

GOOD NEWS! WE HAVE WORK TO DO

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.

The resurrection is not an optional extra as a doctrine. It is vital to the entire Christian faith. To deny it is to become, in this day and age, a materialist. It is to deny that God supernaturally involves Himself in this world and comes closer to a view called deism which believes that God simply leaves the world to follow its natural laws and processes without His aid. We do not believe that. We believe that God very much involves Himself supernaturally in this world and that the resurrection is clear evidence of that fact. So we have good news to consider as Christians. But it is interesting to find that Paul concludes this teaching on the truth of the resurrection with an exhortation to carry on labouring in the Lord. Believing in the resurrection, in Paul's mind, links up with us serving Him joyfully and in a fulfilled way. The good news means that we have a work to do.

1. It can all seem in vain.

We have to be careful to understand that the apostle is talking about 'the Lord's work', and not someone else's work that has been imposed upon us. We can be 'guilt-tripped' into doing something that we are told is the Lord's work but is actually the invention of man and leads to exhaustion, burn-out and depression. But, that said, there is a work to do as comes through to is in the use of the word 'labour' to describe it. It is not a life of ease that the Lord has called us to but a life of service.

In doing that work, there are plenty of temptations to us to stop and give up. The difficulties the church in Corinth were presenting to Paul might have seemed reason enough to give up. So Paul uses the thought of being immovable and steadfast to show what kind of people we should be as we approach the Lord's work. Being immovable suggests to us the idea that we are not moved from our duties by disappointments, failures, or opposition. We resist pressures from the outside that would threaten to halt us in our work. Being steadfast points to an inner attitude, a resolve and personal discipline that will ensure that we hold to the course we are taking and do not waver.

It is true that sometimes we do slacken and fail to abound in the work. We withdraw our goodwill and our willingness from the life, for example, of the local church. We might

begin to cool off in our desire to see the local church and its believers prosper spiritually. We might cease to care about the future of the church or of our nation. An attitude of cynicism and 'couldn't-care-less' takes us over. Often discouragements in the work can mean that we lose interest and desire, and slacken off. The fact that we see so few conversions in our day in the West can lead to us becoming skeptical and cynical about the value of preaching or about the power of the gospel itself.

Not only the lack of gospel success can eat away at us, but also things like the lack of our own personal growth. We find ourselves dominated by the same fears and habits, the same besetting sins and this can be discouraging to us. Likewise, the lack of evident spiritual growth in other people can have a negative effect upon our own willingness to persevere in the work. We can be discouraged by the lack of spiritual discernment in the church at large and begin to withdraw from the work.

2. The resurrection changes our perspective.

The victory that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 15:57 supplies the 'therefore' at the beginning of verse 58. The victory that the resurrection implies provides the reasons for keeping going and for not stopping. It is good news that helps us to continue working and counteracts the temptations we might feel to stop. It is not a victory that communicates to us that we should take a break or ease up. It actually is telling us the opposite.

In verse 57 we see that death has a sting. It has an especial misery because it is bound up with sin, death being the judgment of God for sin. People prefer not to think about this but keep themselves busy to avoid it. Sin is exposed by the law as exceedingly sinful (Romans 7:13). The law shows us that sin is to be judged and that, at death, we will fall into the hands of our Judge. This is not a comforting prospect.

But the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is proof that the law's demands have been fully met in Him. The atonement through His blood shows us that sin is defeated and the wages of sin have been paid by Him. A lasting settlement has been reached and peace has been secured. Fear has been removed from death and we are able to look forward to what follows in the resurrection, as described in verses 42-44. That realization and comfort we carry forward and it affects how we think so that now we can be immovable and steadfast.

We see the future defeat of all our bodily afflictions in the resurrection and it gives hope and courage now to battle with our bodily afflictions and to keep serving. In fact, it is often the case that the corruption of our own bodies is part of the reason we feel discouragement because we are tired or are bearing the effects of chronic conditions. Knowing that our corruption will be conquered one day leaves us encouraged to do what we can, however little, with the bodies we have.

The resurrection is the proof of the pardon of all the sins done in the body and that cheers our hearts. With that joy we are able to work on, even when there are discouragements around us and about us. The resurrection is also evidence that there is power available to change us. We can access the spoils of victory and find the limitless supplies of grace that are to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Abounding grace leads to abounding work. The Spirit works within us to give us fresh insights, power, wisdom, and help. Sometimes we are shown attitudes and thoughts that we need to repent of and this in turn frees us to serve the Lord more wholeheartedly and effectively. The Lord feeds into our souls more and more wisdom so that the work that we do do, we do differently. We are not having to prove something to ourselves or to other people. We are not looking to win the approval of people. It might mean that we will actually stop doing some works. Or that we will start doing new works. Or we will do the work that we do do, differently.

Knowing the resurrection is true and delivers us from the penalty of sin itself is an anchor for the soul and gives us stability. So when we are faced with temptations we are in a stronger position to resist. Furthermore, we realize that this life is not everything. The Lord's work here on earth must one day be let go of as we go to our undeserved, but nevertheless real, eternal rest.

So, the victory that the resurrection represents to us enables us to work with greater hope. It brings light, joy and peace into the soul which proofs us against some of the discouragements that can affect us.