



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 15:1-19

“Paul on the Resurrection”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio begins] We're turning this morning in the Scripture reading to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and reading the first 19 verses. The subject for today is "Paul and the Resurrection of Christ," and this is one of the greatest of the Pauline sections in which the resurrection is mentioned. In fact, it is the earliest account of the resurrection in the New Testament so far as we can be assured of. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 1 through verse 19.

The apostle in beginning the chapter begins it in a way that suggests that while the Corinthians did not write him about this problem as in other cases throughout the epistle he's answered their questions, nevertheless, he felt that this was a question that they might have had some problems with. It's helpful to remember that the Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but they did not believe in a resurrection of the body. In fact, they believed that the body was essentially evil and bad, and therefore, to be released from the body was a blessing. Therefore, the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body would at first have seemed to them as being something that they did not really look forward to. To enter again into the prison house of the body, as they often spoke of it, would be something that they would not like. The apostle, knowing this, no doubt has something of that in mind as he writes concerning the resurrection.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are being saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. (Now Paul does not mean that it is possible for a person to believe and have life and then lose it. What he means is that men believe in vain when they believe in something that did not really happen. And so they have believed in vain in believing in Christ as a resurrected savior if he was not resurrected. That's something our twentieth century theologians, I think, should bear in mind while they like to suggest to us that we can really have a faith in Christ even though we have relative certainty that he did not rise from the dead in bodily form as the Scriptures set him forth.) For I delivered unto you among the first things that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. (Now, when he uses the term "some are fallen asleep," he's not referring to the kind of sleep that we engage in at 11:00 Sunday morning or at 11:00 every night of the week. He's talking about falling asleep as a Christian in faith in Christ, that is, he's talking about death as a believer. That's one of the figures of speech of a believer's death in the New Testament.) After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. (That's a very striking expression. It means, really literally, "as an abortion." We'll say just a little about it in a moment.) For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: (One might think that Paul is boasting, but he hastens to say) yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so

we preach, and so ye believed. Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. (He uses a term that means simply empty, void of content.) Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. (The Authorized Version, from which I'm reading, translates this second adjective in the way that it translated a different adjective in verse 14, which would cause some confusion. He says, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain," but the adjective means something like "fruitless, useless," that is, that of which it can be said, it is mataios, does not reach the end that was intended. That's the point here. Or he says, "Your faith is vain; it doesn't do for you what you thought it would do for you. You are still in your sins.) Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

"If in this life alone we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." Well, Christians can thank God for the fact that it's not in this life only that we have hope by virtue of the resurrection of Christ. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. And let's bow together now in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful on this beautiful resurrection day that we are able to turn to Thee and through the Scriptures be assured of the fact that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, Lord and Messiah, sits at the right hand of the majesty on high waiting until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet. We give Thee praise and thanks. We worship Thy name. We especially, Lord, thank Thee for the blessings that have become ours because our representative, our covenant

head, has completed successfully and gloriously his work. And we are the beneficiaries of it. May Lord there be a special blessing upon each of us as we give attention to the word of God out of faith in Christ. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject this morning is "Paul and the Resurrection of Christ." Is our celebration of Easter an unwitting purveying of an illicit gospel? We do have gospels today that can, practically speaking, be called illicit gospels. There is the health and wealth gospel bequeathed to us by prosperity theology. There is the gospel of self-esteem propagated by a number of professing Christian preachers today. From mainland fundamentalism comes today so often the gospel of personal peace and contentment. Shall we add the gospel of the Easter bunny with God the giant bunny in the sky dispensing goodies to the children.

Well, that's a question that Charles Colson asks on one of the pages of Christianity Today. Speaking of Easter, its origins and what we have made of it, Mr. Colson says, "He may be cute, the Easter bunny, entertaining millions of children, but he's deadly." And the reason, Mr. Colson feels, is that the picture that we get from the Easter bunny and the eggs and the chocolate is a picture of God constantly being set forth as simply someone who does certain things for us. In fact, in evangelicalism, what we find from the pulpit today is the kind of ministry that goes on and on about what God can do for us. And what happens as a result of that is that the great objective facts of Christianity are either neglected or forgotten. And all we have is a presentation of what he can do for us with the whole foundation lying under everything that he may and can do for us unknown and unappreciated by so many of the believing Christians.

In fact, Mr. Colson says, "What God can do for you may be a cover up of the offense of the true gospel." And he tells an illustration of an experience he had not long ago in the country of India. He was speaking to a large audience of Indians. And as he was extolling something of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, he found the audience

very responsive. They were listening with attention and with pleasure. But then he said he came to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he spoke about Christ being resurrected from the dead. He said immediately the tone of the audience changed, and instead of responsiveness, there was no responsiveness. They were very happy as long as Jesus was just another one of their gurus.

In fact, that's the way the Romans thought, too. They didn't mind Jesus, and they didn't mind Christianity as long as there was no uniqueness of Christianity propagated. For when the uniqueness of Christianity was propagated, all of the gods of the Romans fell. And when we talk about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of the other gods unresurrected collapse in a heap of false gods.

Easter is actually, as you well know, a term derived from a false heathen goddess, even the term itself. And what we have at Easter time is the wedding of that false concept with Christianity. We often say that the world materializes Christian things. And so, Christmas is materialistic. And we blame the world. But really, in the case of Easter, it's the church that has reversed the procedure and has itself tainted the fact of the resurrection of Christ.

Mr. Colson says, "We shouldn't call Easter, Easter. We should call it resurrection day, for that's what it is. It's the day in which we celebrate in a special way the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Bodily resurrection, that's the demonstration of his victory over sin and over death and over Hades.

As the apostle says in the very next verse, which I did not read for it belongs to the next paragraph, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

So he says, "Let's brave the outrage of the chocolate lobby and the egg gatherers and on Easter day, let's salute him." Well, that's what I believe that we should do, too. We should salute him, salute Christ, salute him as the resurrected Savior and Lord.

The Apostle Paul did not know Easter as such. He celebrated the resurrection. As a matter of fact, if we want to get down to it and follow what the Bible says, he celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ every day. Every day. For every day was a day in which we honored a living, risen Savior at the right hand of the throne of God in a glorified body. But on the Lord's Day particularly, that first day, every Lord's Day, we celebrate a risen savior.

And the Lord Jesus is responsible for that, too, for when he wrote the Ephesian church, he described himself under the symbol of the lamp stand as the one, the lamp stands representing the churches, he described himself as the one who walks among the midst, or in the midst, of the seven golden lamp stands. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ is alive. He's in our midst. And when we meet together, we salute him in everything that we do. Even in the ministry of the word of God in a sense, which is the taking of divine things ideally and through a human instrumentality, a human, fallible, sinful instrumentality, the Holy Spirit takes those divine things and shows them to men. We are receiving ministry from the risen Christ and dispensing it in order that we might glorify him in response.

Now, the apostle, we say, did not receive a letter, in his letter from the Corinthians did not receive a question concerning the resurrection. But knowing the difficulty of believing in the resurrection of the body among the Corinthians, he inserts this chapter to answer that particular question, which he knew must have originated among them quite frequently.

So we look at, for a moment, some of the contemporary views of the resurrection that exist in our day. One of the striking things about this is that both orthodox and liberals agree on this one fact: that the resurrection is important for Christian faith. Even if one is liberal, he acknowledges that in the New Testament, the resurrection is important.

For example, A. Michael Ramsey, who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury and could never be classified among those who were conservative and orthodox

Christians, said "For them the gospel without the resurrection was not merely a gospel without a final chapter. It was not a gospel at all." So Mr. Ramsey recognized that if you don't have the resurrection, you really don't have a gospel at all. Even if it's not the gospel that the Scriptures teach, it's not even a gospel, and you really do not have Christianity.

C. E. M. Joad, who had a remarkable conversion from liberalism to Christianity, an Anglican theologian of great influence and of lesser influence after he was converted, Mr. Joad said that if he had the opportunity to go to heaven and ask a question, he would like to ask Jesus Christ the question: Did you or did you not rise from the dead? He recognized that, so far as he was concerned, that was the greatest question that anyone could ask.

Well, the views of these men who stand on the liberal side of the theological perspective are quite different from Bertrand Russell, the philosopher and philosopher/religionist. He said, "Belief in fairy tales is pleasant." That was his idea of resurrection.

Well, the liberal views of the resurrection of Christ may be summed up very simply. We have, for example, Rudolf Bultmann who said that we cannot even believe in a resurrection because it involves a supernatural miracle, and we don't have miracles because everything must work within this closed continuum according to natural law and so Bultmann demythologized the New Testament. He considered these great events to be religious myths, and what we do as interpreters is to look at these religious myths and seek to find the essential principles that lie behind them. And linking up Romans chapter 6 with the resurrection of Christ, Professor Bultmann found in the resurrection simply the preaching and proclamation of new life through Jesus Christ. The connection, of course, we would say is irrational. But nevertheless, that has been characteristic of a lot of our existentialism over the past generation or so.

Ernst Käsemann speaks of the historically botched New Testament accounts, for he's a New Testament scholar. And he says that while they are not true historically, nevertheless, they are existential forces for getting the genuine message of the New Testament to us. In other words, we don't have to believe these accounts, but we can see within them the means by which we can come to general existential truth that is important.

John Knox said, "The resurrection, that's simply a reference to the Spirit's coming to us in this age."

Evangelicals have differed. The evangelical consensus, and I'm including for this purpose even men like Karl Barth and Wolfhart Panneneberg of the University of Munich, these men have amidst others things with which many evangelicals might have disagreed have accepted the event of the resurrection as solidly grounded in space and time and in historical sequence. They have believed as orthodox have believed down through the centuries that the resurrection faith stems from a resurrection fact. And you cannot have a genuine faith that is not grounded in the facts of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are many reasons why a person might see in the New Testament support for that idea. I would not be one to think that all of the evidences that we have, and they're overwhelmingly in favor of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus, are sufficient for faith. Faith comes from God the Holy Spirit. In fact, a true saving faith is a faith that is grounded in the word of God ultimately. It's the Spirit speaking through the word by which we come to a saving faith, not from the evidences. Although the evidences are useful for those who are not believers in showing them that many of their objections are invalid. And there're also helpful for believers in strengthening them in their faith. But faith comes ultimately from God. And the conviction of the truth of Christianity is a conviction that is given by the testimony of the greatest person in this universe whose testimony is the convincing testimony, the testimony of God through the Scriptures.

James Denney also said with reference to the resurrection, and its bodily significance, that if we talk about the resurrection, we should talk about the bodily resurrection. If we don't talk about the bodily resurrection, we shouldn't even talk about resurrection at all. So we're not talking about the fact that the influence of Jesus Christ lives on. We're not talking about the fact that though he lived nineteen hundred years ago, still men talk about him and men preach about him.

I went out, turned on my car this morning, and the radio was set on one of the preachers. I think he's a Christian man. I've listened to him a number of times. And this morning he was expatiating about the resurrection. And essentially what he was saying was that the resurrection, well if it came down to really speaking about the historicity of it, it might be called these accounts in the New Testament, it might be called an idle tale. But that's not the important things, he went on to say. The important thing is what was said about the principles that emerge from these idle tales. That's foolish. That's very foolish. That's irrational, to start with, but it's very foolish. And on that basis, there can be no sound faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, let's turn to our passage, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, and we want to say a word now about Paul, the resurrection and the gospel. This I mentioned in the Scripture reading is the earliest account, most New Testament scholars believe, of the resurrection of Christ. Even before the gospels, Paul had written 1 Corinthians 15. We talked about the Greek view of the soul and the body and how they might have been disturbed by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. And I can just imagine, and one reads the Acts and finds it so, that when Paul preached the resurrection, they mocked. They scorned him. In fact, when he preached in Athens, some of them when he talked about the resurrection, they thought he was talking about a new god, the resurrection, a new god to put in the midst of their panoply of gods, a new god.

My old teacher at the University of Edinburgh used to say, "Twenty centuries have echoed the laughter of the Areopagus." And Christian preachers down through the years

have faced the mockery and scorn of unbelievers. But let me assure you, they have, and I'm using this only as a figure of speech, they have the last laugh.

Now when Paul speaks to the Corinthians, he talks about the great events. He talks about the evidences. And then, he talks about the general harmony of the message among those who were of the apostolic company. Notice what he says,

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which you have received, wherein ye stand; By which also ye are being saved, if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain (that is, if Christ did not really rise from the dead). For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures."

Now, the apostle says the first great fact of the Gospel of Christ is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Now, I'd like to suggest, without having to prove it, we don't have time to do that, that the apostle is saying that the Lord Jesus is the servant of Jehovah whose whole career is mapped out in the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly in the Book of Isaiah. The very terms that he uses suggests it. And the servant of Jehovah was the one who was to perform the atoning work by rendering a satisfaction to the holiness and justice of God through the penal substitution of himself for the people of God. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

So the great covenantal head came as the priest and offered the sacrifice for the people of God. That was a penal sacrifice. He bore the penalty of their sins. It was a satisfaction. He satisfied the claims of the broken law, the holiness and justice of God, which would send you and me to a Christ less eternity. And he did it through substitution. He bore in our place that judgment. And because he has born it and because he has paid the debt in full, all for whom Christ died have the assurance that they shall enjoy the benefits of what he has done. He is unfrustrated in his purposes. He

carries them out and lives at the right hand of the throne of God now to secure the blessings for which he died. Point one of the gospel. No wonder Paul said, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." That's where he planted his feet.

The second thing is a bit startling. He says, "He was buried." That seems inconsequential at first. Death, burial. Well, I think there's a reason for burial. That shows that death was truly a death. Burial suggests the finality of the death. Burial rules out all of those theories that our Lord only swooned or something like that. He really died, and he was buried.

And furthermore, if he was buried, then the fact that he lived afterwards underlines and stresses the reality of the resurrection. Peter, when he's preaching about the resurrection, he said, 'Look, David was not resurrected, though he writes about a resurrected one. Look over there. David's tomb is still with us. And there, you can go over there, and you can dig around in there, and you'll find David's bones. But you won't find Christ's bones.' That was part of Peter's argument. That's what he says. Acts chapter 2, verse 29, read it for yourself. He was buried.

Thirdly, he rose from the dead. Now, he says it was on "the third according to the Scriptures." Probably, of this we are a little bit uncertain, not that he didn't rise, but why he said "on the third day according to the Scriptures." It's possible he was referring to the testimony that had been handed down about what Jesus had said. I'm inclined to think that he's talking about the fact that in the Old Testament it was typified by the Feast of First Fruits. And if one studied those ancient festivals which Israel celebrated year after year after year, he would have surmised that the Messiah would be raised from the dead. That coupled with some passages, such as Hosea chapter 6 and Isaiah chapter 53, would have led further credence to that.

And fourthly, he says, "He was seen." This is part of the gospel, too, according to Paul. He was seen. And Paul goes on to talk about a number of persons who saw him.

"He was seen of Cephas." He was seen "of the twelve." "He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." And further, Paul says, I can hear him stopping and saying, Look, the great majority of them are still alive. Go ask them for yourself, although some have fallen asleep in Christ. So, the apostle threw out the challenge. This is obviously a very early account of the resurrection of Christ.

"After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also." Paul doesn't know anything about any additions to this company of the apostles. These are the apostles. Those who claim apostleship today, if they claim apostleship, they'll have to claim a subordinate kind of apostleship or a secondary kind of apostleship. The apostle claims that the Lord appeared to him last of all.

And he was one, he says, "as one born out of due time. That's a rather strange thing. "One born out of due time." Well, the Greek term is really something like "an abortion." That seems very strange. Like a abortion. Why would Paul speak in this way? Well, a number of different answers have been given to that. And I won't try to give them all. It's likely, as far as I can tell, that what the apostle was trying to say was, Look, an abortion is a kind of ugly parody of an infant born naturally. And when it comes to my place among the apostles, I persecuted the church. I was one who went out of his way to slay those witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. But he met me on the Damascus road and he turned me completely around. And in the light of that, I'm an ugly parody of a genuine apostle, "one born out of due time." It's Paul's way of saying, just as he says in this context, I'm the least of the apostles. "I'm not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." In other places, he calls himself the chief of sinners, less than the least of all the saints. He never lost the sense of the majesty of the grace of God in saving him. Or should you and I.

One might ask at this point, What about the women? Where are they? Isn't it striking Paul doesn't say anything about the women? I don't know whether Paul was a macho kind of man. In our society, leave out the women, you're either a bit crazy or

you're a macho kind of guy. Well, Paul was not that kind of fellow. The reason he didn't mention the women in the list of testimonies was not because they were not important to the Lord. After all, he first appeared to the women. It's almost as if he thought that they would be most appreciative of the fact that he was alive. They loved him. They rejoiced in him. They had the deepest kind of affection for him. And so he answered that affection by appearing to them first of all.

But the reason that Paul doesn't mention it, is because in those days, the testimony of a woman did not have the same value as the testimony of men. It was part of the times in which the apostle lived. And so he doesn't mention the women. But I'm sure that the apostle would not have discounted that testimony at all.

Paul concludes then by saying in the 11th verse, "Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed." In other words, if it comes to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, this is what we all have preached. This is what you all have received. And this is what you all have believed. There is harmony, beautiful harmony in the proclamation of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you were ask Paul, But Paul, why is the resurrection important to you? Well, I don't know of any other passage that would be better to go to than this one right here. This is what Paul would have said. He would have said first of all that the resurrection is the ground of our resurrection. After all, if the Lord Jesus had not been raised from the dead, then we would have no reason to believe that he was not a condemned person, rather than a justified person in the sense of his character and his work being justified by a holy God. And if he is not a justified person in that sense, and was not raised therefore, we have no hope at all. He's the ground of the believer's resurrection. In other words, when Christ was raised from the dead, it wasn't an isolated miracle. But it's repeated in the experience of all believers ultimately. If he was raised, his covenantal people are raised too.

Listen to how Paul argues it. He says, "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

Well, I can see immediately a person saying, But Christ is different. He's not like us. But Paul says, Wait a minute. He is like us. You see what lies back of Paul's reasoning is that he was the man Christ Jesus. He doesn't deny his deity, but he affirms also his true humanity. In fact, in other places he would say, "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

So often in stressing his deity, we forget his true humanity. Fully God, but also, truly a man. And so if a person says there's no resurrection of the dead. And I reply, But Christ was raised from the dead. And you say to me, But, yes, that's Christ; that is not we. I say, He is a man. And if a man has been raised from the dead in Christ's resurrection, then you cannot say there is no resurrection of the dead. That's what Paul means. "If there is no reservoir of the dead, then is Christ not risen." So the resurrection of Christ is the ground of our resurrection.

And secondly Paul says it's the basis of a substantial message and a substantial faith. Look at the 14th verse of 1 Corinthians 15, "And if Christ be not raised, then is our message empty, and your faith is also empty." In other words, there's no objective basis for your faith. That's very important. Very important to realize that Christ must be a risen savior as the object of our faith. If he is not a truly bodily-raised savior, our faith does not have a substantial object, our message is not about a substantial fact, Christ's resurrection.

And thirdly, he says the resurrection is the evidence of effectual deliverance from sin. Verse 17, "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is fruitless." It's useless; you are still in your sins. I mentioned the different word that is used here. It's one void of useful effect or aim is the point of the verb. And if, when you put your faith in Christ, so Paul said to the Corinthians, you thought that through faith in Christ, you were obtaining the gift of eternal life. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, your faith is fruitless. It's useless. It has not obtained its object. You don't have the forgiveness of sins. That's why

it's so important that we affirm the fact that Christ's resurrection occurred in history, in proper historical and chronological sequence. As we say, by the cross atonement is made. By the resurrection, atonement is accepted by God. Otherwise, Paul says, Look, you and others, having believed in Christ, thought you obtained eternal life, and you are resting in the fact that you were saved and had the forgiveness of sins. And when the time came for you to die, and my friends in the audience, that time is coming for all of us, you thought that by believing in Christ, you have the forgiveness of sins and you have assurance of life beyond the grave. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, Paul says, Look, those who have fallen asleep in the assurance of falling asleep in Christ, they've perished. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

An so one gets the picture of people solidly in the confidence of personal faith in the Lord Jesus and in the assurance and confession of forgiveness of sins through him, like so many of you in this audience, but when the time comes to die, and you do die, and there is no resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in bodily form from the grave, you die ruined. That's what Paul says. How miserable to have hope only in this life, so he says.

Well, let me sum it up. My time is up. Resurrection is the end of the rule of death for the believer. We affirm, "Now is Christ raised from the dead." And thus, as he says in verse 26, there shall come a time when the last enemy, death, shall be destroyed. And if you want to read about the details of it, read about verse 54 through verse 57.

When the Lord Jesus shall come and come with the spirits of those who have gone to be with him and shall raise the bodies to meet them in the air, and we who are on the earth shall be changed, and all meet the Lord in the air and so be with the Lord forever, then the church shall understand the true meaning of "Death is swallowed up in victory." And the challenge is thrown out, "O death, where is your sting? O death, where is your victory?" There is no victory. There is no sting because Christ has borne the sting

and has borne the death. "And thanks be to God," Paul says, "which giveth us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ."

The resurrection then becomes the principle and the pattern of the joyous life with one who can still the storms, cancel guilt, open the graves and minister the life of God to the saints of God.

Alexander MacLaren once said many years ago, "If all power be his, none can be against his friends. If he has all power, we need not fear, though we have all weakness."

My good friend, for a Christian, death is no journey into the obscure night where the wild beasts are crying in the dark. We pass from this particular place, this dying world, into the world of the living through the Lord Jesus Christ. The life that we enjoy then is eternal life.

I love the way R. W. Dale used to describe eternal life. He says, "You know, we can take plants and shrubs from southern latitudes and bring them into the northern latitudes of Great Britain, and we can put them in the ground." And he said, "They'll grow, but they don't grow like they do when they're in their natural habitat, when they're in their natural soils, and in the natural temperatures to which they're accustomed."

I always think of Charleston and camellias, because I try to grow them over here in the Dallas area. In South Carolina around Charleston, put a camellia in the ground, and you don't have to do anything much for it. Just plant it and watch it grow. The leaves are beautiful, lustrous dark green. The plants grow large. The flowers even are of a more intense color, it seems, than over here. But over here, you put those things in the ground, and these scrawny little plants come. And you can hardly keep them alive. It's like ministering artificial resuscitation to them constantly. Well, when we get to heaven, the eternal life that we know now is going to be life planted in the kind of place to which we are adapted, and we shall bloom with a beauty of eternal, everlasting life like plants do in their natural habitat.

Mr. Spurgeon once spoke about a great hope producing a great love for Christ. I like these words of him. It's characteristic of him. He said, and I think his words express the feeling of every good Christian, "Whether a man ever went insane with love to the crucified redeemer, I don't know, but I've never met such a case. If I should ever go mad, I should like it to be in that direction. And I should like to bite a great many more. For what a blessed subject it would be for one to be carried away with, to become unreasonably absorbed in Christ crucified, to have gone out of your senses with faith in Jesus."

That's magnificent. For those who have truly believed in Christ have the essence of that.

One final statement. The apostle when he was preaching in Athens commented upon the fact that the resurrection serves another purpose. He said God has appointed a day in which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained. Whereof, he has given testimony in that he has raised him from the dead. The resurrection is the pledge of judgment to come. It's God's way of saying there is a judgment day coming.

We don't celebrate that on Easter. We think of God as the great bunny distributing those little chocolate goodies to children particularly. No, we worship a God of resurrection day. And the God, who also admits to all of the magnificent things that he has done in Christ, does bless us with the forgiveness of our sins, but he also warns us of judgment to come.

If you're here today, and you're rejoicing in the salvation in Christ, we're so happy. We hope you enjoy it even more. We hope you have a solid foundation for your faith in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We hope that deep down within, God has implanted a faith through the word in your heart, an unshakable trust in the Son of God. When you die, and you will unless he comes again, you will not perish. You shall truly live.

But if you're here without Christ, we appeal to you. We urge you. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him. Don't leave this auditorium without the faith in him that brings eternal life. May God in his marvelous grace about which Paul speaks bring you to Christ.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how marvelous is the truth of the resurrection of Christ. "But now is Christ raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep." We thank Thee, Lord, for the forgiveness of sins through him. Oh Father, if there are some in this audience who have not truly believed in him, may in their inmost heart at the very present moment they turn to Thee by Thy grace confess their sin, guilt, condemnation apart from Christ, by Thy grace rely upon that which Thou hast accomplished through the Son of God for now and for eternity. For Jesus' sake. Amen.