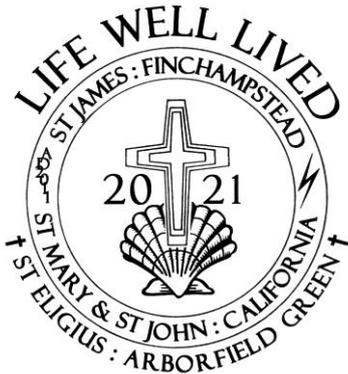


Parish of Finchampstead and California



THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

TALK 3: PAUL

Introduction

- Resurrection appears everywhere in Paul's letters – possible to approach subject in many ways. We will look in some detail at his most extended treatment in 1 Corinthians 15. More than enough material for our purposes.
- Important to remember that Paul was writing in the 50s, at least 15 years before the first Gospel (Mark) was written down.
- Read v3-8.
- Contains the basic statements about the resurrection and details of the witnesses.
- The basic statements are:
 - Christ died for our sins (according to the Scriptures)
 - He was buried
 - He was raised (according to the Scriptures)
 - He appeared to the disciples

The implications of the basic statements

- There are two pairs of statements with the second confirming the truth asserted by the first ie he was buried because he had died; he appeared to the disciples because he had been raised
- These basic statements are equally true of the Gospels so we start on firm ground, though Paul's thought develops in ways hardly hinted at in the Gospels.
- Note that in the combination of buried/raised, the empty tomb is implied though never explicitly stated in Paul. This leads on to the conclusion which Paul affirms later that the resurrection is a physical, embodied event. There is no more warrant for a simply spiritual resurrection in Paul than in the Gospels; and even less for the suggestion that the resurrection occurred entirely in the minds of the disciples as they rationalised the new reality of their spiritual rebirth in the Holy Spirit.
- **According to the Scriptures** was an essential element of early thinking about the resurrection but, unlike the parallel statement in relation to Jesus' death, cannot be easily evidenced by proof-texts from the OT. Rather the whole sweep of Jewish history is brought to fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus (his raising up – see the use of this phrase in Paul's speech in Acts 8:16-41 esp 16-23); this is the longed for restoration of Israel anticipated in eg Ezekiel 37 and Hosea 6:2. Paul's most sustained writing on this is Romans ch 9-11.
- It is by analogy from the resurrection of Jesus that Paul develops his ideas about the future resurrection of Jesus' followers.
- But what about the witnesses? How do they affect the picture? Mainly indeed as witnesses, as in the Gospels, giving eye-witness credibility to their preaching

- There are no women in Paul's account but **Peter** and the male disciples (**the Twelve**) are there, as are **500 other followers**, and **James** who emerged with Peter as leader of the Jerusalem church.
- Finally Paul lists **himself**. He certainly had a dramatic experience on the Damascus road and he was always keen to assert his apostleship, but he never claimed to have seen Jesus physically.

How Paul's views developed out of, and contrasted with, Judaism

- Bodily resurrection was an idea that developed only slowly during OT times but, by 1st Century AD, seems to have become part of mainstream Pharisaic understanding (in contrast with ruling Sadducees who 'say there is no Resurrection' (Mark 12:18)). Key text is Daniel 12:2-3:
At the end of time 'multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever'.
- Paul modifies and expands this understanding
 - From the outskirts of belief it becomes central; occasional references in Judaism become frequent references in Paul. Sharper focus on the meaning of the event and on its implications for Jesus' followers.
 - Daniel's idea of shining like stars is abandoned altogether and replaced by new life, transformed bodies and the metaphor of glory. Paul also revises extensively the meaning of terms like flesh and body.
 - Jesus' resurrection inaugurated *the age to come*; but his resurrection is the sign of the future resurrection of his followers. Such a two-stage idea never existed in Judaism. It involved a shift in what is meant by the final judgement; the concept of judgement is irreversibly modified by the death of Jesus on the cross: his condemnation releases his followers from condemnation. Not only that but it required those followers to work with God through the Spirit in anticipation of that judgement.
 - Jewish metaphor of resurrection standing for a new creation or new exodus (= return from exile) is substantially modified; the new creation is retained but this is achieved through baptism, the washing away of sins.
 - Perhaps the most dramatic element of Paul's resurrection theology was that the resurrected one was God's Messiah. And this idea was offensive to Jews in the case of Jesus because he had been crucified.
- With this background now turn to Paul's most extended commentary on resurrection - 1 Corinthians 15. No attempt to be a comprehensive review of all Paul wrote about the resurrection (eg in Romans, and in 2 Corinthians 4&5, and in his other letters).

Introduction to 1 Corinthians 15

- Paul claims status as witness to the risen Christ, as apostle, and as founder of the church at Corinth. Note the intimacy between Paul and the young church and his concern that it might stray from his teaching (1-3, 11, 17, 29, 33-34, 58), the reliability of which is guaranteed by his status as apostle (8-11, 30-32).
- Contrast between: sin and death entering the world through Adam (Genesis 1-3); sin being overcome and death defeated by God's act of raising Jesus from the dead (16-18, 21-22, 24-26, 42-43, 46-49, 53-57).
- Note that Paul does not question the resurrection of Jesus. He accepts it as an article of faith (3 - 'what I received I passed on to you'). So his question is not *how*, but *why* and *so what*.
- Many ways of looking at and analysing this chapter - focus on 3 themes at the heart of the resurrection Gospel:
 - What would it mean if there were no resurrection?
 - But since Jesus has been raised, what does that mean?
 - What is the resurrection body like?

What would it mean if there were no resurrection?

- Christ was not raised (13,16)
- The Gospel is false (14)
- There are no grounds of faith for the living (14,17) or the dead (18)
- God has been lied about (15)
- Sin and death remain in control (17)
- Christians are pitiable (19)
- Baptism for the dead is pointless (29)
- Risking danger is foolish (30-32)
- Fatalism rules (32)
- But to Paul none of these things are possible under God's rule because they bring no glory to him

So Jesus has been raised from the dead; therefore

- Resurrection of the dead is not just possible but assured (20, 51)
- A prototype for his followers ... (20, 23, 52-54)
- ... but also the means by which we shall be raised (21, 57)
- Adam's sin overcome (22, 54-56)
- God is glorified by the destruction of worldly powers and death – the ultimate sin (24-28, 54-57)
- Read v22-28.
- Quote in v27 is from Psalm 8:6. The Psalm begins and ends 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth'. By raising Jesus, God has ensured that God's name will be honoured in the new creation as it was in the old – that he will indeed be 'all in all' (28).

What is the resurrection body like?

- Discontinuity (ie death) between earthly body and resurrection body (36, 42-44, 49, 51-53). They exist in different kinds of time – the body that died on the cross 'stands in this present time of violence and sin'; the resurrected body 'lives in the time of the coming world of the new creation in justice and righteousness'. Between the two is not an 'and' as in 'died and was raised' but 'a full stop and a pause. For what now begins is something which is qualitatively different'. (All quotes from Jurgen Moltmann – *The Way of Jesus Christ*.)
- Different forms of bodily substance ... (37)
- ... but bodily still, not spirit, even if described as *spiritual* body. (39-41) Problem here is the difficulty of translation. No warrant for thinking that Paul had in mind a spirit or a ghost – at odds with almost everything he wrote, and with the Jewish background from which he emerged. The resurrection body is not *composed of* spirit but *animated by* spirit.
- This reading is consistent with the resurrection body being superior in all respects: imperishable vs perishable; glory vs dishonour; power vs weakness (42-44, 52-53). As such the resurrection body is worthy to inherit God's Kingdom (50).
- Act of transformation is ultimate victory over death (54-56)

Conclusions

- For Paul the whole Gospel depends on the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. Without that, Christian faith is futile (17).
- This fact goes hand in hand with the fact that the Jesus who was raised was the Jesus who died on the cross.
- These two facts are inseparable. Without the other each loses its meaning. Together they imply all meaning.

- But they are different in nature: the death of Jesus was brought about by human beings; he was raised by God. God has put his mark on the future of all people: we are his new creation in Jesus Christ.

Paul and the Gospels

- Two final questions to consider: why are Paul's writings so different from the Gospels? and: why does Paul seem to know so little about Jesus the man and to have made so little effort to find out?
- To try and answer the question about differences between Gospels and Paul's letters, let's look at the start of Luke's Gospel, explaining his aims
- Read Luke 1:1-4:
Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye witnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.
- By contrast read Paul's opening statement to the Galatians (1:6-7):
I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.
- What a difference - Luke is wanting to set out an orderly account, Paul is responding to a crisis. Luke is measured and careful, Paul is impetuous and angry. Luke has character of a historian or archivist; Paul of a leader and debater.
- In addition Paul never set out to write systematic theological tracts - his letters respond to the situation of individual churches, sometimes to questions they have asked him.
- Find more differences as we try to answer the second question about Paul's evident lack of interest in Jesus' life.
- As persecutor of early Jewish Christians interested more in the effect of Jesus on his followers - unorthodox Jews pledging allegiance to a crucified criminal /blasphemer.
- As convert, he had his own relationship with Jesus. His unparalleled conversion experience gave him a unique perspective on how the good news about Jesus could reach far beyond the strict confines of the Jewish faith of which he had been such a dedicated member.
- He identified (stridently sometimes) as an Apostle on an equal footing with the Twelve, even though he had never seen Jesus in the flesh, and they had.
- He seems to have avoided contact with the church leaders in Jerusalem except for his rare visits to Jerusalem when he sought approval for his missionary activities and when the unity of the whole church was at stake.
- In these activities he didn't avoid trying to convert Jews - he often started in a new city in the synagogue, but these were all in Gentile not Jewish territory.
- About Jesus he learnt what he needed to know - basically the scandal of the cross (see 1 Corinthians 2:2) and the resurrection; and some basic traditions such as the mini-creed about Jesus' death, resurrection and appearances; the institution of the Lord's supper; and Jesus intimate relationship with God reflected in *Abba, Father*.
- Taken together, all of this accounts for why Paul's writing feels so different from that of the Gospels. His aims were quite different.
- And this difference of aims, together with the geographic and cultural separation between the Jewish and Gentile churches explains why so little of Paul's theology made its way into the Gospels. None of them were written from a Gentile perspective and their aims were explanatory rather than missionary.