

The Reality of the Resurrection

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 1 to 11. Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles, and do not even deserve 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 to me was not without effect.

[1 : 3 3] No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether then it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Amen. Okay, so Easter is about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That is the astounding claim of Christianity, and that is why we are here today.

Christians are convinced of the resurrection of Jesus and celebrate it, not just today on Easter Sunday, but every single day. Perhaps, though, you are sceptical, and you can't accept the resurrection, or maybe even you don't believe, and you won't accept the resurrection.

Whatever you think, then I am really glad that you are here today, because what better day than to come to church on Easter Sunday when we focus on what is fundamental to the Christian faith, namely, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then there would be no Christianity. Christianity would be a complete and utter waste of time.

[2 : 5 1] And that's what Paul goes on to say in a bit after our reading. But the reality of the resurrection is our best hope.

not just for our lives, but the best hope for our world. And so we're going to look at one of these classic passages about the resurrection this afternoon, and it's from Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Because here, Paul emphasizes the historical evidence for the resurrection. He's saying the resurrection is historical fact, and so he gives compelling evidence as to why it is reasonable to believe, and in doing so, he shows us the life-changing meaning of the resurrection.

And so that's why Christianity is three things. Christianity is, first of all, historical. Christianity, secondly, is reasonable. And thirdly, Christianity is personal.

It's historical, it's reasonable, and it's personal. So first of all, Christianity is historical. It is firmly based on historical events, on actual news.

[4 : 05] And that's what Paul reminds his readers, verse 1 and 2. He says, Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel, you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. So Paul uses the word gospel here, you'll notice that, and it simply means good news.

News. So the gospel is the report that certain events have taken place in history. And those events are the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

And so Paul is saying, these are facts. And as he writes to those in Corinth, the Corinthians, he's saying, I told you about these facts, you believed them, and this news, these things that have happened, these actual events, have changed your life.

Because he says, by this gospel, you are saved. So Christianity is the good news that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can be saved.

[5 : 15] So the Christian faith is a rescue mission. We're in danger, there's a problem, and we need to be saved. And we are saved through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection.

And so without this, Paul's saying, there's no point to Christianity. He says, it is in vain. Verse 2. In other words, it is no use at all.

Now this aspect of Christianity being good news, we're bombarded with news in the world today. News comes at us from everywhere. Newspapers, magazines, TV, the internet.

We can get news feeds into our inbox every morning. We can even set notification on our smartphone to receive news minute by minute as it happens. news.

But with the constant onslaught of news in our world, we shouldn't miss the most important news ever. The news about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[6 : 16] Events in the history of our world. Because these things are the headline news of the world. And they always will be. And that's why Paul says here in verse 3 that these things are of first importance.

They are the most important things that any human being could ever know. The news of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And so, what does he say? Well, let's just look at how he fleshes this out.

Verse 3 to 5. He says, For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures that he was buried that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that he appeared.

And then all the witnesses are mentioned. So, Paul is giving an exact report of what Jesus did in history. So, four things.

Do you notice them? First, he died for our sins. Second, he was buried. Third, he was raised to life on the third day. And fourth, he appeared to many eyewitnesses.

[7 : 23] So, first, Jesus died for our sins. So, Jesus was born. Jesus lived in this world around 2,000 years ago, around 2,000 miles from where we are today.

And then, after his life, Jesus died. He was crucified by being nailed to a cross. And to make sure that Jesus was dead, they thrust a spear in his side and then a professional executioner confirmed and declared that he was dead.

So, why did he die? Paul says he died for our sins. So, sin is our rebellion against the God who made us.

And the penalty for our sins is death. And so, Jesus came to die on a cross in our place for our sins. And Paul says this was according to the scriptures.

So, Jesus' death was prophesied beforehand and it was part of God's plan for this world. So, Jesus died. It's the first thing he says that happened in history.

[8 : 30] Second, he said Jesus was buried. So, Jesus' burial confirms that Jesus died. He was wrapped in burial linens and spices and he was placed in a tomb.

A large stone was rolled over the entrance and then a guard was posted outside the tomb to make sure that nobody came to steal the body. So, Jesus died. Then, Paul says he was buried.

Third, Jesus was raised to life on the third day. So, Jesus was resurrected. The tomb was empty because Jesus had been raised to life again.

And Jesus predicted that this would happen and it did happen. And so, when Paul says he was raised on the third day, Paul is talking about an actual event.

And because Jesus did rise, then he was seen by many people. That's why fourth, Paul says, Jesus appeared to many eyewitnesses and he lists them.

[9 : 31] So, Jesus was seen alive after his death and burial. And so, just as his burial confirms his death, so the many eyewitnesses who saw him confirm his resurrection.

So, what Paul is doing here is he is establishing that Christianity is firmly based on history. So, being a Christian is about responding to certain historical events.

It's taking note of the news that has happened in our world and doing something about it. Taking note of the most significant news and real historical events that have taken place.

And so, it's because Christianity is historical, the Christian faith is a historical faith, that is what makes it reasonable. And that's our second point.

First, Christianity is historical. Second, Christianity is reasonable. because Christianity does stand or fall as to whether Jesus rose from the dead or not.

[10 : 38] And because of that, there have always been attempts to try and disprove or to try and explain away the resurrection of Jesus. But what Paul does in these verses is show how reasonable and how rational it is to believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

because when we look at what he says, we discover the answers to all the common objections to the resurrection of Jesus. So, of course, the main objection to the resurrection of Jesus would be the claim that it didn't happen, that Jesus didn't rise from the dead.

And there's the suggestion that the story of Jesus' resurrection was just made up long after the time. And yet, Paul's words here, verse 3-7, suggest a very early Christian creed.

That's what the commentators think. Verse 3-7 are a bit like a confession, a creed about what the early church said about Jesus, his life and his death and his resurrection.

Because in verse 3, Paul says these words were received by him, so he received them, and then he passed them on. In other words, he's saying none of this stuff was made up.

[11 : 59] There was an oral tradition about what happened to Jesus soon after the events, the events of his death and resurrection, that was being circulated. And it was being passed on almost like a creed of belief by the early church, and it was affirming that Jesus rose from death.

And so when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about 15 to 20 years after these events, the life of Jesus, what he's giving is really a summary of the very heart of the Christian faith.

So Paul says about the Corinthians, they received and they believed. Now, there's no chance that a bunch of people would receive the news of Jesus' resurrection and believe that Jesus rose from the dead if that didn't actually happen.

And so to say that Christ died refutes any suggestion that Jesus didn't really die and somehow he revived inside the tomb.

And then that he was buried refutes the suggestion that the disciples stole his body and then the woman went to the wrong tomb. Because there's no way that the disciples would get past a guarded tomb and roll a massive stone away without anybody noticing them.

[13 : 19] And there's no way that a bunch of women who saw Jesus dying across and then watched Jesus be buried in a tomb would then somehow forget where he was buried.

In addition, I guess the easiest way to deny the claim of the resurrection would be to produce the dead body from the tomb. But that never happened.

death. And so then to say that he was raised on the third day refutes the notion that Jesus didn't physically rise from death. Because the resurrection isn't a metaphor.

It isn't a feeling. Jesus' followers didn't sense that Jesus was somehow alive and they felt better because he was alive in their heads or in their hearts.

No, he was physically alive. life. And so the third day, when Paul mentions even saying it was the third day, what he's doing is he is pinpointing the resurrection of Jesus to a specific time and to a specific place.

[14 : 26] And that's why we're told next that he appeared to many eyewitnesses. And then they're all listed there in verse 5 to verse 8. And so here is the proof that Jesus' resurrection was an objective reality.

because among the eyewitnesses were Peter and the twelve, a crowd of over 500 people, Jesus' family and followers, and Paul himself, who was one of Jesus' enemies.

So the sheer list of names challenges any assumption that the resurrection was a hoax. Because notice what Paul says, when Paul speaks about the eyewitnesses, he says, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep, in verse 6.

So what he's doing is he's saying that the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus are reliable because the eyewitnesses were still alive at the time of writing.

And so his point is that since all of these people who saw the risen Lord Jesus are still alive, Paul's saying to his readers, you can go to them and speak to them and you can hear their testimony about what they had seen.

[15 : 41] And he's inviting them to do so because these witnesses could verify the astounding claim that Jesus rose from death. And there were literally hundreds of corroborating eyewitnesses to the resurrection, which, in Paul mentioning this, is refuting another idea, which is that, well, people were just hallucinating when they thought they saw Jesus resurrected.

But you don't get mass hallucinations, especially over a long period of time. One New Testament theologian, Peter Williams, in his book, Can We Trust the Gospels?

He helpfully lists all the appearances of the risen Jesus. So let me read. He says, the resurrected Jesus is recorded as appearing in Judea and in Galilee, in town and countryside, indoors and outdoors, in the morning and in the evening, by prior appointment and without prior appointment, close and distant, on a hill and by a lake, to groups of men and groups of women, to individuals and groups of up to 500, sitting, standing, walking, eating, and always talking.

Many are explicitly close-up encounters involving conversations. It is hard to imagine this pattern of appearances in the Gospels and the early Christian letters without there having been multiple individuals who claimed to have seen Jesus risen from the dead.

So what he's saying here is there is no way someone like Paul would have the audacity to say all that he's saying here in a public document and send it round when the people who were alive at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection were still walking the face of the earth.

[17 : 34] death. He could never do it. The only way that he could claim that over 500 people had seen the risen Jesus 15 to 20 years afterwards was because they had.

And so any discrepancies with the truth would have been picked up by those at the time. In the same way, I guess, that if we were still alive in 15 to 20 years time, something momentous happened today, and we were around and we saw it, we would easily verify the truth of that big event.

And so what Paul is saying here is just go and ask the people because there were just as many sceptical people around in those days as there are still today.

And so what Paul does is he presents the historical evidence in such a way to show how reasonable it is to believe the Christian faith. Becoming a Christian is never about blind faith.

It isn't intellectual suicide to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Because we're not talking about myth or legend formed hundreds of years after Jesus lived.

[18 : 52] We're talking about an empty tomb and we're talking about hundreds of eyewitnesses and many many changed lives and now a changed world because of the claim of the resurrection.

And so the reason that you and I can trust the resurrection today is the same reason that we can trust any historical event. How is that? Well it's because of the people who were there who saw it with their own eyes and it was written down and passed on.

And that's why the bulk of what Paul says here in these 11 verses is given over to listing and naming the many eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Jesus.

And so what he's saying here is that Christianity is a reasonable faith. And yet still today the assumption is that we modern people are far more sophisticated and savvy than these ancient people.

That somehow they were far more gullible and accepting of these kinds of things like a resurrection but they weren't. The resurrection was just as inconceivable to people back then as it is to people today.

[20 : 06] Listen to what N.T. Wright who is a historian and New Testament scholar he's written a book called The Resurrection of the Son of God and this is what he says actually on page 707.

So this is coming towards his conclusion. This is a big book and he's researched the resurrection. He says this he says the early Christians did not invent the empty tomb or the meetings or sightings of the risen Jesus in order to explain a faith they already had.

Nobody was expecting this kind of thing. No kind of conversion experience would have generated such ideas. Nobody would have invented it. To suggest otherwise is to stop doing history and to enter into a fantasy world of our own.

In terms of the kind of proof which historians normally accept the case we have presented that the tomb plus resurrection appearances combination is what generated early Christian belief.

It is as watertight as one is likely to find. See what he's saying? He's saying you don't live in a fantasy world if you do believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

[21 : 16] What he's saying is you live in a fantasy world if you don't. In other words it's impossible to come up with a reasonable explanation that makes sense of all the evidence.

And so while it's good to raise our doubts about the Christian faith and while it's always good to ask questions and it's always good to think through something like the resurrection because it is so central to Christian belief, history and reason are on the side of Christianity.

So ask your questions, raise your doubts, but know that history and reason are on the side of Christianity. And that's our second point, Christianity is reasonable.

First of all, it is historical. Second, Christianity is reasonable. And third, and finally, Christianity is personal because the resurrection of Jesus transformed Paul in a deep and in a personal way.

And so the resurrection is an objective reality, reality, it's historical and it's reasonable and that's why it leads to subjective transformation of our lives.

[22 : 26] It's personal and it's personal because it's real. Nothing else, nothing else in human history has the power to affect such deep and lasting change in your life or my life or inner world than the resurrection.

So the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus doesn't just satisfy your mind, it changes your heart and it transforms your life.

And that's why Paul gives his personal testimony here in verse 8 to 11. Verse 8 he says, and last of all, he appeared to me also as to one abnormally born.

Paul says he was the last in a series of people the risen Lord Jesus appeared to. And when Paul met Jesus on the road Damascus, that story of his conversion, Paul says Jesus appeared to him as to one abnormally born.

Now that word there speaks about a premature birth or a miscarriage or even an abortion. And so what Paul's saying is that when he encountered the risen Jesus, he was like a stillborn baby.

[23 : 39] And it's a stark metaphor to describe that he was completely lifeless when Jesus appeared to him, when Jesus encountered him.

That's why he says in verse 9, for I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

Paul's acknowledging he didn't deserve any of what God gave to him. He was an enemy of Jesus Christ and he persecuted the church. But what he's saying here is that his life was completely transformed.

How could somebody like him be so completely transformed? Why the change? Well, Paul's answer is the grace of God. Notice in verse 10 and 11, he uses the word grace three times.

Grace. It's fundamental to understanding Christianity. So he says in verse 10, but by the grace of God, I am what I am and his grace to me was not without effect.

[24 : 44] No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me, whether then it was I or they. This is what we preach and this is what you believed.

So Paul's making it clear here that it was the grace of God that transformed him. He was dead. He was in a lifeless state.

He was completely helpless. But then God's grace took hold of Paul and turned his life around and then God in his grace powerfully used Paul in his service.

And so it was a miracle of God's grace towards him. And Paul knew this. He had experienced God's forgiveness and he was made an apostle.

He was a man who deserved rejection from God because of his sin. But by the grace of God, he discovered he was accepted because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

[25 : 49] So meeting the risen Jesus transformed Paul in a deep and lasting way. He could testify that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's grace had reached out and saved him.

And this is the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's the most important news ever because it changes everything for everyone.

Listen to what Kevin McKenna, he's a newspaper reporter, he writes for the Herald. This is what he said this weekend about Christianity. He said, the message of Christ's death and resurrection should evoke profoundly emotional reactions in the hearts and minds of all who hear it, believer and non-believer alike.

You can't simply shrug off this sort of stuff, not when it presents a direct challenge to your way of life, your narcissism, your arrogance of intellect, your banal certainty that you are the master of your own destiny and your own salvation.

I don't think he would profess to be a Christian but he's saying you can't dismiss or write off the resurrection of Jesus. Why?

[27 : 03] Because Christianity is historical and because it's historical, Christianity is reasonable and when you discover that it's reasonable and it gives that direct personal challenge to your life, then it changes you.

And I was struck by this recently when I listened to an online interview with Jordan Peterson. You probably heard of Jordan Peterson who's a famous author but he's a psychology professor and he was having a conversation with a guy called Jonathan Pajau and it was a fascinating dialogue as he talked back and forth and Peterson, Jordan Peterson was moved to tears when he was discussing Jesus and whether he believed in him.

And he was really emotional and so was I. I don't ever get emotional when I watch things on YouTube but this was a first. And it was emotional because Peterson was saying there's the narrative and there's the objective and they come together in Christ.

So there's the world of the objective reality, history, what's happened and there's the world of story, of the gospel, of Jesus, life, birth, death, resurrection.

He says they're touching together. And Peterson was genuinely wrestling as to whether he believed all of this stuff about Jesus and the claims of Christianity.

[28 : 34] And he said this, he said, that seems to me oddly plausible. Well, I still don't know what to make of it. It's too hard. It's too terrifying a reality to fully believe.

I don't even know what would happen if you fully believed it. Well, Jordan Peterson's not sure if he believed it but the apostle Paul certainly believed it.

And Paul was one of the most unlikely converts and he experienced the grace of God through his personal encounter with the risen Jesus. And we can too because Christianity is not just historical, it's not just reasonable, it's personal.

It's not just a truth that you can believe in your head or live out in your life but it's a reality that shapes your heart and transforms you from the inside out and makes you a different and a new person that takes you from death, lifelessness, helplessness and resurrects you so that you are now very different.

that's what happened to Paul and that's what can happen to us. Paul's saying Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures which means whoever we are and no matter what we have done we can find forgiveness for our sins because Jesus Christ has died.

[30 : 04] God accepts us because of what he's done and Paul says and Jesus Christ was raised on the third day so Jesus rose victorious over death giving a certain hope to humanity that death is not the end and also that someday this broken world will be renewed and that is the electrifying message of Christianity that the Apostle Paul is declaring here and it has enormous implications for everybody and everything.

The resurrection of Jesus is an earth shattering reality in history but it is also a life transforming power when we believe it. It's historical it's reasonable and it's personal.

It not only satisfies the reason of our minds because it's based on historical fact but it also meets the deepest longings of our hearts because it personally changes our lives.

So the resurrection of Jesus is a reality. Jesus is the one that we all need. Jesus is the one that we're all looking for even if we don't realize it and so by the grace of God we are invited to put our faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

And so can I encourage you if you have never put your faith in Jesus Christ in fact can I plead with you you can. It's historical it's reasonable the Christian faith it answers the questions of your mind and it fulfills the longings and desires of your heart.

[31 : 47] So you can believe in Jesus. He lived he died he was buried he rose again and one day he'll return and we'll all meet him as judge.

The resurrection proves that this is true. So let's not wait until he comes as judge to meet him. Let's meet him now because when we do he will change our lives forever.

war.