

Death is Lively

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[0 : 00] We come now to our Bible reading, which is today 1 Corinthians 15, and you'll find this on page 961 in our hardback Bibles, page 961.

We've just sung the words, yet from our hearts, a song of triumph, peeling, a song of triumph, and victors we rest in you through endless days. Well, this chapter gives us the basis as to why we have this song of triumph and this sense of victory given to us by the Lord.

So 1 Corinthians chapter 15. This is a great and very consoling chapter. Now, I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you.

Unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures.

That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, that's Peter, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

[1 : 24] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.

We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God, that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if it is true that the dead are not raised.

[2 : 33] For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 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. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.

[3 : 46] 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. 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. Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?

Why am I in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die every day. What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?

If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on

sinning.

For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. But someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?

[5 : 00] You foolish person, what you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars.

For star differs from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable.

What is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power.

[6 : 06] It is sown a natural body. It is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, The first man, Adam, became a living being.

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust.

The second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust.

And as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brothers. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

[7 : 14] For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable. And we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable. And this mortal body must put on immortality.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Amen. The word of the Lord. Well, good morning. Please do turn again in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

[8 : 26] Again, that's on page 961. 240 days to go. Question answered with a yes, and the date is set.

170 days to go. Venue organized. 150 days to go. The caterer is booked. 100 days to go.

Photographer and cake sorted.

41 days to go. Still to decide on what people are going to wear. When an engagement happens, a future event comes into focus and starts to shape what will happen until then.

Suddenly, a couple begin to look forward to the wedding day. With great anticipation, they begin to live in light of that. Organizing all that needs to be done.

Where will they live? Who's going to get the marriage license? And what about the dresses?

Everything begins to shape and point toward that day. Similarly, the hope of the gospel is one that points forward to a day that is yet to come.

[9 : 31] A day that will come, but until it does, it shapes everything in the here and now. Paul wants us to see in this chapter that that future day for Christians profoundly shapes the here and now.

Just like the engaged couple looking forward to the day to come and all the joy that comes with it, Christians look forward to the day that will be the culmination, the denouement, the crowning of all that they've spent their lives on.

Paul wants to give the church confidence that as surely as Christ has been raised from the dead, we too will be raised. Christ being raised engages us to share one day in that resurrection.

His resurrection and ours are two parts of the same event. And that day makes everything that we will do now worth it.

Paul, throughout this letter, is dealing with a rogue pattern of ministry. He spells it out in chapters 1 to 4. This rogue pattern embraces all the words like honor, power, wisdom.

[10:44] They live like the resurrection has already happened. They don't seem to think that the physical matters at all. They think that there is a hierarchy of Christians, those who are super spiritual and the rest.

The truly spiritual people have wonderful gifts that set them apart as superior. They claim to speak in what they describe as heavenly tongues. They have moved on from the cross of Christ and they can't fathom Paul's continued obsession with it.

They draw the line of who is spiritual through the church. Whereas Paul draws the line of who is truly spiritual around the church.

Christians who follow his pattern, all those who cherish the cross of Christ, weak looking as it is, they are spiritual. For now it looks weak.

It looks like dishonor. It looks like foolishness. In fact, compared to this rogue pattern of ministry, it looks positively deathly. And this rogue pattern of ministry plays out in various issues in the life of this church, which is what we see in chapters 5 to 14.

[11:55] But now Paul returns again in this chapter to these two patterns of ministry. He begins the chapter by reminding them of the gospel that they've heard and believed.

The gospel that verse 10 he works so hard for. And then the only commands in this chapter are verses 33 and 34.

Don't be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up. Don't associate with that wrong pattern of ministry. But instead, verse 58, the other commands.

Be steadfast. Immovable. Always abounding in the work of the Lord. These patterns of ministry are shaped by what they believe about the future and what they believe about resurrection.

There are five lines to this argument. It's a long argument, full of detail. So we'll be moving through it fairly quickly. First, verses 1 to 11.

[12:57] The gospel is about death and resurrection. The gospel itself is about death and resurrection. The heart of the Christian faith is the cross of Christ and that Jesus was raised from death.

The gospel is about death and resurrection. And first and foremost, that is about Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul says, Remember the gospel I preached to you, verse 3.

For I delivered, as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. He was buried and he was raised.

This is Paul's message. This is what he has been making plain to them since the start. This is the gospel that when held to, verse 2, saves.

The idea of resurrection is wonderful. But it doesn't come without death. That is the pattern of the Lord Jesus. And it is the message that Jesus both died and was raised that is worth working for.

[14:05] It is that message that when preached, verse 11, brings people to faith. Jesus has been raised. Paul even gives names of witnesses.

He says, There are 500 people who have seen the risen Jesus, verse 6. Most of them are still around. Paul's saying to the Corinthians, You can ask them, Does resurrection exist?

Look at all these witnesses. Ask them. Does resurrection exist? Of course it does. Jesus has been raised. But also in verse 6, we see that this means it's a pressing issue.

For some who have seen Jesus have died. And it is only when the gospel is truly believed that there is hope, It's pressing because what does happen when we die?

The gospel is about death and resurrection. That is the foundation of it. And Paul is making clear that Jesus surely died. But more importantly here for this argument, He is making clear that Jesus was certainly raised.

[15:13] The apostles knew it. 500 others did. And so did Paul. Which leads to the second part of the argument. Verses 12 to 28. It takes both death and resurrection to reach glory.

It takes both death and resurrection to reach glory. Resurrection cannot be separated from death. Both of them together lead to the glorious last day.

If there is no future resurrection or it has already happened, Then death is it. Paul begins to unpick this false pattern of ministry in Corinth.

They seem to believe the resurrection had possibly already happened. Or at least that there wasn't going to be such a thing. Verse 12. Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, As we've seen it is in verses 1 to 11.

How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If that's the case, then verse 13. Not even Jesus has been raised. Verse 14.

[16:19] Paul's whole ministry is in vain. And so is faith. Verse 15. God is misrepresented. No dead person will be raised. Verse 17. Faith does nothing.

Verse 18. Those who have died have perished. That's it. And verse 19. If this is true, that there's no resurrection, Then we of all people in the world are most to be pitied.

For a life devoted to God would be a wasted life. But, verse 20. Christ has been raised. So the opposite of all of those are true.

Christ is raised. Paul's ministry is not in vain. But it's vital. Faith is vital. The dead who have faith will be raised. Faith deals with sin.

And we of all people are least to be pitied. Even if it doesn't look like it now. You see verse 20. Christ has been raised.

[17:20] And he is the first fruits for all who die. The first fruits of the harvest are the things that come first and guarantee that there will be a harvest. So that means that Jesus being raised guarantees that his people will be raised.

That means that death actually leads to resurrection. Just as Jesus died and was raised, we too will be raised as a result of death.

Jesus being the first fruits means that the resurrection of the dead has begun. Yours and my resurrection has begun. It is one event in two parts.

As surely as Jesus has been raised, all those who follow Paul's gospel will be raised. If we trust Christ, then Adam is no longer our figurehead.

We're no longer just facing death and sin. Our fate is no longer tied to Adam's. Our union switches from being joined to Adam to being joined to Jesus.

[18:28] We've been transferred to Jesus, joined to him, in union with him. And so we share in his experience. Verse 21. For as by a man came death, by a man also comes resurrection of the dead.

In Adam all die. In Christ all shall be made alive. That is what is to come. That is the wedding we look forward to.

For now we are engaged, waiting for the full reality to come. Verse 23. This happens each in its own order. Christ the first fruits, which has already happened.

Then at his coming, those who belong to him. Because verse 25. When he returns, he will have finally conquered all his enemies.

And verse 26. The last enemy is death. Death is no small thing. The certain hope of resurrection doesn't mean that death is a minor thing.

[19:31] But it does mean that it is no longer a final thing. In this age, enemies are being destroyed. The last of them is death.

It's not to be taken lightly. But the pattern is that death leads to resurrection. It takes both of those to reach glory.

Because Jesus has died and been raised. We can be sure that we will be raised too. It is no feeble hope. It is no wishful thinking.

It is no crutch for a weakling. It is the future for those who belong to Jesus. Both death and resurrection. And so third.

Verses 29 to 34. Paul tells us that the real Christian life is death shaped. The real Christian life is death shaped.

[20:30] All throughout this letter, Paul has been happy to refer to his ministry as weak, foolish, lacking in honor. His ministry is shaped completely on the cross of Christ.

It is shaped by the cross of Jesus, not just in its content, but also in its manner. Paul's ministry looks like death to the Corinthians.

The Corinthians hate it. They think he's beneath them. They think he's just plain old unspiritual.

They look at what he does and think it is not just foolish. Not just weak, but like death.

Look at verse 29. It seems rather difficult. Baptism on behalf of the dead. But the words translated on behalf of would maybe be more helpfully read in relation to the dead.

So we might read it like this. What will those do who are baptized in relation to the dead? If the dead are not raised, why are people baptized in relation to them?

[21 : 33] And in the context of the letter, Paul mentions baptism right at the start in chapter 1. And baptism is being used to say whose pattern of ministry we like best.

If you're baptized by a certain person, you're saying, I like their ministry best. Paul tells us that he baptized Stephanas. And at the end of the letter, Stephanas' pattern of ministry is commended.

Because it is like Paul's. So the dead in verse 29 are those who follow Paul's pattern of ministry. You're baptized into his way of doing things.

Because, verse 31, Paul says, I die every day. Verse 30, we are in danger every hour. So verse 29 is the question.

Why would anyone in the world want to be baptized into my death-shaped ministry if the dead are not raised? That is the definition of crazy. That's nuts.

[22 : 41] If the dead aren't raised. Paul's ministry is dying. It is putting himself in battle. Why would he get into fights with beasts at Ephesus? Which is probably metaphorical.

But if the dead are not raised, why on earth would you bother with a truly Christian life? Why would you make yourself the oddball forever in the office for standing up as a Christian? Why would you give up all of your weekends and evenings to throw yourself into serving church?

Why would you bother to give up a few hours a week to come and clean or cook at church? Why on earth would you risk being a social pariah by inviting people to church? Or why would you spend the time before and after services welcoming new people and trying to get to know the odd people that sit beside you like me?

Why would you bother giving money to gospel work so that you can't go on the holiday that you want? Or you can't put in the new kitchen that you want? Why would you bother giving money to gospel work if the dead aren't raised?

Why bother with all these things if this is it? We would all be better, verse 32, to eat, drink, to be merry, for tomorrow we die.

[23 : 49] We would be best to make the most of this life. Embrace all that the world celebrates. Ignore Paul's dishonorable, weak, foolish way.

If the dead aren't raised, then honor is for now. Will, wisdom, power, they're for now. So go chase them. But no. Verse 33 and 34.

Paul's first command. Do not be deceived. Wake up. Don't get swept up by those who will tell you only to live for this life. Don't live like this life is all that's important.

Bad company ruins good morals. Do not go that way. That is a rogue ministry that is false. Paul is saying, not that kind of way which prioritizes just life that's now.

Wake up. It is Paul's pattern of sacrifice now, of deathly looking life now, that will see people raised. And so Paul develops this with his fourth point.

[24 : 59] Verses 35 to 49. God truly brings life out of this deathly looking pattern. God truly brings life out of this deathly looking pattern.

Paul dies every day. His pattern of ministry is death shaped. And his argument so far has been, why would anyone bother with that pattern if it didn't lead anywhere?

And Paul anticipates the obvious question here in verse 35. How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come? Is the physical going to be exchanged for some mere spiritual existence?

Is the death shaped way going to be worth it? Verse 36. Don't be foolish. Of course it is.

Of course it's going to be worth it. What is sown only brings life if it dies. The seed thrown to the ground will only sprout fruit and flourish to life if it dies.

[25 : 58] The seed of wheat must perish for the fruit to come forth. So it is with our bodies. Look at verse 37.

What we sow now is not the wonderful body to come. It is this physical body now. It is this body that brings back pain. It's this body that gains weight. That will creak and at some point will give up.

This body that is actually, verse 37, just like a bear kernel. You see, verse 39. Not all flesh is the same because, verse 40, there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies.

And their glories are very different. There is a continuity in that the body that will be raised is still physical. Just like Jesus' resurrection body in Luke 24.

He meets his disciples and he eats. This body that we have now, though, is, verse 42, perishable. But out of this body, this body that follows Paul's death-shaped life, this body being sown, being poured out, dying every day, this body soon will be raised imperishable.

[27 : 17] Paul's pattern of ministry is weak-looking. It's foolish. It's dishonorable. Those words are used all over the first four chapters of this letter.

And they're compared with the words that the Corinthians use, which are all the opposite. But look, Paul's pattern of ministry, his pattern of life is the one that leads to this wonderful and imperishable resurrection.

Verse 43. This body is sown in dishonor, like Paul, but it is raised in glory. Sown in weakness, like Paul, but raised in power. It is sown this natural body, but it is raised a spiritual body, a better body. Just like Jesus' resurrection body that could pass through walls, there will be a continuity. It is physical, but it will be more physical, even more physical than this one.

And it will be spiritual, because Christ is the life-giving Spirit. And it is this body to come, which is the truly spiritual one.

[28 : 25] This body, this natural body, is headed for death. But with Christ, there will be life. Christ's resurrection is the beginning of the new creation to come.

This natural body that's from the first creation can be poured out in this death-shaped pattern of ministry. This natural body can face dishonor. It can face being weak.

It can face looking foolish. It can face the death-shaped pattern of constantly serving and sacrificing for the benefit of others. This body is the body of creation, but there is a new creation body to come. That's why we can face those things. This one is merely, verse 47, from the dust. But the body to come is a heavenly one.

More real, more physical, more glorious than anything this body can be, no matter how many hours we spend in the gym. The Christian life now can sustain the effort of constantly making ourselves uncomfortable for the benefit of others because this life is the shadow life, the life of dust compared to our future, which is the truest, most real life.

[29 : 45] The Christian's future is a gloriously real one. And that is the only hope of having all that we would want. This life can be poured out into serving the Lord Jesus because in the end, it will be worth it.

It is planting our life as a seed and being guaranteed a harvest that is manifoldly grander than what we plant. So finally, Paul says, verses 50 to 58, keep going.

In the end, God will raise his people. Keep going. In the end, God will raise his people. Keep going. God will certainly raise those who follow Paul and the deathly shaped pattern of life and ministry. All of this means that the work of the Lord now is worth it.

Who cares if it looks deathly? For it is truly the liveliest thing there is in light of the future. Verse 50. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[30 : 57] This life cannot hope to take hold of the promises of the gospel if it remains as it is. Or to put it this way, those who do follow Paul's pattern of life will be raised and so they can enter the kingdom of God with an imperishable body.

Those whose trust rests fully on Christ and the cross and so are prepared to follow the pattern of this life by putting up with suffering for others' benefit can look forward to being raised imperishable. But those lives that do not follow the death-shaped pattern of Paul's ministry, they won't be raised imperishable. And as verse 50 says, it is only an imperishable body that can inherit the imperishable glory of the kingdom of God.

But those who put themselves out, who are content to be uncomfortable, to look silly and weak now, to stick at the work of building others up in the gospel, they, you, will be raised imperishable and will truly inherit all that we can ever want.

If we are a church that keeps on pouring ourselves out for gospel ministry, then we have a glorious future to look forward to. If as a church we all play our part and keep doing that, then Paul tells us that we will be changed.

[32 : 29] Verse 52, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the trumpet will sound and we will be raised imperishable, changed, raised just as surely as Jesus has been.

And this mortal perishable body will be changed to be immortal, imperishable. Death will be defeated forever. It will no longer sting.

It will have lost any victory it could have. And truly, as we are raised, we can say, verse 50, O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting? I am raised, imperishable, immortal. Have at me. Your power is gone forever. Sin and its effects can touch me no more.

All the curses, all that is wrong with the world will be once and for all subjected to God, defeated, undone, including the deathly effects of sin, including all that makes this life now under the sun, this life as a Christian, death-shaped.

[33 : 32] For those who embrace the Christian, death-shaped life, in the future, verse 57, we have victory. In the future, we are victorious.

Christians all have a wedding day to look forward to, and that shapes this life now. Therefore, verse 58, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

As a church, we have gone through various stages of pain together. The pain of separating from a denomination and losing a building. More recently, the different kind of pain that comes with planting the gospel.

the pain of seeing people we love head off to other locations to serve there. The pain of things not being quite as they were. The pain of being less comfortable. But that is embracing the death-shaped pattern of life and ministry that alone leads to resurrection.

As a church, we see high turnover year on year. We welcome new people in, invest in them, and they leave. We welcome more new people in, invest in them, and they leave. And it can become difficult to keep on welcoming the newcomer to invest again.

[34 : 57] It can be hard to, week after week, get ourselves ready to come into church and to decide to make the effort to talk to people we don't know, to make ourselves uncomfortable to keep welcoming and keep caring for people.

But keeping doing that is embracing the death-shaped pattern of the Christian life and ministry that alone leads to this wondrous resurrection. Fatigue can easily set in with regards to our serving, whether it be cleaning floors, whether it be preparing Bible studies but thinking, oh, I wonder if people will actually respond this week.

Fatigue can set in to giving up our Wednesday evenings to pray. It's costly to keep inviting people to church, to keep doing hospitality. It's difficult because these things are all part of what it is to live a death-shaped life.

But when we see the glorious future, when we are reminded of the certain hope that we will be raised, then this deathly pattern of life never looks so lively.

Don't be discouraged that this body now feels deathly. That's okay. It is that death-shaped life which leads to the real life of resurrection.

[36 : 22] These things, all that we do in church to serve others for the gospel, to encourage others in the gospel, to reach out to others with the gospel, are by no means done in vain.

They echo into eternity. These things are following Paul's pattern of ministry and it is only this deathly, weak, foolish-looking shape of ministry that has God's part to rescue and the sure and certain hope of us ourselves being raised.

This resurrection means that we can be strengthened to be steadfast and immovable, to keep going with all that puts us out, all that makes us uncomfortable, all that we sacrifice for others' benefits, even though it looks weak, even though it looks foolish, even though it looks like it doesn't achieve much.

Verse 58, we can keep doing it knowing that in the Lord our labors are not in vain. The resurrection to come means that we can keep working at this death-shaped life.

We can keep serving the Lord, even though it looks foolish, because our labor is not in vain. Amen. Let's pray.

[37 : 50] Father, we are astounded and give you great thanks for all that you have achieved in the Lord Jesus.

We thank you for the sure and certain hope that we have of resurrection as we are joined to him. Warm our hearts by this, that we will throw ourselves into serving you now, knowing that it is truly worth it.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.