

## **RESURRECTION CONSEQUENCES**

**1 Corinthians 15**

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The Easter message we celebrate today is a very powerful one, in fact it's astounding. And the message is that Christ, by his resurrection, has 'overcome death'. Listen to that again. Jesus has 'overcome death'. What a statement that is in a world where we are constantly faced with the tragedy and permanence of death. How many will die on our roads this year? How many die from illness? How many are dying in wars and disasters and terrorism? We will all die at some stage. 'Christ has risen' we say today. He has risen indeed! But it is not easy to believe. We have not seen anyone rise from the dead. And there have been times in our grief we wished we did see a loved come alive again. The fact that we have never seen someone rise from the dead and being a technological world where science is the authority, the resurrection of Jesus is often seen as a myth. On the ABC program 'Compass' over the years there have been theologians who have set out to demythologise this confession of the church. The various theories of these theologians all come down to the same thing: Jesus was a good man whose 'spirit lives on'. That is, his ideas, the 'spirit' of his thinking has been developed and carried on by the church. Many will argue there is no such thing as resurrection from the dead. We have not experienced it. So, Jesus did not rise either.

Now the various scholars may think they have something new with this view. But as the writer to Ecclesiastes says "*...there is nothing new under the sun.*" The resurrection has always been hard to accept. Think of the women on that first Easter morning. Mark 16:8 "*Trembling and bewildered the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*" They couldn't get their head around what had happened. In their world, like ours, people didn't rise from the dead. In the church at Corinth in Paul's time there were those who believed there was "*...no resurrection from the dead*", as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15. Their view was that believers would not bodily rise from the dead. They were influenced by the dualism in Greek philosophy which saw a split between the body and the soul, between the spiritual and material worlds. The soul or spirit was seen as good and the body or material stuff was seen as dispensable. There was even contempt for the body. The Corinthians picked up the Greek idea where the 'soul' was regarded as the true person, a 'beautiful bird trapped in an ugly cage' as they used to say. The body was thus something from which

a person wanted to escape. So, who would want to rise from the dead with another body? To them the belief in the bodily resurrection was unnecessary. The harsh reality of life and death made it unbelievable anyway. Now these Corinthians had not gone so far as to deny that Jesus had risen from the dead. After all it was a regular part of the preaching of the gospel to them. But they tended to 'spiritualise' the message. They argued for a purely 'spiritual' resurrection. That is, their 'soul' was revived or born again. They claimed that by this spiritual rebirth they had already arrived. They had already reached perfection. There was no need or even a desire for a bodily resurrection.

In 1 Corinthians 15 the Apostle Paul tackles this thinking head on. He argues that if you begin with the idea that there is "*...no resurrection from the dead*" as your starting point, then you must also deny Christ's resurrection. Note what he says (1 Corinthians 15:12-14) "*But if it has been preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*" Paul hangs all his theology on one nail. And rightly so. For if we deny the resurrection, we rip the heart out of the gospel. Let me demonstrate that from what Paul writes here: Verse 15 "*If Christ has not been raised...we are then false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead*". If Jesus did not rise, Paul is a liar, a con artist. Or was he delusional or hallucinating on drugs like the disciples, as some have suggested? But it wasn't just the disciples who saw Jesus alive. Paul makes reference (verse 6) to five hundred other people who saw Jesus, "*most of whom are still living*". In other words, you can go and ask them. Verse 17 "*...if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile and you are still in your sins*". In other words, you are not forgiven. We know that Jesus died on the cross to bear our guilt and bring forgiveness. But if he did not rise from the dead it would mean the punishment for sin was not paid in full. If there is no forgiveness, we can't be right with God and have no hope. Verse 18 If Christ has not been raised "*then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost*." What he means is those who have died have gone to hell. There is no hope. They are 'lost', doomed for all eternity. Verse 19 If Christ has not been raised then "*...we are to be pitied more than all others*." In other words, we are a bunch of fools, pitied because we are so stupid to believe this nonsense and to have based our whole way of life and all our hope on a delusion.

The central thrust of the gospel is that of a living Lord bringing his salvation and making a people his own. We do not just reach back into history for Jesus' ideas. He is with us now and brings us his grace. His being alive is vitally important. His being alive is God's guarantee that sin has been paid for. By Jesus being alive, by his Spirit and

power we too are already experiencing a new life. You see, what makes a Christian is their union with Christ, the living Jesus. By faith we are linked to Jesus himself. By the Spirit we are as if we were Christ himself. His life is our life. That is the whole argument of Paul in Romans 6 and here in 1 Corinthians. The Christian faith is not simply a set of doctrines or traditions. We are not simply thinking or doing things in the 'spirit of how Jesus would have wanted it'. You know how people try and decide on an issue when someone has died. Christianity is a living relationship with the living Lord. That is the definition of Christianity. If you speak of Christianity only in terms of going to church or knowing church doctrine you have missed the point. Deny the resurrection and there is nothing left.

Paul writes in verse 32 *"...if the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die...it is all in vain."* Take Christ out of life and what do you have left? Nothing, it is *"...all in vain."* The word 'vain' or 'vanity' reminds us of the haunting refrain in the book of Ecclesiastes; "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity". Or as the NIV puts it "Meaningless, utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" The Hebrew word we translate as 'Vanity' means '...emptiness, fluff, a fistful of wind, a pocket of nothing'. It's like comparing fairy floss with a steak sandwich. You take a bite and it all dissolves. There is nothing really there. 'Vanity' can describe so aptly much in our own communities. When we say that life is 'vanity', or 'in vain' we mean there seems to be no meaning to our existence; no purpose. 'Vanity' means working all your life to pay the mortgage and then to die straight afterwards. It means working hard and running fast and getting nowhere. There is no point to anything. As someone once put it there is an 'angst' in Western culture. There are so many who struggle with life as being 'meaningless'. There is no point to it. There is a sense of despair. This comes about because many not only deny the resurrection but even deny that God exists. Much of Western culture now lives as if there is no God at all, especially here in Australia. So, people do not struggle with sin and guilt as Martin Luther did. They do not worry about being right with God. There is no God. Without God the struggle now is 'Why am I here? What is the meaning of my living?' As the French philosopher Sartre put it 'life is about finding your own meaning in life's meaninglessness'. And so, many wonder about the point of it all. Like the drought-stricken farmer who shoots his family and then commits suicide. The unemployed who feel like rubbish thrown on the heap. The ambulance driver who sees the carnage on the road and the senseless deaths. The teenager who can't be bothered trying; 'there's nothing to try for' they think. 'Vanity', 'meaninglessness' shows itself in our culture that buries its head in the sand of materialistic pursuit, alcohol and drugs. Vanity is the attitude of 'let us eat and drink because tomorrow we die'. You may as well; there is nothing else. That Paul would say is the consequence of denying the resurrection of the dead.

But that is not the way it is. Look at verse 20-23. *"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep...for as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ the first fruit, then, when he comes, those who belong to him."* Let's tease this apart a bit. Paul is saying Christ has risen and so will we! He is first. The idea of the 'first fruits' is from the Old Testament. The first heads of the crop were a sign that the harvest was coming in. This 'first fruit' was given in sacrifice to dedicate the year's crop. It indicated that the rest of the harvest was coming. So, Paul says the rest of the dead in Christ will follow Jesus, just as the whole harvest follows the first fruit. That is the logical conclusion, the 'finale' of the fact that we are united to Christ, that we are 'in him' as Paul often says. We live the life of Christ. Thus, whatever happens to him happens to us. As Paul writes in Romans 8:11 *"...if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you."* So, when Jesus returns, we who *"...belong to him"* will have our 'turn' for a victorious resurrection.

What will that be like? What will we be like with our resurrected bodies? The Bible does not say exactly. Paul does say in 1 Corinthians 15 our bodies *"will be raised imperishable, ...in glory, ...in power... a spiritual body"*. But again, remember the central thrust of Scripture. We are united to Jesus. His life is our life. His glory is our glory. Therefore, what we will be like is already seen in Jesus. As Paul says in Philippians 3:20-21 *"...our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await from there the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."* We notice from the reading of the gospels that Jesus, after his resurrection was still himself. He had the same body. The nail marks were there from the crucifixion. Yet his body was 'glorious'. He was fully human. He ate the fish provided. Yet all the weakness was gone. So, it will be for us. We will still be ourselves. Our characters and looks. But perfectly so. We will be fully human. But no more sin. No more weaknesses. No more physical or mental disabilities. No more sicknesses. No more allergies or food intolerances! Then we will be fully human like Jesus, who says Paul, is the 'true human being' the second Adam, the first of the new mankind.

What awaits us will not be a disembodied, purely 'spiritual' life in 'heaven'. We will not be like it's often portrayed as angels in white floating around playing harps. We will live in a purified creation and will each have a glorified body. And to that earth we will bring the work we have done for Jesus. On that new earth we will be able to live in fulfilment of whom God has made us, both as individuals and as human beings together. Which makes us realise that what we are and what we do this side of eternity for Jesus is

never 'in vain'. As Paul says in his final encouragement at the end of 1 Corinthians 15:58 "*Therefore my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain*". See that? Our life in Christ is never "in vain". It is never meaningless. Did you have to bury that covenant child? Their short life was not in vain. In Christ they will live again. Have you lived with disease, disability, been deprived of opportunities? In Christ you will fulfil all your potential. Did you sacrifice much for the church, to bring the gospel? In Christ you will be richly rewarded, living in total joy with Jesus himself. In Christ we have been delivered from sin and vanity, from despair and meaninglessness. Jesus has risen and so will we. We have a glorious future ahead of us, all of us who believe. So, let us live. Live with joy and hope. For Jesus has 'overcome death'.