

There's no future for them. They perish. If we are putting our hope in Christ and He has not risen from the dead, then in this life, above all people in this entire world, we Christians are pitiful.

Hope is the anchor for the soul, as Hebrews says. The anchor for our soul. If our hope is in Christ and He did not raise from the dead, then our souls are anchored to mist.

Now, sometimes it might actually feel like that anyway, even for Christians who know that Christ did raise from the dead. It might feel like this.

We might not feel solid in life. We might feel as if we're not anchored to anything secure. We're blown this way and that. We're knocked and confused. We actually might feel like we're still in our sins, even.

[2 : 49] Both we might feel tangled in the guilt, burdened by the guilt of those things that we've done which have destroyed other people's lives, destroyed our own life.

We might feel the guilt. We might feel the power and feel helpless under the power of the sins that we seem to not be able to say no to. Some of us may feel sometimes like the work that we do, what we labor at, what we strain to get accomplished in life.

We might feel that that is purposeless. It doesn't have meaning. It will, like mist, simply disappear. It doesn't have any fruit. I want us to read chapter 15, verse 58 again, the last verse of the chapter.

Paul writes, Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. How can we live like that? How can we have that type of hope, being firmly standing, secure, completely confident that what we do in life, that when we help people, there is fruit, that what we labor for will actually, does have purpose.

[4 : 22] How is that possible? And how it's possible is in the first word of that verse, or that at least points to how it's possible. Look what it says. Therefore, stand firm.

And the question we always have to ask is, what's that therefore, therefore? Why did he write that? This statement, the reason that we can do this, live a life like this, is because of everything that he's just said, verses 1 to 57.

So we're going to contemplate that for a few minutes this morning, and we're also going to contemplate some different aspects of the same passage tonight. So what does give life purpose? Hope and a firm anchor. And what Paul is talking about is the resurrection of the bodies from the dead. God raising corpses to life again because he has raised Jesus.

Now, there are two main reasons that Paul says in chapter 15 that point towards this therefore, this life that we live now.

[5 : 31] Two main things. There are a lot of small arguments, a lot of things he starts and he stops and he picks them up again. But really, the whole argument in chapter 15 is like this long cord that is very well woven together.

And if you look closely, you can see two thicker strands that run the entire length of the cord that sort of carry the argument all the way. We're going to focus on those two cords.

So we're going to miss a lot that Paul says in this chapter, but we're going to focus on those two main things that carry us toward that hope. And those two things are this.

Jesus has been raised from the dead, in fact, and that means something for us. Jesus has been raised. And the second is that the one who is working in him and in us is the creator of the universe. Those two things will carry us toward hope. That's where our souls should be anchored. So we're going to look at those two in turn.

[6 : 30] First, Jesus has in fact been raised from the dead, and that matters for us. And then second, we'll turn to the creator. So in verses 1 to 34, the first half of the chapter, Paul focuses attention on Jesus and his resurrection and what that means for us.

He points out that scriptures promised that Jesus would rise from the dead. He doesn't point this out, but we can also take note that Jesus himself promised that he would rise from the dead.

So these things are pointing in that direction. But the thing that Paul focuses on is that a lot of people saw Jesus. Not just saw, but actually touched, spoke with, experienced the risen Jesus after he had been dead.

He's rooting this in historic reality. There are so many eyewitnesses. People who didn't just see this form in the passing crowd over there and hope, oh, I think that's Jesus.

The disciples actually were not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. When they were told that he had risen, they didn't believe the ladies who told them. They weren't expecting this in any way. And it wasn't at a distance either that they experienced him.

[7 : 45] He had been dead. The people who knew him had handled his body, his corpse. They had touched him, smelled his blood and sweat. They put him in a tomb. They knew for sure he was dead. The soldier's spear made sure of that, if anybody had had doubts, piercing his side and his heart.

Now he's standing in front of them alive. And they don't just see him. I mean, he's right in front of their face talking to them. They hear him. They're touching his body. They can probably smell him. They can at least smell the fish that he's eating in front of them. They probably tasted him in the sense that I can't imagine that they weren't embracing and kissing each other after having lost him but now having him again.

You want to talk about empirical reality, the things that people like to trust in today. This was so secure. People know that Jesus, the disciples knew Jesus rose from the dead.

And there's absolutely no reason to doubt this. There's no historical reason to doubt that Jesus actually rose from the dead. Now people deny that Jesus did.

[8 : 50] Actually, did you catch in verse 12, some people in the church of Corinth are saying, there is no resurrection of the dead. And plenty of people today say that as well.

There is no resurrection. But what does that mean when you realize that there's every historical reason to believe it and no historical reason to deny it? What they basically are saying is, it's not possible and therefore it didn't happen.

And we would say, well, it obviously is possible because it happened. It's like somebody denying that you can walk on the moon. That can't happen. And people would say, well, it has happened.

So it obviously is possible. The real issue is not whether Jesus rose from the dead. That truly cannot be denied. The real issue is, are you going to follow the risen Jesus?

Jesus rose from the dead and that's a fact historically. What are you going to do about it? Some people bring up science. I've been in conversations with people in coffee shops around here.

[9 : 55] People who say, well, science proves that corpses don't raise. They can't come back to life. And Paul was not dealing with scientists. But it's a reality for us.

So it might be helpful for us to, just for a second, notice what science actually says about resurrection. Does science say that it's impossible? Well, again, it happens.

So it's obviously not impossible. What science can say is a corpse can't raise itself. You can put a corpse in the laboratory and sure enough, it doesn't raise itself.

Well, Christians agree with that. Science can show that a person can't just of their own will raise up a corpse to life. Christians agree with that. We don't claim that that's what happens.

Science can prove that technology, medicine, nothing that science itself can produce can raise a corpse from the dead. Christians fully agree with that. But what Christians claim happened is that God rose Jesus from the dead, vindicating his own son.

[10:59] Can science control God and bring him into the laboratory and force God to raise a corpse so that they can test whether he really can do it or not?

Science is incapable of doing that. And so everything that science can say about corpses and resurrection, Christians agree with. And the thing that Christians claim, which is based in history, science can't talk about.

It doesn't have that ability. So I don't think we should fear in any way people who deny Jesus raising from the dead. We need to beware and we need to talk about it with them. But there's absolutely nothing to fear.

It's a fact. What does that mean for us, though? Well, in verses 1 to 19, Paul establishes this as a historical reality. But then he turns in verse 20 to apply it.

So what does this mean for us? And he says in verse 20, look at verse 20, if you will. Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

[12:02] Again, he says in verses 22 and 23, If Christ, in Christ all will be made alive, but each in his own turn. Christ, the first fruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him.

Earlier in the letter, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says basically the same thing. This is something that keeps popping up in Paul. He says, by God's power, he raised the Lord from the dead and he will raise us also.

Did you notice the word that Paul uses? First fruits. Christ, the first fruits of the resurrection. It's the idea of a crop or a flock.

It's when the crop starts to come, the first fruit that comes, the first grain. A person would bring that and offer that as a sacrifice or as an offering, representing the entire crop that was going to come. And when you have the first fruits, you're going to have the crop. They hang together. The way Paul is describing Jesus' resurrection is, that's the first bit and the crop is coming with him.

[13:10] There's a guarantee here. Jesus rose from the dead. But that's not a stand-alone fact of history. It means something for those who belong to him.

He's going to bring them out of the grave when he comes back. Let me read to you Romans chapter 6, part of chapter 6.

Although first, let me mention what Jesus himself said. Jesus said his mission, in John 6 he said this, his mission is to take all that the Father gave to him and raise them up on the last day.

None of them will be lost. Jesus promised that his mission was not only for himself to be raised from the dead. It was also to bring those on the last day up from the dead with him.

Now let me read Romans 6, because Jesus' resurrection not only has implications for our future, it means something now in our lives. So Romans 6, listen carefully.

[14:13] We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again.

Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once and for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

[15:43] Jesus' resurrection from the dead, after he paid for sin, his resurrection is a fact, and it means a great deal to us as Christians.

So let's keep our eyes fixed on this raised Jesus. This is a theme that runs throughout Paul's great chapter on the resurrection.

Keep your eyes fixed on the raised Jesus because the God who raised him is going to bring us with Jesus into that victory. And he even gives you a glimpse of this now in your own battle with sin.

So that's the first major strand that runs through this argument. Look at the raised Jesus. The second is, the one at work in you is the creator.

The creator of heaven and earth. The creator of everything, including human bodies. This is the second half of the chapter. Verses 35 to the end.

[16:44] 35 to 57. Now, Paul has already pointed out that some in the church deny that resurrection even exists. There seem to be others that have a hard time with it also.

Their queries come in verse 35. This could simply be something that Paul thinks that a person might ask, but it also very possibly could be something that people were actually asking.

Look at verse 35. Someone may ask, how are the dead raised? With what body? With what kind of body will they come? So those two questions, how are they raised?

In what body will they come? Now, those questions might have arisen out of the Greco-Roman way of thinking during this time, the culture they lived in.

There were so many ideas about what would happen after you die. Some believe that nothing happened after you die. You're dead, that's it. Others believe that there's some sort of shadowy, bodiless existence out there.

[17:50] Others believed, or seem to believe, that a corpse could actually come back to life. The gods could raise a corpse up. There aren't many examples of this, but there are some.

So there's this diversity out there. But there are two things that were not believed. One is that those events where someone claimed that someone had risen from the dead, that doesn't give them any promise that that will happen to them.

So when Achilles was raised from the dead, nobody believed that that affected them. It was amazing, sure, but not important, really. But a second thing that was really important is that in each of those instances, when a corpse came back to life, according to what they said, sometimes it's just in their myths, each time that happened, that was only when the body was there.

If the body was gone, if the body had decayed away, there's no example of resurrection from that.

The body had to be there. In fact, when a body was raised and a part was missing, for example, one guy had lost his shoulder, they raised his body back to life, this is in a myth, raised his body, but they couldn't recreate his shoulder.

He had to have a prosthetic shoulder. So, if the body's gone, what happens? Resurrection's not possible. And so you get these two questions.

[19:15] Say, well, how are the dead raised? And in what bodies do they come? Those people who have rotted away and their bodies are no more. Well, and that's what Paul, that's why Paul then turns their gaze to the creator of heaven and earth, the creator of bodies.

He says, look at the creator, his power and his will. So that's what we're gonna do for just a moment. We're gonna take a step back from 1 Corinthians 15 for a moment, look at something in Genesis 1 and a few other comments about creation in the scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures.

Then we're gonna jump back into 1 Corinthians 15 and see what Paul says about us turning our gaze to the creator for our hope in this life. So in Genesis 1, you don't have to turn there because I'm just gonna mention a few points.

Some things are repeated over and over in Genesis 1. Some words are repeated, some phrases. One thing that's very prominent that happens time and time again throughout creation is this.

And God said, let such and such happen, and it was so. That phrase, and it was so, perhaps more full to translate it, and it happened in that manner.

[20:31] So that phrase happens again and again. God said, let it happen, and it happened in that manner. This pattern of God speaking something, God desiring and speaking something to be, is perfectly fulfilled.

In fact, it's so perfectly fulfilled that the number of times that phrase is repeated in Genesis 1 is seven. If anybody knows much about ancient Jewish thinking on numbers, seven is a very

important symbolic number.

It conveys a certain idea. If you see seven, that sort of conveys perfection, completion. So not only is God's word repetitively, perfectly fulfilled, but it's done in a perfect number, seven.

So that's a theme that is in Genesis 1. God's desire, his will, is done perfectly in creation. For example, let me show you what I mean.

In Psalm 135, which talks about creation, Psalm 135, verses five and six, the psalmist says, I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods.

[21 : 38] All that pleased the Lord, he made in heaven and on earth and in the seas and in all their depths. All that pleased him, he did. Again, in Revelation chapter four, listen to what is confessed about God, about the creator.

The elders are standing around the throne of God and they take their crowns off and they put the crowns at his feet in front of the throne and they say, you are worthy. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things by your will they were created and they have their being.

It's a crucial understanding of creation to know that this is what God wants and he did it and it happened perfectly. One other thing about Genesis one, about creation, that I'll draw attention to is that the way God brought things about by his will, the way he did it is very orderly with certain purpose.

The phrase, according to its kind, happens over and over again. In fact, that one happens ten times which ten is another one of those numbers that convey completion. So God is creating bodies and structures and things each according to their own kind, each has its own purpose and function.

That's a very prominent theme in Genesis one. Now we jump back to Paul. What does Paul say to those people who say, how is resurrection of corpses even possible?

[23 : 13] In what bodies do they come? Look what he says in verse 37. Verse 37. Starting in verse 37. He turns them to nature. He says, when you sow, agriculture, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.

But God gives to it a body just as he has determined. And to each kind of seed he gives its own body. See, Paul points out just a simple observation.

You take a seed and you look at its body, you know, its structure. And when it's sown and you see what comes out of the ground, you see what is raised, well, it's this plant.

And when you compare the body of the seed with the body of the plant, they're completely different. Oh, the plant is a lot better, that's for sure. We're going to talk more about that tonight. But totally different.

But that's in everyday observation. You have an example in front of you of the fact that bodies can change. Then he draws attention to God, that God can change bodies.

[24 : 21] He says, God gives to each of those seeds a body as he determined, as he wanted, as he willed. To each of the seeds a different body. Now Paul jumps out of agriculture, out of seeds and plants, and he applies this to all of creation.

Still the theme of God's will and God creating as he wanted, each different as he wants. Read verses 39 to 41.

I'll read it to you in a second. All flesh is not the same. Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, and fish another.

There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. But the splendor of the heavenly bodies is of one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another, stars another, and star differs from star in splendor.

Then in verse 42, he says, so will it be with the resurrection of the dead. In that manner, will it be with the resurrection of corpses. Is it so difficult to believe that God can raise us from the dead even when our bodies have decayed and gone and they are no more?

[25 : 44] Is it so hard to believe that the creator who has made all these different bodies and has made all these different splendors or glories, all these different types of flesh, is it so difficult to believe that he can recreate?

He can take this corpse and remake it and change it into a different type of body. Same person, but changed into this glorious thing. It's actually quite easy to believe when your eyes are fixed on the creator of all things, the creator who has already done that with his own son as a promise of what he'll do to us and for us.

So look to the creator. Look to his power. Look to his will, his desire. That's our hope. It will anchor our souls as we wait for this day and as we begin now to live it out in the face of sin.

So let's reread verse 58 now. With these two things in mind, our eyes are fixed on Jesus' raised person and our eyes are fixed on the creator of all things.

Verse 58, Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

[27 : 11] So when we feel like our labor is in vain, is empty, is meaningless, is pointless, when we feel the weight of sin, when we feel that our own lives are not anchored to anything, how can we stand firm?

How can we push on? How can we keep working works of abundance in the Lord? How can we know for certain that there's purpose, that there's meaning in what we do?

our souls must be anchored to the raised Jesus, to the creator who will raise us with Jesus.

Let me close with these few thoughts about Jesus' mission. Jesus' mission that I've already mentioned that he'll raise up all those who belong to him.

His mission for creation is to gather people who trust him and who praise his father with all their hearts. His mission is to present these people holy and blameless without sin to his father.

[28 : 19] And his purpose is to set the entire creation free. Free from its bondage, its slavery, to sin, to corruption, to decay, to death.

To set the whole creation free and he'll do that by raising up his people and their glory, our glory, will set the creation free.

And Jesus' mission, he's already defeated death. What else is there that could ever stand in his way? What in our lives could ever stand in the way of the one who will accomplish his mission and has already beat death?

So remember our labor. No matter how mundane or how enjoyable it might be each day, no matter how troublesome, maybe painful it is, remember that it is highly meaningful and successful when it is done with our eyes fixed on the glory of the risen Lord, when it is done to the praise of the creator.

Therefore, stand firm, work hard, and hope. And let's pray now, please. and let's go through this. Thank you.