

Christ Was Raised According To The Scriptures

1 Corinthians 15:1-58

Key Verse: 15:3-4

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures....”

Paul began his letter by bringing the Corinthians back to the cross of Jesus. Paul ends his letter by reminding them of the resurrection of Christ. The two pillars of Christian faith—the death of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ—are like bookends of Paul's letter. The resurrection is recorded in all four gospels, which mostly tell the facts of the event. In this passage, Paul explains the meaning of the resurrection most profoundly and completely. There is a cycle of life in this world. We are born as little babies, grow up, marry, have children, and die. Death seems to be the end of everything. This is our human agony. This is why people despair. We need eternal life and eternal hope. How can we have this? It is through the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection. Especially, resurrection is important. Christ's resurrection gives us eternal life, the kingdom of God, and eternal victory. There is power and glory in the resurrection. It is a true hope, worthy of our lives. Let's accept resurrection faith in our hearts through this message.

I. The gospel of the resurrection (1-11)

In verses 1-11 Paul teaches them the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead. To do so, he summarizes the contents of the gospel and presents the witnesses of the resurrection.

First, the contents of the gospel (1-4). Look at verse 1. "Now brothers I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand." Why did he remind them of the gospel? It was because they were losing gospel faith as time passed by. At first, they had accepted the gospel through Paul with great joy, confessing their sins, and standing firm in faith. As time passed, their faith became weak because they entertained false ideas and bad cultural influences, such as sexual immorality. They began to drift in the current of the times. So Paul reminded them of the gospel. By this gospel they were saved, if they held firmly to the word he preached to them. Otherwise, they had believed in vain (2).

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Look at verse 3a. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance...." The gospel is not a man-made story, but a God-made story. Paul received it and passed it on to the Corinthians. The gospel has been passed on through the generations to us. The gospel is the most important thing in our lives. When we hold firmly to the gospel, we are saved.

In the gospel there are two main elements: Christ's death, and Christ's resurrection. Look at verses 3b-4. "...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...." What is man's fundamental problem? Nowadays, it seems to be energy. But the Bible says it is man's sin problem. Sin, "hamartia" in Greek, means to separate or to cut. Sin cuts man's relationship with God. Sin is not accepting God as God, nor glorifying God, nor giving thanks to him (Ro 1:21). Sin is disobedience to the word of God and rebellion against God. Sin is pride-trying to live without God. The consequences of sin are serious. Man loses the glorious image of God and degenerates to the level of animals. Many people think sin is enjoyable. However, sin destroys man's character, body, family and society. Sin brings unbearable guilt and shame, tormenting people night and day. Man dies because the wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23a). People think that death is the end of everything. But it is not. Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment (Heb 9:27). No one escapes God's judgment (2 Cor 5:10). No one can endure the eternal punishment in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 21:8). It is so horrible that we don't want to think about it. But it is real.

Mankind has not been able to solve this problem at all. People have tried hard through various means, yet there is no way. But God solved this problem for us. Verse 3 says that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Christ shed his precious blood on the cross to pay off the demand of sin. Christ forgave our sins and freed us from the consequences of sin.

If the story ended with Christ's death, it could be another poignant yet sorrowful tragedy, like Shakespeare's plays. However, look at verse 4. "...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...." Christ defeated the power of death through his resurrection (Ro 6:9). Christ's resurrection gives us final victory over the power of death. Christ's resurrection gives us a living hope in the kingdom of God.

The words "according to the Scriptures," are important. This did not happen by chance. It was long ago planned by God and fulfilled by God. The events of Christ's

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death and resurrection are facts of history which fulfill the promise of God in the Scriptures.

Second, witnesses of the resurrection (5-11). In the gospels we can find the evidence of Christ's resurrection, such as the empty tomb, the words of angels, and Christ's appearance to women. However, Paul introduces only male eyewitnesses to prove the fact of Christ's resurrection. In a court of law, this would be the strongest evidence. The Risen Christ first appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve as they hid in an upper room-including doubting Thomas, whose doubt turned to worship. Then the Risen Christ appeared to more than 500 believers at the same time, most of whom were living when Paul wrote this letter. Then the Risen Christ appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, to Paul also. These men were changed from fearful to courageous, from selfish to sacrificial, from self-centered to God-centered. Among them, Peter and Paul are the best examples.

Peter loved Jesus. However, he had many weaknesses and made many mistakes. Most critically, he denied Jesus three times during Jesus' passion. Then Peter met the Risen Christ. He was changed into a courageous man of God, the rock of Jesus' church. Paul had persecuted the church of Christ the most. He consented to the stoning of St. Stephen. Then, on his way to Damascus to arrest believers, he met the Risen Christ. He was born again, and became a witness of Christ's resurrection. In the past Paul had been very proud. But after meeting the Risen Christ, he became so humble, the least of all. He remembered what kind of person he had been and how Christ had been gracious to him. To bear this grace he worked hard, harder than all the others. Paul and the other witnesses preached the resurrection of Christ. The Corinthian believers heard the message and believed. When we hear and believe, we, too, can meet Risen Christ and become resurrection witnesses.

II. The power of the resurrection (12-34)

Look at verse 12. "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" There were some in Corinth who did not believe the resurrection of the dead. They did not deny the resurrection of Christ, but they denied the resurrection of believers. Paul exposes their logical fallacy and explains how Christ's resurrection relates to the resurrection of all believers. Paul declares the necessity of the resurrection, the power of the resurrection, and how to live by resurrection faith.

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First, the necessity of the resurrection (12-19). In these verses, Paul assumes for the sake of argument that there is no resurrection of the dead. What would the implication be? If there were no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ had been raised (13). Then preaching would be useless and so would faith (14). Even worse, preaching Christ's resurrection is false testimony about God (15). Instead, we should preach a weak God. However, God raised Christ from the dead and proved that he is living, Almighty God.

Again, if Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins (17), and those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost (18), and Christians are to be pitied more than all men (19). Many believers sacrificed everything to participate in the suffering of Christ. Some even became martyrs. But if there is no resurrection, then all is lost and believers are the most foolish people on earth, deceived by a false hope. Mother Barry would be most pitiful.

Second, the power of the resurrection (20-28). Look at verse 20. "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Christ's resurrection is a fact, an event that happened in history. It is connected to the resurrection of believers. To explain this, Paul calls Christ the "firstfruits." For a harvest, firstfruits are a sign of many fruits to come. Christ's resurrection is a sign of the resurrection of all believers. It gives us great hope that we, too, will be raised like Christ.

Some may wonder how they can be sure of their resurrection based on one person's resurrection. Paul answered in verse 21. "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man." Sin came into the world through one man Adam. Death came into the world because the wages of sin is death. When we are in Adam we are ruled by the power of sin. We did not commit Adam's sin, yet we are ruled by Adam's sin. Likewise, one man, Christ, sets us free. Look at verse 22. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." The Risen Christ has the power to make us alive with him forever. Christ rules us with life-giving power and will resurrect us in glory when he comes again (23).

The power of Christ's resurrection is not limited to giving life to believers. It also brings an amazing change to the whole universe. Jesus' resurrection destroys all the power of darkness and restores God's righteous reign in life and peace to the whole creation (24). After Jesus has subjected everything, he will submit to God and God will be all in all (28). Then believers will rule together with Christ and the new

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heaven and new earth will come. Perfect paradise is restored through the resurrection of Christ.

Third, practical resurrection faith (29-34). In these verses Paul teaches what kind of life we should live. Paul said, "I die every day" (31). In order to follow Jesus, Paul died to himself every day. He died to his desire for comfort, and for worldly honor. He died to serve others sacrificially. He could lose everything for Christ. How could he do so? Paul lived by resurrection faith.

On the other hand, those without resurrection faith become pleasure seeking. Their motto is, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (33). If life on earth is the end, we naturally seek to maximize our pleasure. But Paul was willing to fight the enemies of the gospel, though it was like fighting wild beasts. Paul gave his life for Jesus and the gospel because he had hope in the resurrection of the dead. Paul sacrificed temporary pleasure for eternal benefits and goodness. He encouraged the Corinthian believers, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning..." (33-34). Those who sin are ignorant of God. We must come back to our senses and stop sinning. We must live by resurrection faith and die every day to serve God sacrificially.

III. The glory of the resurrection (35-49)

Thus far, Paul has testified about the resurrection of the dead. Some of the Corinthians had a question about how the dead were raised, and with what kind of body they would come (35). As we see every day on the news, some people's bodies are crushed in accidents. Others are badly tortured in war or cremated at death. So people ask, "How are the dead raised?" Paul explains based on the example of a seed and plant.

It is natural law that a seed must die for a plant to come to life. Only when the seed dies can it produce a plant with many more seeds. Likewise, our body should die to receive a new resurrection body. Again, when we sow, we do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed. Then God gives it a body. To each kind of seed he gives its own body. If we sow an apple seed, an apple tree will grow. There are many kinds of bodies: animals, men, birds and fish. Each reproduces according to its own kind. Physical bodies are for life on earth. There are also heavenly bodies. Their splendor is different than earthly bodies, and each has its own unique splendor. Based on his study of botany, zoology, and astronomy, Paul explains the resurrection body.

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Look at verses 42-44. "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." Our physical bodies perish without exception. Even Miss USA and Alex Rodriguez will be eaten by maggots someday. We want to live a glorious life. But we are full of weaknesses and mistakes. Regrets grow as we get older. Finally, all people become dishonorable. Our bodies are weak. Some people look strong. But the flu makes them powerless. Also we suffer from constant temptation from sinful desires. But the spiritual body is different. It is imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. Our bodies will be changed to be suitable for our lives in the kingdom of God. We will be like Jesus when we are raised from the dead. Wow! We will be like Jesus. How? Through Jesus, the life-giving spirit. We are born of the dust, born in the likeness of the earthly man. But at the resurrection we will bear the likeness of Christ. We will live eternally with him. Resurrection is glorious, and we should desire it most.

IV. Ultimate victory (50-58)

So far Paul talked about the glory of resurrection. Now he sings a song of ultimate victory. But first, he tells a mystery about the last day. Paul said, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (51-52). Here, the trumpet sound signals the coming of Christ as King and Judge. It is called the last day. The last day is a day of judgment for the enemies of God, but it is a day of salvation for all believers. Suddenly at the sound of the trumpet we will be changed. We will all be caught up in heaven and meet the Lord. This is a secret that we must hold in our hearts.

When believers participate in this glorious resurrection, the power of death is destroyed. Then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory. So far death has ruled as king. Every man has died by the sting of death. Before death we suffer from meaninglessness, mercilessness, fear and so on. We suffer from guilt due to law. But at the resurrection, death loses its power completely. Paul shouted, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (55-57). We all want victorious life. But unless we overcome the power of death, there is no

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victory. Only Jesus, who destroyed the power of death, can help us live a victorious life.

Paul testified about the assurance of resurrection glory and hope for all believers. Now he tells us how to live. Look at verse 58. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." There are many good things in the world. It is easy to pursue perishable things, being deceived by the world. Then we can forget the gospel. We must know that the world and its desires will pass away. Only the work of the Lord remains forever. Labor in the Lord is not in vain. It is richly rewarded by God. The Risen Christ will reward believers 100 times, whatever they do for him. So let's pray that we may give our hearts all the more to the work of the Lord, because our labor in the Lord is not in vain.