

Death in Adam, Life in Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 October 2023

Preacher: Jonathan Middleton

[0 : 00] Good morning. Our Bible reading is 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and you can find that on page 1156, 1156 in the Church Bibles. 1 Corinthians 15, and we're reading from verse 20 until verse 34. Let's read God's Word.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn, Christ the firstfruits, then when he comes, those who belong to him, then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for he has put everything under his feet. Now, when it says that everything has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. Now, if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?

If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptizing for them? And for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day? Yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus, our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained if the dead are not raised? Do not be misled? Bad company corrupts good character. Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning, for there are some who are ignorant of God. I say this to your shame. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Well, thanks Alan, and let me add my welcome to Martin's. It'd be a really great help to me and to yourselves if you keep the Bible open at chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. Well, let's join together in prayer again and ask God for his help. Let's pray.

[3 : 25] Father, we pray that you would awaken our souls. We pray that you'd awaken our souls to hear your word for us this morning. We pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, that you would impress on us the finiteness of our days in this life, and the urgency of our need for our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

For we ask in his name. Amen. Well, Nigel Lawson, the former politician, former chancellor of the Exchequer, father of the TV chef and food writer, Nigel Lawson, Nigel Lawson was a staunch atheist. Told he was dying in April this year, he dined on figs and prosciutto and mozzarella, washed down with several large glasses of red wine and a final Armagnac before bed. And five minutes later, he was gone. And why on earth not? If you're going to go, you might as well go out in style. Isn't that what Paul's saying in verse 32? If we're not raised from the dead, if we hope in this life only, if we only live once, then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead? Do you believe that death is not the end? That you will be raised in Christ to eternal resurrection life, the hope of glory? Do you believe in that? Do you hope for that? The extent to which we do will shape us now. That's what Paul's saying in our passage. The resurrection not only gives us hope for the future, but this should shape our attitudes and our thoughts and our lives and our behavior in the here and now. We've got two headings this morning. They're in the notice sheets if you want to follow along. Firstly, those who have fallen asleep will arise. Those who have fallen asleep will arise. Secondly, so wake up and come back to your senses. So the first heading then, those who have fallen asleep will arise. This is Paul giving us his long-term perspective in verses 20 to 28. This chapter, chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, is often preached at Easter. It's often known as the resurrection chapter, but for a chapter that's about resurrection, there's an awful lot about death in it, isn't there? Maybe you noticed that when Alan was reading it for us.

So in verse 20, Paul talks about how Christ has been raised from the dead and about those who have fallen asleep, that is dead believers. Verse 21, death came through a man. Verse 22, all die. Verse 26, death is the last enemy to be destroyed. Verse 29, if the dead are not raised at all. Verse 31, Paul faces death every day. Do a word count of a whole chapter. You'll find that there's more than 30 references to death or dying and just over 20 to resurrection. So if it's a chapter about resurrection, which it surely is, then it's a chapter about resurrection through death. Death was the problem in Corinth, 20-odd years or so after Jesus' resurrection. Death continues to be the problem for us 2,000-plus years on. Christians were dying and staying dead. The issue for the church in Corinth is not whether Jesus rose from the grave. They're on board with that. And if you were here last week, we looked at the historical eyewitness evidence for that.

The Christians know that Jesus is risen from the dead. What they're not so sure about, some of them at least, is whether dead Christians will rise. And so to help us, Paul gives us a kind of sweeping overview of the whole of human history. Now if you're on a long-haul flight, there's a screen usually for passengers showing the flight path, a screen displaying the origin, the progress, and the destination. That's what Paul's doing here, giving us an in-flight map. And verses 20 to 28 displays really where we've come from, where we're going, and who's in control. And in short, it's basically a brief history of death. So in verse 21, Paul says that death came through a man. Humanity has a death-shaped problem. We're born into a world of death on our way, each of us to death. And Paul's taking us right back to the beginning.

Death enters human history through Adam. And as the first human, he was the head of the human race. He's our representative head. Now I probably need to tread carefully here. It's a sensitive subject. But we can get the idea from our national sports teams. The team represents the nation. If a team does well, if it wins, we can say we win. If it loses, then we lose. That's the idea. That's the way to make sense of the in-language in verse 22. We're either in Adam or we're in Christ. Everybody comes into this world in Adam. In Adam, all of us die. We're all part of Adam's helpless race. But it's only those of us who are in Christ, that is trusting in Christ alone for our salvation, that there is life. In Adam, all die. And in the garden of Eden, God had clearly warned Adam that he'd surely die if he ate, took an eight of that particular tree, of the fruit of that tree. And because we're in Adam, what happened in the garden happened to us as well.

[10:33] So when Adam acted, he acted on our behalf. When he took an eight, we, because we are in him, took an eight. And so because of his sin and our own, we're afflicted by this deadly disease called death.

So that's where we've come from, each and every one of us. And it's not pretty reading. But where are we headed? Well, because what we need is a new head, a better representative of being in Adam brings death.

We need someone who brings life, someone to stand in our place, someone who can act in our place, whose deeds can be reckoned to us, a new Adam. And so if it's to be life out of death and beyond the grave, then it must be, verse 21, that through a man also comes the resurrection of the dead.

So if Adam is the captain of your flight, you're headed for death. But if Christ is the pilot of your life, then your destination is resurrection life through death. How can we be so sure?

Well, here's the crux of it. If we're in Christ, if he's our living head, the fact that Jesus rose from the grave guarantees, guarantees that we will too. That's what Paul says in verse 20.

[12:10] Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Okay, firstfruits. It's an important word. It's a harvest word, an agricultural word, an Old Testament word. And we're in 21st century urban contemporary Glasgow. We don't get firstfruits. The idea is basically this. My mother-in-law likes to grow vegetables. They're in a rural setting in Latvia. She keeps chickens and grows all sorts of vegetables and herbs and salads.

And she gets tremendously excited when her crops begin to bear fruit. She brings them in and she shows them to us. The first potato, the first tomato, the first cucumber or courgette. And the reason she's so excited is that this first one is literally the firstfruits. It's the guarantee that there's going to be loads more on the way. And so if I say to my mother-in-law, look, I think this one's basically just a bit of a fluke and it's a one-off sort of thing, then she'll think I'm mad.

She'll think I'm on the wind-up. I'm taking the mickey. She'll think I'm daft. And the promise of the first one is the promise that there's more to come. So that's two things actually, two important things to take a note of when it comes to fastfruits. The fastfruit is the guarantee that it's inevitable.

Inevitably, there'll be a big harvest of similar things. Inevitable.

Secondly, there's a delay. There's a gap between the first one and the rest of the harvest. And so that's what Paul's getting at really in verse 23. There's a sequence, a process. Christ has been raised, past tense. Christ has been raised and in Christ all will be made alive in the future.

And so verse 23, each in turn, Christ the firstfruits, then when he returns, those who belong to him. So let's put all that together. Christ is the first part of a harvest of human beings who are just like him, who God will raise from the dead. Not a part of a second harvest, but as part of the same harvest.

[14:40] Now that's not how we usually tend to think about it as Christians, is it? We think God raised Jesus and stopped. And then we hope and trust that he'll come back and there'll be another resurrection when God will raise us. But that's not the picture we're given here. The picture here is that there's one harvest with a funny kind of delay in the middle. So Jesus, the firstfruits, was raised, but everyone else who belongs to him, all of us who are in Christ, will be raised too, are part of the same harvest. He is the guarantee, the guarantee that we will be raised in him. So if you prove the resurrection of Jesus and you've proved the resurrection of Christians, it's literally impossible that this will not happen. That's what he's saying. So that's where we're headed if we put our trust in Christ, if we are in Christ. The rest of the section, verses 24 to 28, is really showing us who's in control. This is all part of God's big plan for creation, all part of restoring humanity's purpose in creation. And so here we have some slides that come on. In the beginning, God made Adam the king of creation. He was given authority and dominion over the animals. He was told to work and keep the garden and to protect it. But then a creature, the serpent, invades the garden and tempts man to sin.

And death comes because Adam didn't want to be God's number two. He wanted to be God. Since then, sin, of course, has been running rampage, wrecking havoc in the world. It's not the way it's supposed to be. That's what these verses are about. It's about reversing the chaos. So just look at verse 24.

Then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he's destroyed all dominion, 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. It's about reversing the chaos. It's about God putting the new Adam on the front, making Christ the king of creation and putting all his enemies under his feet. And in the end, all earthly and all spiritual forces, all governments, all institutions, all tyranny, all dominion, authority, and power that's opposed to Christ will be destroyed, even death itself. And so the risen King Jesus will finally accomplish what the fallen King Adam failed to do.

[17:43] Christ will reign over the whole of creation, bringing all things into submission under him and the gods. So imagine again that you're a passenger on the airplane. You've just taken off. The pilot tells you that he's handing over the controls, handing over his seat to his seven-year-old child.

And imagine how relieved you'd be at the end of the worst flight of your life after all the bumps and turbulence and all the rest of it that the pilot announces that he's taken control back of a plane.

When God begins to reign, the world will finally be ruled as it should be. And in the final act, verse 28, Christ will subject himself to God so that God may be all in all.

And with that, God's purpose in creation to bring glory to himself will be marvelously and completely fulfilled. And so having set out this glorious vista from such a lofty vantage, Paul really brings us back down to earth with a bump.

And this next section is really where the rubber hits the road. So wake up and come back to your senses, he says. And these are the short-term implications in verses 29 to 34.

[19:11] One day, the world as we know it will end. Jesus will return. Every dead Christian will be made alive again in him, given new bodies after we've died when Jesus comes back.

What difference does that make? What difference does that make in our lives to you and me? How we think about the resurrection?

What difference does that make? How we think about the resurrection of Jesus and believers, those united to him, should shape how we think and act.

And it should shape our attitudes for how our lives are right now. That's why we spent so much time thinking about it in the last section. These verses are a wake-up call.

Quite literally, that's what it says in verse 34. Literally, it says, Wake up from your drunken stupor. Sober up and come back to your senses as you ought and stop sinning.

[20 : 27] Do you see? There's a connection between how we think and our actions. There's a connection between how we think about the resurrection and our daily lives.

Getting our thoughts right, our thinking about the resurrection, informs our Christian living in all sorts of practical ways. So for one thing, our Christian life and practice just doesn't make sense if there's no resurrection.

That's what Paul's saying in these verses 29 to 32 with these two why questions. First why question.

If the dead are not raised, then why are people baptized for the dead? Second why question. If the dead are not raised, then why on earth would we endanger ourselves?

Now we simply don't know what Paul's on about here in verse 29. I wish we did. What is this business about baptizing for the dead?

[21 : 29] I suppose it might have raised a few eyebrows when it was read out. And a lot of ink has been spilt over these verses and not a few PhDs too probably. There's at least 40 different possible interpretations of this verse.

And we're not going to get into them, but basically they fall into two different camps. Either it's a strange Corinthian practice that only they knew of, possibly something to do with the way they're dealing with dead believers who die before they have a chance to be baptized.

That's a possibility. The other possibility is that he's talking metaphorically. And that by the dead, Paul means bodies of living Christians.

Bodies, that is, which are subject to death. And so in this reading, they're baptized on behalf of their dying bodies in the belief that their bodies will be made alive again in Christ.

So this is interesting when we consider who the dead is in the following verses, 31 to 32. Paul writes, I face death every day.

[22 : 41] I get slaughtered for the gospel in the arena of Ephesus every day. So who's the dead person here? Well, it's Paul himself describing his own death-shaped ministry.

And so being baptized with reference to the dead might just mean being baptized into our cross-shaped gospel and its heading for death kind of lifestyle.

But regardless of what Paul's referring to, whatever it is, we can still see how this verse supports his overall argument, that none of it makes sense at all if the resurrection didn't happen without the resurrection.

But if we truly believe that we will be raised from the dead, then that surely frees us to live our lives now for Christ. It frees us to live boldly for the gospel.

Certainly it should embolden us. In the 19th century, John Payton heard the call of God to leave his successful ministry in Glasgow and go on a perilous mission to the New Hebrides in the South Seas.

[23 : 57] There was a Mr. Dixon who got wind of us. And when Mr. Dixon heard this plan, he exploded. The cannibals! The cannibals! The cannibals will get you. You'll be eaten by cannibals.

And indeed, there were cannibals in that tribe in the New Hebrides. But to this, John Payton responded, Mr. Dixon, you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave.

There to be eaten by worms. I confess to you that if I can but live and die, serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me if I'm eaten by worms or by cannibals.

And in the great day, my resurrection body will be as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Lord Jesus. The fact that we will be raised again in Christ, that we will enjoy an eternity with him in the new creation should liberate us to live our lives boldly for the gospel in this life.

And so before any of the teachings or claims of Christianity, before any of the other teachings or claims of Christianity are considered, this is the primary question.

[25 : 23] Was Jesus raised from the grave? You have to decide that for yourself. Is Jesus raised from the dead? Are you persuaded of that?

Because if the answer is yes, then this leads us to hope in the certainty of our own resurrection and frees us to live boldly for Christ. If no, then life is ultimately meaningless.

And the Christian life certainly is meaningless and to be pitied. And the only coherent worldview without the resurrection would be, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

This is exactly the problem of the Corinthian church. The way they're conducting their lives is a telltale signal to Paul that they're not thinking rightly about the resurrection, some of them.

And it's this connection between right thinking and right living that Paul hits them with in verse 33. Do not be misled. Do not be deceived.

[26 : 29] Bad company corrupts good morals. Wake up. Sober up. Stop sinning. And then the ultimate insult to the church that prided itself above all on its spiritual knowledge.

For there are some of you ignorant of God. I say this to your shame. This is a church that has harbored all sorts of sinfulness.

A church that has entertained incest among its number. But Paul says this to their shame. Some of you are ignorant of God. And it's this ignorance of God that issues in their moral laxity.

What you believe informs how you live. And he's worried that some of them are headed for destruction, headed for hell.

And it's because of their confusion, their wrong thinking, their wrong understanding about the resurrection that they have such messed up morals. Remember, this is a church that's had to write about all sorts of things, idolatry, greed, drinking to excess, sexual immorality.

[27 : 48] What they believe about the future ruins their ability to live for Jesus when it costs them something with their bodies.

What you believe informs how you live. I suppose some of us, one way or another, have been struggling over the past days and weeks, struggling with something or other.

You're finding the Christian life hard, asking yourself, is it really worth it? Is it really worth it when you see what the world has on offer?

And for some of you right now, it might just seem easier to give in and do whatever your friends are doing in school or at uni or in your work environments.

Sometimes it just seems easier to give in and do what everyone else is doing. Or maybe over the past few days and weeks, you've found yourself entertaining all sorts of sinful thoughts and possibilities, letting the seeds of sinful desires start to take root in our lives.

[29 : 01] Perhaps there's one stubborn sin in particular that you've been wrestling with, trying to fight with over these past few months that you just can't seem to shake free from.

I wonder, when we find ourselves pursuing these sinful pleasures that the world offers, is it worth asking yourself, do you really believe in the resurrection?

Functionally, do you believe in that? Are you trusting in that? Are you remembering that one day your body will be raised? Because the extent to which we do, the extent to which we do believe in the resurrection life, will mean that we'll be able to forgo the worldly pleasures that tempt us in this life.

Adam took and ate of the forbidden fruit. The world presents us with feasts of figs and prosciutto and mozzarella and to drink as much as we can.

For tomorrow we die. But if our hope is in the resurrection life of glory, it means that whenever we die, there will be such a feast when Christ returns that all else will pale into insignificance.

[30 : 27] So do you believe in the resurrection of the dead? Do you believe that death is not the end? That you will be raised in Christ to eternal resurrection life, the hope of glory?

Do you hope for that? Let us return to our senses. The clock is ticking. Let us live out the remainder of our days for Christ in light of the future resurrection to come.

Let's pray before we join together and respond in song. Let's bow our heads and pray. Father, we praise you for the very real hope we have in Christ, our living head, and the guarantee of eternal resurrection life in him.

Would you impress this certain hope in our minds that we may live out the remainder of our days for Christ, forgoing the earthly delights of this wanton world and living boldly for the gospel.

We ask it in the precious name of our risen king. Amen.