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Last year just before Easter, the Discovery Channel, made one of the biggest announcements of the year. They claimed in a documentary that they had found the bones of Jesus. The actual bones of Jesus. Film maker, James Cameron, the Director of Titanic, appeared on TV, along with some other local historians to claim that they had proof, undeniable proof, that Jesus had never risen again.

I remember thinking to myself, I have to watch this special. And so I tuned in and found out that when some builders were putting up a block of flats a number of years ago, they stumbled across an ancient burial cave. With human remains dating back to the time of Christ. And on one of the graves they found the name Jesus, the son of Marius (similar to Mary, Jesus mother). Inside that grave were bones.

Now 60 Minutes picked up the story a couple of weeks later. Alright the evidence was pretty circumstantial, but if it was true, Christianity is blown out of the water. So since then I have been waiting for the scholarly evidence to back up the claims, but a year later, none has come.

You see the Resurrection of Jesus, is probably the most important event in the history of the world. On it, the claim of Jesus as Son of God stands or falls. On it, the message of Christianity is intractably linked. On it, my faith and yours, if you are a Christian ultimately rests. And that is the topic that Paul turns to next. And firstly he outlines

### **1. The Certainty of the Resurrection. (v1-11)**

For Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel, the basis of everything they believe. And the gospel, which is of first importance, is all about Jesus. It is not about my actions, my faith, my going to Church. It is not about a Grand Spirit, a Great Architect, even a God. It is about the God, the Father who according to His Word, the Bible, sent his one and only son, Jesus into the world. And this Jesus, died for our sins. This Jesus was buried in a tomb and this Jesus was raised to life on the third day.

Wow, that's going to hard to prove isn't it? No one ever before has died, been buried and come back alive, other than the people who were raised by Jesus himself. But now Paul makes the claim, the amazing claim, the almost unbelievable claim, that Jesus did to Himself what he had done for a young girl, a widow's son and for his best friend Lazarus. He had come back from the dead.

That he was *raised* on the third day. Not just as an *illusion*. Or a *spirit*. But alive; and he appeared to *Peter*; and then to the *twelve*; Verse 6, after that, to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time. Most of whom are still living, though *some* have fallen asleep. And he had lastly appeared to the writer of the letter, the Apostle Paul. Yes he was verifiably dead, lots of people saw that. Yes he was buried, the Romans made sure of that, why they even posted a guard on the tomb. Yes the tomb was empty. And yes there is eyewitness proof that he was seen alive. And Paul says, why I

could give you some of their names and addresses if you would like. Sure some have died in the last 20 years, but hundreds are still alive. You can know for certain that the resurrection of Jesus really happened.

John Singleton Copley, one of the great legal minds of British history and three times High Chancellor of England once wrote, "I know pretty well what evidence is, and I can tell you, such evidence as that for the resurrection has never broken down yet!" And author GB Hardy put it this way, "There are but two essential requirements: first: Has anyone cheated death and proved it? Second is it available to me. Here is the complete record. Confucius' tomb - occupied. Buddha's tomb - occupied. Mohammed's tomb - occupied. Jesus tomb - empty. Argue as you will. There is no point following a loser!" The resurrection, its certainty and

## **2. The Resurrection - its centrality. (verses 12-20)**

For Paul continues, he says mark my words. If there is no resurrection, we are ruined. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus hasn't been raised. And if Jesus hasn't been raised back to life, then Paul's preaching is profitless. All Christian preaching is profitless, you may as well go down to the beach and enjoy yourself today because you can't trust what the preacher nor the Bible will say.

If Jesus has not been raised then our faith is foolish, because quite frankly it is grounded on a lie, a wicked, mischievous lie. If Jesus has not been raised then the disciples are deceivers, because they went all over the known world and didn't bring people closer to God, they left them far, far away. They didn't open the door to heaven, they slammed it shut, not just for themselves but for all those who believed their message.

If Jesus has not been raised then sin is sovereign. You and I are still unforgiven sinners and that sin separates us from God. If Jesus has not been raised then death has dominion. Those who have already died are lost. For death has defeated them. Death has won. Death is the victor. And if Jesus hasn't been raised then the future is futile and you and I have been the victim of a huge, huge con job. We are now up the creek without a paddle. We are now the biggest losers, the people most to be pitied.

That's how central the resurrection of Jesus is. For if Jesus has not come back to life, we won't come back to life. We have our three score years and ten, if we are lucky and then we enter the world of nothingness.

A Christian has no Saviour but Christ, no Redeemer but Christ, no Lord but Christ. Therefore if Christ was not raised, he is not alive, and our Christian life is lifeless. We would have nothing to justify our faith, our Bible study, our preaching, our service for him or our worship of him, and nothing to justify our hope either for this life or the next. We would deserve nothing but the compassion reserved for fools.

But according to verse 21, Christ has been raised from the dead. It is true, it is certain. So in the words of Victor Hugo, French novelist perhaps best known for "*Les Miserables*," *I feel within me that future life. I am like a forest that has been razed; the new shoots are stronger and brighter. I shall most certainly rise toward the heavens--the nearer my approach to the end, the plainer is the sound of immortal*

*symphonies of worlds which invite me. For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse: history, philosophy, drama, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song; all of these I have tried. But I feel I haven't given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies with me. When I go to the grave I can say, as others have said, "My day's work is done." But I cannot say, "My life is done." My work will recommence the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight but opens upon the dawn. "*

### **3. Its Consequences**

What a difference the resurrection of Christ makes. Paul says, like Hugo, it has consequences for the future. Jesus death and resurrection is like the first fruits guaranteeing the future harvest. He is like the contract guaranteeing the done deal. It is like the wedding ring assuring us that the promises made to us will be fulfilled.

So the resurrection of Jesus ushers in the last days of this world. Yes we may all die like our forefather Adam. But if we belong to Jesus, then we will all be raised like our Saviour Jesus. You see Jesus is no longer dead, he is reigning on high at the right hand of the Father. But when the time comes for him to return to this earth, he will put all his enemies under his feet. And the last enemy is death itself. Death will die. Death will no longer affect every single human being. And with all his enemies now quashed, Jesus will hand the reigns of the Kingdom over to his Father God.

Thus the consequences of Jesus rising to life again means we can trust the Word of God. We can trust Jesus vision of the future. We can be certain that this world is not the end of all things. God is in control, no matter what war, or abuse, or poverty, or pain or cancer happens in this life. Somehow all these things are part of his plan to bring me through this life into life eternal.

So it has consequences for the future, but it also has consequences for the present as well. Move down to verse 29. Where there's more. And this is bizarre. Somehow the Corinthians have picked up the idea of being *baptised* on behalf of dead people. Old Uncle Bruce... long dead. He wasn't a Christian. So let's get someone to get *baptised on his behalf*. As I think the Mormons do these days.

Not a smart idea. Because you're saved by *trusting Jesus*; not by *baptism*. And especially not someone else's baptism. But that's not Paul's point. He says, you Corinthians are totally *inconsistent*. You want to have your cake and eat it. Because on the one hand you want to say there's no *resurrection*. And on the other hand you want to get baptised for Uncle Bruce. If the dead aren't raised at all, he says, then why are people getting baptised for them? You have to think through what you are doing now in the light of what Jesus has already done for you.

So he goes on in verse 31, that is why I am willing to place myself in physical danger because I know that death is not the end. That is why I watch the company I keep, because I don't want to be corrupted by what other people say and do. Because it will affect not just what I do here on earth but my eternity. For if there is no such thing as the resurrection then I might as well eat and drink for tomorrow I die.

It reminds me a bit of the story of the missionary John G Paton, the 19<sup>th</sup> century

missionary to the South Seas. Apparently he met opposition to leaving his home in Scotland and going to preach to the cannibalistic tribes of the New Hebrides, what is today Vanuatu. For a well meaning Church member moaned to him, by saying “The cannibals, the cannibals! You will be eaten by the cannibals.”

But without hesitation, Paton replied, *“I confess to you that if I can live and die serving my Lord Jesus Christ, it makes no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms, for in that Great Day of Resurrection, my body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.”*

#### **4. The Resurrection -its certainty, its centrality, its consequences and its connection**

Look with me at verses 35 to 49. For Paul says there is a connection between the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection bodies. For just as Jesus died and on the third day rose to life, with a resurrection body, so when we die we too will rise to life with a resurrection body as well.

Now if you remember when Jesus rose from the dead, it was a body that you could touch. Remember Thomas wanted to put his hands in the nail marks to make sure it was him and Jesus said to Thomas, go on have a try. It was a body that ate, for he ate fish in their presence. But it was also a body that seemed to come and go as Jesus pleased. At one time they were hiding behind locked doors and then suddenly Jesus was amongst them. Does this mean that he went through the wall or are we reading too much into this verse?

Well anyway, Paul says our new resurrected body will be connected to the old one body like a plant is connected to the seed. Now the tree looks very different to the seed, the acorn tree to the acorn. But they are made of the same genetic material aren't they? Even though they are very different. Or using another illustration the butterfly is related to the caterpillar, but that doesn't mean that they look the same.

The point being is that our resurrected body will be connected to our earthly body. Joni Eareckson Tada, was paralysed in a diving accident, and she explains it well when she said, *“Somewhere in my broken paralysed body is the seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become all the more grand when you contrast atrophied, useless legs against splendorous resurrected legs. I'm convinced that if there are mirrors in heaven (and why not?), the image I'll see will be unmistakably 'Joni,' although a much better , brighter Joni.”*

But just as all flesh are not the same, so the new body will be different to the old. And just as the birds have an appropriate body to fly, the fish, an appropriate body to swim. The moon is made to be in the sky and the sun to heat the world, so our new body will be appropriate not to an earthly live but a heavenly life.

And that's how it's going to be, verse 42. The body *sown* is perishable. The body raised is *imperishable*; it's sown in *dishonour* and *weakness*; raised in *glory and power*. Sown a natural body. Raised a *spiritual body*. Which he says follows on just like *Christ followed Adam*. We once got Adams body of dust; we soon will get a *heavenly body* like Christ. Which, he says, is absolutely *necessary*. Because no matter *what* the Corinthians are thinking, *flesh and blood*, the bodies we've got *now* – they're

not fit for eternity. But God is preparing something for us that is fit to last forever.

So at present we are a bit like Humpty Dumpty. Remember, Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall and fell and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put him back together again? Well you and I are broken because of sin. And there's not a thing anyone can do to fix us. We are utterly helpless and hopeless and stand in judgment before God because of our sin.

But while we may be broken like Humpty Dumpty because of sin and unfixable by anyone in the world, because that tomb is genuinely empty and Jesus is alive, what He did on the cross paid for your sins and we've been given an opportunity to not only be fixed, but to become a new creation and to have fellowship with God. That's the joy of Resurrection morning. God can fix you spiritually and you can have the hope that He will one day complete your redemption by redeeming your body to be like Jesus' body! Which leads to Paul's last point about

### **5. Christ's resurrection - the conclusion (verses 50-8)**

The changing of our bodies will be one of the last things that God will do. We will not inherit our new bodies until the last day when the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised to life and then death will be defeated. Death will no longer have any control over us. Death will no longer be the bogeyman for the human being. Death will lose its sting.

It reminds me of the story of the young boy who had a deadly allergy to bees, and one day he was driving along in the car when a bee flew in the window. Now this was dangerous, extremely dangerous for him. One sting and it could have been the end. But what does his father do? He stops the car, he traps the bee and he draws its sting onto himself. Now the bee has lost its sting, its power, its fear factor. And the boy is now completely safe again.

In the same way at the end of the world, Christ, will remove the sting from death itself. He will draw its sting on Himself and show that he is more powerful than death, than sin, than Satan. And it will mean that death will never ever break in and destroy the life that God has in store for us.

And that should mean for us a hymn of praise should come onto our lips. *"Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting. But thanks be to God. For He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* We are not on the losing side. We are not defeated by sin, the world or the devil. We are on the winning side, we are on Christ's side. For his resurrection, ensures our resurrection.

I like the quote attributed to preacher Dale Evans who once said, "I spent most of my life searching for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Then I finally found it at the foot of the cross." Or more correctly I found it at the entrance to the empty tomb!

Which just means we can give ourselves completely to God's work now, doesn't it? We don't have to be scared of death. We don't have to be paralysed by failure. We don't have to be worried about our future. It's safe. It's secure. So we can get on with serving God in the present. We can find our niche, our calling, our spot in our Church,

in our family, in our community and live for the Lord.

Because everything we do for the Lord is not in vain. Everything we do for the Lord will last longer than our worlds 30 seconds of fame. It will last for eternity. It will declare the power of God in this world and in the next.

Which leads me to conclude with the epitaph that Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself while still a young man. It wonderfully catches the spirit of Paul's words in 1 Cor.15. It says, "*The body of B. Franklin, printer, (like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding) lies here, food for worms. But the work shall not be lost; for it will (as he believed) appear once more, in a new and more elegant edition, revised and corrected by the Author.*"

I wonder what things that you will do today, that will also not be lost. But will be transformed by the Author of our life and the Lord of time and eternity. Time will only tell whether we made the most of today and used for the here and now or whether we used it doing something that lasts for eternity.