

Eastwood Baptist (2/12/'18)

## **“CHRIST HAS INDEED BEEN RAISED”**

(1 Corinthians 15)

### **Introduction**

1 Corinthians 15 is a great passage about Christian belief. But what it says about belief in Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of Christians is no mere abstract doctrine. It is personally and eternally relevant to every Christian.

### **“He was raised on the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)**

**Read 15:1-2.** Paul chooses at this significant moment in the letter to remind his readers of the gospel. And he makes it clear why he has done so – it is because the gospel is so important. Their salvation depends on their holding on firmly to the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ. And so does ours! Paul now goes on to state briefly the fundamentals of the gospel – **read 15:3-4.** He is not trying to be original or creative – he reminds the Corinthians that he has passed on to them the same gospel which he himself had received. This gospel is about Jesus Christ's dying for our sins and about his being raised from the dead on the third day, both of these things being in line with the Old Testament Scriptures. But Paul chooses to expand on the second of these great facts, the fact of Jesus' resurrection – **read 15:5-8.** He is emphasising this part of the gospel because it is essential to the gospel, and because the Corinthians need to be reminded of it. And he does this in a way which makes it clear that the resurrection of Jesus is historical truth, based on the eyewitness testimony of people who are well known to the Corinthians, and on one occasion of a great crowd of people at one time. By saying that most of these more than five hundred people are still alive, Paul implies that they are available to those who want to check up on their testimony. Paul puts himself at the end of the list of witnesses as a person known to everyone, or almost everyone, at Corinth. But he declares that he is not of special importance. Rather it is the gospel which is important, and the resurrection of Jesus is an essential part of that gospel. Paul is emphasising the resurrection of Jesus because it is essential to the gospel, but also because some of the Corinthians are losing sight of a key implication of his resurrection, the implication that all Christians can look forward to their own resurrection.

### **Are the dead raised? (1 Corinthians 15:12-34)**

In v.12 Paul gets to the main issue – **15:12.** It seems likely that few, if any, of them raised doubts about Jesus' resurrection, otherwise Paul would have given more space to this fundamental truth. What some of them doubted was the eventual resurrection of all Christians, and probably they didn't see this as a fundamental Christian belief. Beginning with what some of them are saying – “that there is no resurrection of the dead” – Paul proceeds in vv.13-19 to show them that they are quite wrong if they think that denying the Christian hope of resurrection is not of great importance. He points out first that the blanket statement which some of them are making, that “nobody rises from the dead”, rules out Christ's having risen from the dead. This in turn undermines the preaching of the gospel,

and thus their faith in Christ. If Christ has not risen from the dead, then he is not victorious over sin and death, and those who have put their faith in him have not had their sins forgiven. Moreover, Christians have no basis for a hope of eternal life, and are basing their lives on a lie! At the end of this line of reasoning, Paul turns the argument on its head – **read 15:20**. He forcefully asserts that Christ has in fact risen from the dead, relying on what he has already established back in vv.4-8. If Christ has risen, then we can have confidence in the whole gospel. And if he has risen, then he is victorious over sin and death, and Christians can be confident that their sins are forgiven and they will have eternal life. It is this last point which Paul emphasises by describing the risen Christ as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”. Jesus doesn’t stand alone in his victory over death. He stands at the head of a long line of all those who have put their faith in him. Paul proceeds to spell out the consequences of Christ’s victory over death in vv.21-28. I won’t take you through these verses, but I think that I should say something about **v.29 – read**. It seems clear that some of the Corinthians are being baptised on behalf of the dead, or possibly for the sake of the dead. This enables Paul to point out that this action reveals a felt belief in life after death, however much their words deny the possibility of life after death. Paul’s point does not depend on an understanding of what exactly they were doing. This is a good thing, since we don’t know what this was. For us, the relevance is that people today, even if they say that no one rises from the dead, may well have a sneaking feeling that there might be something beyond death. There is a saying, springing from the experience of war, especially the First World War, that “there are no atheists in the trenches”. Similarly, there are few total sceptics at the funerals of people they have loved. And we should never give up hope that people might come to believe in Jesus and his resurrection.

**How are the dead raised?** (1 Corinthians 15:35-49) At v.35 Paul turns his attention to a different kind of objection to the idea of resurrection. **Read 15:35**. It is clear that Paul is not here responding to a genuine question about the nature of resurrection, but to an objection in the form of a question, since he immediately call the questioners “foolish” in v.36. This objection probably springs from negative ideas about the body. This question about resurrection is similar in spirit to the question put to Jesus by the Sadducees, who challenged him about marriage in the resurrection life, only to be told that they had failed to understand the nature of resurrection life. Paul does something similar in vv.36-49, but in terms which probably address the particular character of the Corinthians’ questioning. Paul begins by giving examples of different kinds of bodies. He points out that the physical nature of a crop, such as wheat, differs from that of the seeds from which it comes. He then argues that various creatures have different kinds of bodies, instancing human beings, animals, birds and fish. Finally he draws their attention to the fact that heavenly bodies are very different from earthly bodies, and even heavenly bodies (sun, moon and stars) differ significantly from one another. He then proceeds to apply this to resurrection – **read 15:42-44**. Paul teaches that those who are resurrected are not disembodied, but have spiritual bodies, bodies different in some ways from natural bodies, and superior to them. This section of the chapter reaches its climax in **vv.48-49 – read**. Right now we have imperfect and perishable bodies, like Adam. But when we are raised from the dead we will have perfect and imperishable bodies, like the risen Christ. We cannot fully understand this now,

but we can trust God for it, the same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And we can rejoice that, if we have put our faith in Jesus Christ, we will be like him.

**God gives us the victory** (1 Corinthians 15:50-58) In the final part of the chapter Paul moves on from argumentation and explanation to rejoicing and thanksgiving. **Read 15:50-54.** The doctrine of resurrection of the dead is not essentially a problem to be solved. It is a belief founded on the faithfulness of God and his having raised Jesus Christ from the dead. We may not fully understand it now, but one day all of us who believe in the risen Jesus Christ will experience it. Right now we can look forward to it and rejoice in the great hope which God has given to us. But Paul hasn't quite finished. In the last few verses of the chapter he reflects briefly on two important consequences here and now of our hope of eternal life. First, Jesus Christ's victory over sin and death is our victory – **read 15:55-57.** If we have put our faith in Jesus, his victory is our victory. Therefore, as Paul told the Thessalonians, we should not grieve like those who have no hope, either for ourselves or for other Christians whom we love. Paul ends with the second consequence of believing in resurrection. **Read 15:58.** If death is the end, then our greatest achievements are undermined by the fact that we won't survive to enjoy their effects. But if we belong to Christ, then death is not the end, and one day we will stand before our risen Lord, and hear him say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."