



What now?

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 17th April 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Romans 12:1-21

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

God has shown *extraordinary* kindness to us. Such love. Such mercy. Such grace. And at what cost to us? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. That's incredible.

But with such amazing grace shown to us, it is right to consider how we act, and how we should act, in response to that grace. John puts it concisely in chapter 3 of his first letter where he writes:

1 John 3:1-3

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

That, in essence, is what we are going to study this evening. To consider what Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection, and what that means for us (what our response should be).

And we're going to look at the resurrection chapter that is 1 Corinthians chapter 15. So, if you have your Bibles, please turn, flip or scroll to that chapter as we'll camp out there for a little while.

Study

We read in the first two verses:

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

Paul, writing to the Christians in Corinth, says “this is the the gospel” - that is, this is the good news that I preached, you received, and you obeyed and believed from the heart.

However, he points out that it wouldn't be good news if they had believed in vain - if, in fact, Jesus hadn't died and risen again. So he writes:

1 Corinthians 15:3

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

First, Jesus died for you. And note that He didn't merely die, but He died for our sins. For your sin. For all that you have ever done wrong, and ever will do wrong. Not only in the sight of man, but in the sight of God. And He did so according to what the Bible and Jesus Himself had prophesied - from Psalm 22:1, to Isaiah 52:14, Isaiah 53:1-12, John 3:14 and more.

Likewise Paul says:

1 Corinthians 15:4

and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

That is Jesus wasn't only buried, but He rose again on the third day. That in doing so He might defeat death, and give us new life. That we might live forever with Him. Again, exactly as had been prophesied, from Isaiah 53:12, to Psalm 16:10, and Jonah 1:17 with Matthew 12:40 plus more.

But even beyond the confidence we have from these incredible prophecies being fulfilled, Paul underlines that there were many eyewitnesses to this. We read...

1 Corinthians 15:5

and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

So, that's Cephas (Peter), and the twelve disciples saw Jesus alive, risen from the dead. For clarity, that's the 12 disciples minus Judas, plus Matthias who joined them in Acts 1:26, who had literally seen Jesus crucified, now literally saw Him alive again.

But, it seems, some people doubt the reality of that. Richard Dawkins is one such person. And in his book *The God Delusion* he wrote:

“Nobody knows who the four evangelists were, but they almost certainly never met Jesus personally. Much of what they wrote was in no sense an honest attempt at history. . . . The gospels are ancient fiction.”

Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

Now, you don't need to be a historian, or a Bible scholar, to realise there's some flawed assumptions Dawkins makes, and that he is, in fact, utterly wrong. Bernard N. Howard, who is a pastor in Manhattan, wrote an article a few years ago that makes this point well, saying “If Dawkins is correct, one might imagine the following conversation...”

Luke: Let's have another round of drinks. I've an idea I want to run past you.

John: Sure. What's on your mind?

Luke: You probably heard about the Nazarene named Jesus who was crucified yesterday. I think he could be the perfect candidate for our fake Messiah project.

Mark: One tiny problem: he's dead!

Luke: Yes, but that means we'll control the narrative. We'll be in charge of his reputation.

Matthew: Who would follow a dead Messiah?

Luke: Nobody, so we'll begin with a resurrection myth. We'll hire some thugs to fight off the soldiers guarding his tomb so we can get rid of the corpse.

John: But a missing corpse isn't the same as a resurrection.

Luke: You're right, so we'll have to persuade Jesus's friends to spend the next 30 years telling everyone he's risen from the dead, even if sticking to that story means they'll be imprisoned or killed.

Mark: Okay, then what?

Luke: Well, to make a conspiracy credible you need precise details. So we'll invent stories where Jesus interacts with people in specific locations.

Matthew: Won't people just disprove the stories by visiting those places and asking around?

Luke: There's no need to worry about that. We could invent a story about a synagogue ruler's terminally ill daughter being healed, give the synagogue ruler a name, set it all in a particular place, and still no one—absolutely no one, not even the people living in that place—would trouble to fact-check. Everyone would simply swallow the story whole!

Mark: It sounds like we're on safe ground there. But if we want people to follow Jesus, he'll need a message. People have been waiting for the Messiah for centuries. He's got to be worth listening to when he finally appears.

John: Good point. I'll cook up some deep quotes.

Luke: Thanks, John. Mark's right: you'll need to put profound wisdom on Jesus's lips that theological scholars can happily study for their entire careers.

John: Not a problem.

Luke: Guys, it will take us a while to put these documents together. We need to get communities of people worshiping Jesus in the meantime so that when our books come out they'll get a good reception.

Mark: There's a guy I know called Saul, he could help with that.

Luke: Saul the Pharisee? I can't imagine him getting involved with this kind of thing.

Mark: Trust me, he's our man. I see him leaving behind everything he's been trained to do and planting congregations of Jesus worshipers throughout the Roman Empire, whatever it costs him personally—beatings, shipwrecks, and the like.

Matthew: Awesome. But Luke, can you just remind me, what's the point of all this? I mean, what exactly do we get out of this?

Luke: Come on, Matt, it will be so much fun. We'll watch people being brutally martyred, and we'll know they've been deceived by our dishonest fiction! What's not to like about that?

John: I agree with Luke. This is definitely worth years of effort on our part. Count me in.

Mark: Me too.

Matthew: I'll do it if my name comes first in all the promotional material.

Luke: Deal. Let's get to work.



If Richard Dawkins Is Right

Bernard Howard imagines a conversation between writers of the four Gospels if the story of Jesus is indeed fiction.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/if-richard-dawkins-is-right/>

Richard Dawkins clearly has a problem. He doesn't like it. He doesn't want it to be true. But that doesn't change the facts of history. And his problem in that area isn't that 4 gospel writers saw Jesus alive following His resurrection, nor that 12 people saw Him alive, but that *hundreds* of people saw Him alive. At once! We read...

1 Corinthians 15:6

After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.

In our legal system, a single eyewitness is enough to convict someone. Here we now have over 500. As the title of the famous and good book by Josh McDowell suggests, this is *Evidence Demands that a verdict*.

But Paul's not done yet, for he writes:

1 Corinthians 15:7

After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

Why call out a single person when he has already counted over 500 witnesses? Because James grew up as Jesus brother in the same house. He knew Him. And he didn't believe Him, for we read in John 7:3 "For even His brothers did not believe in Him."

Yet, by Acts 1:14 we read "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." And James not only believed, but wrote that powerful letter we have in the Bible.

Something changed. Something convinced James that Jesus wasn't the older brother he thought He was, but that, in fact, He was God's own son, who died and rose again for him. He believed the gospel - he'd seen Jesus alive again after His resurrection.

And speaking of those who didn't believe, Paul now gives his personal testimony in the matter:

1 Corinthians 15:8

Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

This was Paul who had persecuted the church, killing and imprisoning Christians for their faith in Jesus. He hated the church. Yet now, having been confronted by the risen Jesus, was preaching the gospel - utterly convinced that Jesus died and rose again from the dead.

And with this confidence in the resurrection, from what others had seen, and what he had experienced, Paul asks the Corinthians just a few verses later...

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

That is, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then all this is worthless, because we are not saved! And that means those who we love who have already died, and that loved Jesus, are also not saved - and there is no hope, no eternal life for any of us. Rather, we will all have to stand in front of God and be dealt with according to our sin, faced with an eternity in hell.

But, thankfully, that's not the case. We read...

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

Jesus was the first-fruits of the resurrection - the first with a new body that will never fail. Unlike Lazarus who, though he rose from the dead, died again later.

And this new body, and an eternity with Jesus, is something that we can look forward to with hope and joy. Towards the end of this chapter Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 15:50-57

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O Death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?"

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, what has been accomplished for us! This isn't about feeling good now. This is about our whole eternity being changed, as of now. For Jesus paid for all of our sin, thus rescuing us from the jaws of the law. And that is a breathtaking thing, because the law is hard. It is strong. There is no room for our error. James notes in his letter:

James 2:10

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

So serious was our sin, that we were helpless - because we couldn't hope to pay that which we owed. Indeed, we read the worst *and* best news in a single verse in Romans.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The certainty of the resurrection means we are each faced with a very real choice. Death. Or eternal life. Forever in hell. Or Forever in Heaven. They are the only 2 options.

If you are not a Christian, here is where you need to make your decision. You can hope it's not true. *Or* you can look the evidence in the face, reach the conclusion many have before, and put your faith and trust in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

But as Christians, we sometimes miss that we also have a choice at this moment. And that is how to act in light of what Jesus has done. Let's look at Paul's conclusion in verse 58:

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Paul's conclusion based on all that Jesus accomplished for us *wasn't* that we should give each other chocolate eggs at Easter. But, rather than we should be steadfast and immovable. Steadfast and immovable in what? you might ask. Your faith.

And that we should be abounding. Abounding in what? The work of the Lord. Not football, or any sport. Not education, qualifications, or careers. Not money, not status. But the work of the Lord. And not dabbling in it. But abounding in it.

To the Colossians, Paul writes:

Colossians 2:6-7

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

We are to walk in Him, for we have been given new life through Him. In the next chapter Paul writes:

Colossians 3:1-11

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

If you have been saved, live like it! For we are to be obedient to Christ. That's only reasonable after all He has done, as Paul writes to the Christians in Rome:

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

If Jesus is your Saviour, consider all He has done for you. And how you are living for Him in response to that. Are you obedient? Are you?

A comment I've shared before is this, from AW Tozer, who said:

True obedience is the refusal to compromise in any regard our relationship with God, regardless of the consequences.
AW Tozer

The problem is, we're too easy on our lack of obedience. DA Carson wrote:

We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.
DA Carson

Are we lacking in obedience? Do our lives suggest we've understood what Jesus did for us? A final thought I'll share with with this evening is something I read around a week ago, and has been weighing on my mind. The missionary Elisabeth Elliot said:

Sometimes 'struggling' is a nice word for 'postponed obedience'.
Elisabeth Elliot

Wow. Is that us? Do we too easily say to ourselves, or others, that we're struggling with anger. Or jealousy. Or lust. Or bitterness. Or lying. When the reality is, we're not struggling with it at all - in fact we're enjoying our sin and putting off being obedient.

Summary

There is no doubt, when you look at the facts, that Jesus rose from the dead. But how will you respond?

- If you're not a Christian - you have the most important of decisions to make
- If you are a Christian - you still have a decision to make, whether you will now obey Jesus, or treat his sacrifice for you as if it were nothing more than a useful favour, rather than if your life depended on it

Either way, don't leave this place the same. If you feel convicted, and want to talk to someone, please see myself, the pastor or other elders tonight. We'd love to pray with you.

Let's pray.