

7.1 Why on Earth Would Someone Want a Life That Looks like Death?

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn in our Bibles now, and we're reading together in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Josh has been leading us through this letter in sections recently, and we've come now to chapter 15.

We're going to read the first half or the first section of this together, down to verse 34. We'll come back to it next week, and we're going to be, God willing, finishing off this letter then.

But I'm going to read tonight 1 Corinthians chapter 15, beginning at verse 1. This follows on from chapter 14, where Paul has been rebuking the Corinthians, really, for their chaotic and disordered, selfish behavior in their meetings, urging them to do things in order.

And now he says, I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel that I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being 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.

[1 : 26] That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. And that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles.

And 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?

[2 : 39] But if there's 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're even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise. If it's true that the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you're still in your sins. And those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If in this life only we've 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.

[3 : 47] But each in his own order. Christ, the firstfruits, and then at his coming, those who belong to Christ. And 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.

But when it says all things are put in subjection, it's plain that he is accepted who put all these 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?

[4 : 58] Why am I in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, but 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 wild beasts in Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.

But do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right.

Don't go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. And I say this to your shame. Amen. Amen.

May God bless to us his word. Well, do turn again in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

[5 : 58] Why on earth would someone want to live a life that looks like death?

Well, throughout our time in 1 Corinthians, we've seen that there was a fundamental issue at play in the Corinthian church. They were a divided church, and their division was between the mighty and the weak.

This was a church who looked down upon Paul because he looked much more like the weak Christians in Corinth than he looked like those who thought themselves mighty.

And throughout this letter, we've seen that the Corinthians have tiers and markers of the truly spiritual. They are the mighty Christians. And so they don't have much time or much patience or indeed much love for the weak-looking, for the unimpressive-looking Christians.

And the Corinthian problem manifests by defining spirituality in brazenly worldly terms. So the Corinthians draw the line of who is truly spiritual through the church, dividing the pious Corinthians from the puny Christians.

[7 : 22] Whereas Paul has been at pains throughout the letter to make clear that any such line can't go through the church, but must go around it. Those who truly belong to Jesus, those whom the Spirit has brought to life, those whom the Spirit has enabled us to believe and to confess that Jesus is Lord, they are the truly spiritual whom the Spirit has blessed.

And so the Corinthian pride, their love of being obviously wise and mighty in this world, is like rusted water that spews out of any tap that's turned on in Corinth.

The source of all their issues is the same thing. They think that they're mighty. A might that is to be celebrated and preserved.

And so whatever the arena, whatever the issue, whatever the tap, turn it on, and this same putrid problem spews out. We've seen it appear in how the Corinthians think about sex and marriage. We've seen it in how they relate as a church family and in thinking about what they eat and what they do about idols in the idol temple. And we've seen it appear in what it is to be male and female.

[8 : 38] And through the Lord's Supper. And most recently, through how they gather for corporate worship. Not separate issues, but the same issue played out in all these different arenas.

And at every turn, Paul's prescription, his answer, his corrective has been the same. Embrace not only the word of the cross, but also the way of the cross.

Proclaim the cross, but also pattern the cross. Exposit it, but embody it. The message and the manner matter.

Now, we've studied chapter 15 a couple of years ago. And there's much to be gained from turning to this chapter again and again. But as we come to it this time, it's important that we see why Paul begins his descent in this letter with this chapter.

Why is this chapter the point at which he begins to land the plane? Why did he pen this chapter towards the end of this great letter? I don't think that this is yet another arena where the Corinthians have questions.

[9 : 44] I don't think resurrection is the next issue after the spiritual things and food offered to idols. No, Paul returns in this chapter to the ideas and the words that he used in that key section at the start of the letter in chapters 1 to 4.

Turn back to chapter 4. We've looked here often. And it's very important for the whole letter.

Chapter 4, verse 8. Paul says, Already you have all you want.

Already you've become rich. Without us, you've become kings. Of course, that's a scathing, deuce of sarcasm from Paul. The problem is that the Corinthians think that they are these things.

Which is in contrast to the apostles who, verse 9, are the last of all. Notice again in chapter 4, verse 8, that Paul says the word already twice.

Already you have all you want. Already you've become rich. The Corinthians' clocks are broken. They're living now as if they've received all that's promised.

[11:01] They are resurrection now people. Paul, on the other hand, is a cross now and resurrection to come person. And look at the difference that makes. Chapter 4, verse 10.

Notice these words that have come up throughout the letter. We are fools, but you are wise. We are weak, but you are strong.

You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. And on it goes. And it is to this fundamental issue that Paul returns in our chapter. These same words appear prominently in chapter 15.

We'll see them particularly next week. And so whilst this chapter is known as the resurrection chapter, I think it's perhaps better to place our focus here on death, which is actually mentioned even more than resurrection throughout chapter 15.

And the key question of this chapter is, what does death do? What does death do? What if we pick up our cross and carry it sacrificially until death?

[12:09] Will it have spoiled our fun? Will death end our opportunities? Will death mean we've missed out on things? Do we need to fit into this life all that we possibly can before death slams the door shut?

This chapter is not ethereal and out there. It isn't about metaphysics. I think it's a chapter that's much more plain than that. Paul in this chapter exposes both the folly of living only for this world, with all of its acclaim, and he also gives us the fuel that we need to genuinely embrace the way of the cross.

If the prescription throughout this letter is to embrace the cross's pattern in our lives, then chapter 15 may explain why we must, and it casts before us a hope that enables us to keep on carrying our cross.

That's where Paul finishes after all this chapter, verse 58. In light of all that he's about to say, he says, Abound in the work of the Lord.

Abound in carrying your cross for the building up of your precious brothers and sisters. And so in this chapter, Paul is exposing that the Corinthians look at death in the wrong way.

[13:32] And in looking at death in the wrong way, they live this life as if it were all that there is. They want the crown without the cross. Is that really an alien idea to us?

Is that out there and ethereal? Not wanting to miss out on the best of this life? Not wanting to put in jeopardy that which is precious to us here and now? Or becoming embittered when our responsibilities limit us and take away opportunities?

And so Paul's conclusion to this great letter is to dwell on death. And then, yes, afterward, resurrection. But the order is significant.

The cross brings the crown. The cross is the path to a certain unglorious crown. This life is a life to be crucified for.

Resurrection follows it. The Corinthians were living for the moment. Was it spiritualized? Yes. Pious in every which way. But when stripped back, Corinthian spirituality is no more than worldliness.

[14:45] And so despite their strong claims to be resurrection people, to already be kings, to already be rich, the reality is they've lost the wonderful hope of the future. They reveal by their predilection for the acclaim of this world that they believe that there's nothing better to come.

There's no crown to come. Have it all now. Or never have it. They live as if death will ultimately end. Anything good.

So we best enjoy life now. And you better not, jolly well, put yourself in danger. Or as Paul says in verse 32, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Well, of course, we know that Paul's having none of that. And the first thing that he shows us in this chapter in verses 1 to 11 is the power of the resurrection in this age. The power of the resurrection in this age.

Paul models for us that the resurrection produces hard work in this life. That's the power of the resurrection here and now for the believer. Hard work for the kingdom of God.

[15:57] And as much as the Corinthians don't like it, this is best exemplified in Paul himself. Now, the chapter hinges around two questions and two commands.

We can see them at the first question, verse 12. And then we can see in verses 33 and 34 a related command. And then next week we'll look at the second question, verse 35.

And a related command in verse 58. That's the structure of the chapter. But first we have in verses 1 to 11 a kind of introduction, which is returned to in verse 58.

So look at verse 10. Paul tells us that he works harder than any. And then his big conclusion around the certainty and glory of resurrection is verse 58.

Be always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. Well, a few things to notice in these verses. Paul tells us that the gospel is all about death and resurrection.

[17:04] They cannot be separated or elevated one over the other. Verse 1, the gospel that Paul preached. Verse 2, the gospel that will save them if they hold fast to it.

The gospel has of first importance, verse 3, that Christ died for sin. And verse 4, he was buried. And that he was raised on the third day.

Notice that Paul says twice that all this happens in accordance with the scriptures. Like any good communication, God has told his people what he's going to do.

Then he did it. And now he's also telling them what it is that he's done. The scriptures spoke of Christ's death and resurrection. So when Jesus came and died, that was no surprise.

And as his body was placed in the tomb, well, that shouldn't have been a cliffhanger, should it?

When Jesus conquered the grave, when he was raised, that was no plot twist.

[18:08] Always planned, already revealed. But the emphasis here from Paul is not really on either the death or the resurrection. Notice in these verses, Paul says that he died.

And so linked to that, he was buried. But then he was raised. And linked to that, verse 5, he appeared. Then again, verse 6, he appeared.

Verse 7, he appeared. Verse 8, he appeared. And he appeared to lots of different people. It wasn't just the apostles.

But we can also see 500 witnesses, most of whom are still alive, we're told. So some have died. So Paul is clear. Jesus' resurrection is historical fact. There were lots of witnesses.

He could have debunked it if it wasn't true. There's no hiding the claims. God said what he would do. He did it. And he even ensured that there were plenty of people to witness it.

[19:11] But Paul doesn't say this here simply to give us an historical account to use with skeptics. Although, of course, this is history. Rather, look at the direction that the four appearances go in.

Verse 5, he appeared first to Cephas and the Twelve. That's the original band of the apostles. Then verse 6, he appeared to 500 others.

And you'd think that this must include some of the apostles as well. And then verse 7, he appeared to James and the rest of the apostles, the later ones. He appeared to all of them.

But the final appearance here is to Paul. Of all the apostles, he was the last. He arrived late to the party. Verse 8, he was the one who was untimely born.

That phrase is said to speak of something like a miscarriage. Paul's journey to apostleship wasn't quite like the others. But notice his way of describing it is in terms of death.

[20:16] Paul is the apostle associated with death. Paul was last. Verse 9, he was least. And the Corinthians at this point might be nodding in agreement.

Yes, indeed, Paul is the least. Wretched, weak-looking apostle. An embarrassment to the church. Scorned by the world. But look at the conclusion of this. Paul's happy to say that he's undeserving of grace.

He's happy to admit that he was the vilest of sinners. He holds his hands up and sees that he was more than just a little scallywag. Verse 9, he was the persecutor of the church.

But through the resurrected Jesus appearing to him, he was also the one who became the proclaimer of the cross and the personification of the cross.

So throw mud at Paul. He'll take it. Have a go at his past. He'll accept it. But what he won't accept is anyone denigrating the fruit of Christ's resurrection at work in his life.

[21:22] By the grace of God, Paul is what he is. And God's power at work in Paul was no waste. The resurrected Jesus worked with real power in Paul. And it fostered a very fruitful ministry.

And so notice that these verses in verses 1 to 11 are all about Paul and his ministry. Verse 1, I remind you. I preach to you.

Verse 2, I preach to you. Verse 3, I delivered to you what I received. Verse 8, last of all, he appeared to me. Verse 9, I am the least.

I was the persecutor. Verse 10, but by the grace of God, I am what I am. Because he showed his grace towards me. And so despite Paul being the least of the apostles, Paul was transformed by the gospel, by the death and resurrection of Christ, to the point that verse 10, he worked harder than the rest.

Because it was grace at work in him. Because Jesus appearing to him shed light on all that the scriptures have said. Paul could see that in Jesus everything was fulfilled.

[22 : 36] So what does it look like to be gripped by the awesome power of resurrection? Does it look like being wise? Being strong? Being honored?

Well, not, says Paul. It looks like hard work. It looks like weakness to this world. It looks like folly to this world.

It looks like being on the outside. It looks like living a life that looks like death. It looks like Paul. Like picking up your cross.

So the introduction, Paul says, resurrection power in this age produces hard work. And he goes on to say, secondly, that there is only pity for those who live for this age.

Verses 12 to 28. There's only pity for those who live for this age. The resurrection transforms how we ought to look at this life.

[23 : 36] Verse 12. Notice that Paul takes for granted Jesus' resurrection. The Corinthians aren't denying that. If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there's no resurrection of the dead?

You see the logical problem there is in accepting that Christ is raised and in treating this life as if it's most important? How can you claim there'll be no future after death if you do that?

How can you ignore the resurrection that awaits us and be consumed by this world if you believe the truth about Jesus? Paul spells out the implications that there are for Christians if there is no resurrection for us.

He says, if it's true that death is the end, if it's true that this life is all that counts, well, verse 13, then not even Jesus has been raised.

If this life is all that there is, then verse 14, all that the apostles have preached is pointless. It means that all that is believed about Jesus is of no consequence.

[24 : 47] Verse 15, well, the apostles were liars. It means verse 17, we're still in our sins. And it means verse 18, that all who have died have perished.

It's a pretty grim picture, isn't it? But notice that Paul is not reasoning here with skeptics or atheists. The full force of what Paul is saying is meant for those who profess to be Christians.

Christians, the Corinthians thought themselves not just Christians, but super Christians. But their indulgence in the things that this world cherishes is telling. Their want to be recognized by the world around, to not fall foul of public opinion, to be obviously special by the world's standards, these things, well, then we are of all people most to be pitied.

If our goals as Christians are focused on what the world around thinks of us, if our goals are focused on life here and now, on life under the sun, instead of all that will last into eternity, then Paul says that's a path that produces only pity.

A church that is so caught up in winning a claim here and now, a church that longs for acceptance by the world, is a church that's lost its way.

[26 : 12] And we need to come to terms with this, because it's going to be getting harder and harder for us as Christians in this country to be respectable, to be well looked upon members of the middle and upper classes.

It's just going to get harder and harder, and even impossible. The truth is that when secular organizations fall over themselves to speak highly of a church, when there's good press and a newspaper for a church, when a church is heralded with awards and acclaim for doing what the world loves, then that is a surefire sign that they've lost the future and lost their way.

Paul's language here is stark. Being the toast of this world, cherishing this world above all, is pitiable. Most pitiable.

Look at verse 20. But, in fact, Christ has been raised.

Death, dying. That's not the credits at the end of a great movie with no promise of a sequel. Christ has been raised. And notice his being raised is the first fruits for our resurrection.

[27 : 29] First fruits, of course, is an agricultural term. The first fruits are the very first part of a harvest. And, in fact, the first fruits would signal the kind of harvest that was coming.

But what's important is that the first fruits were very much a part of the harvest. And Paul's point here is that not only has Christ been raised, but Christ's resurrection is the beginning of an event that will end with ours.

Our resurrection is guaranteed. Ours and Christ's are two episodes of the same event. Christ's resurrection engages us to be raised with him.

The two events cannot be separated. Christ's victory over death. His resurrection has set in motion our resurrection. That is why it is pitiable to pour our lives out for this passing world.

Because there's something so much better to come. Death is certain. We cannot avoid that. Verses 21 and 22 make that clear.

[28 : 46] Through Adam, the curse of death entered the world. And because of our shared ancestry in Adam, all people will die. It's unavoidable.

And for a world without hope, that is deeply uncomfortable. But avoiding the topic won't make it go away. The truth is that no government will outsmart death for its people.

It's impossible. Sin entered the world and brought death. Now, death is an affront. It's a curse. It's not natural and normal.

It's tragic and horrible. Philip Jensen, well known to our church, wrote an excellent reflection after a very tragic death close to him. And he opened it with these words.

When we cease to rage against death, we've given up on life. Death is the horrible reality of our life that screams, there's something wrong with the world.

[29 : 48] We try to hide that scream, silence it with distractions, pretend it's not happening with anti-aging creams, and rationalize its existence with meaningless platitudes. We question the sanity of those who want to die, but there is no greater madness than thinking that we can avoid death.

The sin inherited in Adam, the sin that brought death, required a solution that could only come through death.

And so just as we have inherited from Adam, those who belong to Jesus have inherited from Christ. In Adam, all die.

In Christ, all are made alive. But notice the timing of this, as Paul puts it. Paul is careful to talk about the order.

He's careful to say that we don't have resurrection now. This life isn't where the action is. How disappointing it would be if it was. No, verse 23.

[30 : 51] Resurrection happens each in its own order. Christ as the first fruit. That has happened. And then, at his coming, those who belong to him.

It is then, at his coming, verse 24, that the end comes. It is then that death's dark shadow will no longer hang over this life. Not yet. Not now.

But then. For now, life is cross-shaped. It's death-like. It's to be sacrificed. The truth is that for Christians, for those who belong to Jesus, it is only in the future that we will see and know true and lasting glory.

It is only at Jesus' return, it is only when we're finally raised with Jesus, that everything will be grand and glorious. Until then, this life is a struggle.

I don't know about you, but I find that a little bit of a relief. We won't see, in this age, life in all of its fullness. This life isn't for ticking off all of our dream-holy spots and all the fun activities we can think of, visiting the Taj Mahal, learning to fly, completing an Iron Man.

[32 : 09] Perhaps I'm just a bit of a grump, but I don't think so. I reckon the experience of most people, if not all listening, is that the Christian life is evidently inglorious in this age.

I suspect that most, if not all of us, feel that being a Christian is a jolly struggle. I'm sure many of us have thought, why does it have to be like this?

Wouldn't it be much better for Christians to be obviously powerful in this age? Maybe the Corinthians are right. Why do we have to wait? Well, it's no mistake.

That is how it is in this age. A lovely holiday, a subscription that gives you regular treats and perks, or wining and dining regularly.

These things might help us with some of the struggles and frustrations of this life. They may well get us through a bleak Scottish winter. But the truth is that life as a Christian in this world is going to be tinged with all kinds of things that are meager to the world.

[33 : 12] And a dream holiday won't change that. When will glory come? When will things be truly wonderful? Only when death is destroyed once and for all.

Only when the curse of the garden is undone fully, finally, and forever. But, verse 26, death is the last enemy to be destroyed.

Why is that the case? Well, the age we live in is a time of God being patient. For us, to take hold of full life means his patience would have ceased.

It would mean that there's no more mercy. Death will finally be destroyed when humanity is raised, but then no more people will take hold of Christ. We live in the age when resurrection power produces hard work, and that hard work is the work of ministry.

It's the hard work of seeing friends and neighbors, loved ones, colleagues, one to Christ to join us in looking forward to that day. But when that day comes, there will be no more mercy.

[34 : 23] That will be the time when the last enemy is crushed. For now, God is patient. But also, we live at the minute waiting because God's plan and purpose isn't primarily to exalt us.

Verse 27 is quoting from Samiëtte. And Paul is saying that God is in the business of establishing Jesus' rule, not ours.

God is at work to magnify his own glory and grace so that the world will see that, verse 28, God is all in all. And friends, there's nothing better in this world than for us to see and know just how truly wonderful God is.

Well, Paul says, there is only pity for those who live for this age. True glory will come, but it isn't here yet.

And so finally this evening, he says, verses 29 to 34, pick up your cross and take hold of true life.

Pick up your cross and take hold of true life. Missing out on this world, prioritizing the body of Christ above all else is no waste.

[35 : 42] Look at verse 29. At first, this might seem somewhat baffling to us. What on earth were these Corinthians up to?

Baptizing dead people or baptizing people for the benefit or in relation to dead people. Sounds a bit strange to us. And there are all kinds of wild speculations in the commentaries about what was going on to produce this verse.

And if taken on its own, then perhaps we could speculate that verse 29 is about some bizarre practice. But I don't think that's particularly helpful.

If we look at what follows immediately, we'll see that Paul goes on to talk about himself as he's had to do often in this letter. So verse 30, Paul says, he and his companions are in danger every hour.

In fact, verse 31, Paul dies every day. So who are the dead in verse 29? I take it that Paul is speaking in some way about himself, the untimely born one, the one associated with death and death-like things, the one who dies every day.

[36 : 55] And now remember back in chapter one, we've already seen Paul talk about baptism. And in chapter one, it seems as if baptism is being used in Corinth as a kind of badge of honor.

Whose pattern of ministry do we like best? I want them to baptize me. I was baptized by Kephas.

Yes, well, I was baptized by John Calvin. And so I think Paul's question in verse 29 is really saying, why would anyone in the world want to be baptized into my death-shaped ministry if the dead are not raised?

That's the definition of nuts. It's crazy. Paul's ministry is dying. It's putting himself in battle, verse 32, with wild beasts.

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 at school by flying the flag for Jesus?

Why would you give all your weekends and evenings to throw yourself into serving your church family? Why bother working hard to teach the Bible in a group group when it feels like waiting through treacle week after week, when your group's riddled with relational awkwardness and every week sidetracked by some random contribution?

[38 : 17] Why on earth would you risk being a social pariah by inviting people along to church or the life course or by telling people that the one thing in your week that won't be moved no matter what, come rain, hail, or storm, is gathering with the people of God?

Why on earth would you lead a ministry in India that means you'll get beat up and opposed as one of our mission partners does? Or in Pakistan, why would you lead a team reaching out to Muslims under great danger?

Why on earth would we stand against the shibboleth of our day? Why would we resist the twisting of human sexuality into more and more harm? Why would we put our heads above the parapet to

defend the unborn when we'll be shouted down and ostracized and lose our jobs and receive bile on social media?

Why on earth would we do any of these things if the dead are not raised? If the dead are not raised, then we have to squeeze every bit of life out of our time here and now.

Waste no minute, lose no favor, put yourself in no danger. Don't waste time doing things that look fruitless, slow, and hard. Well, if Paul hasn't already shocked us with his language, perhaps he will now.

[39 : 44] He says, do not be deceived and verse 34, wake up from your drunken stupor. Snap out of it.

Give yourself a good shake and realize that there is nothing more foolish than to spend this life investing in this world alone. Because a day is set, a day is coming, when this world will be no more.

Paul wants to spell out loudly, he wants to shout and scream that to place all of our hopes in this life is to be so inebriated that we're blind. I had the misfortune of having to do a late night visit into the city center on Friday, Halloween night.

And on the way in, there was a man who was drunk out of his mind, on the road, blocking cars, shouting at other people as if it was their fault and creating a real nuisance, stumbling about, falling all over the place and falling into cars.

It's a grim and sad picture, isn't it? Well, Paul says, to prize this world, to be the toast of your non-Christian friends for being more like them than they are, to never cause a ruction, to make things awkward for yourself as a Christian, that's to be in the state of that drunkard in the street.

[41 : 08] To the church overcome by worldliness, Paul says, wake up. He says, if we're chasing everything now, we're chasing the wrong things.

How can some of you say or live like there's no resurrection from the dead? The first half of this chapter is a very strong, do not choose this.

Don't choose that. And so the second half that we'll look at next week is telling us what to choose instead. But until the full-blown encouragement of what's to come, let me just leave us with this.

Every instance of us gladly following Paul in hard work, in the inglorious Christian life, every sacrifice, every taste of opposition that we face as a Christian, or that we face as a church, that's another step towards the most glorious and guaranteed future.

And that each of those are further instances of us picking up our own cross and following Paul of taking on his death-shaped life, following him as he followed Jesus, following him on the path that is the path to a very certain crown.

[42 : 28] if in Christ we have hope for the life to come, and we have seen that we do, if in Christ we have hope for the life to come, then we are of all people least to be pitied.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, how we need your help.

How we need your help not to be pulled in by the world and all of its longings and pleasures. Help us be spent for you and assure us of our glorious future for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.