

“The Resurrection of the Dead Is”

**1 Corinthians 15:12-20** <sup>12</sup> Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; <sup>14</sup> and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. <sup>15</sup> We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ-- whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. <sup>17</sup> If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. <sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

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Today is an important day in the life of Claude Church. We are taking in a few new members and we are also commissioning Doug Lackie to go forth in mission. Thus, we are gathered here to celebrate not simply that this is an important day for the individuals concerned and for us as a church of Jesus Christ, we gather here today to praise God for his steadfast love and faithfulness. He has really acted in history in, through, and as Jesus Christ to deliver humanity and his creation from the disease of sin and its bondage to death. Moreover, God in, through, and as the Holy Spirit is indeed acting in history in our midst through the through proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ creating faith in us and sending us forth in mission.

Oddly, though it might seem a bit out of context, I wish to again devote some time this morning to discuss the resurrection of the dead for it is a core component of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To say that there is no resurrection is to deny the Gospel altogether. Last week I spoke of the resurrection and its relationship to grace. If you remember, grace is God's presence with us, his favour poured upon us, and his acting not only for our benefit, but for the benefit of all of God's creation. God's grace, in essence, is the gift of the Holy Spirit who creates in us a union with Jesus Christ in the same way that blood unites the human body and in the same way that blood relation establishes kinship. By God's grace, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are really his children, his family, in Christ Jesus. As such, we are in the present what we will be in the future when Christ returns and the dead are raised. We are tasting of our future and are a foreshadowing for the world to see. Our fellowship in the Holy Spirit in the love of Jesus Christ is proof that the dead will be raised. If new life in Christ is given to us now by the gift of the Holy Spirit, then we shall be resurrected as Christ Jesus is when he returns because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

In Paul's day, there were some who were saying that the bodily resurrection of the dead is not. It isn't going to happen. In 2 Timothy we learn more about them that they were saying the resurrection had already taken place; that it was a present spiritual reality and not a future hope. Their beliefs were rooted in the Greek Pagan idea that the body, indeed all things made of matter, are bad and that spirit and/or energy is truly what divinity is. They said God would not raise the body because it would essentially be bringing evil back into

existence. Resurrection for them was that they had been spiritually awakened. Finally, they taught that our immortal soul now awakened will after death be free from this body and be reunited with uncorrupted divinity.

This teaching is called Gnosticism and it is still around today. Tom Harpur, if you are familiar with him, is one of its loudest proponents here in Canada. He says that spirituality is all that matters. There are more subtle versions that have been with the church almost from the beginning. Some will say that Jesus was the only one to be resurrected from the dead and when he ascended he reverted back to being a spirit and that his resurrection is simply proof that our immortal souls will go to heaven if we believe in him. Last century it became very popular to say that those who saw Jesus were experiencing a manifestation of their corporate grief, an illusion which they later turned into a myth of Jesus' bodily resurrection. Finally, whenever someone speaks of our immortal souls going to heaven or hell, they are preaching the Gnostic gospel. When we die, we die; every bit of us, even the soul. 1 Timothy 6:16 says that Jesus alone possesses immortality (and it is bodily immortality). Apart from union with him in the Holy Spirit, we will not live after death until everyone is raised. For the Christian there is life after life after death meaning when we die we will live on in him until we are raised from the dead at the resurrection when everyone will be raised to face judgment.

I recently got into a discussion with someone about what will happen to the yet to be convicted serial killer Robert Picton when he dies. I said he will die and he will eventually be raised. When he is raised he will be raised in a body that no longer has that sin-sick evil desire to kill and mutilate. He will know the love of God in Christ Jesus as we know it and he will know himself free from sin. He will then be judged, held accountable for what he has done. He will know the full extent of the evil he has done because he will know the full extent of God's love for him and his victims. If that ain't Hell then I don't know what is. Who could bear it? What ultimately happens to him is in God's hands and we must remember that it is not outside of the nature of God to forgive.

But, I ask how I or any of us are really any different than Robert Picton? We all are guilty of some pretty shameful stuff. There is no difference other than God chose to touch us now and awaken me by the Holy Spirit to faith in his steadfast love and faithfulness in Jesus Christ and by that same Spirit has summonsed us into his service. That God has done this is how we know that the resurrection of the dead is. It will happen. The Gospel is true. Its proof is the grace that is in your very midst evidenced in the faith you have and the love you share. That there are those in your midst desiring to respond to this grace and the summons to discipleship together with you is proof of the resurrection of the dead. That this church is involved in God's mission to save his creation is evidenced in the fact that one of our own is going forth as an ambassador of Christ to be a witness to God's love and desire for peace among the peoples of Israel and Palestine. He's going to the very heart of the matter where stones are being thrown and people are cursing one another and he is going there to say the God who loves you sees and the rest of the world sees the injustice that is happening here.

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Friends, your faith is not in vain. You are indeed forgiven your sins. You are indeed being saved from sin and death. You are indeed growing into the image of Christ Jesus. Thus, you have reason to share in the proven and living hope that you will be resurrected from the dead by the Spirit of Christ who is here dwelling in you. Go forth and live according to this real hope, this real peace. Amen.