



Session 8 – 1 Corinthians 15

RESURRECTION

Some members of the church in Corinth had doubts about the promise of resurrection – “Some of you say...” (v.12). Paul reminds them of what they know about Jesus’ resurrection and shows them what it implies.

1. v.1-11 Jesus’ resurrection – the heart of the gospel

The Christians in Corinth have all heard and believed the gospel (v.1,2).

- *It is the saving gospel.* Through accepting it, they are saved (v.1,2)
- *It is the historic gospel.* It is based on the facts about Jesus: he died for our sins (v.3); he was buried, emphasising the reality of his death (v.4a); and he was raised from the dead. Paul lists the eye-witnesses to emphasise the reality of the physical resurrection: the risen Jesus could be seen by all who met him – it was not just a spiritual resurrection (v.4b-7).
- *It is the apostolic gospel.* All the apostles teach it (including Paul who became an apostle by meeting the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road) and it is shared by the whole church.

“For Paul and his hearers, the word ‘resurrection’ didn’t mean ‘life after death’. It was never a general term for any and every belief about what might happen to people after they die. It meant, very specifically, that people already dead would be given new bodies, and return to an embodied life not completely unlike the one they had before.” (Tom Wright)

2. v.12-34 Our resurrection is certain

a) *Denial of the Resurrection – No Resurrection, No Salvation (v.12-19)*

If dead people don’t rise, the logical consequences are

- Jesus was not raised, and so all Christian preachers are liars, and all Christians have a faith that is empty and useless (v.13-16).

- We cannot be sure that our sins are forgiven. Jesus' resurrection is God's vindication of what he did on the cross – his acceptance of his sacrifice for our sins. Without that resurrection, we have no assurance of forgiveness (v.17).
- We have no hope for the future. Without Jesus' resurrection we have no certainty of what our future life will hold for us, and so we are quite pitiable (v.19).

b) Jesus' resurrection has eternal consequences (v.20-28)

But Christ has been raised, and there are two key consequences:

- ***Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection (v.20-23)***
At harvest time, the first fruits are a foretaste and a guarantee of what will come. So it is with Jesus' resurrection: the resurrection of those who are in Christ will follow. Even though they were in Adam – sinful human beings, whose sin deserved death (ie separation from God) – through Jesus they have life. At the time of his return, their resurrection will be complete.
- ***Jesus' resurrection guarantees his ultimate victory (v.24-28)***
With the resurrection came the defeat of death and the defeat of evil which had flung everything it could at Jesus on the cross. It was the guarantee that ultimately good will triumph over evil. In God's good time, Jesus will return, evil will be obliterated, God's perfect purposes for the world will be complete, and this will be recognised by all creation.

c) Jesus' resurrection has consequences for the present (v.29-34)

Paul's first point is a mystery to us: we have no idea what "being baptised for the dead" meant. His other points are clear.

- ***Suffering is willingly accepted (v.30-32a)***. Paul refers to the hardships of his ministry (see eg **2Cor 11:22-end**) and in particular to what he went through in Ephesus – see **Acts 19:23-end (2Cor 1:8f.** may refer to the same incident). It is only because of confidence in the resurrection that he or anyone else would be willing to go through such things.
- ***Life has meaning (v.32b)***. If, on the other hand, there is no resurrection, then there is no hope; life will seem pointless and be lived in a dissolute way.

- ***Life should be lived well (v.33f)***. Christians should live as those who are destined for a new life after this one. They should reject sin; it is quite incompatible with resurrection life.

3. v.35-50 Our resurrection – the resurrection body

To people like the Corinthians immersed in Greek culture, the body was an encumbrance; they longed for the day when they could get rid of their bodies and their spirits would then be free. The idea of physical resurrection raised questions (v.35) which Paul goes on to answer.

- ***Continuity and transformation (v.36-38)***

When a seed ‘dies’ when it is buried in the soil, the result is a plant which is still the same organism but transformed into something far more wonderful than the unremarkable looking seed. So it is with our resurrection bodies: it will still be me, but I will be transformed into something glorious.

- ***Fit for heaven (v.39-44a)***

In the universe as God has created it, there is a variety of bodies; each one is adapted for its particular existence in its particular environment. So it will be with our resurrection bodies: they will be glorious bodies – “spiritual bodies” (ie physical bodies animated by the Holy Spirit) – which are just right for life in heaven.

- ***Adam-likeness transformed into Christ-likeness (v.44b-49)***

As human beings, we are like Adam: our earthly bodies are weak, mortal, subject to decay (returning as dust to the earth), and prone to sin (dishonour). But through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the second Adam, our bodies (not just our souls) are redeemed; we will have bodies like Jesus’ resurrection body – immortal, imperishable and glorious (cf **1John 3:2**).

Tom Wright explains v.44: **“Paul is contrasting a body animated by one type of life and a body animated by another type. The present body is animated by the normal life which all humans share – the ordinary life-force on which we all depend in this present body, the ordinary energy that keeps us breathing and our blood circulating. But the body that we shall be given at the resurrection is to be animated by God’s own Spirit – and it will be a new body which won’t wear out!”**

4. **v.50-58 The moment of the resurrection body – the victory**

- **Victory (v.50-58)** Paul looks forward to the great day of Jesus' return – the day, in Jewish thought, of the last trumpet (cf **Mat 24:30f**). Christians who have died will gain their resurrection bodies; those still alive will also be transformed (cf **1Thes 4:13-18**). With their new bodies (described as *imperishable* and *immortal*), they will be ready for their new existence in the new heavens and new earth. It will be the final complete victory over death, which was guaranteed by the original victory of Jesus' resurrection.
- **Live firmly and fully in the work of the Lord (v.58)**

“The overall point of the chapter is that, in the resurrection of Jesus himself, the power of the creator God was at work to bring about the renewal of the world, and that through the work of the Spirit, this same creator God will give new, glorious, deathless bodily life to all his people.” (Tom Wright)

For homegroups

1. What would you say to a person who believes that the resurrection of Jesus was 'spiritual', not physical?
2. How would you explain to a not-yet-Christian friend the importance of Jesus' resurrection?
3. In **v.3-7**, Paul appears to be quoting an early Christian creed. How important are creeds?
4. Why does Paul think it is 'of first importance' (**v.3**) to provide evidence for Jesus' resurrection?
5. What words are used to describe the resurrection body (**v.42-50**)?
6. What will happen when Jesus returns (**v.51-55**)?
7. “He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (**v.57**). Victory over what? (See also **Heb 2:14f.**)
8. How does Jesus' resurrection affect your relationship with God? your thoughts about physical death?
9. How does what we believe about the resurrection affect the way we live?