

No Resurrection, No Gospel

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] And now let's pray. God our Father, we know that no human words can truly unfold the divine word, and so we ask for the promised help of your gracious Holy Spirit.

We pray that as we draw near to you, you will most graciously draw near to us, and that you will open your word to our hearts, and that you will open our hearts to your word.

In Jesus' name, Amen. We could have our Bibles open, please, at page 961 at the 1 Corinthians passage.

This week I was browsing in Waterstones one day, and as I browsed in the bestseller section, I saw it there before my eyes, the new book, The Jesus Family Tomb, and the dust jacket informed us that this book would shake the very foundations of the Judeo-Christian faith.

It must be one of at least ten books I've read in the last years. I haven't read this book, but it must be one of at least ten, which have said that very thing.

[1 : 32] Discoveries have been made that will shake the very foundations of the gospel. A number of years ago I remember reading one which was a variation of the Judas story.

Judas had in fact not been the villain. The gospels present him as being. That Jesus had in fact died, but had not risen again. And of course the most famous of all these, which last year at this time was topping the bestseller list, was The Da Vinci Code.

Because that book and the film associated with it captured popular imagination. But all these books have one thing in common, don't they? Jesus of Nazareth was a remarkable teacher.

A guru. Perhaps even did a few healing miracles, if you can call them miracles. But his body lies in the grave. He's not risen.

He has not ascended to heaven. He did not send the Spirit. And therefore, there is no gospel.

That's what our title is this evening. No resurrection. No gospel.

[2 : 36] Last week we looked at the first twelve verses under the heading, We have a gospel. Paul is saying here, no resurrection, no gospel. But the fascinating thing about so many of these books, is that these ideas were around in the first century.

Paul and the other apostles were already grappling with these. Indeed, the very day of the resurrection, the first of these stories began to circulate. The disciples have come, have stolen his body.

That's why the tomb is empty. Indeed, even before he rose from the dead, Pilate was urged to put a guard on the tomb, in case that's what happened. So we're not dealing with new ideas.

We're simply dealing with recycled ideas. All of them basically saying, Jesus of Nazareth died, but he did not rise again. And Paul, as he develops the argument, says, first of all, we must grasp the big picture.

We must see that the resurrection is not an isolated event. It is according to the scriptures. That's why he mentions Adam here, and particularly next week we're going to see how he goes right back to the beginning of the story and looks forward to the end of the story, back to creation, back to Adam, and then to the coming of Christ, in accordance with the scriptures.

[3 : 56] And Paul is saying the resurrection makes sense of that big story. And the other thing that Paul emphasizes in this chapter, you may be surprised from verses 29 onwards, the tone seemed to change.

From this glorious assertion of the resurrection, Paul gives a warning, and he says, do not be deceived, verse 33, bad company ruins good morals. Many people live in a comfortable fog, in a kind of vague set of beliefs, and don't worry too much about what they believe, as long as they're decent people.

Paul says that's not the case. What we believe shapes the kind of people we are. If we believe the wrong things about Jesus Christ, if we have wrong ideas about the gospel, before very long, that will overlap into our behavior.

So, Paul is saying, no resurrection, no gospel. He develops his argument, it seems to me, in three stages. First of all, in verses 12 to 19, there is a dreadful prospect.

If Christ has not been raised. Dreadful prospect. Secondly, there is a glorious reality, in verses 20 to 28. And thirdly, there is a challenging warning, in verses 29 to 34.

[5 : 20] So, as we look at this section, let's look at it in that way. First of all, a dreadful prospect. Paul says, you Corinthians, you are arguing, there is no resurrection of the body.

If that's the case, then Christ himself is not risen. If you pull this thread, the whole garment unravels. If you take out this brick from the building, the whole building collapses.

It's not something you can take away, and leave part of a gospel. If you take this away, there is no gospel left. The consequences are dire. The consequences are disastrous.

First of all, he says, if there is no resurrection, Christ's work has failed. Verse 17, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile.

You are still in your sins. These chilling words, you are still in your sins. Think what it means if there is no resurrection. Jesus stood in for us.

[6 : 23] Jesus took our sins in his own body on the cross. If there is no resurrection, that means God did not accept his sacrifice. That means that there is no forgiveness.

The cushion of the temple was not torn. The barrier signs are still there. We do not have a great high priest who has gone into heaven.

We need to rewrite our resurrection hymns, won't we? Imagine singing, Hail the day, he didn't rise. In the ground, his body lies. Jesus, son of Mary, dead.

His followers have been misled. Now, we are not going to sing Hallelujah at that. Apart from the fact it is the most appalling doggerel in any case. There is no gospel in that. Hail the day that sees him rise.

Hallelujah. To his throne above the skies. That is the... But we will have to rewrite that. We can't sing that any longer. We can't sing Jesus lives your terrors now. Can no death no more Apollos.

[7 : 21] We can't sing any of the hymns that we have sung. We can't possibly sing as we are going to at the end of the service. Thank you, oh my Father, for giving us your Son and leaving your Spirit till the work on earth is done.

And worse still, God is not what he claimed to be. Verse 15, we are even found to be misrepresenting God that he raised Christ whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

We don't have a gospel to proclaim. We have nothing to say. Which of course is why so much preaching does have nothing to say. Because it is so empty of content. If we deny this great fact, we might as well close the doors and do something useful.

Because if Christ is not risen, then everything else we do is futile, it is empty. And there is no hope for the future.

Verse 17, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. Think of the implications of that.

[8 : 28] The kingdom will not come. Loved ones who died believing in Christ, believing they were going to be with him, are not with him. They have died in their sins.

We cannot say what Paul says back in 1 Corinthians 6, but we were washed, we were sanctified, we were forgiven. You see, that is why it is so empty when people speak about the rise of Easter faith in the disciples.

Many years ago when we first went to Durham, the notorious David Jenkins, then Bishop of Durham, used to say these kind of things every Easter. Easter was not, to use his notorious phrase, a conjuring trick with bones.

It was the rise of Easter faith in the hearts of the disciples. Try telling that to the widow who has lost their husband of 50 years. Try telling that to the young man whose wife has died of cancer, leaving him with two small children.

Try telling that to the heart-breaking people of the world, to the bereaved everywhere. That's no gospel. The gospel is that Jesus Christ physically, literally, rose from the dead in that same body which was placed in Joseph's tomb.

[9 : 43] And that is where Paul's mood begins to change. We have another but, verse 20. An awful lot of Paul's theology centred around this word but.

Many years ago in Westminster Chapel, the late Dr. Lloyd-Jones used to preach many a sermon on this very word but. When lesser practitioners tried it, the results were dire, it has to be said.

Nevertheless, but, in fact, Christ has been raised. So we go then from the dreadful prospect to the glorious reality, but, in fact, Christ has been raised.

And because he's been raised, he must reign. Verse 25. Now notice what Paul is saying. Paul is saying here the resurrection is not simply an isolated event.

The resurrection is something that makes sense of the whole story. It's not just tagged on at the end. It's not just we live and then we die and then there's after that at some point there is resurrection.

[10 : 47] The resurrection has already happened. The first fruits, as Paul says, is to say later on, guarantees the whole harvest. That's why Paul says to the Athenians, God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by the man whom he has raised from the dead.

Very odd thing when you think of it. Lazarus was raised from the dead. Lazarus isn't going to judge the world. Nor is Jairus' daughter. Nor the unnamed young man whom Luke tells us in chapter 7 of his gospel, the son of a widow whom Jesus also raised from the dead.

The point is the raising of Jesus from the dead has begun the judgment. An irreversible movement towards the new heaven and the new earth. Which means that the big story will be completed.

Perhaps completed is not the best way to put it. It means that the big story which always seems to end in death will actually go on forever and ever.

Remember at the end of Narnia the end of the last battle Lewis says that they were now experiencing that great story which no one on earth has ever read where every chapter is better than the one before and where it never comes to an end.

[12 : 10] And this is why he uses the Adam-Christ comparison. which he's going to use later on in the chapter. As in Adam verse 22 all die so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

Because we are in Adam we shall die if Christ doesn't come before then. Because we are in Christ we will be raised to life eternal. There is a gravestone in a village graveyard on the east coast of Fife which has these haunting words.

Oh Adam what have you done? That's just exactly the emotions as you stand among these graves. Oh Adam what have you done?

And because of the sin of Adam we have become subject to death. Now it's very important we don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here. Paul is not teaching universalism.

He's not teaching that everyone will be saved whether they give their lives to Christ or not. Paul is speaking here exclusively about the resurrection of Christians in this chapter.

[13 : 18] We know of course from John and Revelation and elsewhere and indeed back in the book of Daniel that all will be raised. the hour is coming says John when all who are in the graves will hear the voice of the Son of God.

Paul is making clear in verse 18 he's talked about those who have fallen asleep in Christ. Not just those who have fallen asleep but those who have fallen asleep in Christ.

And then in verse 23 those who belong to Christ. So we can't take that verse to mean that just since we are all sinners then we are all redeemed. We're all sinners in Adam we're all redeemed in Christ because he is talking here in this chapter about the resurrection of Christians of those who belong to Christ.

The big story will be completed. And also Christ will reign. Verse 24 Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

This is reflecting Psalm 110 the psalm which is most often quoted in the New Testament. The Lord says to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

[14 : 40] But it's also very important to realize and I'll explain why in a moment or two that he's also quoting Psalm 8 or referring to Psalm 8 Psalm that means what is man that you are mindful of him you have given him dominion over the works of your hands you have put all things under his feet.

This is the son of man who gave his life and who will come in the clouds of heaven and who will judge the world. And Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians this will all happen because we believe that Jesus died and rose again.

Now the last enemy he says to be destroyed is death. And this isn't just individual dying. It's not just that there will be no more dying it will be no more possibility of death.

Death will be completely utterly eradicated. See back in Eden there was always the possibility of things going wrong. There was the possibility of sin and death.

In the new heaven and the new earth these things will be gone. John tells us that later in Revelation death will be no more or more dramatically death and hell are thrown into the lake of fire.

[15:59] Death's number is up. It still rains. It still terrorizes. And it's not a little thing. We can't be blabby about it. Death is terrifying. Death is fearsome.

Death destroys our hopes our joys. But yet this is the last enemy that will be destroyed because of the resurrection. The big story will be completed.

Christ will reign and God may be all in all. Interesting phrase this God may be all in all. This once again takes us back to the beginning of the Bible.

God will be all. The God of Genesis 1 who created the heavens and the earth. God will be in all. God of Genesis 2 who comes down into his creation. But it's very important not to misunderstand what Paul is saying in these next verses.

Verse 27 God has put all things in subjection under Jesus' feet. But when it says all things are put in subjection it is plain that he is accepted who put all things in subjection under him.

[17:06] When all things are subjected to him then the son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him that God may be all in all.

Now I think we've got to be very careful how we interpret that. That does not mean that at the end of time the son will then become inferior to the father because that itself would destroy the gospel.

Unless Jesus Christ is very God of very God. There is no gospel. If he's simply someone like God, however glorious, however near God he is, unless he is God himself, he cannot possibly be our saviour.

And his resurrection means very little for us. The point is, this is why I emphasize the fact of the son of man and Adam. Christ as the representative human hands over the kingdom to the father.

Just as God created Adam long ago to be lord of the earth, to rule it, to subdue it, so Christ coming into the world fulfills that. And as representative human, he hands over the kingdom to God the father.

[18:19] But as the part of the Godhead, the reign of father, son, and spirit will continue to all eternity. We're not talking about an inferiority of the son, per se, to the father.

We're talking about the son as representative human, handing over the stewardship to God to whom it belongs. I think it's so important we realize that because if it was anything other than that, Paul's whole argument would fall apart.

The gospel would fall apart. So we have this glorious reality, but Christ has been raised, and all that that implies for the fulfilling of God's purpose.

But then we have a challenging warning. Paul is a realist. Paul knows very well how easy it is to sing glorious hymns, to rejoice in them, and then to leave and basically be unchanged, be unaltered.

Paul is a realist. Paul knows that this truth has consequences for everyday living. and if we really believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we won't behave as if we didn't.

[19:37] Remember, Paul is responding to many of the Corinthians questions. I said last week, obviously a letter passed from the Corinthians to Paul, which we don't have, which we have fragments of in 1 Corinthians, where he responds to the various questions.

And both the hedonist, the pleasure-loving person, and the ascetic who despised the body, were both in their different ways treating the body wrongly. The body, particularly as we'll see next week, is fallen, but it is to be like Christ's glorious body.

What does he mean then by this curious custom in verses 29 and following? Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptised on behalf of the dead?

If the dead are raised not at all, why are people baptised on their behalf? The latest commentary on 1 Corinthians, which needs a wheelbarrow to carry around, written by a former principal of mine, who knows far more about 1 Corinthians than anyone's any right to know, says there are 30 different explanations of this curious custom, baptising for the dead.

But I want to suggest a different way of looking at this. Paul is, most people, when they try to interpret this verse, think that Paul is speaking of something that he approves of, baptising people

by proxy for those who died, which in fact the Mormons do, as one of their customs.

[21 : 07] But I think what Paul is doing here, as he does so often in the letter, is he's taking his opponent's view and showing how foolish it is. Paul is saying even if you have a magical view of baptism, that there needs to be no faith on the part of the person, or the representatives, indeed the person could actually be dead.

Even on that view, you must see that the resurrection of the body is necessary. Why be baptised at all? Why for bodies which are not going to be raised?

You must see, he argues, that in the long term, the overwhelming majority of God's people will have died before Christ returns. That's the point. I mean, all of those who originally received that letter have long gone.

Paul himself has long gone. We don't know when the Lord will return. But by the time he returns, the overwhelming majority of his people will have died. And unless there is bodily resurrection, then this curious, magical custom makes no sense at all.

I think that's what he's saying. It certainly cuts through the 30 explanations which I'm not going to go over with you this evening. he'll be glad to know. But the curious can read it if they're interested.

[22 : 24] So first of all, this curious custom. Paul says, even on your own beliefs, there must be resurrection. Then he turns to his own experience as an apostle. Why? I'm in danger every hour.

This is going to be developed much more in his second letter where he talks about his hardships for the gospel. He's answering those who attack him as an inferior apostle. I protest, brothers, by my pride in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I die every day. Verse 32 probably does not mean, as some commentators rather imaginatively think, that Paul fought wild beasts literally in the arena.

That was extremely unlikely because he was a Roman citizen and Roman citizens were not subjected to such things. In any case, he's unlikely to have survived. The point he is making, surely, is my own experience as an apostle.

Why am I putting up with all this hardship? Why am I not eating and drinking for tomorrow we die? I'm not, he says, because this body is going to be raised.

[23 : 29] We're going to be raised to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He's going to say in his second letter. So what he's arguing is believing or not believing in the resurrection has consequences for the way we behave.

Wrong thinking leads to wrong behavior. Be not deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. And basically he's quoting here, of course, from the Psalms and from Isaiah, quoting from Isaiah 22, verse 13, where the prophet warns of coming judgment.

Judgment is coming on Jerusalem. So you better live in a proper way. The Corinthians are so sure that they're a spiritual elite. But by the denial of the resurrection, they are actually in bad company. Wake up from your drunken stupor as is right and do not go on sinning. See, it's no accident that wrong belief leads to wrong behavior.

Why is it that those who are most militant and most vocal people in advocating non-gospel lifestyles and patterns of sexual behavior?

[24 : 47] Why is it that these are also people who deny the resurrection, deny the divinity of Jesus and so on? These two things go together. because if we stop believing the word of the gospel, we'll very soon stop living in gospel ways.

And he's saying, some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. Ultimately, it's about knowing God. So you see how the argument has developed. Facing the awful reality of a world which has no resurrection in it, a world which is a black hole.

And then turning from that to the glorious reality that the story is going to be completed. That the work of Christ is going to be finished, indeed is going to continue to all eternity because of the resurrection.

Then if you like coming back to earth and saying that doesn't just have consequences for the last day, that has consequences for today. The event of the resurrection is the event by which the gospel stands or falls.

And it is the event by which we are saved or not. So this great chapter is saying to us, don't abandon in any way our firm grasp on our belief in the resurrection.

[26 : 10] But once we do that, there is no gospel left. Let's instead rejoice, as we thought last week. We have a gospel to proclaim. Let's keep on proclaiming it knowing that what as the last

