

Intro

I came across a questionnaire recently which insurance companies use to calculate how long their clients will live for before they die. And it's called the count down calculator. Pretty morbid isn't it? There's lots of things to fill in and you begin and it says...

- ⌚ Date of birth. And you put that down and then you answer the questions...
- ⌚ Do you smoke? If so how many a day?
- ⌚ Do you exercise regularly?
- ⌚ On average how much do you drink?
- ⌚ Do you eat saturated fats? If so how much? Saturated fats – they're things like carrots, and broccoli and cabbage and Brussels sprouts – so it's best not to eat those kinds of things, they kill you, don't touch them.
- ⌚ Are you overweight, if so how much?
- ⌚ How much sleep do you get a night?
- ⌚ Is there a history of cardio vascular disease in your family?
- ⌚ Have you ever been involved in a car accident? If so how often?
- ⌚ Do you wear a seat belt?

Any way you answer all these questions and then the count down calculator tells you your estimated age of death and your date of death. And when I read that I'm telling you the next day I had a salad for lunch, I went for a run and I was in bed by 10.30.

Well, whether we joke about it or not, the fact is that we are all on a count down to death. And the question is, what happens then, that's the issue in 1 Corinthians 15 – what happens to us after death. And do you remember last week that Paul began with what happened to Christ after he died. He said that Christ's after death experience was a resurrection experience – a physical, factual resurrection from the dead.

But now he begins to move on v12 ¹² **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?**

And that's the problem in Corinth

The Christians were saying there is no resurrection of the dead. Now why would they say that? Well the best explanation is that that's what every one around them was saying. The pagan world didn't believe in resurrection. It's not that they didn't believe in some kind of life after death, it's just that they didn't believe in resurrection. They didn't believe that your physical body would rise to life.

- ⌚ I guess for one thing they could see what every other human being has been able to see since Adam – that after you die, your body rots. Death is self evidently the end of the body.
- ⌚ But in any case to the Greek mind the idea of having a body in the after life was a disgusting thought. Your body is a pain, it gets sick, it wears out, it hurts, it limits you. The idea of being confined to your body for the rest of eternity was horrific. Life after death was about your soul being released.

And so it seems like the Corinthian Christians had just gone on thinking what everyone else around them thought: that is they didn't think too much about life after death. They weren't exactly sure what it would be like, but it certainly wouldn't be physical.

That's the problem in Corinth.

But what's the problem in Sevenoaks, at St Nick's?

Well I guess we wouldn't deny the idea of the resurrection of the dead. But the question is, in practise, does it play any part in our thinking? Or in practise – is the idea of the resurrection of the dead just as absent in our lives in Sevenoaks, as it was in their lives in Corinth.

Well they were actually saying there is no resurrection of the dead. And just for the sake of argument Paul goes along with them. He says, alright, let's just say there will be no resurrection. What if that was true? Well then v13 ¹³ **If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.** He says it again in v16: ¹⁶ **For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.** In other words, look if you're saying physical resurrection just doesn't happen, then you're saying Christ couldn't have been raised either. And here's the real problem. What if that was true?

1. WHAT IF...Christ was never raised?

And that's our first point, vv14-19, what if Christ was never raised?

Well v14 **if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.** So let's take those in turn like Paul does. If verses 1-11 aren't true then...

...preaching is pointless.

He says our **preaching is useless.** That word useless literally means empty. Jesus used the same word when he described someone being sent away empty handed. That's the picture Paul wants us to have of resurrection-less preacher.

- ⌚ What good, for example, is a shop keeper without any goods to sell – the shop's empty, he's useless.
- ⌚ What good is a swimming pool without any water – the pool's empty, it's useless
- ⌚ And what good is a preacher without the resurrection – the preaching is empty, it's useless.

Useless because the resurrection is right at the heart of the Christian message. What is the point of talking all about Jesus and his death and his resurrection *if it never really happened.* There isn't any - it's pointless.

In fact, ¹⁵ **More than that**, verse 15, he says **we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead**. In other words as we saw last week Paul went to great lengths in his preaching to make it clear that this is more than fiction, it's more than fairy story. And so if it never really happened Paul's preaching is worse than pointless – it's all lies, he's a false witness...

But then if Christ was never raised...

...believing is pointless too.

V17: ¹⁷ **And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...**
In other words it doesn't result in anything. You might well be a believer – but you might as well not bother.

Because if Christ didn't rise, then there's no pardon in the past.

V17 again: **if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins**. Now if you think about that for a moment it's not what we'd normally say. We'd normally say

- ⌚ if Christ had not *died*, then your faith would be futile, you'd still be in your sins. Because Christ did for sins on the cross in our place. His death took away our sins. But what has the resurrection got to do with our sins?
- ⌚ How come Paul says **if Christ has not been *raised*...you are still in your sins**.

Well the key to understanding it is to remember the link between sin and death. Death is God's punishment for sin. Or at least it's the physical sign of punishment for sin...If we hadn't sinned, then there wouldn't be death. And so when Christ died on the cross the idea was that he would deal with sin – he would take it away from us – he'd clean us from it's stain, and free us from it's consequences. So now that Christ has died, what should we expect? – well we should expect to be forgiven, we should expect to be cleansed, *and we should expect the death sentence to be*

removed. If the crime has been dealt with, then the punishment is no longer necessary.

So when we look at the resurrection of Christ we're to think: great, if death no longer applies then that must mean sin has been dealt with. But then again, if Christ didn't rise, if death still applies then that must mean sin is still a problem. To deny the resurrection of Christ, amount's to saying Christ cross was a failure.

- ⌚ For example imagine if a brilliant scientist claimed to have discovered a remedy for AIDS, but then he himself contracts AIDS and dies. Well you'd just have assume his remedy didn't work. AIDS can't have been dealt with it's consequence still go on.
- ⌚ And likewise imagine if Christ claimed to have dealt with sin on the cross, and then stayed dead. Well then you'd have to assume that the cross hadn't worked. Sin can't have been dealt with if its consequences still go on.

If you're saying Christ wasn't raised, your saying your sins haven't been pardoned.

And therefore you're also saying...

You'll perish in the future

V18: ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. Simply because if sin hasn't been pardoned, then I'm still separated from God, not just for now, but forever. In other words the future's bleak, the future's awful. Sometimes we try and sentimentalise death don't we to escape that kind of thought.

For example, there's quite a well known...well it's not really a poem, it's just a little reading – have you heard this before:

- ⌚ Death is nothing at all, I've only slipped away into the next room. I am I and you are you and whatever we are to each other that we are still. Wear no forced air of solemnity or

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sorrow: laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we always enjoyed together. Play, smile, think of me. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was. I am but waiting for you just around the corner. All is well.

But no all is not well. Death is not nothing at all, Death is not a slipping away into the next room. Death is an execution. For sin. And if sin has not been pardoned, ¹⁸ **Then those also who have fallen asleep...are lost...** forever.

Now if that's true of Christians as well – then being a Christian is a complete waste of time. Or as Paul puts it in v19 ¹⁹ **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.**

A pitiable present.

In other words Paul's saying it's waste of time living for Christ if at the end of the day there's no difference. Perhaps you know the story of Jim Elliot. If you don't he was a missionary trying to reach a tribe of Indians Ecuador. And on Sunday 8th January in 1956 he and his team were preparing to make their first contact with the tribe. There'd been years of preparation, but the moment had arrived, and Jim Elliot's wife later wrote these words:

- ⌚ Committing themselves and all their carefully laid plans to Him who had so unmistakeably brought them thus far...they sat together on a strip of white sand on the Curaray river, deep in Ecuador's rainforest, waiting for the arrival of a group of men whom they loved, but had never met – savage stone age killers, men known to all the world now as Aucas. But before four-thirty that afternoon the quiet waters of the Curaray flowed over the bodies of the five comrades, slain by the men they had come to win for Christ, whose banner they had borne. The world called it a nightmare of tragedy.

And do you see if there is no resurrection after death, the world is right. It's a tragedy, it's pitiable. If there's no life after death

Jim Elliot's death is a total waste of life. What is the point of doing that kind of thing or anything for Jesus, if Jesus is still in the grave, if that's where we'll end up too. ¹⁹ **If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.** Because we're wasting our lives on lie.

So there we, are – what if Christ was *never* raised? Well then preaching is pointless, and so is believing.

But then...

2. WHAT IF... Christ was indeed raised?

Well that's our second question, our second point, vv 20-28
Well if Christ was indeed raised, then first of all...

The dead will be raised too.

V20: ²⁰ **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** So in other words Paul is saying look if you want to understand the resurrection of Christ, visit the fruit farm, let's go to a vineyard. Because if you know anything about fruit farming you'll know that it's a pretty anxious business. All that planting and pruning, all that work over the winter and the question is: will it all pay off. And so once you see that first piece of fruit on plant, then you can you can breathe a sigh of relief. Because what does it mean? It means: there's a crop on the way. Of course it's early days yet, spring's barely started, you can't go to market yet. But at least you know this: the rest of the crop is on the way.

And Paul saying the same about Christ.

Because once we see that Christ has been raised, then we can breathe a sigh of relief. Because what does it mean? It means: our resurrections are on the way. Of course it's early days yet. But at least you know this: the rest of the resurrections are on the way.

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Which is a key thing to understand isn't it? Because if Christ has been raised from the dead, then why do we still die? Didn't his resurrection work? Well no his resurrection is a print preview – it's a trailer for the main film, it's the first fruits of the main crop.

But it's not just that Christ is a the firstfruits. I guess if we pushed the analogy too far we might say to ourselves, well sure, but crops fail sometimes – Christ might have been raised but that doesn't necessarily mean I will be does it?

And Paul's answer is yes it does. V21: ²¹ **For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.** He's saying to us, just flip your Bibles back to page 1 – remember Adam? Remember how he sinned? God's punishment for that sin was death. And ever since then human beings have been dying – in their droves. We never question it – Adam's death, it made the death of every single one of us inevitable – it's a fact of life on earth.

And Paul's point is this, v22²² **For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.** Christ is like Adam – his resurrection means human beings will rise – in droves. Christ's resurrection, it makes the resurrection of every single Christian inevitable – it's a fact of life in Christ.

I went to drop Catherine off at the train station last week and it's all very sad isn't it saying good bye – but as I'm standing on the platform waving her off, I hear the engine roar up as it begins to pull out of the station. Well once that engine starts to move, what happens next. Well all the carriages follow behind. It's inevitable - they're coupled to the engine.

And Paul wants to say that us and Christ – we’re like that. Once Christ has risen, what happens next? Well all the Christians will follow behind. It’s inevitable – we’re coupled to Christ.

Yes there’s delay - *each in his own turn*, v23: *Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*

Christ’s resurrection means the dead *will be* raised too.

And the flip side of that of course is that Christ’s resurrection means death will be destroyed.

And that’s the point of vv24-28. Christ will return and *Then*, v24, *the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.* ²⁵ *For he must reign* - do you realise that’s what Christ is doing now? He reigns, and there’s no doubt he’ll triumph, *he must reign*, v25, *until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* ²⁶ *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

Christ is risen, which means he is reigning, which means he will destroy death, which means, v27,28, God will finally do what he’s always intended to do – since Genesis chapter 3 – he’ll have brought everything back under his control.

What if Christ was indeed raised?

Well then the dead will be raised, and death will be destroyed.

But then...

3. SO WHAT...?

So what difference does it make here and now? Well says Paul it means we should...

...be consistent

Paul has just argued that to think there is no resurrection of the dead is a serious mistake - And now he says, v29, ²⁹ *Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptised for*

the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptised for them? Well good question! What on earth is Paul on about now? And the answer is that no one really knows. This ‘baptism for the dead’ is only mentioned just here in the Bible. It just seems to have been some kind of religious practise they’d developed. But we don’t really need to know exactly what it was – because we can still see the point Paul’s making: he’s saying –

- ⌚ On the one hand your religious practices you just assume there is a resurrection of the dead: you baptise people for the dead (whatever that actually means)
- ⌚ Yet on the other hand in your lives you seem to act as if there is no resurrection of the dead.

You Corinthian Christians you’re just inconsistent!

But now I wonder if he could say anything very similar to you and me?

- ⌚ Maybe he could say to us, look on the one hand your religious practices just assume there is a resurrection of the dead: you celebrate Easter, you say the creed, you sing songs about it.
- ⌚ Yet on the other hand in your lives you seem to act as if there is no resurrection of the dead.

You Sevenoaks Christians, maybe he’d say to us – you’re just inconsistent!

So what does it look like a life shaped by, a life consistent with the resurrection? Well Paul mentions two things: if we’re going to be raised, then

Sacrifice makes sense

Verse 30: ³⁰ And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? ³¹ I die every day -- I mean that, brothers -- just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained?

In other words Paul regularly put his life on the line for the gospel.

- ⌚ He was imprisoned and beaten and lashed
- ⌚ He was stoned and shipwrecked and assaulted
- ⌚ He often went without food, or water or warmth.
- ⌚ He faced danger on the road, danger from the Jews, danger from the Gentiles: that's what he means by that reference to fighting wild beasts in Ephesus

But if there's going to be no resurrection, what is the point of making those kind of sacrifices for the gospel? ³² **If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, he says, for merely human reasons, what have I gained?** Well absolutely nothing. Because from a human perspective Paul's life is a wasted life. He had everything going for him. He had power, he had influence, he had respect, but he's thrown it all away. And if there's no resurrection of the dead, he's thrown it all away for nothing. He's had one life and he's wasted it.

In fact to put it the other way round – v32 **If the dead are not raised,**

**"Let us eat and drink,
for tomorrow we die."**

In other words, let's live for now, because now is all there is to live for.

And the question Paul wants to ask us is this: are your lives consistent with your beliefs - which life are we living?

- ⌚ A life which says – I know there's a resurrection – so I know sacrifice makes sense
- ⌚ Or a life which says – **Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.**

Maybe you know that sentence which Jim Elliot wrote in his journal when he was a young man, he said this: *he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.* Of course

the world would think it foolish. In fact the world would think exactly what Paul said back in v19 – it would pity that kind of waste, that kind of sacrifice. But here's the thing that's been challenging me this week. If an unbeliever were to leaf through my bank statements – or flick through my diary, would he find anything to pity. Would he look and say what a waste of money, what a waste of time. Or would he basically think – well actually there's not much difference between Joe and myself.

But then again if we're going to be raised, sin is unacceptable.

V33: ³³ Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." That is to say their characters are being spoiled by this lack of belief in resurrection. So he says v34 ³⁴ Come back to your senses as you ought, because a Christian who doesn't live with resurrection in mind – is out of their mind. So come back to your senses...and stop sinning; In other words if I forget that I'm heading for heaven to be with Jesus, then I'll start living for myself and not for him. Which, if you were to read the rest of 1 Corinthians this afternoon you'd see is exactly what they've been doing.

You see the world tells us that if we make sacrifices for Jesus, if we avoid sin for him, then we're missing out. But the resurrection says to us – no you're not.

- ⌚ So if I avoid listening to gossip, I'm not missing out. I'm waiting for heaven.
- ⌚ And if I turn off the seedy movie on channel 5 I'm not missing out, because I'm waiting for heaven.
- ⌚ And if I can't go to the party because I'm preparing for Centrepoint, or I'm cooking for Christianity Explored, I won't be missing out, because I'm waiting for heaven.
- ⌚ And if I refuse to buy the flashier car, or the more expensive dress, I won't be missing out, because I'm waiting for heaven.

- ⌚ In fact I want to say that I could end my life as a bachelor living in a bed sit in Bognor and I won't be missing out. Do we believe that?

Now of course we're not all called to be Paul's or Jim Elliot's although some of us might be. But we are all called to say – I believe in the resurrection of the dead, and so sacrifice makes sense, and sin is unacceptable.