

If the dead are not raised ... 1 Corinthians 15.12-34

Today's TFTD comes from Anna:

“If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (v19)

I like our church. In fact, I have liked most of the churches I have been to. I, mostly, enjoy Sunday morning worship, getting to know people and getting involved in other activities during the week. I also like living in Macclesfield. I like my house with all my creature comforts- Yes, my neighbours play their music too loud sometimes but they are all nice people. I like my family and my friends and my hobbies.

All in all, I don't think I am to be pitied. I don't think my faith and hope in Christ has had too much of a detrimental effect on my life at all. In fact, I think that being part of the church and training for ministry has been a great joy in my life and I would be much worse without it.

I would guess that very few of us could say that our faith in Christ has changed our lives so much for the worse that we are to be pitied. Yet for some it does. Paul was one of those people. He was a Pharisee, part of the ruling class in a position of power when his conversion changed everything! He went out on the road, he spent his life telling people about Jesus and most people disagreed with him. He made powerful enemies and he lived in constant fear of beatings or imprisonment. As a leader in the first churches, he constantly arbitrated between disagreements and quarrels, his letters show he felt the responsibility for the people in his churches keenly. He didn't get much rest.

Yet his argument is that he isn't to be pitied because he doesn't just have hope in Christ for this life but for the resurrection of the dead. When Paul says the resurrection of the dead he doesn't mean 'our souls go to heaven when we die': he is talking about bodily resurrection just like Jesus had. His argument is that Jesus was raised first and he is proof that we will be raised like him at the right time, and that right time is when the last enemy, death, has been defeated and God has won.

Now, don't get me wrong, I don't think it is wrong that we enjoy our faith in this life, or our lives with our friends, families and creature comforts. In fact, I think that our faith helps us be more the people God created us to be and that should bring us joy. But, I do think that our ease in this life makes us think less about our hope for the next. Paul's argument for the resurrection of the dead is that it is central to Christian faith, that our faith is worthless without it. *"For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."* (V16-17) All the comfort we receive from worshipping a God who loves and forgives us is based on the belief that Jesus died for our sins and was raised again and that he will ultimately defeat all sin and death in the future. You can't have one without the other.

It can be a hard thing to believe, a bodily resurrection in the future. I am not saying I understand how it will work (and anyone who says they do is lying) but if we believe in the Easter story it is at least plausible. And it is a hope worth believing in.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the

*Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**" (Rev 21:1-4)*

I may enjoy my life but it doesn't mean I don't have times when I don't or that I don't watch the news and see the pain in the world, hope in the resurrection of the dead is a hope that God will sort it all out. It is a hope that means when we feel the world is unfair, that darkness is winning we don't give up and say *"Let us eat and drink because tomorrow we die"* (V 32). It is a hope that says that any discomfort or even persecution we may face in this life because of our faith will be worth it in the end. Paul had to hold on to that hope daily because he put himself in danger. We need to learn how to hold on to that hope as well.

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