

Look to the Future

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Preacher: Andy Gemmill

[0 : 0 0] for our services as normal. We're going to turn now in our Bibles. Andy Gemmill is continuing his series in 1 Corinthians. You'll find the reading in chapter 15, which you'll find in page 961 of the Pew Bible. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, page 961. Andy's been working his way through this awesome chapter, chapter 15, and we're going to pick the reading up in verse 12.

1 Corinthians 15, page 961, chapter 15, picking it up at verse 12, and we will read through to verse 34. Let us hear then the word of God. 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's true that the dead are not raised. 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're still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ, they've 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 also comes the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so 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. 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 in behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized in their behalf? Why am I in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my prayer in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die every day. What do I gain if, if humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus, if the dead are not raised? Let us drink, 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.

[3 : 3 7] Amen. And may God add his blessing to this, the reading of his words. Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

I wonder if you've ever set off on a car journey thinking that you knew where you were going, only to find out after 10 minutes or so that the route you thought you knew so well has somehow eluded you.

Suddenly, nothing looks familiar. There are no recognizable buildings or junctions. The right turn that you thought was just about to come up has not come up. And you think, why on earth did I not bring the sat-nav? Why did I not bring the map? And why on earth does my husband not stop and ask the way? 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is a bit like, I think, a bit like that kind of car journey. You kind of think you know where it's going, but after a little while you find yourself in unfamiliar landscape. And this week we're looking at verses 12 to 34. And I think this is the point in the chapter where for most readers, the landscape suddenly becomes somewhat less certain.

So I want to spend just a minute or two at the start of this sermon just drawing in the roadmap a bit. There is one very important feature that needs to be put in its proper place when we look at this chapter. When you start off on a journey through 1 Corinthians 15, it looks like a chapter all about the resurrection. And that's particularly strong in verse 12. Now, if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

We start with a kind of introduction in verses 1 to 11, where we're getting into the car and the engine's being turned on and we're getting ready to go. And then we start off on the journey. And it seems to be a journey about the resurrection of the dead. But in fact, the chapter is not really, I think, about that. The resurrection is talked about a lot in this chapter, but that is not what the chapter is about. The chapter is really about the work of the Lord. What does the work of the Lord look like in this world? You see, that's where the chapter begins and that's where the chapter ends. Look at verse 1. Paul reminds them of the gospel work he did. Now, I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand. And in verse 11, he comes back to that work, verses 10 and 11. By the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of the other apostles, though it wasn't I, but the grace of

[6 : 37] God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preached and so you believed. He's looking back to the work he did when he came to Corinth proclaiming the gospel. That's how the chapter starts.

And the chapter ends on a similar note. Look right over to the end, 1558. In 1558, Paul encourages the Corinthians to do the same work that he did when he came to them.

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. This is a chapter which starts and ends with the work of the work of the Lord done by Paul when he went to them and which he wants the Corinthians to keep doing themselves. What is the big issue then in this chapter? Well, it's this. The big issue, I think, is that some of the Corinthians are no longer convinced that the way Paul did things when he came to them and the way he does things generally is the right way to do things.

They think there's a more impressive way of doing the work of the Lord than Paul's way. More powerful, more spectacular looking, more spiritual looking, wiser looking.

And that's what this chapter is about. And the basic shape of the chapter is not complicated. The first half of the chapter says, Corinthians, stop doing the things you're doing at the moment and thinking the way you're thinking at the moment. And the second half of the chapter says, start doing it the right way. And let me show you that that's the shape of the chapter.

[8 : 25] The chapter is punctuated by two sets of commands. Look at verse 33. Here's the first set. This is the stop doing it that way set. Verse 33, don't be deceived.

Bad company ruins good morals. Wake up from your drunken stupor as is right. Don't go on sinning. Some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. You must have been on the beer. Wake up. Snap out of it. Stop sinning.

Think rightly and do rightly. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, he says. And the second command is more positive. Verse 58, we've already looked at it. Therefore, my brothers, do the right thing. Stop doing the wrong thing. Do the right thing.

That's the basic shape of this chapter. Now, this morning, we are in the stop doing that leg of the journey. That's where we are in verses 12 to 34.

And I think there are probably three major steps towards that. Stop doing that. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves conclusion.

[9 : 33] And I'm going to state these three steps as though they are addressed to the Corinthians. Step one, verses 12 to 19. Corinthians, your current way of thinking and doing is pitiable.

Verse 12. If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there's no resurrection of the dead?

And what he goes on to do in this section is to say, look, if there's no resurrection of the dead, lots of bad things follow in consequence from that, if that's really true.

What was going on in Corinth that's being spoken about in verse 12? Well, we cannot know precisely what the shape of their denial of the resurrection was.

Is somebody in Corinth actually saying, look, there's no hope for those dead Christians? That's possible, though I think verse 18 is rather against that. Look at verse 18.

[10 : 34] Then those also who've fallen asleep in Christ have perished. He uses that as a, look, you don't want to think that because otherwise those who've died are lost. The Corinthians don't really think, I think, that those who've died are lost.

Now, I suspect that their resurrection denial is a bit more subtle than that. I suspect that in verse 12, what Paul is doing is making the Corinthian mindset sound more shocking than it looks on the ground.

Some of you lot are actually saying that the dead aren't raised. Hang on, nobody's saying that. Surely not. Oh, yes, you are. You are so focused on the here and now.

You are so full of all that you have in the here and now. So full of how much better your way of doing things looks than my way of doing things.

The present has become so big for some of you. That that is tantamount to denying that the resurrection is reality. I think that's what's going on.

[11 : 42] And that is precisely what he leads up to in verse 19. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, what a pitiable position that is to be in.

You lot are so this life focused. It's pitiable. What Paul is doing here, I think, is looking at the life of the Corinthian church and saying, from what I can see and hear, you people do not look like people who are looking forward to resurrection at all.

Let me show you an example of that. Look back to chapter 4 and verse 8. We turn to this verse quite often, but it's a very helpful summary of where the Corinthians think they are.

Chapter 4, verse 8. Here's what the Corinthians think they have now in contrast with the Apostle Paul. Already you have all you want.

Already you've become rich. Without us, you've become kings. If only that were true, he says. The Corinthians think that now.

[12 : 57] They're satisfied. Now they are reigning. Now they're in a superior position. Now they're actually doing better than their apostle. Without us, you've become kings. In chapter 15, back to chapter 15, Paul is saying, I think, that way of thinking.

We're satisfied now. We're reigning now. We're better than the apostle now. That way of thinking is a denial of the resurrection. You show by that way of thinking that no matter what you say, you are not looking forward to resurrection at all.

If you've got it all now, if you're rich and reigning, what is there to look forward to? And what Paul is saying in chapter 15 is, if you continue to think that way, face the consequences of it.

And that's what he does up to verse 19. Face the consequences. If you think you're rich and reigning, well, verse 13, you can forget the resurrection of Jesus then.

If it's all about what you can have before death, then the resurrection of Jesus just drops off as an irrelevant thing, drops out of focus.

[14 : 09] Second consequence is verse 14. If you think that way and live that way, then both our preaching and your faith are a complete waste of time. Because our preaching was all about the future.

And that's what you believed. And if it's all really about now, then you can forget all that stuff that we said. In fact, verse 15, we must have been lying.

And of course, verse 17, if Christ's resurrection is an irrelevance because everything is about the here and now, then verse 17, actually your sins haven't been forgiven.

And if that's so, verse 18, then those Christians who've died have only hell to look forward to. Corinthians, if you will persist in believing that you have now found a more spiritual, powerful pattern of ministry than mine, face the consequences of thinking that way.

You can forget the resurrection of Jesus. My ministry among you must have been a false ministry. Sin cannot have been dealt with and we only have judgment and hell to look forward to.

[15 : 19] Verse 19, you appear to think that life in Christ is all about this age. That is a wretched position to be in. That's the first part of the argument.

Corinthians, your current way of thinking is pitiable. It looks grand, how much we have now, how powerful we are now, how wise we are now, but all of that shows that you're not really looking forward to anything.

In bigging up what you have now, you are denying all those things that are most important, which are to do with the future. Now, folks, this is exceptionally important.

I don't think I've ever come across anybody who called themselves a Christian, who did not believe in their head that resurrection was coming. In fact, I meet loads of people who are not Christians, who are basically hopeful about some sort of positive future beyond death.

Most human beings think kind of positively about future beyond death. Now, most Christians don't deny the resurrection in their head, but there are lots of Christians who say they're looking forward to resurrection, but by what they think and say and do demonstrate that actually all their focus is on the here and now.

[16 : 47] And there are lots of forms of Christian ministry, the work of the Lord, that nod at the truth of the resurrection. Of course, we wouldn't deny that, but all of the focus is on what it looks like now, how powerful our work can look now, how spiritual our work can look now, how fruitful our work can look now.

What Paul is saying here is that that kind of this worldly focus is ultimately to be pitied because it denies everything that is most important.

The gospel, you see, is about the future and unseen. The future of the Lord Jesus, the future of humanity, the escape from the judgment to come, that's what the gospel's about.

Corinthians, your current way of thinking, which is all about now, it's a pitiable way of thinking. That's the first step in the argument. Here's the second step in the argument. Excuse me while I adjust my technology.

It's slightly getting away from me here. Here's the second step in the argument. Corinthians, it is only in the future that everything will look grand and glorious.

[17 : 59] only in the future. Verse 20. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

You see, the way God has actually done things is not like the Corinthian mindset at all. Christ has been raised, and he is the first fruits.

That's an agricultural term. The first fruits is the first bit of the crop that you see growing. The first seeds, the first things that have grown that you want to get.

The first bit, the first bit of a big crop. Let me illustrate. We went away for a week in late July. We went to England, and it was really sunny all week.

Before we went on holiday, our broad bean plants had grown a couple of smallish pods with some smallish beans. When we were away in England, where I think I've already mentioned it was so extraordinarily hot and sunny all week, we worried about the garden back home.

[19 : 13] Will it have shriveled? Will all the vegetables have died? We need not have worried. Before we went, there were a few small fruits.

A week later, on our return, monster broad bean plants, I mean, almost unrecognizable, with beans popping out everywhere, huge. You see, the combination of a long day length and nearly incessant rain does wonders for a bean crop.

That's the first fruits idea, a little beginning with a big end. To start with just a little. In the end, a monster result.

That's what Paul says the resurrection of Jesus is like, verse 20. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the first fruits of those who've fallen asleep.

The first product of a massive harvest that will come from the dead. His one resurrection is, if you like, the first bean of a massive bean harvest.

[20 : 21] But the final result of his resurrection is hugely greater than the final result of our bean crop in our garden. In fact, verse 21, his resurrection is as dramatic in its impact as Adam's sin was.

One man brought death to the whole of humanity. One man has reversed all of that. Verse 22, For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

Every human being who is united to Adam dies. That, of course, is all of us without exception. We cannot escape our ancestry. Everyone who is united to Christ will be made alive.

Now notice, verse 22, notice the very important future tense there. Will in the future be made alive? The big results of Jesus' resurrection are not present tense results.

They are future tense results. They come in the future. Now, the Corinthians believe in the resurrection of Jesus. But they also think that now is the time of spiritual riches.

[21 : 49] And now is the time of spiritual authority. And now is the time of spiritual power and wisdom and knowledge and speech and all those Corinthian words. But this passage says that the bean harvest that Jesus' resurrection brings is not a present bean harvest but a future one.

Paul is very particular about this. Look at verse 23. He's very particular about the timing. When are the results seen? Verse 22, As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive but each in his own order.

Christ the firstfruits, that's already happened. Then, at his coming, those who belong to him. Question, when will we properly be made alive?

Answer, when Jesus comes. It is only in the future that the fruits of Jesus' resurrection will be seen.

It's only in the future that it will be seen to be as good as it really is. Now, let me say, that timing issue is a tremendous relief. It really is. Think about your own life for a moment.

[23 : 04] Christian, don't you feel anxious sometimes that the death and resurrection of Jesus hasn't quite had enough impact in your life yet? It's not that nothing has changed, but you wonder if enough has changed for you to be able to call yourself a real Christian.

Don't you? Let me encourage you, now is not where the beans are. When will we be made alive? When will the results of what Jesus has done be seen in our lives?

When will we have life in all its fullness? Not in this age. When he comes, says Paul. Think about the ministry you do, whether it's just the day-to-day ministry of trying to get the gospel to your work colleagues or school friends, or whether it's the work you do in leading your Bible study group or home group or Sunday school class.

Don't you often worry if your meager efforts will come to anything in the end? Doesn't the work that we do so much of the time look so weak in terms of its impact?

Don't you often wonder if there isn't something more powerful looking that could happen to transform your personal ministry into something more fruitful looking? Brothers and sisters, now is not where the beans are.

[24 : 25] Where is the harvest? When he comes. It doesn't look splendid now. Why must it be like that? Well, let me read verses 24 to 28 because I think in this rather complicated section, Paul describes why it must be that way.

Verse 24. Then comes the end when the Lord Jesus delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and every power.

for he must reign until he's 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's 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. Now, I don't know about you, but you may have felt confident in setting out on the journey in this chapter, but this is where we get totally lost on some nameless estate somewhere and we don't know what's going on.

I don't think this is terribly easy to follow. What is this bit doing? I think it's here for two reasons. It's answering the question, why is it like this? Why do we need to wait for the results?

[25 : 46] Why does the impact of Jesus' resurrection not do more now? Why doesn't it feel more powerful now? Why do we have to wait for life in all its fullness?

It's a very important question that, isn't it? If I had won a huge, momentous, game-changing, world-transforming victory, I would want everyone to know right now that I'd won that kind of victory.

Why does God not do that? He doesn't do that, does he? It's not obvious right now that being a Christian is the only thing worth being.

I mean, look around the room this morning, just look at your next-door neighbor. Is it really obvious that of all the groups of people in the world, this is the group, this is the kind of group it's really worth belonging to? Well, if that's so, it's pretty sad, isn't it?

Of course it's not obvious that this is where the victory is. Why does God not make it obvious? Why does he not show right now so that no one can be in any doubt that being a Christian is the only thing worth being?

[26 : 55] Why does he not show that now? Well, I think we're given two reasons here. First, God is not interested merely in winning. He is interested in rescuing.

God's concern is not merely domination, but reclamation. Verse 24, to be sure, he will dominate in the end. There will be a day when every anti-God rule will have been destroyed.

But, verse 25, until then, he is in the business of reclaiming for himself people who were once enemies.

It is very important for the Corinthians to know this. You see, they want to look superior now they think themselves superior now. Paul says, no, the day when you really look all that God will have made you, the day you will really look splendid is the day when death is destroyed.

Frankly, friends, until death is destroyed, we will not look much different from anyone else. But when that day comes, verse 24, every enemy will have been destroyed.

[28 : 12] there will be no more opportunity come that day for those who are presently enemies to subject themselves to God's rule.

When God's victory is finally rolled out so that everyone can see it, that will not be a day anymore of mercy, but of destruction. God is in the reclamation business, not merely the domination business.

He wants people to submit to the rule of his king before that day of destruction of enemies comes. That's one reason. The second reason I think that God doesn't make his people look really splendid now is that God isn't primarily in the business of human achievement.

Fundamentally, God isn't in the business of making human beings look special. I mean, he will make human beings look special, but that's not the business he's in. He's in the business of re-establishing his kingship over a rebel creation.

And not even the Lord Jesus Christ was pursuing a program of human advancement. Look at verse 28. You see, Jesus, the Lord, the risen one, was not himself pursuing greatness for himself.

[29 : 36] Rather, winning enemies to him in order that in the end, verse 28, God might be all in all. Jesus is Lord, but he is under the authority of God the Father.

In his death and resurrection, he was not promoting his own advancements. He was not bigging himself up. He was humbly following the will of God in order that God, in the end, should be seen to be everything for every human being.

The Corinthians, in contrast, think that they are special. Better than other believers elsewhere. Better than their apostle.

And for all their talk of how spiritual they are, what Paul is saying here is, it is not God you are concerned about, but yourselves. You are right out of line with the way the Lord Jesus did things.

In digging yourselves up now, you are not doing what he did. So, let me summarize. Corinthians, your current way of thinking is pitiable. That's the first step.

[30 : 46] Second step, Corinthians, only in the future will everything look glorious. And there are very good reasons for that. God is in the rescuing business. The third thing, Corinthians, Corinthians, do you really think that me and all the other Christians are totally stupid?

That I think is what verse 29 to 32 says. Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised, why are people baptized on their behalf?

Why are we 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. Corinthians, do you really think that we are stupid?

If the dead aren't raised, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of them? Now, that phrase, verse 29, on behalf of the dead, you wouldn't believe how much ink has been spilled over that phrase.

[31 : 59] Vast tracts of commentaries on this book, PhDs on this book, what does being baptized on behalf of the dead? There are a stack of theories about that.

Is this some strange Corinthian practice that only they knew of? Well, possibly, but note two things. First, there is a significant range of possibilities for that phrase translated, on behalf of the dead.

It could perfectly legitimately be translated with reference to, or with respect to. Here, it looks like, it's translated in a way that looks like people are being baptized in place of other people, but that's not really a necessary translation.

Someone has suggested that it could mean being baptized as a result of the death of another believer that you love. Their death spurs you to take on the hope that they took on.

But I wonder if there's something more obvious than that. Who are the dead Paul is talking about at this point in the argument? Well, it's very interesting that he moves straight on, verse 29 and 30, to verse 31.

[33 : 14] Paul talks about himself, verse 31, dying every day. he talks about himself, verse 32, being fighting wild beasts in the arena in Ephesus.

Now, he's not talking about literally fighting wild beasts. He's talking about the persecution he received in Ephesus for his gospel work. It's Paul, the one with the death-shaped ministry, whose company the Corinthians don't want to keep at the moment.

they think themselves superior to him. And being baptized with reference to the dead might just mean being baptized into Paul's cross-shaped gospel and its heading-for-death lifestyle.

Why do people get baptized into our message if the dead aren't raised? Why would they do that? Are they all stupid?

And what about me, says Paul? Do you really think I'm some kind of fathead? Why do you think I endure all this persecution stuff if the dead aren't raised?

[34 : 33] Where is the possible gain in that lifestyle if the dead aren't raised? Do you think I'm an idiot? If the dead are not raised, I ought to be down the pub, in the restaurant, on the beach, in the gym, not in the arena.

I ought to be at a golf club, having my nails done, watching Australia getting slaughtered in the test match. Something nice I ought to be doing. If the dead aren't raised, why would I do all this difficult stuff if there wasn't gain to be had at the end of it?

What kind of idiot do you think that I am? If there isn't a future to look forward to, you must think I'm mad. I think that's the way the argument goes.

Corinthians, your way of thinking is pitiable. In bigging up how good you think the spiritual life is now, you're actually forgetting all that is most important.

Corinthians, only in the future will everything look glorious. There are very good reasons for that. And Corinthians, do you really think that I'm an idiot? Why would I be doing this if there were no resurrection of the dead?

[35 : 42] So, verse 33, do not be deceived. At the moment, you're keeping the wrong company.

You're listening to the wrong voices. Wake up. Stop doing that. It's as if you've been out on the beer last night.

I had a heavy night in the pub of the way you're thinking now. Why are you doing that? Stop sinning. It's sinful, that way of thinking, that it's all about now.

Some have no knowledge of God. You've totally lost the plot of what God is doing in the world if you think that way. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, he says. You know better than that.

You see, they thought what they were doing was spiritual. But Paul says it's the spiritual equivalent of a heavy night in the pub.

[36 : 49] It's that spiritual. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Well, folks, our time is gone. What are we going to take away from this for ourselves? Well, let me say there are two things to take away.

One, there is enormous reassurance in this passage. Enormous reassurance. the genuine pattern of life and ministry for the Christian and the Christian worker does not look good now.

It's tremendously important to realize that and tremendously reassuring. For Paul, what did it look like? Well, verse 30, danger every hour.

Verse 31, dying every day to self-interest. That's how good it looked now. Now, of course, not all of us are involved in precisely the same shape of gospel ministry that he was.

Not all of us are itinerant apostles to the Gentile world. But, Paul encourages the Corinthians at the end of the chapter to embrace the same sort of work that he is doing.

[37 : 59] And I take it therefore, for every real believer, the future is where the beans are, and the present is not all that straightforward. And let me say, if you find that the present has not been all that straightforward, and your spiritual life is not all you'd like it to be, and your evangelistic efforts are not all you'd like them to be, and your Sunday school class is not all you'd like it to be, you're in good company, namely, the apostles company.

For he found it hard too. It does not have to look victorious now to look, to be the right thing. In fact, if it looks splendid now, the chances are it's taken its eye off the future.

If you're finding it hard, take courage and keep doing the right thing. There is no easy route to a great harvest in the end.

There is no easy route. There wasn't for the Lord Jesus. There was not for his apostle. There was not for the Corinthians that they thought there was and there isn't for us. There is an easy route to that harvest. There is great reassurance here, but there is also a great challenge.

You see, if now is not where the beans are, are our lives recognizably lives that are lived for a different age?

[39 : 26] Or are they indistinguishable from every other life lived for what can be got in the here and now? That's the challenge. It's both reassuring and challenging. It doesn't have to be good look now, but if we're chasing everything being brilliant now, the chances are we're chasing all the wrong things.

things. Now, for Paul, the results are in the future. As in Adam, all die.

That's true of all of us. But in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order. Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to him.

him. Let's pray together. Just a moment to respond in the quiet to what God has said to us, and then we'll pray together.

God, we'll pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Gracious God, we thank you that you have indeed raised your son from the dead.

[41 : 08] a great assurance to us that his work has not been in vain, and a great promise of a wonderful harvest to come, of the resurrection of many from death.

We pray that you would help us to thoroughly believe the things we've read and thought about this morning. help us to believe that here and now is not where the results of Jesus' reign and victory will ultimately be seen.

Help us to look and to work for a great future, a much greater future. Please help us in the present time to embrace the difficulties of following the Lord Jesus.

Help us not to look for shortcuts to that glorious harvest. Help us not to be discouraged when we find things difficult and complicated and not straightforward in this age.

We thank you that that was true, that is true not just for us but for every believer everywhere, and it was true for the Apostle Paul, and it was true for the Lord Jesus Christ who did not experience comfort and ease this side of the grave.

[42 : 30] We are not greater than our Master. Help us to follow in his footsteps, we pray. We ask it in his name. Amen.