

Acts 17

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[0 : 0 0] Why is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ so vital to us? Why do we attach so much importance to it? Why is it that we cannot accept at any price any compromise on the reality of a literal bodily resurrection of Jesus? Why do we defend this gospel truth against all those who would seek to undermine its credibility? Why is it such a wonderfully reassuring glorious truth to us? Well for all sorts of reasons but amongst other things it brings to us guarantees that cannot be found anywhere else in life. There are many guarantees offered to us. Your washing machine will probably have one. Your computer will have one. But it only lasts for a certain period of time. And even then how often have you discovered when you seek to make a claim against it there's something in the small print that means you can't get what you think you deserve. Guarantees in life are few and far between. Sure certain copper bottomed 100% sure fire guarantees in life are very few and far between. But the resurrection is one such guarantee. So the Apostle Paul in that great chapter 1 Corinthians 15 tells us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ ensures that the preaching of the gospel is not futile.

We need that reassurance. We need that reassurance. Particularly in the days in which we live in our land where so few are interested to hear the gospel and sometimes we can get very disheartened and we think well are we wasting our time? But the resurrection of Christ ensures its effectiveness, its power and we can thank God for that. And the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Paul tells us, ensures also that sins are really forgiven, truly forgiven, genuinely forgiven, not just overlooked, not just temporarily forgiven, but forgiven forever.

That's what Paul tells us. That's what Paul tells us. If Christ is not risen, we're still in our sins. We're of all men the most miserable. But now is Christ risen. And you can have the absolute assurance that coming to you. And you can have the absolute assurance that coming to this Saviour, casting yourself upon his mercy, then he speaks to you.

The words he often spoke when he was here in this world, your sins are forgiven. And he means it. And it's real. And it's genuine. The resurrection ensures that. The resurrection, Paul tells us, ensures that one day we will have new bodies. What a tremendous prospect that is. These creaking old bones of ours, which we're more and more aware of, the older we get.

And one day transformed into a new resurrection body, perfect, perfectly fitted for the world to come. Isn't that a tremendous prospect?

[3 : 3 1] And Paul says, that is absolutely sure, because Christ has risen. And Peter also strikes a similar note, as he reminds us that because we have a living Saviour, we have a living hope, a real hope, not some wishful thinking, not just some, well, I hope it will turn out all right in the end, but something to build your whole life and your future and your eternity upon, a living hope, because we have a living Saviour, an anchor for the soul.

So these are some of the surefire guarantees that the resurrection of Jesus Christ ensures.

But there is another that I want to bring to you tonight that maybe is not immediately obvious and yet is just as real and just as important.

And that is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ ensures a perfect justice. A perfect justice.

That is what Paul tells us here as he's preaching to the men and women of Athens, when he's emphasized the fact that this Jesus Christ died and rose again.

[4 : 58] And then in verse 31, as he concludes his address, he speaks in this way, for he, that is God, has set a day when he will judge the world with justice.

By the man he has appointed, he has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. That resurrection ensures that there will be one day justice, pure justice, perfect justice.

Peter also, in his sermon to Cornelius, strikes a very similar note. This is important, pivotal, watershed point in the history of the Christian gospel.

Because the church, the early church, which of course began amongst Jewish people, is just beginning to come to terms with the fact that God's mercy is not just confined to one nation there in the center of the world, but it is for the whole world, for every nation.

And that was a big thing for them. It took a long time for them to come to terms with that, to grasp it. Peter had to have a special revelation before he would even go to Cornelius with the gospel, a Roman official.

[6 : 22] But he goes, and because this is such a crucial moment in the history of the gospel, we may be absolutely certain that the Holy Spirit will ensure that the message Peter preached is the authentic gospel.

And so what is the message then that Peter has for Cornelius? He says, we are witnesses of everything Jesus did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. You see, there is that emphasis on the crucial necessity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.

You see, Peter is inspired by the Holy Spirit as he sets out the authentic gospel to bring in this note of judgment.

[7 : 42] This is Peter preaching to a Roman centurion and it is a bold thing for Peter to say when he talks about judgment, about justice.

But once again, he makes the point, it is because he has been raised from the dead that Jesus Christ has been appointed to that task.

Exactly the same point that Paul has made in Athens. So the resurrection of Christ ensures a perfect justice.

Now that is important to us. It is important to us as human beings. How indignant we get when our justice seems to be inconsistent and flawed.

We thank God we have a legal system. We have a system of justice in our country and we look at other countries sometimes and we're rightly proud.

[8 : 42] But we all acknowledge that very often it fails at crucial points. How about this Abu Qatada, this man who's been in our country for all these years preaching hate against us and yet we can't get rid of him.

He's costing us millions as taxpayers and our justice system has no way of dealing with him, so it would seem. And we get really hot under the collar about this, don't we?

And let me give you another example I was just reading in the newspaper a few days ago about a young man who went to a hole in the wall to get some money out and it failed to deliver the money he wanted and he lost his temper so violently that he said about his girlfriend and beat her and kicked her.

And there was a picture of this poor young woman in the paper and one of her eyes was completely closed and it had closed for two weeks apparently. Such was the violence of his attack simply because he could not get his money.

And he was charged with this offence and he got, so the account tells us, a few hours of community service. Now we don't have all the facts behind this and we must be careful about that.

[10 : 01] But nevertheless, immediately there is that, that's not fair. And the young woman and her family are indignant because our justice system seems to have failed.

It is important to us. Like it or not, it is important to us because instinctively we know that our justicism for all its vaunted effectiveness is flawed very often and inconsistent.

Perfect justice is guaranteed. So the scriptures tell us because God has appointed him, raised him from the dead for this very office to be judge of all the earth, to judge all men.

So it introduces a very solemn note, doesn't it, to the Easter message that sometimes I think has passed us by because we very often made Easter a very cozy time, rather a comfortable time.

And daffodils and Easter bunnies and fluffy chicks and chocolate is about as far as many people, sadly in our nation, will perceive Easter.

[11 : 30] But we, who know a little more than that, hopefully, nevertheless, find such comfort in the truth that we have a living, so that sometimes this solemn aspect of what Easter means has passed us by, but we ought not to overlook it.

We ought not to pass it by. He's given proof that one day the Lord Jesus will judge the world and the proof is that he raised him from the dead.

It is not an unimportant aspect of the Easter message. Perfect justice. Such a crying need, isn't there, for perfect justice.

See, who is going to vindicate the cause of the oppressed? Those in our world, throughout history, who have been denied justice, who's going to speak for them?

Who will speak on behalf of those who even in our world today are starving because of the greed of a few? Or those driven out of their homes by aggression and violence?

[12 : 53] Who will speak on their behalf? And sadly, in our fallen world, there is nobody who will stand and speak for them.

Who will vindicate their cause one day? Who will speak for the thousands yearly of young lives aborted in the womb who will never see the light of day?

Who's going to speak on their behalf? When it's become just acceptable in our society, who will speak for them?

Who will avenge the blood of the martyrs? One day, one day, one day, one day, the cause of all the oppressed and afflicted and suffering and deprived and murdered, one day their cause will be vindicated because the judge of all the earth will sit upon his throne and these things will be exposed for what they are and judgment will be visited and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ ensures that.

How in our world is it that the wicked seem to get away with it? How can Mugabe survive in Zimbabwe?

[14 : 38] Who will bring him to answer for his crimes? It doesn't seem that any system of justice in our world is able to do that.

So who will do it? Who will bring the rich and the powerful who trample so often over the week in order to get into their positions of influence?

Who will bring them to justice when they seem in our world to get away with it? It's a problem, isn't it? The psalmist had it when he saw how the wicked seem to prosper and the godly and the godly well their lives were lives of deprivation apparently.

Who will deal with those who seem in our world to get away with it? And suffering and paying the price just seems to be so disproportionate doesn't it?

Had a lady in my house along with her friend these last few days who runs a children's daycare centre in South Africa.

[16:06] She takes in about 140 children who are infected with the HIV virus through their mothers and she takes them in and she cares for them and it's a wonderfully compassionate ministry that I've been able to see at first hand.

But she tells me of the situation in South Africa amongst the black South Africans where the men take a woman have relations with her infect her with this terrible virus she gets pregnant the man moves on to another woman then to another woman and then to another woman and it is the mothers and their unborn children who pay the price for his promiscuity and it's just so unfair isn't it isn't it who then will speak for those who suffer through no circumstances of their own those little children born with this terrible thing in their bloodstream and his lives are going to be cut short because of it through through the wickedness of men and sometimes of course their mothers who give themselves to these men who will speak for them do you understand what I'm saying and our hearts cry out for perfect justice for a vindication of the countless millions who have suffered throughout the course of this world's history because of sin because of the greed of men a risen

Christ ensures that there will one day be that perfect justice and God has given proof of that by raising him from the dead but we get all steamed up over this don't we get indignant when I just list this catalogue of the ills of our world and the temptation is then of course to detach ourselves from it well we're not like that are we we don't behave in that fashion do we and we gather around us the cloaks of our respectability and as if that has nothing to do with us and whilst those glaring cases demand justice and we can see that so clearly but who will bring us to account every every thought unworthy thought that's passed through your mind every every untruth that you've spoken throughout the course of your life every unkindness that you've done to another all recorded not a single idle word goes unrecorded last book of the bible tells us that the books in heaven opened the dreadful record of your life and mine exposed on that day of judgment and and so what then of perfect justice what what what is it that

I deserve and what is it that you deserve and the comfort and consolation that we can that we can derive from thinking upon the Easter story is tempered a bit isn't it by the realization this one whom God raised from the dead on the third day is one day going to sit upon a throne and you and I will pass before him and nothing will be hidden and judgment will be declared who will bring us to account because the risen Christ ensures there will be judgment so it's a very solemn and it's a very sober and it's a rather terrifying thought and we want a way of escape we want to find some hope in this so it's perfect justice which standing by itself is a frightening thought because it means you and

I as well but it is also a reassuring justice and if I couldn't say this to you then I have no right to speak to you because it wouldn't be appropriate for me to just leave you with a note of judgment if I couldn't speak to you tonight of a real hope of a real escape so reassuring justice because the pure justice guaranteed by a risen saviour is the very greatest comfort should be can be is you know the words we quote them so often very often in our prayers that if we confess our sins we hear

[22 : 38] God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness that we understand is to be the gospel the hope of the gospel sins truly forgiven but have you ever wondered about those words because words familiarly quoted sometimes just lose a bit of their power don't they if we just trot them out glibly that if we confess our sins he is faithful and just what a strange what an unexpected way to put it not the faithful bit God is faithful to forgive our sins we can understand that we know God to be gracious and merciful we know that he has to be true to himself we know that he has promised in the gospel that those who put their trust in Jesus Christ will find God to be faithful and mean it when he says that sins are truly forgiven we understand that he has provided for us in his son a glorious salvation

God is faithful to forgive our sins we understand that but God is just to forgive our sins how does that come into the equation how is that part of this glorious truth that sins can be forgiven where does where does that where does that form part of this promise faithful and just how can forgiveness God's forgiveness I mean be consistent with justice because God's forgiveness is not the same as yours and mine is it because if I were to offend you in some way I trust that you would be gracious enough to say I forgive you but you might say that but it doesn't alter what I've done to you does it it doesn't change it what's done is done so your forgiveness would be something that would be comforting to me but it's not going to change the hurt

I've done to you and if you were to offend me in some way I'd trust I'd find it in my heart to forgive you but what you've done what's done is done isn't it but the forgiveness of God is different you see when the apostles preached this message of forgiveness of sins they used a word an important word they used the word remission what does remission mean putting away so sometimes an unfortunate sufferer may develop some symptoms of illness and the doctors try to treat it but then sometimes it's happened isn't it when mysteriously the symptoms disappear altogether and what does the doctor say the doctor says it's in remission the disease is in remission the symptoms have gone put away we're looking at the forgiveness of God for our sins it's not

God saying well I forgive you but unfortunately what you've done still remains on the books it's not God saying look I'm prepared to overlook what you've done because how can God do that has God got an imperfect memory so how can God forgive sins and remain just how can the ungodly be justified how can it be true that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sins I need to know that I need to know that to be really sure in my heart that I am truly forgiven by almighty God and I've got so much to be forgiven for how can

God remain just it's because the punishment that I deserve has been visited on another the penalty has been paid on my behalf thank God it's not it's not that God is just being nice to me not that God is just overlooking my offences because I could find no real reassurance in that because he might change his mind tomorrow he might say well I'm nice to you today but next week I'm not going to be so nice I need something I need something that is permanent I need something that is guaranteed I need I need my sins to be put away to be remitted and that is that is the way

[28 : 13] God speaks in the scriptures about his forgiveness that that that they're like a thick cloud but I blotted them out used to sing in Sunday school when I was a boy God has blotted them out I am happy and glad and free God has blotted them out I turn to Isaiah and see chapter 44 22 and 3 he's blotted them out and now I can shout for that means me that's God's forgiveness that's putting away sins pert you about something I have about a mistake that that if I were to make a journey in a westward direction across the British Isles,

I'd come, wouldn't I, I suppose, well, it'd be to the Irish Sea, would it? Yeah, I don't know quite how high up you are here. We'll go across, keep going westward, across the Atlantic.

We come to the eastern seaboard of the United States. We travel across that great continent and we're going westward, we're going westward. Come to the Pacific.

And we cross that great ocean. We come then to Asia, don't we? Russia, I suppose, would that be in the right orientation? Cross that great expanse.

Come again to where we started from, always going westward. In our journey, the circumference of the earth and nowhere in my journey, anywhere, as I've traveled with the west in front of me and the east behind me, nowhere have those two come together.

[30 : 37] God says, as far as the east is from the west, so far will I remove your transgressions from you. That's the forgiveness that I need and you need.

And I'm asking, how can God be just and provide a forgiveness like that? And the answer is because the penalty for my sin has been paid by someone else.

And justice demands, therefore, that God cannot punish me. Please punish somebody else in my place. You get these great bushfires, don't you, sometimes in some parts of the world.

And if you've got a dwelling place somewhere in the middle of the bush, then the recommendation is, this is what you do. You actually burn a section of the bush around your house.

So that when the fire comes, it cannot touch your property because the vegetation has already been burned.

[31 : 50] The fire cannot come where the fire has always been. The judgment of God for my sin and for yours cannot come again where the judgment has already been suffered by somebody else.

That's why God can be faithful and just to forgive our sins. That's pure justice.

That's perfect justice. That's reassuring justice. And that is guaranteed by a risen saviour.

He has appointed a day when he will judge the world. Terrifying day. By the man he has appointed.

He's given proof of this. This will happen. He's given proof of this by raising him from the dead. On that day.

[32 : 59] When you stand before the perfect judge, whose justice is, cannot be flawed in any, any minute way.

If you are trusting in him, he will say, he will say to you, I gave my life for you. I have paid the price for you.

No punishment will come your way. Perfect justice demands that you cannot be punished. And that, the guarantee for that is because he is a risen Lord Jesus Christ.

So it's an aspect of the Easter message that has its solemn undertones, that can be tremendously comforting if your trust is in this Lord Jesus.

Because one day you will face him as your judge, but you need not fear that day because if you come to him as your risen saviour, you will be safe and secure in that day.

[34 : 30] And that's what Easter means amongst many, many other things. So that's why, that's why we can be joyful if we know this risen Jesus Christ for ourselves.

So I, I don't know who I am speaking to tonight. I know one or two of you. But I don't know how it stands between you and almighty God. I feel I need to say this to you.

If you are in your sins, then the Lord Jesus who rose on that third day will be your judge. God has proved that by raising him.

But it doesn't have to be like that, does it? Because you can come to him now in your heart and confess your need of him and call upon him for his mercy and receive the forgiveness of sins that justice demands because he's paid the price on your behalf.

that's why we Christians love the resurrection for all sorts of reasons but not least for that, for the assurance that our Savior will bring us into his heavenly home perfect one day when he comes to judge the world.

[36 : 12] So how is it with you? I must leave it with you but we thank God for a risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.