

1 Cor 15 Resurrection
Tim Anderson 11/4/2021

Well we begin a new series today.
We celebrated Easter Sunday last week.
It's a time of new beginnings.
So we are beginning something new.
Last year a church member asked me
for a sermon series on death and dying.
There are lots of practical issues we don't often talk about, she said.
Should I get cremated or buried?
How does a Christian die well?
How can I support other people who are dying?
Well I've decided to do a series on 1 Cor 15.
It's the great chapter in the Bible about our future resurrection.
So if we are going to spend 8 weeks talking about our resurrection,
hopefully issues about death and dying will come up along the way.
So today, I'm going to give you a general introduction
to 1 Cor 15 and resurrection.
And then for 7 weeks I will be taking the chapter in small pieces.
I'm borrowing shamelessly from Alistair Begg here.
He's a much better preacher than I am
and he's done this series some years ago.
So I'll be listening to him preach each passage
before I write my own sermon.
So if you decide you want more about a certain week,
one option available to you is to listen to Alistair Begg preach the passage.
His sermons are about twice as long as mine,
so you will get at least twice as much from them.
Probably many times more.

So 1 Cor 15.
You might ask,
"Is it appropriate to rip one chapter out of the book

and take it without its context?"

The answer is, it's always better to study God's Word in its context.

But if I were to try

to tackle the whole of 1 Corinthians in this type of detail,

the sermon series would be 128 weeks long,

and I think many of you might have given up and gone elsewhere.

So when we want to treat a passage in detail,

we have almost no option but to remove it from its context.

So I'm going to fill in a bit of the context in broad brush strokes now.

1 Cor is a letter written to the church in Corinth.

No surprises there.

Paul had planted the church some years prior.

And then he had gone on to plant other churches in other places.

Another early Christian leader named Apollos

had also ministered in the church.

And then Apollos moved on too.

And the church had become divided.

Some followed Paul,

some followed Apollos,

some followed Peter,

Some followed Christ.

So they are a divided church,

and a church with some doctrine problems.

Various doctrinal issues have crept into the church's life in Paul's absence.

They aren't totally sold out on listening to Paul.

He's got to keep justifying his position as an apostle appointed by God.

But they are at least willing enough to listen to him

to send him a letter and ask him some questions.

Quite likely one of their questions prompted 1 Cor 15.

And that's a reason why it's not such a bad thing

to study this chapter in isolation from the rest of the letter.

As an answer to a particular question,

it's fairly self contained in what it is saying.

So what's the question that shapes the chapter?

We can see that from verse 12.

15:12 "If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?"

Some of the Corinthians were saying that there is no resurrection.

They were not denying Jesus' resurrection, they and Paul were agreed upon that.

But they were saying

that Christians will not be resurrected when Jesus returns.

Now that strikes us as very strange indeed.

We have trouble convincing people that Jesus' was resurrected.

But heaps of non Christians in the community

want to believe in an afterlife,

even if they don't believe in Jesus' resurrection.

It's like our problem is the reverse of the Corinthians' problem.

So let's try to understand

where the Corinthians were coming from for a minute.

The Corinthians were a very spiritual bunch.

There is lots of instruction to them earlier in the letter about not going overboard with speaking in tongues.

They were big into miraculous gifts,

way more than any of the other churches that Paul wrote to.

Some of their married couples had given up having sex

because they thought that they were way too spiritual for that.

Paul had to tell them to get back in the sack

so they wouldn't fall into temptation.

They had what you might consider an over the top spirituality.

Basically they thought that they had all of the spirituality of heaven now, and they were just waiting for the day

when they could get rid of their tiresome bodies

and be fully 100% spiritual.

So what's that got to do with resurrection?

Well the Christian belief in resurrection is resurrection of the body.

The Corinthians has no problem with believing in an afterlife.

They just wanted a spiritual afterlife with no body on.

But Jesus was raised with a body
and we will be raised with bodies too.

So that's the nub of argument of 1 Cor 15.

Are we going to be raised with bodies?

Yes we are.

OK so now you know where we are going over the next 8 weeks.

But that's not an invitation

to have a long holiday from turning up to church.

God has plenty of stuff to show us along the way.

I guess another question on your mind might be,

"How does what happens to me after I die
make a difference to my life now?"

We are an impatient practical generation.

We need some indication of the cash value before we will tune in.

Well I think there is lots of implications for life right now.

Let me give just one.

We are in a generation with an epidemic of anxiety.

When I was a school kid,

I'd never heard of someone suffering from anxiety.

I'm sure there was someone,

but it wasn't very common.

We would have called it anxiety

if one of our class mates was scared to abseil down a cliff.

But now, every school has piles of children suffering from anxiety.

As a chaplain, Cherida runs workshops for kids suffering from anxiety.

And it's not confined to children.

Lots of adults suffer from anxiety too.

How did it happen?

In one generation, this condition almost didn't exist.

Roll 40 years down the track and it's everywhere.

What changed?

Well the world is a complex place,
and there could well be many inter related causes.
But part of the answer is to do with resurrection.
In a generation where most people believed in their future resurrection,
people knew that human history was going somewhere.
They knew that human life had a purpose.
And that sense of knowing where you are going,
that your life has a purpose,
has a great power to diminish anxiety.
Think about a family in America
who make the decision to come to Australia to escape the pandemic.
Their kids get uprooted from school and their friendship groups,
they would be feeling very anxious.
But if their parents sit them down and explain to them the reasons why,
well they can see there's a purpose.
They may not like it still,
But they can see the purpose,
so instead of the great unknown,
there is a future with a purpose.
That's how the resurrection functions for us -
just on a larger scale.
There might be many things in our lives we can't control.
Many things that worry us if we let them.
But at least if we know the final outcome,
we know where our lives are going.
Our lives have a purpose.
They have a destination.
And in the face of stuff that can spiral out of control,
knowing the final destination is very reassuring.
Of course I'm not saying
that if our community went back to the settled conviction
that we have a future resurrection to look forward to,
that it would wipe out the epidemic of anxiety overnight.
There are people who suffer from medical conditions

that have nothing to do with their view of the world.
And there are many other social forces at play.
But I am saying that there is a general sense of community anxiety regarding the meaning of life.
Orielle's music teacher has moved house,
so I went for a drive along the marina in Safety Beach taking her home from her music lesson last week.
It's evident as you drive along the marina that there is a good portion of our society whose life revolves completely around their recreation.
And ultimately this is anxiety producing.
You do your recreation.
It's good for a break.
But it's very unsatisfying as the meaning of your life.
"Isn't there more than this?" is a haunting question.
The resurrection of dead is solid answer to a haunting question.

The resurrection of the dead is also a lynchpin of the gospel.
Without the resurrection there is no gospel.
Paul begins this chapter,
15:1 "I want to remind you of the gospel".
Why does he want to remind them of the gospel?
15:2 "By this gospel you are saved."
What is the connection between the resurrection and the gospel?
15:17 "If Christ has not been raised,
your faith is futile;
you are still in your sins."
Take away the resurrection and there is no forgiveness of sins.
You might as well not be a Christian.

This stress on the gospel is not unique to 1 Cor.
Paul's letter to the Romans begins this way.
Rom 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus,
called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."

What is the gospel?

Well it's about Jesus who

Rom 1:4 "was appointed the Son of God in power
by his resurrection from the dead."

What does the gospel achieve?

Rom 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel
because it is the power of God
that brings salvation to everyone who believes."

Paul's message is similar to his friend Timothy.

2 Tim 1:8 "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord."

What is that testimony?

Same verse "Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel,"

The testimony about our Lord is just another way of saying the gospel.

What is the gospel?

2 Tim 1:10 "It has now been revealed
through the appearing of our Saviour,
Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death
and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

The gospel is the message of how Jesus destroyed death.

How did he do that?

Through the resurrection.

All through the New Testament,
there is an urgency to get people
to respond to a message called the gospel.

Responding to that message is what will save them.

And the resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to the gospel message.

There's no good news without the promise of eternal life.

You can even find the flip side of that in the New Testament.

What happens if people don't respond to the gospel?

2 Thess 1:8 "He will punish those who do not know God
and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

Not only is the gospel good news for those who respond.
In the words of the passages we've read out.
It is salvation.
It is life.
It is immortality.
The gospel is also bad news for those who don't respond.
The good news is bad news if you reject it.

The resurrection is then the truth
that can move you from being religious to having a saving faith.
Lots of people are religious
in a sense that doesn't provide eternal salvation.
That is to say they are committed to living a moral life.
They like ceremonies and ritual.
They try to improve themselves and earn God's favour.
But being religious doesn't save.
The gospel saves.
The gospel is the power of God for salvation.

We sometimes sing a hymn "And Can it Be".
It's one of Charles Wesley's greatest.
In the fourth verse it says,
"Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray.
I woke.
The dungeon flamed with light."
They are evocative words.
It's beautiful poetry.
But what's he talking about?
Was he actually in prison?
No he wasn't.
His spirit was imprisoned by religion.
He was trying to save himself by good works.

And when you earnestly try to do that,
you are overwhelmed with how impossible the task is.
It's only the shallow and unreflective person
who can blithely say "I live a pretty good life".
Someone like Charles Wesley, who was at the time an Anglican minister,
who was desperately and earnestly
trying to make himself good enough for God,
felt like he was in prison.
All of his efforts were simply reinforcing the bars on his cell.
There was no way out through his good works.
They simply reminded him of his failures.
So how did he escape his prison cell?
God's eye diffused a quicken ray.
Wow that is language of yesteryear.
Light shone out of God's eye.
That is the light of revelation.
The gospel message will not be understood by simply working it out.
Lots of people hear about Jesus resurrection,
but never appreciate its significance.
It's not because they are thick.
It's because God hasn't revealed it to them.
But for Charles Wesley,
though he hadn't understood the gospel for years,
suddenly it was like a light turned on.
And he saw that light shining directly from God's eye.
Where once he was bound in prison by religion,
now God had revealed the gospel of his resurrected Son to him.
"I woke,
the dungeon flamed with light."
That revelation of the gospel was like waking up from a deep sleep.
How could he have missed what now seemed so obvious?
That the resurrection of Jesus put an end to all his religious striving.
That now he could lay it all down at the foot of the cross,
and simply follow Jesus.

"My chains fell off,
my heart was free.
I rose, went forth and followed thee."
Moving from religion to faith gave him a great sense of freedom.
The chains of religious performance fell off.
And now Charles Wesley simply served Jesus
with a heart of gratitude for the blessings of the gospel.

What do I want you to take away from this sermon?
I want to remind you of the gospel.
The gospel that has at its heart the resurrection.
This is the gospel that gives freedom.
It makes your chains fall off.
Some of you may be like Charles Wesley was,
desperately trying to please God
without the freedom and grace of the gospel.
If the resurrection seems a bit vague and abstract,
this may be you.
If this is you, please ask God to shine his light into your heart.

Some of you may have a good appreciation of the gospel,
but you might be a hazy on how the resurrection fits in.
Maybe you've heard lots of Easter Sunday sermons
trying to demonstrate
that it's sensible to believe in the resurrection of Jesus,
but you haven't connected his resurrection to our own.
Well hang around.
We've got seven weeks
to plumb the depths of what the resurrection means.

Others of you are already living in the power of the resurrection.
Why are you here, if you don't need this message?
Because this message is the message that saved you.
It's God's 'I love you letter'.

And who tires of being told that they are loved?