

Well, I hardly need to tell you that it's a joy and a delight to be here again with you this morning. I bring you the fondest love and greetings from Joan, who's sick this morning. Hopefully she'll be able to come this evening. And from David, Jonathan, Rebecca, and Sarah, their spouses, their children, We hold you in the highest esteem. We love you dearly.

You have all made a profound impact for good in our lives. And we remember with delight regularly our first time with you, which hardly seems possible, was 34 years ago. Every memory of our time with you is precious to us and was formative in the goodness of God in shaping our lives, impacting our lives. Your lives have meant so very, very much to us and I want never to forget that and I never want you to forget that also. Well, it's a privilege for me to be with you this Easter Sunday morning, so please turn with me in your Bibles to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15. We will read the first 28 verses, but before we do so, I'll pray.

Our God and Father, you have given us your word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths. It is this word that makes us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. And we seek your help, gracious Holy Spirit. Give us understanding. Cause the truth to live in our hearing. Cause the word of Christ to dwell richly among us and in us. Meet with us in our need, we pray. gracious God, our Father in Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. Before we read, let me just remind you of the context in which we find these very familiar words. Paul is writing to a church that he knew very, very well.

He was the first pastor of this church. Under God, he saw it raised up and established during his second missionary journey. You read about it in Acts chapter 18. And for 18 months, this little flock of Jesus Christ had the Apostle Paul as its senior minister. He must have been a remarkable pastor to that little flock. You don't need much imagination to think how deeply instructed they must have been in the things of God and in the gospel of Jesus Christ in particular. How richly blessed they must have been by a man who had met the risen Christ while on the road to Damascus.

And yet this is a church which within a few years after Paul leaving it had become dysfunctional. It had become theologically aberrant. It had become morally complacent and indifferent. And Paul has had to write this letter because he's heard news that has deeply distressed him.

And it's a reminder to us that the most privileged of congregations with the most blessed of ministries can so easily and quickly drift from the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must never think that because God has privileged us or blessed us with significant ministry that we are somewhat inured from, guarded from, preserved from, drifting away theologically or morally. If a congregation like this congregation could have the Apostle Paul as its pastor, for 18 months and be taught so deeply the things of God, and yet so quickly become theologically aberrant, let's not think for one moment that's beyond us in second prayers, Yazoo City. And what Paul does in these opening verses in 1 Corinthians 15 is to take this theologically aberrant, this morally complacent congregation back to basics. He begins the chapter, you'll notice, now, I would remind you, brothers. He's writing to a gospel congregation, and he's going to remind them of the great truths that lie at the very heart of the gospel of God.

And he does so for a particular reason, that when people begin to drift from Christ, they need to be brought back to the very heart of the gospel. Everyone who drifts from Jesus Christ, whatever the reasons may appear to be, can

always be traced back to this. They have drifted away. They have become unmoored from the great doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who loved us and who gave himself for us.

And so Paul writes to this congregation. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preach to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preach to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, that is Peter, then to the 12, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy 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 toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is within me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed.

If Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, Your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then it is coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end. when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule and every authority and power, for he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for God has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when it says all things are put in subjection, it is plain that he, the father, is accepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him. that God may be all in all. This is a congregation that under God was founded through the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

And yet he can write in the 12th verse, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead. Had Paul not preached that? Had the apostle Paul not taught them clearly about the resurrection of the dead, that the Christian hope is not simply the immortality of the soul, Platonism, but that the Christian hope is the resurrection of the body? Of course he had, of course he had.

But one of the reasons why Paul goes back to basics in this 15th chapter is because he knows that the church is never a pure church. The church is always, or almost always, a mixed multitude. There are people who appear to believe the truth, to embrace the truth, but who have never been savingly encountered by the truth. Paul never assumes that the people to whom he ministers, whether preaching the word or through his letters, he never simply assumes that they all have come to a living, saving, life-transforming experience of God the Holy Spirit and uniting them to Jesus Christ.

And he knows that the antidote both to unbelief in the congregation and to true-hearted believers who have begun to drift from Christ, he knows that the antidote is the same. Preach to them Jesus Christ. Preach to them the great truths that lie at the heart of the gospel. This is God's unvarying antidote both to unbelief and to believers who have begun to drift away from Jesus Christ, the work of his church, the cause of his kingdom in this world.

And so Paul begins in the opening words of the 15th chapter, now I would remind you brothers, We need to be constantly reminded of the gospel. We never graduate in the Christian life beyond the gospel. We never hear too much about the glorious gospel of the blessed God in his son, Jesus Christ, the incarnate son, who lived, died, who rose again, who ascended into heaven, who reigns, and who one day is coming again. We can never hear too often or too much about the great, glorious, mighty, saving acts of God. in his son, Jesus Christ. And Paul is not embarrassed to go back to basics, to this apostolically founded and apostolically taught congregation.

And I want to notice four things with you about the resurrection here. I want to make four substantive comments about the resurrection, and then, if time allows, applications, practical applications, because the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is not simply a truth we are to acknowledge, it's a truth we are to live. Doctrine is for living. One of the most significant moments in a young Christian's life or in an older Christian's life is when it dawns upon them that doctrine is for life. that doctrine, rightly understood, is instinct with life.

There's a wonderful example of this in John Calvin's Institutes, if I remember rightly, in book one, chapter 13, section 17. Calvin is explicating the glorious doctrine of the Holy Trinity. And he pauses and he says these words of Gregory, vastly delight me."

Now, Calvin's a tightly buttoned up Frenchman. You know, we have this idea the French are very, you know, outgoing and garrulous. Well, Calvin wasn't like that. He was really quite emotionally, tightly buttoned up. And when he wrote these words of Gregory, Gregory Nazianzen, a late fourth century Greek church father, vastly delight me. You stop and you think, wow, Calvin was fast. What vastly delighted Calvin in Gregory Nazianzen. Well Calvin quotes three lines of Gregory's baptismal oration, number 40, section 41. Don't be impressed, I read it so often I know it well. And in that baptismal oration, Gregory's preparing a young man for baptism.

And this is how he begins. He says, young man, let me begin by speaking to you of our blessed God, the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are one undivided torch. When I think of the one, I must think of the three. But when I think of the three, I must think of the one. Oh, I need to stop now. My heart is overflowing. Tears fill my eyes.

Let us worship. And Calvin says, These words of Gregory vastly delight me. Maybe 15 years ago, I was sitting Cambridge in our house when I was pastor there and Joan was with me and Jonathan was visiting and I happened to be reading Gregory, as you do. I said, let me read this to you. This is wonderful.

It just takes about three minutes to read the baptismal oration. And I read it and I turned to Joan and I said, what do you think of that? And she just sat silent. She didn't know what to say. And I turned to Jonathan. I said, Jonathan, what do you think of that? And all he said was this, wow. When did the Holy Trinity last wow you? When were you last overwhelmed by the wonder of the godness of God?

You see, doctrine is not simply a brute chunk of truth that we are to confess and acknowledge. What we read in the Heidelberg Catechism, my only hope in life and death is that I'm not my own. Glorious words, we often use them in Cambridge. These are not simply words from the 1563 that we are to confess accurately. They're truths that are to stir us inwardly, and to bring us to adoration. You see, the resting point of doctrine is doxology. If our doctrine doesn't lead us to doxa, to glory in God, we've never understood the doctrine.

And that's what Paul is about here. He's not simply trying to recalibrate their minds as to the truthfulness, the historicity, the facticity of the resurrection. He wants them to glory in Jesus Christ, the resurrected, risen Savior. So let me mention just a few things, four things if I can think of them. The first is this, he reminds them that the resurrection is a fact of history.

He doesn't assume this, he's taught them this. But like a good teacher, he knows that the heart of good teaching is repetition, repetition, repetition. You found that, Becky, in your teaching. All the years, repetition, repetition. We are dumb students. We're dull-minded and dull-hearted, and we need the Lord again and again and again to remind us of truths that we know and have come to love.

And Paul reminds them that the resurrection, the bodily, the embodied resurrection of Jesus Christ, this is what he's speaking about here. Not some ethereal, spiritual resurrection, but the visible, embodied resurrection in time and space, of God the Son who was dead is a fact of history. I simply want to note with you in the opening verses that He tells them that the Holy Scriptures testify to that, as the Scriptures testify, he says. He points to the witnesses who saw it, the 500, the apostles, James, the brother of the Lord, and Paul himself. And of course, that Jesus himself promised that he would have taught them that. He wants to impress on them. A truth that is embedded at the heart of human history and is one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith.

Maybe you're unlike me, but I often amaze myself at my stupidity. How often I dislocate the resurrection from the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, when Paul says, God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world, Galatians 6, 14. You need to understand that in the whole conspectus of his teaching because he never separates the cross from the resurrection.

They belong as one coherent unity. When we dislocate the cross from the resurrection, we dislocate the cross from its triumph. And when we dislocate the resurrection from the cross, we have an empty resurrection. And Paul simply wants to bring them back to basics. That the resurrection isn't an idea, an ideal, something vague and spiritual.

It's an attested fact, witnesses saw it, the holy scriptures that cannot lie teach it and Jesus Christ himself promised it again and again and again as you well understand. But we need secondly to remember and this is really embedded and implicit in all that Paul is saying here. that it was the resurrection that confirmed the success and triumph of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. He was put to death for our trespasses, but raised for our justification. Now from our side, we are justified, made right with God, by grace alone, through faith alone. that that subjective justification is grounded in the objective work of Jesus Christ. When he cried, it is finished on Calvary's cross, and on the third day, God testified to the truth and the glory of that it is finished by raising his son from the dead. The resurrection belongs to the very heart of the good news of God. Because in the resurrection, God was publicly placarding the triumph of his son, Jesus Christ. And such, just as it was the Father's will to crush him, Isaiah 53, so it was the Father's delight to raise him.

He was raised for our justification, for our acceptance with God. And so when Paul can write in verse 12, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? He's posing a very searching question. He's saying, do you know what you're actually saying when you talk like this? you're actually dismantling the whole foundation of your salvation.

The resurrection was God's public seal to the triumph of his crucified son. When Jesus Christ cried, it is finished, Yes, the veil of the temple was torn in two but it was the resurrection that gave public and I think cosmic significance to the it is finished of Jesus Christ. We celebrate the resurrection every Lord's Day, of course we do. But I think it's right, the reformers were committed to this if the Puritans were a little unhappy with it. To remember on an occasion like this that the resurrection is not simply where we gather to remember that we belong to a Savior who has conquered death, but to a Savior who has paid in full the price of our sin, who has died the death we could never die, and God raised him from the dead and gave his public seal of approval, as it were, to the saving triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A third thing we should take to heart and consider carefully is that the resurrection was the most inevitable act in human history. Why so? Well, we could quote It was not possible for death to hold him, Acts 2, 23, 24. We could quote that. But if we see it in the full conspectus of the work of Jesus Christ, we can understand that the resurrection was inevitable because it was the fruit of the son's loving obedience to his heavenly father. Remember how this is so beautifully brought out in Philippians chapter two. Let this mind be among you, almost certainly, plural, in the life of the fellowship of the people of God.

Let this mind be among you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but literally himself he emptied. He didn't empty himself of anything, actually. Himself he emptied, taking the form of a servant. It was subtraction by addition, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. He humbled himself, became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him. He is the only man who has merited anything from the hand of God throughout whole of human history. We're saved by works. Thanks be to God, but not our own works, but the works of Jesus Christ. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and in him all who are united to him. The resurrection was the most inevitable act in human history because it was the fruit of the loving obedience of the son to the father

who commissioned him in the covenant of redemption to be the redeemer of God's elect. And he accomplished that work.

And the father raised him. Remember how Jesus puts it himself, John 10, 17, Listen to this, the reason the Father loves me is because I lay down my life for my sheep that I may take it up again. You say, but didn't the Father love him from times eternal? Absolutely. As God the Son, he was ever beloved of the Father.

Even on Calvary's cross. And even when the son cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When all the lights went out and there wasn't a pinprick of light in the cosmos for God the son. Can we doubt the father was saying? If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, tis now.

He was loved from times eternal as God the Son, but as God the Son in our humanity, as the God-man, he could say the reason the Father loves me. is because I lay down my life for the sheep, because I fulfill to the absolute perfection what he committed to me in the covenant of redemption and times eternal. I lay down my life for my sheep that I may take it up again.

Only as he holds the reins of power, as the resurrected risen, Son of God in our flesh, can the church go forth in his name and say to the world, repent and believe the good news of Jesus Christ. But notice this fourth thing that Paul highlights really in verses 20 through 22. that Jesus' resurrection was the first fruits of a great harvest. And he's speaking here, remember, remember this, he's speaking of the bodily, the embodied resurrection of Jesus Christ, not of some spiritual ideal. Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man Adam came death, by a man Jesus Christ has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order, Christ the firstfruits, then it is coming those who belong to Christ. Why was there a resurrection? Well, you might think, well, that's a no-brainer, Ian. There was a resurrection because without the resurrection, we couldn't be saved. Well, that's a decent answer. It's a Bible answer.

It's not the best answer, is it? What is God's ultimate purpose? You and I are God's proximate purpose. The Son of God did not come into the world ultimately for you or for me. Did you know that? Why did God send his Son into the world? You say, well, does the Bible not tell us God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life? Absolutely true.

But that's not God's ultimate purpose, is it? Think of Romans 8, 29, those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son in order that he might have the preeminence, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. God's ultimate purpose terminates on the glory of his son, not the salvation of his people. We are his proximate purpose. God's ultimate purpose is to populate his glory with creaturely reflectors of his son, Jesus Christ, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And you'll know, we don't have time to unpack it, you know the significance of the firstfruits in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were a pledge of the whole harvest, the full harvest that was to come. And because Jesus Christ is the covenant head of all who believe in him, he's the appointed head who came to be what Adam failed to be, to do what Adam failed to do. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive, all who are united to him, all who are

represented in him and by him. We must never think of the Lord Jesus Christ as a private man. He never was a private man. He was a true man, but he was a public man. He was a covenant head.

All he did, every breath he breathed from the moment of his conception in his mother's womb till he breathed his last breath on Calvary's cross, was raised and reunited with his glorified spirit on the third day. And every breath, if we can use such language, in heaven's glory, he breathes on behalf of his people. Every breath he breathed, every word he spoke, every step he took was for us.

And that's why saving faith says with Horatius Bonner, upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die. Another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity. In other words, our resurrection is as sure as his because we are united to him. In times eternal, we were chosen in him from before the foundation of the world.

The Christian life is not lived atomistically. We so often read the Bible as if it were addressed to us personally. Well, it's not. Well, in a sense, it is. You know what I mean, though. It's addressed to us covenantally. The Bible's a covenantal book. We need to learn to read the word of God Hebraically, if I put it like that. Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus. Well, I need to think like Jesus. That's not Paul's point. Well, in a sense it is, but that's minor.

His point is corporately, covenantally as the people of God, we must reflect the mind of Christ as we seek to live the Christian life. He is the first fruits of a great harvest. And one day the whole harvest will be gathered to him. So Paul is taking these Christians back to basics, to truths that they know that have somehow become distanced from or dislocated from.

Well, let me in the few moments that are left. That took a little longer than I thought. Just seek to apply it in four ways. Number one, this truth that we are united to a risen, regnant Jesus Christ. This truth should shape and style how we live. Remember how Paul puts it in Romans 6 verse 4?

We were therefore buried with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Now here's the thing. Would anyone looking at your life or my life think this? They've been raised from the dead. That's how I was converted to Christ. I didn't have the light. I had no Bible, no church.

You know that. But it was a boy at school. He was in his senior year. I was in my junior year. We were very, very different in every conceivable way. I couldn't put it into language, probably couldn't put it into words, but he lived differently from anyone I'd ever met in my life.

And years later, we met and we were chatting, and it was through him, he invited me to a gospel meeting one Sunday afternoon, and the man preached on John 3, 16, and the Lord's great mercy, he saved me, he opened my eyes. I said, you know Albert, isn't it remarkable how God used your life to bring me to himself? Because you never really talked about Jesus to me. And he looked at me, he said, Ian, I was always talking to you about Jesus. I can

honestly say this morning, I don't remember one occasion when he witnessed to me about Jesus Christ. But I believe him. But it was his life I couldn't put it into language, Bible language or theological language, but he lived a resurrected life. He wasn't odd. He wasn't weird. He just was different. There was something about him.

And if we are united to a resurrected, risen Savior, surely amongst our neighbors, our friends, our families, our folk at school, at college, wherever we may be, Should maybe be saying, twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Does your life and my life give any evidence that we have been raised from the dead and are united to a risen, regnant, reigning, cosmically supreme Savior, Jesus Christ?

Secondly, this great truth should fill our hearts with unceasing thankfulness to God. You know, one of the marks of being filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5, 18 and 19, always thanking God. Always. Not some of the time when the sun's shining and life is sweet. But when life is hard, when dark providences almost crush the very life out of us, always thanking God.

Because brothers and sisters, no matter what, no matter what, if we are united to our risen Savior, nothing in all creation can separate us from Him. And we should be thanking our God and Father every day of our lives. that he has been so gracious as to unite us, not just covenantally, not just federally, not just by faith, but by the Holy Spirit, he has united us to the risen, reigning Jesus Christ. Thirdly, this truth should give us a calm assurance in the faith of life's trials and tragedies. Because this truth shouts out to us, our God reigns. The last word in life is not death or its miseries, but Jesus Christ, the risen, conquering savior of sin and death and hell. And the last thing I'd say is, this truth should inspire us to tell out the greatness of the Lord.

I've been quite struck of late thinking about the Great Commission for different reasons. I think you know I'm involved in the Peyton Society, John G. Peyton. I spoke at a conference last week and only one person had read the autobiography of John G. Peyton at a reform conference. I almost want to ask how many hands would be up today. John G. Peyton, missionary to the New Hebrides, missionary to the cannibals.

And what has struck me afresh in the Great Commission is this. This is the moment when the Lord says, go and make disciples of all the nations, when he's sending out the church, this is the moment when he reveals God's name for the very first time. Moses says in Exodus 3, Lord, when they ask me, who sent you, what am I to say?

I am has sent you. I am. I am what I am. And now, for the very first time, the Son of God in our flesh takes the I Am in the context of cosmic mission and says, here is the I Am, baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It's the risen Lord who unpacks the I Am, the Vayehi Yahweh. And it's in the context of mission.

Go. and make disciples, and as you probably know, it's a participle of attendant consequence, but that's for another thing. It's not simply saying as you go, bear witness, it's saying, church, send out missionaries. Alexander Duff, you don't know the name. First missionary sent out by the Church of Scotland, 1829 to India. First missionary. He said if a church is not sending out missionaries, it's not a church.

Oh my. We talk about the marks of the church, the Notai Ecclesia. The preaching of the word, well, the right hearing as well as the right preaching, Callum puts it. The administration of the sacraments, and then the Scots came along and rightly said, and the exercise of godly discipline. And Duff is saying, no, there's a fourth mark of an authentic church. Because the risen savior said, go.

His church is to be a going church. If it's not a going church, it isn't a Christian church. Something to think about, isn't it? I've been pondering that the last few weeks. So we serve a risen Savior. Through our lives, does my life, in any way, in any way say to anyone, anywhere, He's living a risen life. Because that is what it means to be united to Jesus Christ. May the Lord bless to us His word. Amen.