

1 Corinthians 15 and the Resurrection: Part 1 – The Gospel of the Resurrection

(1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

1. The Corinthian church was a struggling church.
 - A. It struggled with pride, division, personal disputes, and how to deal with them.
 - B. It struggled with how holiness demanded their separateness from the world, especially in relationship to immorality and idolatry, and how to deal with those who refused to be holy.
 - C. It struggled with their assemblies and how to conduct them in holy and orderly fashion.
 - D. It struggled with completing the works God desired and that they had even promised to do.
2. This was a church struggling to be focused upon why it existed, why they were Christians, why they assembled, why they served.
3. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul seeks to refocus them by helping them remember the gospel and its foundational message upon which their faith and service to God were built.
 - A. That foundation, that focus, that center of the gospel and their hope in Christ is the resurrection.
 - B. Unfortunately, we talk a lot more about Jesus' life than we do His death and resurrection. But without the resurrection, Jesus' life would be meaningless to us and the world.
4. Today I want to begin a study on the resurrection by looking at 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and how the saving gospel of Christ is the gospel of the resurrection.
5. It is my hope that our examination of this chapter will help us grow in awareness and appreciation of the importance of the resurrection to our faith and hope in Christ.

BODY:

I. The gospel of salvation (15:1-2):

- A. Text (15:1-2 – “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”).
- B. Though they were Christians, Paul had to “make known” the gospel he had preached to them.
 1. It seems the Corinthians had lost their focus, had forgotten what was essential to the gospel and their salvation.
 2. As strange as that may sound when I say it, how often do we focus our thoughts throughout the week on the core of the gospel—Jesus' death, burial, and especially the resurrection?
- C. The Corinthians were reminded of how the gospel of the resurrection was the foundation of:
 1. Their *past*—they had previously **heard** the gospel of the resurrection preached by Paul and **received** it.
 - a. Hearing the gospel preached is how we become exposed to God's power to save (Rom. 1:15-16 – “So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”).
 - b. Reception of the gospel results in that power to save being applied to our souls (Jas. 1:21 – “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility **receive the word** implanted, which is able to **save your souls**.”).
 2. Their *present*—they **stood** in the gospel of the resurrection.
 - a. Stood is perfect tense, indicating action begun in the past and continuing in the present.
 - b. Christians take their stand upon the gospel in facing life and all its temptation, trials, etc.!
 - c. We do not realize how shaky, how ungrounded, our lives become when the good news of the resurrection is forgotten, is ignored. We lose the real purpose for continuing to serve!
 - d. I fear, in fact I know, that I have let you down in this area by not focusing my preaching enough on this foundation of our continued faith and service.
 3. Their *future*—they were **being saved** by the gospel.
 - a. It is true that salvation by the gospel is all-encompassing, covering one's past salvation from sin, one's present state of salvation in grace, and one future salvation in heaven.
 - b. Here it seems Paul addressed their eternal salvation in heaven, seeing it could only be had *if they hold fast*, or stand firm, in the word Paul had preached to them.

- c. Therefore, to lose sight of, or forget, or let go of the gospel message of the resurrection (no matter why) is to have *believed in vain*—to have believed to no profitable end.
- d. I hope all of us, including myself, can grasp the magnitude of this statement and how the gospel of the resurrection is to impact our lives on a daily basis.

II. The gospel of the resurrection (15:3-4):

- A. Text: 15:3-4 – “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”
- B. Paul had *delivered* to them as *of first importance* what he *received* (15:3).
 - 1. Paul *delivered* or *given* the gospel to them for them to receive, to possess in their hearts!
 - 2. What he gave was *of first importance*, or the most important facts of the gospel.
 - 3. Paul delivered it this way because it was what he had *received*. It was not of Paul.
- C. The things of first importance preached by Paul:
 - 1. How Christ died according to the Scriptures (15:3)
 - a. Though the Jewish people expected the Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom, even as people do today, Paul’s and the apostles’ message was that of a suffering Messiah.
 - b. This was because Christ’s death was *according to the Scriptures*.
 - i. Christ’s death did not defer God’s plan. His death happened according to the Scriptures, according to God’s plan.
 - 1) Isaiah 53:5-6 – “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”
 - 2) Peter (Acts 3:18 – “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.”).
 - ii. Christ’s work here was never about a physical kingdom, but about providing the needed sacrifice for sin that we might be saved from sin and have a hope of heaven!
 - 2. How the Christ was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (15:4).
 - a. David prophesied of Jesus’ burial and resurrection (Psa. 16:8-10 – “I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely. ¹⁰ For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.”).
 - b. Peter and the apostles confirmed Psa. 16:8-10 to be a prophecy of Jesus death and resurrection. For after quoting the above (Acts 2:29-32 – “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. ³² This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.”).
 - c. That Jesus was to be raised the third day was addressed by Jesus (Matt. 12:39-40 – “But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰ for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”).

III. Proof of the resurrection (15:5-7)

- A. Text: 15:5-7 – “and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles”
 - 1. Paul is saying that when he preached the gospel of the resurrection, he also presented proof of Christ’s resurrection in the abundance of eye-witnesses.

2. That should not surprise us, seeing that is how we determine proof of incidents even today.
 3. These were witnesses who not only would testify of seeing the risen Jesus, but were also willing to stake their lives and eternal wellbeing on what they saw and heard.
- B. The resurrected Jesus appeared to the apostles on two occasions, beginning with Cephas (15:5, 7).
1. The Lord's appearance to Peter was mentioned by those who saw Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:34).
 2. The appearance of Jesus to the apostles was recorded in John 20:19-23 when Jesus appeared to them in a closed room on two occasions, offering the second time for Thomas, who was absent during the first, to touch his hands and side that he might believe.
 3. These men were willing to *witness* of Christ's resurrection, having personally seen and heard the resurrected Jesus, and preach it openly despite knowing it was a death sentence.
- C. The resurrected Christ was seen by over 500 at one time, most of whom were still living (15:6).
1. This likely referred to the meeting in Galilee called for by an angel at Jesus' tomb and by the resurrected Jesus (Matt. 28:7, 10 – "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, **there you will see Him**; behold, I have told you."...¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there **they will see Me.**")
 2. More importantly, think about what is being said here—the significance of this claim.
 - a. If this claim was not true, what would Paul have hoped to gain?
 - b. His claim begged for *investigation!* He basically said, "check it out for yourself!"
 - c. If this was a lie, then no witnesses would be found, Paul would be shown to be a false teacher, and the gospel would have lost credibility!
- D. The resurrected Christ appeared to James his brother, who had not believed (Jn. 7:5), but became a believer. He appeared again to the apostles a second time, as we addressed above.

IV. The gospel of the resurrection is a gospel of grace and change (15:8-11):

- A. Text: 1 Cor. 15:8-11 – "and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."
- B. The resurrected Christ was seen *last of all* by Paul, as to one untimely born into Christ's kingdom (15:8-9).
1. The resurrected Christ did not appear to anyone after Jesus.
 - a. No one else had the resurrected Jesus appear to them after Paul.
 - b. Since seeing the resurrected Jesus was required to be an apostle, there have been no new apostles since Paul (Acts 1:22).
 2. Paul compares himself to a miscarriage, or a premature birth.
 - a. This indicates the abnormality of his conversion compared to the other apostles.
 - i. He was not like the rest who were disciples while Jesus was on the earth.
 - ii. His conversion began with Jesus appearing to him on the road to Damascus and being struck blind while he was on the way to Damascus!
 - b. For, Paul further explains his untimely birth as being because he persecuted the church, making him unworthy to be called an apostle (15:9).
 - i. Acts 26:9-11 – "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."

- ii. Paul's past caused him to feel as though he was a miscarriage, someone that should have been left for dead, undeserving of the life he had in Christ.
- C. The gospel of the resurrection that came to Paul was a lifesaving and life-changing gospel of grace (15:10-11).
 - 1. Paul was what he was *by grace* (15:10a).
 - a. God's grace meant Paul was not only forgiven of his wretched past and saved, but also made to be an apostle and preacher of the gospel (15:10).
 - b. 1 Tim. 1:12-14 – “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,¹³ although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.¹⁴ And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”
 - 2. The gospel of grace did not come to Paul in vain but resulted in hard work for Jesus (15:10b).
 - a. Jesus' appearance to Paul and his following salvation by grace had a purpose as seen in the recounting of Paul's conversion beginning on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:15-18 – “So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.¹⁶ But rise and stand on your feet; for **I have appeared to you for this purpose**, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.¹⁷ I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,¹⁸ to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”).
 - i. Paul had seen the resurrected Christ, though He knew Jesus had been killed, and its power changed everything about him.
 - ii. He became a preacher of the resurrection (ex. Acts 17).
 - b. If God's grace has not changed your life's purpose and is not driving you to work hard in service of the kingdom, maybe you have not been touched by His grace.
 - i. For, Paul says his labors were produced by “the grace of God with me.”
 - ii. God's grace must change who we are and what we do (1 Pet. 2:9-10 – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may **proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;**¹⁰ for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”).
 - iii. All that we do as Christians must be motivated by and governed by the reality of God's grace in our lives that came by Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

CONCLUSION:

1. The gospel of Christ...
 - A. Is a gospel of salvation.
 - B. Is a gospel of salvation based on the resurrection.
 - C. Is a gospel of the resurrection and its ensuing grace resulting in a changed life and dedicated service to Jesus.
2. If the gospel is not these things to you, you have either received the gospel in vain, or are in danger of doing so, or you have never received the gospel.
3. I invite you to remember that Jesus died for your sins, was buried in the tomb three days, and was raised from the dead to give sinners like you and me the hope of salvation, purity, and eternal life.
4. What will you do with Jesus today?
5. Will you come to the resurrected Christ today in F-R-C-Bp?