

Imagine a child at big airport saying goodbye to loved one. The person goes through doors that say "Passengers only." We know they go through immigration and security checks then board the plane. But to the child they disappear and are seen no more. What happens to them? Where do they go? It is all a mystery to child. They may be going to a wonderful country but there is sadness in saying good bye.

It is like that with a funeral. The person passes beyond veil of death. The coffin lowered out of sight; the curtain closes at the crematorium. What happens after death? Where do they go?

Grave stones show what different people think. Here are some words from gravestones: "In God's care", "Peace at last", "Together again". "She'll be right mate", "Always remembered", "I told you I was sick" and "Safe in the arms of Jesus".

Some flowers may last for only a day, others for many days. Huon pines may live for a thousand years but in the end they all die and return to the ground. This is our experience of all living things.

So what happens for people?

In our reading from 1 Corinthians Paul asks, *How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?* (15:12)

Some people in Corinth were saying, "Dead people don't rise." Corinth is in Greece and Greek people believed in an immortal soul.

They believed in an afterlife but not in a resurrection of the body. The word "resurrection" means the rising of a body. It doesn't just mean life after death. (Do you see the difference?) They were saying dead bodies don't rise again.

This is an issue today also. People may believe in a spiritual afterlife. But many reject the idea that our bodies will rise to new life.

What Paul says here is that belief in resurrection of the body is essential to Christian faith.

1. No resurrection, no salvation

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. (15:13) If dead people can't rise then Jesus couldn't have risen.

But if Christ didn't rise there are serious consequences:

a) But if Christ's body didn't rise, the apostles' preaching is useless. It is empty. (15:14)

Paul just told them that the preaching of Jesus' resurrection is central to the gospel. It is the message that was preached by all the apostles. It was the message he received from them. It is the message he passed on to the people in Corinth.

I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,* ⁴ *that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.* (15:1-4)

He is saying the truth of the message about Jesus depends on the fact that Jesus' body rose again. If Jesus didn't rise there is no resurrection, no good news, no salvation.

b) If Jesus didn't rise your faith is useless. (15:14)

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (15:17)

"*Still in your sins*" means not forgiven, not saved, no eternal life. We are not saved by Jesus' death on its own. He had to overcome death to save us from its power. He had to rise again to open the way to a new life for us. If he didn't rise he didn't save us.

c) We are then found to be false witnesses about God. v.15

Resurrection was central to the message that Paul and all the apostles preached. See 15:1-4, and the preaching in Acts.

But if Jesus wasn't raised then their preaching is false. Telling lies is morally wrong but telling lies in a court of law is called perjury. It is deliberately giving false witness. The penalty for perjury is up to 14 years in jail. It is a very serious offence. But giving false witness about God puts you under God's judgement. They would be seriously misrepresenting God.

d) If there is no resurrection then those also who have fallen asleep (already died) in Christ are lost. (15:18)

If Jesus didn't rise then those who have already died have not been saved because there would be no forgiveness of sins.

e) The Christian life would be a waste of time:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (15:19)

It would be a waste of time coming to church serving Christ and perhaps suffering for him if there is no resurrection.

We are of all people most to be pitied.

So the physical resurrection of Jesus is a critical issue. To deny the resurrection happened is to remove a key foundation of the Christian faith.

We visited Pont du Gard in the south of France' It is a high aqueduct over a river that used to bring water to the city of Nimes. It was built by the Romans nearly 2000 years ago. It has stood for 2000 years. But if you removed a keystone from one of the arches the whole structure would come crashing down.

Paul is saying our whole faith depends on the facts of Christ's death & bodily resurrection. If there is no resurrection then all we believe collapses.

Do you see? There would be no resurrection, no salvation, no hope of eternal life.

2. BUT Christ did rise. 1 Cor 15:20

Paul continues with a big BUT. A BUT that changes the sorrow of Good Friday into the joy of Easter Day.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (15:20)

Sigh of relief - we don't have to worry about all that!

a) His tomb was empty

The Gospels tell us that Jesus' tomb was empty. On Easter morning Jesus' physical body was gone. Even Jesus' enemies do not deny that fact.

If it was just his spirit rising his body would still be there but the body was gone.

b) He was seen by many

Paul has already listed people who saw him: Peter, the 12 apostles and more than 500 believers at one time (15:5-8).

He appeared over 40 days. He convinced doubters like Thomas that he had risen. He had to see and touch the nail holes.

In Luke 24:39 Jesus says, *"Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."* He had a real body. He eats some fish in their presence. It is a real resurrection of his body, but it is a transformed body, a resurrection body.

The apostles and others saw the risen Jesus. They were witnesses testifying to what they had seen. They were prepared to die for the truth of what they saw. We can rely on their testimony. Our faith is not a leap in the dark. It is trust based on the evidence of reliable eye-witnesses.

c) Those who believe will also be raised

Paul calls Jesus *the "firstfruits" of those who have fallen asleep.* (15:20)

The firstfruits point to the crop that will follow. They show that the harvest of many has begun. Jesus' resurrection shows that many others will follow. If God raised him he will raise us also. It is a sure sign of what will happen to those who believe.

d) A timeline of death

We need to understand how God is dealing with death itself.
So Paul gives us a timeline of death.

A timeline of the Rome would be like this:

753BC - Founded by Romulus and Remus

509BC - Republic

3rd Century BC - Empire

476AD - Fall - When it began to when it ended.

Timeline of death:

- Came through Adam (15:21) *Death came through a man.*

Death entered the world because of Adam's sin.

- Death spread to all people (15:22) *In Adam all die*
We all inherit death from Adam.
- Christ was raised from death
Christ has indeed been raised from the dead. (15:20)
Death has been defeated.
- But we still face death until Jesus returns.
In Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (15:22-23)
- When he comes the dead will rise to be with him.
- Then death itself will be abolished.
²⁵ *For he (Christ) must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (15:25-26)*

Death will be no more - we will receive a resurrection body. There will be not more aches and pains, doctors, hospitals or funerals. No doubt we will all be able to sing in tune!

- But we have to wait for that day.
We still have to face death - but as Paul says later,

⁵⁶*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (15:56-57)*

Salvation secure – supported by the facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because of the resurrection we can be sure:

- That the message of the gospel is true – not useless.
- That our faith is true – not wishful thinking.
- It is worth serving Jesus and even suffering for him.

We can be sure we will be "Safe in the arms of Jesus."