

## Sermon

### *Resurrection Life*

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**Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

#### Recap and looking ahead

This is our last week working through Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. We've talked about unity in diversity – we are one body with many gifts. We've talked about agape love, modelled by Jesus. And we've talked about the Good News! Today, as you might have guessed, we're talking about resurrection life.

Next week: we'll be hearing from Teen Challenge – You might remember that last year, a reasonably large group from Teen Challenge came to join us for worship one Sunday morning. Well, next week they're returning and this time – we'll get to hear from them.

Teen Challenge are passionate about helping people break free from their addictions. Their mission statement is 'to powerfully influence troubled youth to reach their full potential'.

Then on the Sunday after that, the first week in March, we'll be into Lent – the season that leads into Holy Week and Easter.

A season when we'll be reflecting on what it means to *be* disciples ...

But let's return to Paul's letter to the Corinthians..

We heard last week about the good news and how the good news for Paul is that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day .

He then went on to speak of all who witnessed this, and how that message was passed on.

In my sermon last week I explored a number of perspectives of Good News, all centred on Christ – on his birth, life, humanity, teachings, death, resurrection and so on. I quoted from Brian McLaren’s book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, which our book club is reading at the moment.

I want to remind you of two of these perspectives:

1. We can proclaim the Good News that Jesus saves us by dying on the cross.<sup>1</sup>  
Quoting McLaren: By dying, Jesus mysteriously absorbs the penalty of all humans wrongdoing through all of history. The cross becomes the focal point where human injustice – past, present and future – meets the unconquerable compassion and forgiveness of God. Jesus’ innocent self-sacrifice somehow cancels out human guilt. By dying, Jesus opens the door, not just to heaven beyond this life, but to true communion and relationship with God, in this life – whoever you are, whatever you’ve done.

So, we could say that the good news is that:

Jesus’ death pays the full penalty for human sin.

Or

2. We can proclaim the Good News that Jesus saves us by rising from the dead.<sup>2</sup>  
Through the resurrection, God has defeated death and all that comes with it. By entering life’s worst – suffering and death – and breaking through it, Jesus opens the way to heaven, to life with God beyond this life. Jesus is risen and alive, intersecting with our lives on earth, and waiting for us beyond this life.  
So, we could say that the good news is that:  
Jesus’ resurrection defeats death and sets us free.

Two perspectives of the good news – that lead us to the resurrection and today’s reading.

For Paul the resurrection of the dead is core to his beliefs. Not just Jesus’s resurrection, but the resurrection of all believers – at some time in the future - when all will be reconciled.

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<sup>1</sup> Conservative Protestant (or Evangelical) Churches

<sup>2</sup> Roman Catholic church (note McLaren words it: Jesus saves *the church*..)

So let's look at resurrection and what the fuss was all about..

And let's first do so through CS Lewis's analogy in the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe..

In a moment we're going to watch a brief clip from the movie based on the book – part of the Chronicles of Narnia.

Now Lewis intentionally wrote fantasy fiction so as to engage the imagination in such a way that we can picture ourselves in a world that we can be part of.

Our own stories begin to make sense and begin to gain value and significance when we realise that we have become part of a greater story.

That's what happened for the Pevensie children in the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe.

In the story, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy are deported from London to the house of an eccentric professor during World War II. They find life in the house extremely dull, until Lucy discovers a wardrobe that leads to a magical world called Narnia, where animals can talk and all are ruled over by the wise and kind lion Aslan. The others don't believe her at first, but soon all of them go through the wardrobe and discover all is not well in Narnia. The land is being kept in a perpetual winter by the evil White Witch, Jadis, who turns anyone who doesn't obey her into stone. The children join Aslan and the animals loyal to him in an attempt to defeat Jadis.

As the children enter Narnia the first time they hear different stories about Narnia and they need to determine which story is to be trusted.

Is Narnia really the realm of the white witch or is Narnia really the realm of the noble lion Aslan who will one day come back and then everything will be different.

As they listen to the stories they need to decide how to decide which are true.

They develop a friendship with the Beaver family who tell them about Aslan the Lion, who is on the move. A prophecy is revealed: The White Witch of Narnia will be overthrown when four "sons of Adam and daughters of Eve" are enthroned.

Three of the siblings begin to accept Aslan as the one to trust.

But Edmund is not convinced - he chooses to believe the lies and seduction of the White Witch and goes searching for her

But, when he finds the witch, she makes him her prisoner. The other children and their friends the Beavers, set out for the Stone Table, where they hope to meet Aslan and somehow rescue their brother Edmund. In the meantime, the Witch has also gone to the Stone Table with Edmund and her other followers. There she plans to seize the other children and prevent them from taking their thrones.

At the Stone Table, the White Witch prepares to kill Edmund, thinking that with his death the prophecy can be derailed.

But Aslan intervenes. He who is innocent of wrong-doing will give his life for Edmund, who has betrayed everything for greed. In an epic scene, the lion Aslan is put to death instead of Edmund, while the children look on. He is killed with the stone knife on the Stone Table.

Everyone leaves except for the 2 girls, Susan and Lucy. They cannot bear to leave Aslan alone.

Let's see what happens next..

**Play video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2O3VpubRq8&t=21s>**

There was Aslan! Death could not hold him down!

Susan and Lucy saw him, touched him, spoke with him..

The story doesn't end there – if you haven't read the book or seen the movie, I encourage you to do so. A new season was about to begin in Narnia.

This story is one of a number of analogies of Jesus' death and resurrection that we find in modern books and movies. Each requiring characters to make a choice about who to trust and who to believe.

## McGrath – and did it happen?

Like we just saw with Aslan, we know that Jesus was alive through God's Word - because of the lack of a dead body, because the stone has been rolled away / cracked - with an empty tomb, and then because of the eye witness sightings of Jesus. In the gospel of Matthew, a very normal sounding Jesus - who seemed to have looked and felt just like he had before Easter.

The two Marys saw the risen Jesus - they touched him and they heard him speak.

Jesus did as he promised - he had taught the disciples that he would be killed and would then rise after three days<sup>3</sup>

And he had said that after he had risen, he would go ahead of the disciples into Galilee." <sup>4</sup>

Jesus can be trusted. We can trust him.

## So why was Paul writing about resurrection?

### What the confusion about it?

John Ortberg, in *Who is this man?* Says that the ancient world, like our own, had a wide variety of opinions about what happens after death. Some believed that life goes out like a candle. Others believed in a place, sometimes referred to as Hades, where departed spirits go at death. They have a shadowy existence there, (it's neither good nor bad there) and they don't come back to this world.

In Israel a different belief emerged called resurrection. This word was around for a long time before Jesus. It was different to a vague, shadowy afterlife. To believe in resurrection meant believing that the universe has been created by a great God and that he means to heal and redeem it. When that happens, he will forgive his people their sin, establish justice, end suffering, heal creation, and bring the righteous dead to life. Resurrection will be dramatic, they believed - it would be obvious and done on a mass scale.

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<sup>3</sup> (Mark 8:31, Mark 9:31)

<sup>4</sup> (Matt 26:32, Mark 14:28)

Because of this belief, nobody in Israel would ever think to claim that one individual had been resurrected in the middle of history.<sup>5</sup>

Even though they had heard Paul's teaching about Jesus before, the Corinthians found that they couldn't make sense of his Christian idea of resurrection because of the worldview of the culture they found themselves in.

Paul was arguing that the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of believers is the foundation of the Christian counter-culture. Paul is saying that it is central to Christian faith. Non negotiable.

With Jesus' resurrection, a new world had opened up, and the power of sin and death have been defeated.

### So what does the resurrection mean for us today?

The resurrection brings us hope, by assuring us that we shall share in the resurrection of Jesus, and be with him forever.

### Death is not the end

Anyone who has lost a dear one, writes Paul Sampley<sup>6</sup>, knows what Paul means when he speaks of the finality of death as an enemy. The utter irretrievability of the lost one sends shock waves of grief. Similarly those who have faced a terrifying medical diagnosis know death as an ultimate threat. Pauls' message, as simple as it is profound, is that the death will not have the last word; God will.

Nothing, not even death, can break the bonds which unite us to him. To become a Christian, writes Alister McGrath<sup>7</sup> is to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ as our living Lord and Saviour which is not ended by death, but is rather brought to its consummation. We need not bid farewell to Jesus when we die; we can rest assured that we will be raised with him forever.

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<sup>5</sup> John Ortberg: Who is this man?

<sup>6</sup> New Interpreter's Dictionary

<sup>7</sup> Alister McGrath: Jesus. Who He is and What that matters

## New life

When we accept Jesus' resurrection, it opens the door to hope and joy.

We are invited to open our eyes and see new life, open our minds and believe new life, open our hearts and love new life, open our hands and give new life. And we are invited to do this because Jesus is risen, and with him new creation has come into being.<sup>8</sup>

We see this reflected in creation:

- Grains of wheat that need to die by being planted into the dark ground before they spring into life and produce a harvest
- New shoots that spring to life after a bushfire
- Deciduous trees that move through the cycle of falling leaves in autumn, bear unproductive branches in winter, new growth in spring and fruit in summer.

It is said that Martin Luther said:

“Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.”

Creation reflects Jesus' glory!

So where are we seeing new life today?

I see it - in renewed faith?

In new initiatives to reach out to people in friendship

In increasing interest in the things we are offering our community.

Where else do you see new life?

I encourage you to intentionally look for signs of new life around you this week.

Let's break with tradition and say the Easter greeting:

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Wright: The Crown and the Fire