

## Rainham Christian Fellowship Zoom Service 19/04/20 - Does it matter if we believe in a literal resurrection?

### Welcome:

Welcome to our second Zoom service.

- I hope you have enjoyed a time of worship with the songs prepared by Neil
- It is good to know we are still together in Jesus even when we are apart.
- Last week we talked about the Hope of Easter found in Jesus' resurrection
- An assurance of God being in control
- And of his victory over sin and death

### Prayer:

Father God, thank you that you love us, and you have called us to follow you.

We ask that this morning, although we are apart that you will meet with us and encourage us and enable us to be your family, your church in the difficult circumstances we find ourselves.

We pray for those we know or hear of that are suffering from the effects of the Corona virus.

We ask for your healing and restoration. For your peace and hope to fill our hearts as we worship you this morning. Amen

**Preamble:** From the SEBA ministers thought for the day from Stuart Davison

*Last year, on Country File, they went to the mill in St Alban's and bakery where, they said, the first hot cross buns were made. They explained that the idea was that as they were big, they could be divided into four parts by so making them with the cross, and more people could get a share, especially in poorer families. The BBC thus took the cross out of Good Friday, sanitising even the Hot Cross Bun.*

*Queen's Easter message was available in full and she spoke of faith, her own faith, and the great importance of the message of the resurrection of Jesus at Easter. It then appeared on the BBC news as being about the fact that we shall overcome this coronavirus - a message of hope, yes, but sanitising out the most important bit!*

*Archbishop Welby was interviewed on the BBC following his Easter message. The important thing to the presenter seemed to be that he had preached with a toaster in the background. If he had looked closer, he would have seen that it was a radio, not a toaster! But more importantly, he again rather missed the content of the message – the 'unreasonable hope' in these days because of Jesus; that the resurrection of Jesus is the solid foundation of all hope for a better world.*

*Our celebrations of Easter this year put many of us at our nearest to the disciples on that first Easter – in isolation, fearful of going out, fearful for our lives and those we love, worrying about the future. But in Jesus we have that hope. It changed everything for them – and it does for us! We cannot miss JC out, even to be PC.*

### **Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-32 The Resurrection of Christ**

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

*<sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

*<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

*<sup>12</sup> 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? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup> More than that, 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. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

*<sup>20</sup> But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. <sup>24</sup> Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. <sup>28</sup> When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.*

*<sup>29</sup> Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? <sup>30</sup> And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? <sup>31</sup> I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>32</sup> If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”*

## Introduction:

Last week I asked if anyone had a question they would like answered.

- The only question I have come across was on a TV programme I caught the end of
- It was discussing questions of faith and had a panel of various religious persuasions.
- The Question that they were discussing was
- **Does it matter if we believe in a literal resurrection?**

The question was looked at in different ways

- On the one hand it asked does it matter if the resurrection is true or not
- On the other it asked if it is true spiritually does it matter if we believe in a physical resurrection.

Obviously, there were different views

- One panellist seemed to be expressing the view was that it doesn't matter
- As long as what you believe works for you it is fine
- But this doesn't work for me!
- It denies the power of the resurrection

It demotes Jesus' death and resurrection to a good example

- A story to encourage us to be better people
- That is not the Gospel!
- The gospel requires Jesus to have done something concrete
- Done something that deals with sin.
- Something that allows us to be forgiven

In some ways it is like debt advice

- If we are told a story about someone getting out of debt that is helpful
- It doesn't really matter whether the story is literally true or not
- As long as it offers hope and good advice.

However, if I am told my debt has been paid off.

- Then it really matters whether it is true or not
- If it's just a story, I can live in hope of 'winning the lottery' and paying off my debts
- But I am still in debt
- And the bailiffs will still be knocking on the door.

But if it is true, then my life is transformed.

- I no longer have to worry or live in fear of the 'knock on the door'
- Or struggle to find ways to pay back my creditors.
- I've been set free!

Having said that there may be a difference between what I believe and what is true

- If I believe my debts are paid off, and it is not true
- Then I am heading for a disaster
- As Paul puts it in verse 17

*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*

- *And again in 19.*
- *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

Conversely,

- If I don't believe my debts are paid off but in reality, they have been
- Then I am living in fear unnecessarily.
- But just because I am not benefiting from the truth it doesn't stop it being true.

From this argument, I guess it suggests the truth is not affected by what we believe

- But what we believe affects whether we live in the light of that truth.
- So, the truth is, that Jesus is risen from the dead.
- What we believe does not change that
- But it makes a world of difference to how we live.

I have been discussing this with Jenny (Brooks) over the week

- She made the following point

*A number of theories have been suggested that attempt to disprove but ultimately offer no credible historical evidence to validate anything other than His literal bodily resurrection. Most of the Corinthians understood that Christ's resurrection was bodily, as the spirit doesn't die and therefore cannot be resurrected. Scripture also made it clear that Christ's body would see no decay (Acts 2:24-27), which is unnecessary if His body was not resurrected. And Christ Himself told His disciples it was His body that was resurrected: "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." (Luke 24:39).*

*Our Christian life is based on our old self dying a spiritual and physical death, then being resurrected spiritually and physically by Jesus into a new creation, just as He was. The young man in the empty tomb tells the women that the reason Jesus' body is not there is because, "He has risen!" (Mark 16:6). Without question, most of the eyewitnesses to the Resurrection (though certainly not all) were followers of Christ who loved him deeply. The strength of the evidence presented by the eyewitnesses in Mark is strengthened by the sheer number. The Gospels alone tell us of 10 separate instances where Jesus is seen after His death, at different times and in different places, to different people. In 1 Corinthians 15:6, Paul describes a scene where over five hundred people saw Jesus at one time, most of whom were still living when Paul was writing. And in Acts 26:22-23, he says "but God has helped me to this very day; so, I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."*

Thank you, Jenny,

- If we accept the bible as an accurate historical record, then the evidence for a bodily resurrection is very hard to refute

- If we apply the normal methods for establishing the accuracy of historical records, then the bible scores more highly than many historical events that we would not question.
- So, the only other objection can be the disciples lied. They made it all up.

But this cannot be true.

- Paul is writing to the Corinthians in the early AD 50's.
- 15-20 years after Jesus resurrection
- The people he is talking about are still alive
- He could not have maintained that lie, he would have been found out
- But it is inconceivable that a gigantic hoax could have transformed the world in the way the Gospel has.
- And it makes no sense because they did not benefit from it.
- In fact, most of them suffered and died for their beliefs.

That is the point Paul is making to the Corinthians

*<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. <sup>15</sup> More than that, 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. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

When I was at university (many years ago)

- There was an evangelistic argument popular with some students
- They said – *“You should become a Christian because being a Christian is a great life and if its true you get to go to heaven. But even if it is not true, you’ve had a great life so you can’t lose.”*
- Needless to say, I disagreed, and I used verse 19 to refute it  
*“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.”*

Being a Christian is great, but it has a cost.

- We give our lives in service to God
- And if we pay that cost for a lie, then we have wasted our lives
- As Paul goes on to say in verses 30-32  
*And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? <sup>31</sup> I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>32</sup> If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”*

There is no point to faith unless it is true

- But the truth is it is not a lie
- And we rejoice in the knowledge of Jesus as our risen saviour.
- Amen?

But there is another aspect to our question

- What if we doubt, like Thomas?
- What if we believe Jesus rose in a spiritual sense but not physically?
- Are we still saved?

This was the question I posed to Jenny (Brooks)

- This was her thoughts

*Firstly, I don't believe it can affect salvation because the criminal on the cross next to Jesus was told he would be in paradise with Him (Luke 23: 40-43) before Jesus had even died, let alone been resurrected! And "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) so it is fundamentally irrelevant to salvation whether Jesus' resurrection was bodily or spiritual but still an interesting question. Jesus said of Himself, in John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."*

Clearly, we are not saying it doesn't matter if Jesus was raised or not

- From what we have said
- From what we have read from the bible
- Jesus death and resurrection as the only means of salvation.
- And we need to believe that to receive salvation
- But we are not saved by correct doctrine, however important that might be
- We are saved by faith in Jesus
- Romans 10:6-10 tells us

*But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: <sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.*

Paul is saying it is not our place to say who will go to heaven or hell

- To do either is to disrespect Christ
- Our faith is to say Jesus is lord and believe he is risen.

Those of us who struggle with the faith to believe it is physically true may still be saved.

- Like my hapless debtor from earlier
- My debts have been paid off
- I'm just not experiencing it in my life.
- So, the message is 'let us grow our faith'
- Take hold of all the Christ has done for us
- Pay the price because it is true and worth it whatever the cost

Let us say with Paul (Romans 1:16)

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes:*

It is a power not just for the next world

- But a power to live for God in this one
- It gives us the confidence to live this life in the expectation of Jesus' return.
- It means this physical world is valuable and worth caring for.
- It means we have hope to strive for a better world today not just in heaven
- I'm going to finish with an excerpt from a book by Timothy Keller
- 'Called the Reason for God'

"Each year at Easter I get to preach on the resurrection. In my sermon I always say to my sceptical, secular friends that, even if they can't believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger, and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by an accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up in the death of the sun. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realising that their own world view undermines any motivation to make it a better place. Why would we sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do makes any difference? If the resurrection of Jesus happened, however, that means there's infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves for the needs of the world "

(T Keller, The Reason for God. Chapter 13)

### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus thank you that you are alive. You have risen.

Forgive us when our faith is weak. When we doubt and compromise.

Like the man who came to you pleading for his son we say "Lord I believe, help my unbelief"  
Help us to know you better, send your Holy Spirit to lead us into your truth that in knowing the truth we may be set free.

Please give us confidence in your word and sufficient faith to trust our lives to you, to offer them in your service.

Fill us with your Spirit that we may be your witnesses and others will come to know you through us

In Your precious name

Amen

### **Grace:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore. Amen