

Christ was Raised According to the Scriptures
1 Corinthians 15:1-58, Key Verse: 15:3-4

Easter Sunday Message 2012, by Matt Misurac (1-11)

"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...."

Happy Easter! Today, we are going to explore the resurrection through 1 Corinthians 15. Paul began this letter to the Corinthians by reminding them about the cross of Jesus. In the middle of his letter, he dealt with many issues in the church, such as divisions, sexual immorality, people suing each other, marriage, worship, communion, and spiritual gifts. They had many issues. However, Paul chose to end his letter by reminding them of Jesus' resurrection. The death of Jesus for our sins and his resurrection are the foundation of our Christian faith. In the four gospels, we read the facts of Jesus' resurrection, but in this passage, we get to explore the meaning and implications of Jesus' resurrection. This message will consist of three parts: Part I is The Gospel of Jesus Christ (verses 1-11), Part II is The Power of the Resurrection (verses 12-34), and Part III is The Glory of the Resurrection (verses 35-58).

I. The Gospel of Jesus Christ (1-11)

First, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel and tells them to hold firmly to the gospel. Verse 1 says, "Now, brothers and sisters, 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 want to remind them of the gospel? To answer this question, let's think about a practical example. I have a tendency to forget minor things that most people remember, such as taking out the trash or forgetting my water bottle. But, I do my best to remember the big things, such as my wife's birthday, or our wedding anniversary. If I forgot my wife's birthday, I think my wife would be sad. But actually, there is something even more important that we must remember--the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel is the critical element of Christianity.

Paul continues in verse 2, "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." Paul reminded them that unless they hold firmly to the gospel, they would not be saved. If we change the gospel or let go of the gospel even a little bit, we may lose our faith. Many of the Corinthians accepted the gospel when Paul first preached it to them. At that time, they must have received the gospel with sincere repentance and were overjoyed to receive God's grace. Do you remember that feeling? But, as time went by, the gospel became less important to them. Instead, many of them allowed their previous sins and the pagan culture to infiltrate their church community. In the city of Corinth, idol worship was very common, and sexual immorality was rampant. There were 10,000 priestesses that during the day served the Temple of Diana or Venus (the goddess of love). But at night, they were prosperous businesswomen with many male clients. As they loosened their grasp on the gospel, these sins began to spread in the church. Also, the city of Corinth had many philosophies to distract them. In this environment, the believers began to drift away from the gospel. Therefore, Paul exhorted them to hold firmly to the gospel he preached to them.

We also need to be reminded of the gospel and we must hold tightly to it. As the days go by, we often forget the gospel. For example, if a husband and wife are having issues in their marriage, this struggle can consume all of their thoughts and energy and they may forget the grace and power of Jesus. When I say forget, I don't mean that we forget the facts, but that we lose focus on the gospel and we do not keep it fresh in our hearts and lives by coming to Jesus and by practicing it. We may start to make something else the center of our lives.

In American culture these days, there are many temptations and ideas to distract us from the gospel. Our culture is inundated with media, entertainment, and advertisements. Even while writing this message, I was distracted by my email, a magazine article, a poem and a painting on the internet. Today, college-aged students are part of the Millennial generation. Millennials have to struggle especially hard in this culture to maintain a healthy balance between hobbies/leisure time and spending time with Jesus. As a personal example, if I sense that my heart is being led away from Jesus by anything else, I must examine my life, heart, and schedule to see what the problem is. But ultimately, I find the solution when I come back to Jesus and renew my commitment to hold on to the gospel. This is not a small matter--our whole faith depends on it. So, we must hold firmly to the gospel and never let go.

Second, what is the gospel? Paul prefaces the gospel in verse 3a, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance." Paul did not make up the gospel; rather, he received it. This means that the gospel is not manmade--it is from God. Also, he passed on this gospel to the Corinthians as of first importance. It was the most critical message. What is it? Let's read verses 3b and 4 together: "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." These are the facts of the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ. But what is the significance of these facts, and what do they mean to each of us?

Let's go back to the beginning. Since Adam and Eve sinned against God by disobeying His command, the relationship between God and mankind was cut off. The Greek word for sins in verse 3 comes from the root word "hamartia," which literally means "to separate" or "to cut." God is the source of all life, so when we are cut off from God we lose our spiritual life and we gradually wither like flowers that were cut from their stems. This means that the love relationship between God and us is broken. Relationship problems can be very damaging. For example, if a husband and wife make the grave decision to get divorced, their relationship is cut off and they are both hurt deeply in the process. Additionally, their families and children will be greatly damaged. Divorce can negatively affect children for their entire lives, even for generations to come. How much more serious is the breaking of the relationship between God and mankind! This affects all of Adam and Eve's descendants as well as the earth itself until the end of time.

When we are cut off from God, God's image in us becomes more and more distorted, and we degenerate in our sins. For example, the average person lies every day. A new survey shows the average person tells four lies a day, for a total of 88,000 by the age of 60. The most common lie is: "I'm fine." As another example, we worship movie stars, the latest iPhone, our facebook profile, and our favorite musician, instead of God. Each one of these sins is very serious before God. Eventually, we can become worse than animals and one day will surely die due to our sins.

Romans 6:23a says, "The wages of sin is death..." It's easy to think that death is a normal part of our humanity. However, the Bible says that it is the direct consequence of our sin. Many people also think that after we die, we just cease to exist. But death is not the end. Hebrews 9:27 says, "Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..."

Have you ever had to go to court? Most people get at least a little bit nervous in a courtroom. How much more should we dread standing before God on Judgment Day with no defense! We are sinful, corrupt, and tainted; God is pure, holy, and absolutely just. He lives in unapproachable light, and sinners could die if they saw his face. Since God is utterly holy and just, he has to judge every sin ever committed, or he would not be true to his character, and justice would not be served. Not even one sin can go unpunished.

From this story, it seems like our fate is sealed. There is no way we can restore a relationship with God on our own. But God loves us as his own children and he was willing to go all the way to save us. God had a plan from the beginning to pay for each person's sins if we only accept it. The only way that the problem of Sin could be completely paid for is with a perfect sacrifice--one who has never sinned who willingly takes on Sin and Death. God sent his own son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Jesus is also God, but he manifested himself as a human on this earth, lived a perfect (sinless) life, and suffered and died on the cross, accepting our punishment instead. Is. 53, verses 3a, 4a, and 5 say, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...Surely he took up our infirmities and bore our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus suffered in our place out of his great love for us and his desire to restore a relationship with us.

In verse 3, Paul also notes that Jesus was buried. His body was dead beyond any doubt. He did not fake his death, but everyone there observed that his body expired, and they pierced his side and blood and water flowed out. There was no way that Jesus just fainted. Jesus died on the cross.

In verse 4, Paul clearly states that Jesus was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures. Notice that Paul emphasizes that his resurrection on the third day was according to the Scriptures. In fact, the prophets of the Old Testament predicted both his death for our sins and his resurrection, hundreds of years before these things happened. For instance, his resurrection was predicted by Ps. 16:10, "because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." In addition, Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection several times before

they happened. So, the point is: "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."

Third, witnesses of the resurrection. In verses 5-11, Paul further assures us of the accuracy of the gospel through many witnesses. After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to many people who could verify this fact. In a court of law, presenting 2 or more witnesses with testimonies that agree tells a convincing story. In order to convince the Corinthians of Jesus' resurrection, Paul presents over 500 witnesses, including Cephas (Peter), the twelve disciples, more than 500 of the believers at the same time (most of whom were still living), James, all the apostles, and finally Paul himself.

But these witnesses did more than just confirm that they saw some dead guy walking around. Their lives were changed and they were transformed through meeting Jesus after he rose from the dead. It was relatively easy for them to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead when they encountered him in person. But there was a deeper significance in Jesus' resurrection that they also accepted--that Jesus conquered Sin and Death by dying on the cross for their sins and rising from the dead. Jesus' resurrection was not just an intellectual fact, but it was about accepting Jesus in their hearts and lives.

One such example was Peter (Cephas). On the night of Jesus' arrest, he was driven by fear and denied Jesus three times, failing miserably as his disciple. But after meeting the risen Christ, he became so bold and courageous that he rebuked the Sanhedrin members publicly and testified to Jesus' resurrection courageously.

Also, Paul was once a proud Pharisee and a persecutor of the church--a violent man. But, after meeting the risen Christ, he was changed into a humble servant of Christ and a compassionate shepherd for all kinds of people. He confessed in verse 10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

As a personal example, my life was also changed when I encountered Jesus personally. I went to church with my parents from as far back as I can remember. From my memory, one day when I was 5 or 6 years old, the pastor was giving a sermon, and at the end, he gave an invitation to accept Jesus as my personal savior. He told me that Jesus died on the cross for all our sins (my sins), was buried, and rose again the third day, according to I Corinthians 15:3-4. He said that Jesus loves me no matter what. My parents had spoken with me before concerning salvation, but I believe the Holy Spirit moved in me that day specifically. I was convicted to accept Jesus' love and saving grace. On the church pew, I prayed the prayer silently that the pastor led. It went something like "Lord, I know I am a sinner, and there is no way I can save myself from eternal punishment. I know you died on the cross for my sins, were buried, and rose again the third day. Please come into my heart and wash away my sins." I told my parents about this after church, and they were overjoyed. Although I only understood the gospel at a surface level at that time, I accepted it by faith. There have been ups and downs in my walk of faith, but since I totally committed to serve Christ with my whole life in UBF about 5 years ago, God has been growing me steadily. And by God's grace, I am here giving this message today. From all of these accounts as well as the evidence of changed lives, we can have confidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead. May God help all of us to come to the conclusion that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.