

Guest Preacher Rev. Dr. Thomas Davis (Carloway)

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

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

Robert Haldane was a Scottish theologian and missionary and author, and together with his brother James, they were instrumental in supporting mission work in Scotland.

So they lived about 200 years ago, and they were actually very, very wealthy. But Robert and James Haldane used their wealth to support the work of the gospel.

They inherited lots of property, they sold a lot of it, and then they used that money to fund the work of the gospel in Scotland and abroad. And they were very influential. James and Robert Haldane are quite famous in Scottish church history.

In the early 1800s, they had a very prominent part in the life of the church. I read a quote from Robert Haldane that really struck me, and I want to read it to you.

[1 : 21] He said, Let me read that again.

That quotation is very striking, especially the opening words, Christianity is everything or nothing.

And that's what I want us to think about today. Now, of course, Robert Haldane wasn't the first person to realise this, because exactly the same emphasis is made throughout the New Testament, especially in 1 Corinthians 15.

Here, Paul is addressing the fact that some people among the Corinthians were denying the resurrection from the dead, which by implication meant that they were denying that Jesus had risen from the dead.

And Paul is tackling this, and you have this magnificent chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. And he begins by highlighting that this is the matter of first importance.

[2 : 47] You see that in verses 3 to 4. He delivered to them what is of first importance, that Christ died and that he rose again. These are the most important truths of the gospel. He then goes on to recount the eyewitness testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.

So it speaks about Jesus appearing to Peter, Cephas mentioned there in verse 5, then to the 12, then to more than 500, to James, to the apostles, and last of all to me, to Paul.

He was also a witness of the resurrection. And he's building this argument, which comes to a climax in verses 12 to 19, where he's basically saying, look, if you say there's no resurrection, then that means that Jesus has not raised from the dead.

And if Jesus has not been raised, verse 14, then our preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain. In other words, the whole of the Christian gospel is centered on the resurrection of Jesus.

And if that's not true, then everything falls apart and our faith is in vain. Or to put it another way, Christianity stands or falls on the question of whether the resurrection of Jesus happened.

[4 : 08] And if it did happen, then nothing matters more than this message. And if it didn't happen, then none of this matters at all.

Because Christianity is everything or nothing. As we think about that today, I want to do so under three headings.

Inescapable sovereignty, incomparable victory, everlasting security. All three of these are discussed in the passage before us.

So first of all, inescapable sovereignty. The everythingness of the Christian gospel arises from the fact that the claims that the Bible makes about Jesus are massive.

And this is so important to recognize that if we take the statements that the Bible makes about Jesus, if those statements are true, then even just the most basic conclusion that we can come to is that Jesus is everything.

[5 : 22] In other words, none of what the Bible says about Jesus is kind of compatible with a sort of middle-of-the-road view of Jesus. Lots of people have a kind of middle-of-the-road view of Jesus.

They see Jesus as well. Well, yes, he is quite important. I'm not sure if he's completely the Son of God and everything else, but he's certainly important. And people have this kind of medium Jesus in their minds.

But it's a logical impossibility to hold that position. Because the Bible's claims about Jesus do not allow for a medium view of him. The Bible's claims about Jesus are far higher and far bigger.

And so in John 8, 58, Jesus says, Before Abraham was, I am. What's he saying there? He's saying, I am God himself. John 1, 1 says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, the Word was God.

The Word there is a title being used for Jesus. That's telling us that Jesus is eternal. Never, never a moment when he did not exist. Colossians chapter 1 says that all things were made through him.

[6 : 35] So Jesus is the creator. Everything that exists came through him. And Hebrews 1, 1-3, sorry, I keep getting my references wrong. Hebrews 1, 1-3 says that Jesus upholds the universe by the Word of his power.

And as this chapter emphasizes, in verses 24 and 25, Jesus is the king who reigns over absolutely everything.

In other words, Jesus possesses an inescapable sovereignty over all creation and over all of us.

There's a famous quotation from a theologian from the Netherlands called Abraham Kuyper. He says, Jesus looks at every square inch of the universe, and he says, There's not one square inch of the universe over which Jesus cannot say, Mine.

He reigns over everything. And in many ways, what this means, what the Bible teaches us about Jesus, the claims are so big, what this means is that everything, everything that you will encounter this week has either come from him or it's heading towards him.

[7 : 56] It's either come from him or it's heading towards him. So, you look at everything good in your life, everything good that we're experiencing day by day in our lives. You think of a beautiful Hebridean morning like today.

The sun is shining, you look outside, it's just stunning. It came from him. You look at an endless starry sky on a clear winterish night, it came from him.

You pick up a flower and you smell its fragrance and you look at the intricate beauty of the colors woven together in that tiny flower.

It came from him. You listen to the beautiful melodies of music. It came from him. You experience all the precious joy of family and friendship and community that came from him.

Jesus is the source of everything that's good in our lives. Everything that's good has come from him. At the same time, you and I know that our lives are so, our lives are full of really good things, our lives are full of hard things and life is full of so many things that are wrong.

[9 : 06] So, you can open your curtains this morning, you see a beautiful sunrise and, well, maybe not the sunrise, maybe you were up that early, I wasn't up that early, but you see beautiful sunshine but then you take out your phone and you look at the news headlines and it's a different story.

You see all sorts of suffering and horror in the world. There's so much pain and evil and hurt and injustice and cruelty in the world. Now, none of that came from Jesus. God is not the author of sin.

It did not come from him but it's heading towards him. every sin, every injustice, every act of evil is going to come before the judgment seat of Christ.

Everything's heading towards him. He's going to hold every injustice to account. So, that means if you look at the world and you see light and beauty and joy, we marvel that that came from Jesus.

And when you look around and see darkness and evil, we can rest knowing that that's heading towards him. And he will bring justice and hold everyone to account for what they've done.

[10 : 22] What does that mean? It means that the level that the Bible places Jesus is at the very highest level. He's utterly sovereign.

He's everything. And that sovereignty is proven by the resurrection. It's the resurrection that proves Jesus is who the Bible says that he is.

So, Jesus came to be one of us. He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross as Philippians 2 tells us. But he rose again in power and he's ascended to the right hand of the Father and now he is exalted over all so that every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

Not just Lord over religious stuff on a Sunday. Lord over everything. And if all of that's true, then Jesus' sovereignty is inescapable.

He's not a little bit of a king. He's not like a wee bit exalted in the kind of religious spheres of life. He's not kind of important. He is absolutely sovereign.

[11 : 44] And the place where you see this perhaps that is most vivid is the book of Revelation. I'm just going to read a few verses from the opening chapter of Revelation. Listen to how these verses describe Jesus.

If I sometimes we say imagine Jesus in your mind. You might imagine the baby in the manger or maybe we would imagine him teaching the crowds or maybe we would imagine him suffering on the cross. Do you imagine him like this? Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands.

And in the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man clothed in a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white like white wool like snow. His eyes were like flames of fire.

His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace and his furnace was like the roar 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 sun shining 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. That is an astonishingly vivid picture of sovereignty.

[12 : 59] And that's why Paul in chapter 15 of Corinthians 1 Corinthians can speak of Jesus overcoming every other rule and authority and power.

You see that in 23 through to 25. He overcomes every other power because he has absolute sovereignty and that means that for anybody who rejects Jesus you can never escape your accountability.

And so often we want to do that we want to push Jesus to one side and we want to tell Jesus not no and we want to avoid dealing with the questions of our eternal destiny. But if Jesus really does reign in the way that the Bible says he reigns it's impossible to put him to one side and escape your accountability.

Pushing Jesus away is a little bit like I want you to imagine that you're sitting in a wee rowing boat and you're beside the pier and you're thinking I'm going to push this pier away from me and so you push the pier and you feel movement but you're the one who's adrift.

The pier's not moving you're the one who's moving you're the one who's pushing yourself into danger and all of it's teaching us it's just reminding us of that the truth that the gospel confronts us with again and again the fact that nothing matters more than your relationship with Jesus nothing matters more than that and I don't know where everybody in here is in terms of that relationship with Jesus but please I want that to penetrate into your heart nothing matters more than this that's just that's just a logical almost if you like common sense conclusion from what the Bible claims if it's true nothing matters more and of course it also means that if you are a believer or if you become a believer then the inescapable sovereignty of Jesus means that you can never ever fall outside his protection and so if Jesus can look at every square inch of the universe and say mine that means it doesn't matter what square inch you're in you're under his care he's with you watching you holding you and it's described beautifully in verse 23 you can see that it speaks about those who belong to

[15 : 38] Christ what a beautiful phrase that is that if you are a believer and you might feel like the most rubbish Christian that there is but you belong to him you're his possession you're Christ's and the one who reigns over everything is never going to let you go because Jesus is everything or he's nothing but if Jesus is nothing then what is everything else everything good in our lives has come from nothing beauty love joy friendship loyalty compassion just nothing it's an illusion and everything evil is going nowhere no accountability no ultimate justice no reason to actually say that anything evil is actually evil at all if Jesus is nothing then that's where we are the second point is incompatible victory if you look at any era of human history if you look at any human society across the globe today you see massive diversity so you study history you study different cultures there's massive diversity there are so many things that are so different but no matter where you look whatever you look at in terms of human society either across the world today or throughout history every community every society every era of human experience has all got one thing in common death wins so no matter how successful or powerful or influential a group or a person or a society might be sooner or later death wins you look at every single person in history and apart from

Jesus obviously but every other person in history death wins that's why empires rise and fall leaders come and go influencers emerge and disappear and that dominance of death affects all of us and Paul recognizes that he says in verse 22 in Adam all die and what he's speaking about there is a fundamental truth that runs through the whole Bible the fact that Adam functions as the head of the human race and he sinned and because he as the head of the human race sinned the implications of his sin spread to all humanity and so he sinned and because of that death spread to everyone else and death always has the final say over human life and because death always wins we're actually becoming used to it many people today are seeing death as a kind of inevitability it's sort of like well it's going to happen we can't avoid it and sometimes we even resign to that inevitability and sometimes people think well it's going to happen it's also death is just one of those things the Bible never does that the Bible never sees death as an inevitability the Bible sees death as an enemy and you see that in the language of verse 26 and that resonates so powerfully with the human heart because nobody can stand before a terminal diagnosis nobody can stand before a tragic accident nobody can look at the horrors of war nobody could stand right now in the middle of

Gaza and say this is nothing death is not nothing death is a hideous enemy and because of that humanity strives and strives to delay death and so much of that is so good and so many of you here I have no doubt will have benefited so much from the amazing medical care that we have for the amazing advances in our society where we've got clean water and we've got warm houses and all of these things preserve our lives they prevent death and they mean that we can live longer we can be healthier we can be safer and all of that is an incredible blessing and so humanity works so hard to delay death death and that's a great thing but the gospel is way better the gospel is way better because Jesus has not come to delay death

Jesus has come to defeat death on our own in the face of death the most that we can find is something that will help maybe for a while with Jesus in the face of death we find everything that we need and all of this is reminding us of what lies at the heart of Christianity the fact that the heart of the gospel 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 it's teaching us and reminding us that Jesus didn't come to teach or to serve or to set a good example Jesus came to fight and he came to conquer he came to conquer the power of death and that's the thread that runs right through the whole Bible in the immediate aftermath of Adam's sin God confronts

Satan and he announces that there's going to be conflict and then the Old Testament foreshadows that there's a lot of war and fighting in the Old Testament all of that's a shadow of the bigger conflict that we're part of the conflict between good and evil between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil the prophets in the Old Testament foretold that victory is ultimately going to come and Jesus does eventually come and he engages in conflict that's why when you see Jesus come into the world when you read the gospel narratives what's the thing you see from the very beginning he's constantly facing opposition as a baby there was a plot to try to kill him as he begins his public ministry he's tempted by Satan with the very same tactics that had caused Adam to fall in the first place Jesus is constantly opposed by demonic and he's betrayed and arrested and falsely accused and mocked and condemned and ultimately Jesus is killed dying in agony on the cross and everybody thinks death has won again but on the third day what happened

[23 : 00] Jesus rose again and that resurrection is a resurrection of power and conquest and total victory Jesus came to confront our greatest enemy he engages in a relentless battle and he emerged in total victory and so when we face the reality of death we might often talk about a medical breakthrough where there's a cure or a treatment for an awful disease and it's amazing when that happens these things are to be celebrated but nothing compares to the breakthrough that the gospel has brought and Paul speaks about that so magnificently at the end of the chapter that's why I wanted to read that last section because it speaks about the fact that Jesus is utterly victorious verses 54 through to 57 and these verses there are teaching us a crucial point that we've got to remember it says when the perishable puts on the imperishable the mortal puts on immortality then shall come to pass the saying that's written death is swallowed up in victory oh death where is your victory oh 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 now this is these are one of these sections of verses where the overall message is very simple it's telling us Jesus has given us victory but you actually read the verses it can be a wee bit complicated what's it teaching us it's reminding us that there is an inseparable connection between sin and death we've got to remember that inseparable connection between sin and death sin leads to death sin puts us on an unstoppable path to death that's what makes it so awful sin leads to death and so if you're going to deal with death you need to deal with sin that's what makes sin so serious and that's why Paul mentions the law because the law of God can simultaneously be the best thing and the worst thing that we ever hear because it's amazing in that the law of God reveals a righteous holy and good God but the law is also awful for us because it exposes our sin so you've got the law that exposes sin that inevitably leads to death and on our own we're helpless the law is powerful because it exposes sin sin is powerful because it guarantees death death is powerful because it knows nothing of mercy but Jesus has come and he's fulfilled the law to absolute perfection and he's taken your sin and placed every one of them on his shoulders and he's tasted death in all of its agony in your place and now he's risen again in total victory and that was always

God's plan look again at verse 57 it says thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ there's three parties in that verse there's there's God the one who has planned it all initiated it desired it there's Jesus is the one through whom this astounding victory is completed but all of it is given to you in verse 57 there's God there's the Lord Jesus and then there's us that victory is shared with you in the face of death's power Jesus is everything or he's nothing but if Jesus is nothing then ultimately death takes everything every person every achievement every memory even the universe gets swallowed up but if

Jesus is risen it's not the universe that gets swallowed up it is death that gets swallowed up and it's reminding us that Jesus is victory is everything that we need in the face of death and if you trust in him then he is going to share everything that that victory has achieved with you so we've got inescapable sovereignty we've got incomparable victory last of all and quickly as we can we've got everlasting security so Jesus reigns over everything Jesus has won a total victory over death all of that is proved in the resurrection and all of this is the reason why everyone who trusts in Jesus can have eternal security so look for example at verse 22 in Adam all die but in Christ shall all be made alive all who trust in Jesus are made alive in him that's the promise that the gospel gives whoever believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life and the guarantee of that comes through

Jesus himself and this is what's so so so important to understand the gospel because so often we can be struggling and fearful and anxious because we think that in some way we understand the gospel and we see the beauty of what Jesus has done and we recognize yes and maybe we feel yes I am trusting him but we're still convinced that somehow we're going to stuff it up that we'll do something wrong that we'll make too many mistakes that we'll be too annoying towards God and that we'll just mess it up and that's where the New Testament's language of guarantee and its teaching about guarantee is so important because the guarantee never ever ever ever rests on you the guarantee comes through Jesus himself and Paul describes that magnificently in this chapter with the language of first fruits so you can see that in 20 to 23 you've got that beautiful word first fruits which is speaking to us about a wonderful concept in relation to the gospel first fruits is the language of harvest so at the start of the harvest you get the first crops the first fruit and whatever that first fruit is it's going to tell you what the rest of the harvest is going to be what comes first tells you what's coming behind now there's two very important lessons here first all of that is the language of anticipation and so what we see in Jesus we can look forward to he has risen he has triumphed he cannot be threatened with the power of death and he is now reigned risen in majestic glory and what's true of him is going to be true of you what's true of him is going to be true of you if you're a

[30 : 14] Christian if you're trusting in him the language of first fruits is pointing in anticipation towards that glorious harvest where Jesus will gather in all who trust in him but the second key point is that this is not just the language of anticipation it's the language of guarantee first fruits are crucial because whatever the first fruits are you can guarantee that what comes afterwards the rest of the harvest is going to be like that and all of this is reinforcing how the gospel establishes an unbreakable connection between Christ and his people so Jesus has conquered death he's taking you with him Jesus has risen in power he's taking you with him Jesus reigns in glory forever he's taking you with him and so there's this beautiful guarantee if there's first fruits then there's a guarantee and the amazing thing about the gospel is that it's not saying that the first fruits are coming the gospel is saying the first fruits have come because Jesus has risen and what we anticipate will happen to us and what is guaranteed because of everything that

Jesus has done all of that is what we can be certain of and confident in in other words let me put it another way if you're a Christian or if you become one then it means that you and Jesus are the same fruit you're the same crop you're part of the same harvest and that means that wherever he is you belong there too and the security that the gospel gives us changes everything means that death has no power over you it means that that everything that's good in your life is just a glimpse of an amazing eternity that Jesus is preparing for his people and it also makes a massive difference to our lives now because the realities of the gospel gives us new meaning a new purpose a new motivation that's why Paul can say that as he declares the magnitude of

Christ's victory when he says that death is swallowed up in victory when he says thanks be to God who gives us the victory to our Lord Jesus Christ he's speaking about the eternal security that we have as believers and then in the very next verse he says and because of that you're going to serve him this week be steadfast immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain that's the same as what Robert Haldane said if the gospel is true it warrants and commands every sacrifice to promote its influence and that's why the gospel the gospel is amazing for eternity and the gospel is amazing for Monday morning because every single day we get up under his inescapable sovereignty we want to serve a risen king and every day we go out in light of his incomparable victory and we want other people to know about that and through our constant witness as our lives are lived obeying Jesus' commands and through the opportunities that we may have to invite people to church or to share the gospel we are looking to extend his kingdom and to proclaim his good news and we do that every day of our lives and we can go to bed every single night resting on the eternal security that Jesus has given us and that means that no matter what a day has brought whether it's good or bad hard or easy happy or sad we are always and forever safe in his arms and all of it is reminding us that in Jesus we've got everything everything we need everything we've longed for everything we've dreamt of but it's also reminding us that ultimately if you refuse to put your trust in Jesus you've got nothing

I really want you to think about that and I want you to think about your funeral and I want you to think about your family standing around your grave do you want them to stand there and say we've got nothing or do you want them to stand there and say they have Jesus they have everything amen let's pray Lord Jesus we marvel and rejoice in your inescapable sovereignty your incomparable victory and the everlasting security that you give to all who trust in you help us all to see that you are everything amen we're going to conclude with psalm 16 from the sing psalms version and that's on page 17 and we're singing the last four stanzas which are just a beautiful resurrection song and the apostles several times in the book of

Acts quoted these words in reference to the resurrection of Jesus so although you know like this is what makes the psalm so beautiful that although they were written so long before Jesus they are speaking about him all the time and 8 to 11 is speaking to us about the resurrection it's reminding us that he is risen and it's also showing us that we have eternal joy and everlasting security in our risen saviour so let's stand and sing from verse 8 to God's praise!

[37 : 47] miracle Thank you.

Thank you.

For you will not allow my soul and death to stay, nor will you leave your Holy One to see the truth's decay.

You have made known to me the path of life divine.

This shall I know, and your right hand joy from your face will shine.

[39 : 48] As we go into a new week together, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.