

Everything Or Nothing

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like us together to turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and let me read again verses 13 and 14 where Paul writes, 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.

Our title this morning is Everything or Nothing, and that title comes from a quote that I read a few weeks ago from a man called Robert Haldane.

Robert Haldane was a Scottish author, theologian and missionary, and along with his brother James they were instrumental in supporting mission work in Scotland between 1805 and 1840. So the Haldane brothers are very famous figures in Scottish Church history, and they were actually very wealthy. They came from a wealthy family, but when they came to faith in Jesus, they sold some of their property, and they gave very generously from their wealth to fund gospel work both in Scotland and in other parts of the world.

So they were very influential both here and in Europe in the early part of the 19th century, and the quote that I read from Robert Haldane is as follows, he said, Christianity is everything or nothing.

[1 : 16] If it be true, it warrants and commands every sacrifice to promote its influence. If it be not, then let us lay aside the hypocrisy of professing to believe it.

And that's a very striking quotation. Christianity is everything or nothing. And of course Haldane wasn't the first to realise that.

Exactly the same emphasis is made throughout the New Testament, and one of the places where we see it very clearly is in the chapter that we read in 1 Corinthians 15. Here Paul is addressing the fact that there are some people among the Corinthians who are denying that Jesus rose from the dead, and Paul tackles that head on throughout this chapter.

He insists that this is actually a matter of first importance. You see that at the beginning of the chapter that Christ died for her sins, he was buried, and he was raised. That is a matter of first importance in terms of the gospel.

He goes on to then recount the eyewitness testimony that Jesus appeared to Cephas, to the 12, to 500 brothers, to James, to the apostles, and last of all to Paul himself.

[2 : 28] And then he raises the stakes higher and higher, culminating in what he says in verses 12 to 15. He's saying, we are proclaiming that Jesus is raised from the dead.

So how can some of you deny the resurrection? If there's no resurrection from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith is in vain, we're even misrepresenting God because we're testifying about God, that he raised Christ whom he did not raise if it's true that the dead are not raised.

Because if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you're still in your sins. Those who fall in asleep have perished. If Christ, if in Christ we have hope only in this life, we're of all people, to be most pitied, Paul's argument is just very simple.

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching, our faith, our hope, our whole Christianity is in vain. In other words, Christianity stands or falls on the question of whether or not the resurrection of Jesus happened.

And if it did happen, then nothing matters more than this. But if it didn't happen, then none of this matters at all.

[3 : 46] Christianity is everything or nothing. And I want us to think a little bit more about that today. And we're going to do so under three headings, inescapable sovereignty, incompatible victory, everlasting security.

So first of all, thinking about inescapable sovereignty. When we say the gospel is everything, the everythingness of the gospel arises from the fact that the claims that the Bible makes about Jesus are massive.

And that's so incredibly important for us to recognize. If we take the claims that the Bible makes about Jesus, if these claims are true, then even the most basic conclusion that we can come to is that Jesus is everything.

In other words, none of what the Bible says about Jesus is compatible with a kind of middle of the road view of Jesus. You can't have a medium Jesus and be compatible with what the Bible is actually claiming.

And that's because the Bible's claims about Jesus are huge. They are absolutely massive. And I'll just run through a few examples. The Bible claims that Jesus is God. And a great example of that is John 8.

[4 : 55] Jesus himself said, truly, truly, I say to you before Abraham was, I am. Now, that is a really loaded phrase that Jesus uses there because that word, that phrase, I am, of course, comes from the Old Testament, name given to God, revealed in Exodus, chapters 3 and 4.

And when Jesus is basically saying, I existed before Abraham, I am, he is making himself out to be God. And of course, that's why they wanted to stone him because to them that was blasphemy.

Same emphasis is made in John 1. He is God. He is emphasizing the fact that Jesus is eternal. In beginning was the word that's referring to Jesus. The word was with God.

The word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And John goes on to talk about how all things are made through him. The same emphasis is made in Colossians 1, that it's through Jesus all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, all things created through him and for him.

So Jesus is God. He's eternal. He's creator. And he's the one through whom everything is upheld. Hebrews 1 speaks about that long ago at many times, in many ways God spoke to us by our fathers, by the prophets.

[6 : 08] But in these last days, he's spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. So there's creation again. He's the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

After making purifications for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. And so Jesus is the one through whom everything's made. He's the one in whom everything is upheld.

And then 1 Corinthians 15, as we read, speaks about how Jesus reigns over all. He has an inescapable sovereignty over all creation and over all of us.

Jesus is everything. That's the most basic claim that the Bible is making about him. And in many ways, what the Bible says about Jesus is teaching us that everything has either come from him or it's heading towards him.

Everything has either come from Jesus or it's heading towards him. So you look at everything good in your life. You stand before an incredible Hebride in sunset.

[7 : 25] That came from him. You stare into an endless starry sky on a clear night when there's no streetlights around. All of that came from him.

You pick up a flower and you look at the incredible beauty of a petal or you smell the delicate fragrance. That came from him. And you experience all the beauty and joy of friendship and family and community.

All of that came from him. Here's the source of everything that is good in our lives. Everything came from him. But at the same time, you and I know that life, yes, it's full of loads of good stuff, but it's also full of loads of awful stuff as well.

And there's so much in life that's wrong. There's so much pain and evil and hurt and injustice and cruelty in the world. It just seems to be at the moment, the news is full of so much that just seems so wrong.

None of that came from Jesus. And that's that's an absolutely vital point in our theology. God is not the author of sin. And so that does not come from him.

[8 : 33] But all of it is heading towards him. Every sin, every injustice, every evil act is going to come before the judgment seat of Christ.

Everything is heading towards him. And he will hold everyone to account. You see that emphasized in the second letter written to Corinthians, to the Corinthians of Christ.

For what is we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what's due for what he's done in the body, whether good or evil. So if we look at the world and we see light and beauty and joy, we can marvel that it has come from Jesus.

And if we look at the world and see darkness and injustice and evil, we can rest assured knowing that it's all heading towards him. And he's going to hold every injustice to account.

Everything either comes from Jesus or it's heading towards him. That's the level that the Bible places Jesus at. He's utterly sovereign. He is everything.

[9 : 43] And that sovereignty of Jesus is proven by the resurrection. The resurrection proves that Jesus is who the Bible says that he is. So you've got this magnificent description in Philippians 2 where it speaks about Jesus humbling himself and becoming a human alongside of us all the way to the point of death.

And then following that humiliation comes his exaltation. God has highly exalted him, bestowed on him the name that's above every name so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Jesus has risen again in power. He's exalted over all.

Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that he is Lord. And all of that, if all of that is true, if all of that is true, then Jesus' sovereignty is inescapable.

So he's not just like a little bit of a king. He's not like a wee bit exalted in the kind of religious areas of life. He's not kind of important. He is the absolute sovereign over everything.

[10 : 56] And the place where you probably see that most vividly is actually in the book of Revelation. Let me just show you a section from chapter one where John, who wrote Revelation, has a vision of Jesus.

In the midst of the lampstand, so I'm picking it up at verse 13, I saw one like the Son of Man. So this is describing Jesus, clothed with a long robe, with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace. His voice was like the roar of many waters.

In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the shining sun in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades.

[11 : 55] Jesus is sovereign over everything. And what that means is that if anybody rejects Jesus, you might feel like you're pushing him away, but you cannot escape your accountability.

So often we want to do that. We want to push Jesus to one side. We want to tell him, you know, well, maybe not now. Like, this is not a good time for me to think about this. And we want to avoid dealing with the questions of life and death and time and eternity.

But if Jesus really does reign in the way that the Bible claims that he does, it's impossible to put him to one side. In many ways, trying to push Jesus away is a bit like trying to push the pier away when you're in a boat.

So if you're sitting in a boat and you buy the pier and you start pushing, you can feel the movement and you can see a gap emerging as you push.

But of course, it's not that you're pushing the pier away. It's that you are moving away and you are the one who's at risk of drifting.

[13 : 03] And it's all pointing us back to the fact that absolutely nothing matters more than your relationship with Jesus. Nothing matters more than your relationship with Jesus.

And you must press that truth into your heart. But it also means that if you are a believer or if you become one, the inescapable sovereignty of Jesus means that you can never fall outside of his protection.

That's one thing that's emphasized beautifully in this chapter. If you look at verse 23, it talks about everyone who trusts in Jesus as those who belong to Christ. If you're a Christian or you become a Christian, you belong to Christ, your His possession.

And the one who reigns over everything is never going to let you go. Jesus is absolutely everything. Or He's nothing. But if Jesus is nothing, then what is everything else?

[14 : 12] Remember, we said that everything either comes from Jesus or it's going towards Jesus. If Jesus is nothing, if none of this is true, then where has everything that's good in our lives come

from?

Where does love and beauty and joy and hope come from? And if the ultimate answer to that is, well, from nothing, then all of that's actually just an illusion.

And we're just pretending that these things are important and that they matter because ultimately they have no basis. And even worse, if Jesus is nothing, not only does everything good in our lives have no origin, no ultimate meaning, no eternal basis, even worse, every evil is going nowhere.

And so there will be no justice, no accountability, because there's actually no basis for saying that something that's evil is actually evil.

And so when we strip away Jesus from our worldview, we lose the basis for appreciating anything that's truly good.

[15 : 37] And we lose any prospect of evil actually being called to account. And I don't want a worldview like that.

And I doubt very much that any of you want one either. Our second point is incomparable victory.

If you look at any era of human history, if you look at any human society across the globe, they're all very, very different, but there's one thing in common. You look at all the different kind of ages of history of human history.

If you look at all the different societies across the world today, it's a huge diversity, but there's one thing that they all have in common. Death wins.

So no matter how successful, powerful, or influential a society or a person or a group may be sooner or later, death wins.

[16 : 38] And that dominance of death affects every single one of us. And Paul recognizes that in this chapter. He speaks about how in Adam all die. And the teaching that lies behind that statement is the fact that Adam functions as the representative of the entire human race.

He stands as head of that race, and he sinned against God. And as a result, death has spread to all humanity. And death always has the final say over a human life, always.

And there's a kind of striking example of that in the news just now. I'm sure some of you have seen it last night. And this morning that Chris Hoy won a Britain's most successful Olympians as announced that his cancer diagnosis is terminal.

And there's something astonishing there, because there you have Chris Hoy, one of the most phenomenal athletes that this country has ever produced. You look at him when he was cycling. If you've not heard of Chris Hoy, he was a cyclist, a track cyclist.

He won, I think, seven or eight Olympic gold medals. Just incredible at what he did. So powerful. Chris Hoy would be one of the most physically powerful humans on planet Earth in his prime.

[17 : 55] He's powerless in the face of death. And that's just true across every age of human history.

Death wins. And because of that, some people just sort of resigned to the fact that, well, that's just an inevitability. It's as though death is just one of these things that's going to happen.

The Bible never does that. The Bible never sees death as this kind of just unstoppable inevitability that you have to just accept. The Bible never views death as just one of those things.

The Bible always views death as an enemy, as a hideous, brutal enemy. And that resonates so powerfully with the human heart because nobody can stand before a terminal diagnosis or before a tragic accident or before the horrors of war and say, ah, this is nothing.

Nobody can say that. Death is not nothing. Death is a hideous enemy. Because of that, we strive in so many ways to delay death.

[19 : 03] And so much of that is good. And we live in an era of history, and we live in a particular society in the world where the advancements in medical care are an incredible blessing. But what we've got to recognize is that the gospel is even better.

Because Jesus hasn't come to delay death. Jesus has come to defeat death. And on our own, in the face of death, the most that we can find is something that might help for a while.

In Jesus, in the face of death, we find everything that we need. We find everything.

And all of it's reminding us that at the heart of Christianity is the great conflict that every human is caught up in, the conflict between life and death, between good and evil, between the kingdom of God and the domain of darkness.

And at the heart of the gospel is the fact that Jesus didn't come to just teach or to serve or to set an example. Jesus came to fight, and he came to conquer.

[20 : 05] And that's the thread that runs right through the whole Bible. The Bible is a conflict narrative leading to an ultimate conquering through Jesus. And so it runs right through the Bible.

From the very beginning in the aftermath of Adam's sin, God confronts Satan and announces that there is going to be conflict. That conflict is then foreshadowed in the battles and struggles experienced by the people of Israel in the Old Testament.

You see that all through the historical narrative. You see it in the Psalms, the nations raging, the people taking counsel against the Lord, against his people, ultimately against his anointed king. That's all a kind of type, what we would call a shadow, a type of the great conflict that God is dealing with. The prophets foretold a victory. Isaiah is a great example where it says, on this mountain, the Lord of Hosts will make a feast for all people, a feast of well-aged wine, a rich food of marrow, of aged wine, well-refined, and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that spread over all nations.

He will swallow up death forever. That's what's prophesied in the Old Testament, and that is what is accomplished through Jesus. He comes, he engages in conflict.

[21 : 19] And that's why when you read the life of Jesus, what's the first thing you see? You see that he is constantly facing opposition. And so as a child, there's an attempt to kill him. When he begins his public ministry, he's tempted by Satan in exactly the same way that Adam was tempted.

And throughout his work, Jesus is constantly opposed by demonic forces. Ultimately, he's betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, mocked, condemned, and killed.

Dying in agony on the cross, and everybody thinks that death has won. But on the third day, Jesus rose.

And that resurrection is a resurrection of power, conquest, and total victory. Jesus came to confront our greatest enemy. He engaged in relentless battle, and he emerged in total victory.

When we talk about living our lives in the face of death, we'll often talk about medical breakthroughs, and there have been so many incredible medical breakthroughs. They are amazing. They are to be celebrated. But nothing compares to the breakthrough that the gospel has brought, the healing and hope and security that comes through Jesus.

[22 : 34] And Paul speaks of that so magnificently in the last part of this chapter, when he says that when the perishable puts on the imperishable, when the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

Or death, where is your victory? Or death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ.

And it's all teaching us that Jesus has come to address the problem of death. And all of that is ultimately for our benefit.

I love what it says in verse 57. If you look at verse 57, you can see that there's three parties involved in this verse. There's God.

He's the one to whom thanks is given, because he's the one who has planned and initiated all of this. There's Jesus.

[23 : 35] He's the one through whom it's all accomplished. And there's us. Saying that Jesus accomplishes is given to you.

That's what the gospel brings to all who put their trust in him. In the face of death's relentless power, Jesus is everything.

Or he's nothing. But if Jesus is nothing, then death takes everything. It takes every person, every achievement, every memory.

Even the universe gets swallowed up. But if Jesus is risen, then it's not the universe that gets swallowed up. It's death that gets swallowed up. Jesus' victory is everything that we need in the face of death.

And if you trust in him, but everyone who trusts in him, then he will share everything that victory has achieved with you. So Jesus reigns over everything.

[24 : 43] Jesus won a total victory over death. And that's the reason why everyone who trusts in Jesus can have everlasting security. In verse 22, Paul writes that in Adam all die, but in Christ shall all be made alive.

That's the promise that the gospel gives. John 3.16 captures it perfectly. Whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. And the guarantee of that comes through Jesus himself.

And Paul describes that magnificently in this chapter in the language of firstfruits. So word you'll see him use a few times in this chapter. And that's the language of a harvest.

And so at the start of the harvest, you get the first crops, the first fruit. And whatever that fruit is, is telling you what's going to come behind. And there's two crucial lessons here.

And we'll just finish with these. The first is that that language of firstfruits is the language of anticipation. And so that means that what we see in Jesus, we can look forward to for ourselves.

[25 : 50] So he has risen, he has triumphed. He cannot be threatened by the power of death. And he is now in the majestic glory of being at the Father's side and what's true of him is going to be true of us.

What's true of him is going to be true of you. If you're trusting in Jesus. That language of firstfruits is pointing towards this amazing harvest, this gathering in where Jesus brings all his people home.

So there's the language of anticipation. But the second key lesson is that this is also the language of guarantee. Because the first fruits are crucial because whatever the first fruits are, you can guarantee that that's what the rest of the harvest is going to be like.

And all of this is reinforcing the unbreakable connection between Christ and his people. He has conquered death and he's taking you with him. He has risen in power.

He's taking you with him. And he reigns in glory forever and he's taking you with him. And the resurrection of Jesus means that it means that we're not saying that the first fruits are coming.

[27 : 07] We're saying the first fruits have come because Jesus has risen. And so what we anticipate will happen to us is guaranteed because of everything that has already happened to him.

In other words, all of this means that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, then you and Jesus are the same fruit. You're the same crop, the same harvest.

And that means that wherever he is, you belong there too. And that's the security that the Gospel gives us.

And that security changes everything. And that brings us to a crucial point that Paul makes at the very end of the chapter. When we think about the eternal security that we have in the Gospel, it's very easy to think that that can justify day to day indifference.

So sometimes people will think, oh, well, I'm saved, I'm sorted, I'm fine. And so I don't really need to think about Jesus very much in my day to day life. To think like that is to completely misunderstand the Gospel because the Gospel is so big, so magnificent, so important that it changes everything and it transforms every aspect of what we live for.

[28 : 15] And that's why in Paul you have this magnificent declaration of the security we have in Christ at the end of the passage at 54 to 57. And then immediately he says, therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Robert Haldin said the same thing. If Christianity is true, then it warrants and commands every sacrifice to promote its influence.

In other words, if Jesus is risen and we are securing him for eternity, then we want to live this week and every week of our lives for him.

Every single day we get up under his inescapable sovereignty, and so we want to serve and obey our King. Every day we go out in light of his incomparable victory, and we want other people to know about that so that we live out our lives a lifestyle and a conduct that speaks to people to say that there's something different in our lives and a readiness to share our faith, to invite people to church, to try and reach out to the community that God has placed in front of us.

And then every night we go to bed resting on the everlasting security that Jesus gives us. And that means that whatever a day has brought, whatever a tomorrow will bring, we are always and forever safe in him.

[29 : 45] And it's all reminding us that in Jesus we have everything, everything that we need, everything that we long for, everything that we dreamt of, and in him we have it for eternity.

And it's also telling us all that if you push Jesus away, if you refuse to put your trust in him, it means that you've got nothing.

And I really, really want you to think about that. Do you want to go down to Dalmore this afternoon to the cemetery and stand surrounded by a hundred graves and stand there and say, I've got nothing?

And do you want your family to stand at your funeral and say, we've got nothing?

Or do you want them to be able to say they had their trust in Jesus, they have everything?
[31 : 17] Because ultimately it's the difference, trusting in Jesus is the difference between everything or nothing.

Amen.