

Gospel of the Ressurrection

by J. Glyn Owen

The resurrection of Christ is the central message of the Christian faith, proving that Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of humanity.

Duration: 44:58

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:12

Topics: "Resurrection"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the danger of embracing a philosophy that denies the substance of the apostolic preaching. He emphasizes that if we truly have a genuine Christian experience, we should know better than to believe in teachings that undermine the power of Christ's resurrection. The speaker highlights four implications of this philosophy: it denies the truthfulness of the apostolic witness, exposes the Christian experience as a fraud, renders the Christian hope baseless, and renders the apostolic preaching useless. He emphasizes the importance of a gospel that has a living Savior at its core, as it is the only source of power to transform lives.

Transcript

Will you kindly turn with me in the words of Scripture to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and I would like to read verses 12 13 and 14 as focusing upon the theme of our message this morning. But if it is 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.

You will remember how the Apostle Paul began this gigantic chapter 15 in 1 Corinthians with a restatement of the essentials of the gospel which he had originally preached in Corinth as the Apostle to the Gentiles. That preaching had resulted in the founding of a Christian church there. Despite the gross proverbial immorality of Corinth, there had emerged as a consequence of the preaching of the Apostle, a church of Jesus Christ of men and women who were set apart from the rest of society and became known for their faith in God and their confidence in Jesus Christ.

Now that gospel, Paul tells us in the opening words, related essentially to the death, the burial, and the subsequent resurrection of the Saviour. Now it's important for us to grasp that. The Church of Jesus Christ in Corinth did not emerge by preaching simply the ethics of Jesus, by preaching the standards of the Sermon on the Mount, important as they are.

The church emerged in Corinth when the Apostle preached that the Christ of God laid down his life for our sins on the cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb, but ultimately emerged from the darkness of the grave, tearing the bars of the grave asunder to live henceforth in the power of an endless indestructible life. When by faith Paul was able to link the people of Corinth with the Lord risen, when they were brought together by faith and linked together, men and women leapt into newness of life. They left their spiritual graves and immortality of life and became newborn creatures.

And so the church emerged. Proceeding, the Apostle reminded the Corinthians of the many to whom the crucified and risen Lord manifested himself after he was risen from the dead. You remember he enumerates individuals to whom Jesus appeared, showed himself to be alive and well after his death and after his burial.

He tells us that there were individuals, there were groups, and there was one large group of over 500 people, most of whom, says Paul, are still alive and you could confer with them and hear their witness if you so desired, though some of them have fallen asleep in Jesus. Now subsequent to that, subsequent to the emergence of the church in Corinth, there were some philosophers who sought to influence all and sundry, including some of the Christian community. And apparently there were some unwary Christians in Corinth who imbibed, or were in danger of imbibing, this new philosophy, one of whose tenets said something like this.

There is no resurrection of the dead. Apparently it was very cleverly presented. It was almost beguilingly appealing.

And quite a number of the folk who were at any rate associated with the church, even if they were not members, felt that this was such a reasonable philosophy that they began to think in terms of making it their own. Now Paul, in writing to them, has to bid them face the issue that you cannot believe something like that in the light of Christian experience and in the light of the witness of the Apostles and the preaching of the gospel. And that is going to be our theme this morning.

Against the background, of course, of the evidence for the resurrection of our Lord, it is untenable that anyone, particularly a Christian, should receive a philosophy which includes the notion that resurrection is not possible. Now the general proposition of the speculative philosophy which Paul exposes is put very simply in verse 12 then. If it be preached that Christ has not been raised from the dead, how can some of you say, here it is, there is no resurrection of the dead.

Now let me summarize this in order to get its thrust. These philosophers were not apparently denying the immortality of the soul. Oh they believed, most of the Greek philosophers did, that the soul outlives the body.

And indeed many of them yearned for that day when when the spirit would leave the body behind because they felt there was a larger existence beyond the body. They spoke of the body as the tomb of the soul, and they wanted to get away from the tomb. So they anticipated death as something glorious, something leading beyond the life of the body.

And it was only then they anticipated a fullness of experience as they spoke of it. Now the gospel that they objected to was the gospel that said not only that a man's soul is immortal but that there is a resurrection of the dead. The literal meaning of the word that is used here is corpse.

And this of course brings out really the punch of the whole issue. If Christ is announced or heralded that he has been raised out from among corpses, that's what Paul said literally, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of corpses? You see what the gospel says is this, that by the grace of our crucified risen Lord even the body is to be raised again. And those who trust in our Lord Jesus Christ have a future which involves a new body, a rising out of the body that has been there is a body that will come.

There is a connection between them as Paul teaches us later on in this chapter. Now the philosophers simply could not take this in. The Greek philosophers were bewildered, totally bewildered by that, because of course they did not believe in the supernatural.

They did not know God. They were clever, they were wise according to their own standards of wisdom, but they knew not God. And therefore they poured constant scorn upon those who believed that a body that has decomposed in the grave can possibly, can possibly be brought together again in a new way or in any way.

Celsus, one of their sarcastic writers put it like this, he said that the hope of resurrection is really the hope of worms. For what soul of man would wish any longer for a body that had rotted? Such was the scorn poured upon the Christians and upon the doctrine that we have a Savior who himself rose from the dead and will cause his people to come out from their graves and give them a new body at last. Now that was the general proposition.

Now Paul looks at the logical implications of that speculative philosophy and he ruthlessly exposes it in verses 13 to 19. He addresses the entire church and he wants to make it very, very clear that you can't, you can't as a Christian imbibe any teaching such as that. It cuts the main nerve and what is more it would seem to me, the Apostle wants us to see that if we really are Christians and if we have a valid, genuine Christian experience, we ought to know better.

If by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ we have been brought into fellowship with the Living God, then we ought to know that the Christ who brings us into fellowship with the Living God is no dead corpse any longer. He's alive. A dead Christ cannot save me.

A dead Christ cannot bring me into relationship with a Living God. He has to be alive in order to introduce us to court as Paul puts it in one of the chapters in Romans. Now a basic implication of the tenet that there is no resurrection of the dead then, is that if that were so then even Jesus could not have been raised from the dead.

If the philosophical tenet is true it not only applies to us but it applies to Jesus. But now the Christians in Corinth ought to know by the very experience of life through Jesus Christ and of fellowship with God and with the Holy Spirit who has graced them and gifted them with different gifts. They ought in themselves to have the answer to such a speculative philosophy.

The Christian and the church, the Christian is an answer to this speculative philosophy if a man is really a Christian. But now I want to come down to two of the more general implications of that basic tenet and Paul deals with four. We are going to look at one or two this morning.

The four that he deals with in this passage here is as follows. He shows how the philosophy concerned one, denies the substance of the apostolic preaching beginning of verse 14, belies the truthfulness of the apostolic witness verse 15 and in consequence the Christian experience is thus shown to be a fraud and

the Christian hope is baseless. Verses 18 and 19.

We are going to look at the first two of these if time permits. The first, if this philosophy is true then the apostolic preaching is rendered useless is the word here. It really means empty.

The preaching is empty. In other words it's like a cartridge that has been spent. There's no power in it.

You preach a Christ who lived and died and is finished with, however great his life, however precious his life, however noble his teaching, if he's dead and gone he cannot help you now. And this is important. A message relating to a dead Savior is powerless to save.

It would be like a cartridge that is spent. Death is the ultimate expression of man's impotence and limitations and a Savior who cannot master death and transform it would be no Savior at all. He would be impotent at the point where mankind needs him most.

Now this becomes more tellingly clear when we rightly understand what the Bible teaches about death. Scripture assures us that death is much more than the mere exit off stage, off the stage of our present existence. Death is much more than the snuffing out of the candle of our present life.

Of course it is the exit off stage. It is the way we leave this world unless we are alive when Jesus comes again. We shall all leave this world the way of death.

We shall all be buried in a cemetery or otherwise disposed of. We shall die. It is appointed unto men once to die.

But death is much more than that. Death has unique dimensions. It carries in its bosom a peculiar sting for us humans that it doesn't have for the animal kingdom.

And it's not simply confined to the emotional upheaval of letting go of our loved ones when they're called away from us. There is an emotional upheaval. There is a tearing of the spirit.

If you have loved those who were called away, well you know what it is. And all of us have had death visit our homes at one time or another. There is an emotional upheaval, but death is much more than that.

What then is death according to the Scriptures? Scripture views death as a composite phenomenon that assumes its most challenging characteristics because of human sin. Now something akin to death might have been our experience even if man had not sinned. But it would be completely different from death as we know it.

The sting of death is sin, says Paul at the end of this chapter. We might have had some way to leave this world even if man were still the kind of being he was when he was created. But death as we know it is altogether different from that.

What is death then? There are three things that always need to be remembered when we view death in the light of Scripture. And our Savior must be able to deal with these three aspects of death. And he can only do so if having died for our sins he's alive again.

First of all, death is the outworking of a sentence of the judge of all the earth. Death is the outworking of a judicial sentence by the Creator and the judge of all men. A way back at the beginnings of the human race the recently created man in Eden was told by God, a quote from Genesis 2 17, you must not eat from the

tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

Now Paul assures us in his epistle or epistles that death is nothing less than the carrying out of that sentence threatened back there in the book of Genesis. Death is the wages of sin. The wages of sin is death.

Or to put it in Paul's words elsewhere in Romans 6 23, sin entered the world through one man. And death through sin. And in this way death came to all men because all sinned.

Death therefore is the outworking of a sentence. The judicial sentence of the Lord and the moral governor of the universe who said that when we sin we shall die. As one aspect of it.

The second aspect is this. Death then becomes a state of the soul, a condition of the inner man, the inner being, the inner person. In writing to the Ephesians in chapter 2 Paul reminds them that when they were dead in trespasses and sins they were already dead.

Not physically of course, but spiritually. When they were dead in trespasses and sins God broke into their lives and brought them back to life. He quickened them.

He gave them a spiritual resurrection through Jesus Christ. Now what is this state of death within? Well you have only to read the epistles of Paul particularly and also some aspects of the gospel of our Lord or the Gospels, the four Gospels. And you'll come up against it over and over again.

Let me quote Paul because he gives a summary of it in Romans chapter 8 verses 6 and 7 and 8 particularly. The mind of the sinful flesh of the sinful man is death. Paul says that a man is in such a condition spiritually that the way of his way of thinking, his very mind, the very motions of his mind exhibit the characteristics of death.

Well you say how is that? Well I think Paul explains it just by going on. He says it expresses itself in a hostility towards God. Doesn't like the Holy One, doesn't like righteousness, doesn't like the character of God, doesn't like the company of God, doesn't like the truth of God, the word of God, the Son of God, the people of God, the day of God or anything that belongs to God.

It is hostile toward God and then it is a refusal to submit to Him because it is hostile to Him. And then finally it is a consequent inability to please God. Man in this state of spiritual death just cannot please God even though he may do some things that God requires, he cannot please God because inwardly there is an antipathy towards God.

So there are two aspects of death. A Savior must deal with both. There is a third.

Death is also something beyond both features we have mentioned. Apart from the saving work of Christ it leads to what scripture significantly refers to as the second death. The physical aspect of death awaits all of us alike, believers and unbelievers, even though the knowledge that we have a Savior who is risen from the dead transforms death or should transform death for every believing man and woman.

But we have to die. Beyond the physical and beyond the present condition of our souls which is called death, however, Jude and John speak in terms of a second death. Whilst Paul refers to the experience of a final banishment of men and women from the presence of God in 2 Thessalonians 1.9. Jesus himself speaks of the cursed as going into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels Matthew 25 41.

What John speaks of as a fiery lake of burning sulfur is a second death. Now whatever image you take it points to a grimly terrifying reality beyond physical death and beyond our present experience of being inwardly dead to God. There is this other dimension to it.

Now a Savior needs not only to rid us and to save us from one aspect of death but from all aspects of death. And it was necessary in order so to do for God to become incarnate in his Son. No man could do this.

No man could face death in all its manifestations, in all its forms, in all its power. It was necessary for God to become incarnate. So the Lord Jesus was born of the Virgin conceived of the Holy Ghost.

He lived among men and he laid down his spotless life an atonement for our sins to deal with death in all its dimensions. But even as death was not adequate did he not rise again from the dead to be the living Lord. Manifestly a Savior who is contemporary with every generation and not the Savior who lived yesterday two thousand years ago upon whose memory, the memory of whom we are asked to live.

Jesus is not a memory. He's alive and he has to be alive to save us from death in its present manifestations and in its future. And Jesus knew this.

So of course our Lord Jesus promised his disciples that he would die for our sins and they all tell us so. In their preaching they echo what Jesus had taught them. Whether it be Peter or John or James or whoever they re-echo the words of their master and they tell us that Jesus died for our sins.

But they also tell us that he rose from the dead. And Jesus was very aware of this before he died so that he promised them. Now if you want to see how telling this is and how precious it is you have only to read the Gospels and you will find that when Jesus began to teach his disciples about what were the things that were then in the future.

He invariably taught them about the fact that having suffered he was going to rise again. Let me read to you for example just one illustration from Mark 8 31. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders chief priests and teachers of the law and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

He knew it was necessary. It was a must be if he's to be the Savior. Now he says almost identically the same thing in Mark 9 31 in Mark 10 33 and 34 in Matthew 12 40 and in John 2 19 to 21 to mention a few scriptures.

This is no solitary reference. He knew that he must die and rise again. Now my friends having thus recognized the need and pledged himself to meet it.

Did Jesus fail to rise again? He could not be the Savior of men. Do you think they could trust him? And do you think they would trust him? And do you think they would go out into a hostile world to say that he had died for our sins and is risen again? If he had not they were not paid for their preaching. They had to pay with their lives for the privilege of proclaiming a risen Savior.

And yet they moved into the jaws of a hostile world and refused to be silenced because they knew that he was alive. One can almost sense the guilt of genuine Christians in Corinth that had countenanced such a timid as there is no resurrection of the dead. For if that were true then Jesus could not have risen.

Paul's logic is irresistible and the challenge of his teaching is most powerful. If that philosophy is true then the whole preaching of the gospel will have been powerless. But you see let me repeat.

That is one thing that the Christians in Corinth could not accept. That the gospel preached by Paul was powerless. Everything spiritually had been powerless until he came and he preached.

And he stood on what a historian speaks of as that ancient dunghill of Corinth. And he stood on the dunghill and he preached Christ crucified, buried, risen. What happened? From among some of the most debauched men and women in that ancient society there came into existence new creatures who by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ were cleansed of their filth, remade in their spirits, and came to know God.

That experience can only grow out of a gospel that has a living Savior at the heart of it. And I think it is most important for us to remember. In a day when there is not all that evidence of power in our churches, that in the early days of the Christian church it was not so.

It was quite otherwise. Even when the Apostles had died out, and the Apostles had gone, and the next generation came, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ spread like wildfire. And it could only do so if it had power in it, if it was the dynamic of God as Paul tells the Romans.

The same gospel of Christ crucified and risen moved into the ancient society so that Pliny, a governor of Bithynia in the second century of our era, in writing to Trajan, the Emperor, had to confess. Christianity, he says, has pervaded not only the cities, but the villages, and the country places, so that the temples are nearly deserted. That is the temples of Roman, where Roman gods were worshipped.

And another writer, Tertullian, in the second century has a similar thought. He says, we are but of yesterday. We've only, as a Christian church, we've only been in existence, he says, as of yesterday.

And yet, he says, we have filled your places, your cities, your lands, your castles, your towns, your councils, your houses, your camps, your senates, your forum. We have left you nothing but your temple. What a magnificent picture of this living Christ storming the strongholds of paganism in Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism, in Rome, the capital of heathenism, and claiming men and women and making them anew after the image of God as revealed in his Son.

If it says anything, it says that the gospel as proclaimed by these heralds of it was not impotent. The only explanation of the power that thus recreated men, took them out of spiritual death, made them fearless of physical death, and of the beyond, is that they knew Jesus Christ to be risen from the dead, their contemporary Lord, who would never die, but would keep them. Now, I must mention this other matter because it is necessary in order to see things in focus.

Secondly, then, if Christ was not risen, the Christian preachers were false witnesses. You see, the Christian preachers did not simply preach. The first preachers were also witnesses.

Now, a witness is to be distinguished from a preacher, though it is to be hoped that every preacher is a witness to certain things. Read verses 15 and 16. More than that, says Paul, we are then found to be false witnesses about God.

For we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

You're still in your sins. Clearly this applied particularly to the first preachers of the gospel who had to be witnesses. Now, you who read your New Testament carefully will remember, we're told in Acts chapter 1 and verse 29, that when the early church thought of having someone to take the place of Judas, among the twelve, one of the characteristics, one of the essential characteristic features of such a person who would take Judas's place would be this, that he had been a witness to the life of Christ, to the death of Christ, and to the resurrection of Christ.

Let me read to you. It is necessary, says Peter, to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of the resurrection from the dead.

The early apostles then were chosen for one thing, because they had witnessed the Lord Jesus during his life, seen his death. They saw him alive from the dead. They were witnesses as well as heralds.

Now Paul, who did not qualify on that basis to be an apostle, was given a very special dispensation. He did not witness Jesus according to the flesh, he didn't, he wasn't one of the twelve, and so he tells us here that he was, he was, to use his phrase, he was like one untimely born. He had a special birth.

In other words, he became a Christian not like the others. He was given a vision, he was given to see the glory of the Lord Jesus ascended, risen at the Father's right hand. This was something physical.

The glory of the ascended Lord broke in upon his life so that it was greater than the glory of the Son. It wasn't something in his mind only, it was real, it was objective, it blinded him physically. But as it blinded him physically, it convinced him spiritually that Jesus was alive.

You and I don't have that experience when we are converted. Nothing like the Apostle Paul, that was especially his, it was singularly his, because of his need. The Savior would have him as an apostle, and the only way to prove to him that Jesus was the living Lord, was by this amazing vision that he had on the Damascus Road.

You see, all of them could thus affirm that Jesus was alive from the dead. But the rest of the Apostles had witnessed him, had seen him. And you will notice when you read the book of the Acts of the Apostles, what emphasis is laid upon this, the witness factor.

They were witnesses, put in the dock, they had seen him. And you notice they'd not only seen him, they'd heard him. And not only had they heard him, they had touched him.

They had eaten a meal with him. He had spoken to them, he had commanded them, he had comforted them, he'd done all kinds of things for them. And they had met in all kinds of circumstances.

Sometimes it was in an upper room, and the doors were closed, and the windows barred. At other times it was out by the lake. At other times it was going on a road into the country.

Another time it was on a mountainside. Sometimes there were one, there was one person alone, sometimes two, sometimes more, sometimes on one occasion even five hundred people at once. There were varied witnesses in varying circumstances, using all the senses, so that there is no, no, no, no event in history, which is more amazingly confirmed than the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then of course that to which we've referred already. These men were not paid for what they did in preaching the gospel. They had to pay for it with their own life.

And it is very significant that whatever charges are brought against the Apostles, no one ever charged them with dishonesty. No one ever charged the Apostles with being immoral. No one ever charged them with dishonesty or untruthfulness.

And when they preached their gospel, they made people who had been liars and fibbers, call them whatever you like, they made them say the truth. Their ethical teaching was, you must speak the truth. Speak the truth in love, but you must speak the truth.

It would be completely inconsistent with a whole psychology, as well as the history that underlies the gospel, to suggest that these people preached a fraud, something they knew to be untrue. Chuck Colson, in his recent book on loving God, says that some of the facts to which we've referred now were so significant in his being convinced of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He says that his experience in the Watergate affair, the Watergate scandal, made it absolutely clear to him that Jesus must have been risen from the dead, even apart from his own experience of rebirth, just from the testimony of these men.

And this is how he argued. He said, they're involved in the Watergate scandal. You had some of the most powerful people, in the most powerful situation in the world.

And there they were, they were tempted to cover up certain things, and they tried it. But they simply could not do it. They tried to change some of the facts.

They tried to give this color to it, or that color to it. But given time, out it had to come. And even the President of the United States of that day was proved to be other than truthful.

And here, he says, we have eleven men, simple, ordinary men, who are alleged by some people to have preached a fraudulent gospel, to have preached that Jesus was alive from the dead, when he was not. And they had a body to dispose of. How could they do it? The thing is psychologically impossible, says Chuck Colson.

I know how much effort, how much thought, how many sleepless nights go into the business of trying to cover up, when you don't have anything like this to cover. No, no, they were not fools, and they were not fooled. They touched him, they heard him, they handled him, they saw him, and they received from his lips comfort as well as challenge.

And they went into all the world to proclaim glad tidings to all men, because he commanded them as the risen Lord. And they believed that he was with them in every situation. Why did they thus believe? Because they were witnesses.

They knew it to be true, and it is on the basis of this fact that there is a gospel to preach. Brothers and sisters, this morning let us be reminded of this. The Christian gospel is not just a theory spun by men in a theological college or somewhere else.

It has arisen out of the fact that God has broken into history, and he's done something. And central to what he has said and what he has done is this. He gave his Son to die that you should not perish, that I should not perish.

To die our death. And when he had so done, God raised him from the dead. And he lives today at God's right hand, a prince and a savior.

Do you trust him? Is he yours? What's your relationship with him? If you have never come to him with faith and love and obedience before, I beg you come to him this morning. I don't know, I guess many of you will have heard of Harry Lauder, the British singer of yesteryear. Harry Lauder was a great entertainer in Britain during and after the war, and sometime after the war.

He was hurled into a state of total despondency one day when a telegram arrived at his home to say that his son had been killed in battle. Harry Lauder was a very jovial kind of man. You could never imagine him with other than a smile on his face.

But he was, he was completely, completely beaten. And he really didn't know what to do. Now it was so extreme that they thought he was going to become mentally deranged.

And a young Christian visited him, a soldier, and told him, Harry, perhaps you didn't know. And I don't remember the name of the boy now, so I can't refer to him by name. But your son, before he died, repented of his sin and trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior.

And he insisted that death for him would only be a comma, not a period, not a full stop. And he was going to be with his Lord. And Harry, if you, if you trust him too, you can meet your loved one again.

Now this was the message of the soldier. I'm not quoting, I'm not adding anything to it. This was the message.

Harry Lauder bade him repeat the story, I think two or three times. He said, do you say that it is possible for me, for me, to see my loved one again? And the soldier said, I am as sure of it as I am sure that this book in my hand is the Word of God. Then said Harry, tell me what I must do.

And dear Harry Lauder, in his awful condition at that time, went on his knees and cried to the Christ of Calvary, the Christ of the Resurrection, to take him as his disciple, just as he had taken his son. And Harry came back to life again, and sang probably better than he'd ever sung before. He certainly was a new husband to his wife, and a new father, and a different preacher.

My friends, it's the only message that casts any ray of light on this pilgrimage of ours, and on its terminus and beyond. There is no other, for he's the only one who has taken the sting out of death and says that he will keep in his hand, keep in his care, the shape of his fold. If Easter be not true, then faith must mount on broken wing.

Then hopes no more immortal spring, life prove a phantom, death a dirge. If Easter be not true, but now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of a harvest to come of those who trust in him. I bid you trust him.

I bid you crown him as your Savior and your Lord. The rest of your days will be days in the sunshine of his love, and the unfailing care of the one who holds the keys of death and of Hades. Let us pray.

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