

“Resurrection Gospel”

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

I want to invite you to take your Bible and turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15.

There are certain chapters in the Bible which are known for a particular emphasis. For example, Hebrews 11 is the faith chapter, 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter, Isaiah 53 is the Servant chapter, or Psalm 103 is the praise chapter, and so on. 1 Corinthians 15 and its entire 58 verses could very well be referred to as the ‘resurrection’ chapter of the Bible because more than any other chapter, it presents the most detailed teaching on the subject of the resurrection. Not only is this chapter about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it is concerned with the future bodily resurrection of the believer. If it is your future that you are interested in, then you will want to pay careful attention to what the apostle Paul says here.

Now, this subject of life after death is most often the subject matter of religion. Each of the world’s religions and their adherents have something to say about what comes next. Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism see life as being cyclical. Therefore, they hold to a certain belief in reincarnation. This idea of ‘karma’ means that a person’s actions in this life determines the state of their life once they are reincarnated. If a person is good, he or she can be reincarnated in a higher order or caste. If you are bad, you are reincarnated as a lower caste or even as an animal. The goal is to achieve oneness with Brahman so your soul can escape the cycle. There are other religions that believe in annihilation and that death is the ultimate end. Universalism sees everyone going to heaven after they die. Secular humanism sees this life as all that there really is, and it is foolish to place your hope in something beyond.

Christianity is unique in the sense that Scripture teaches a bodily resurrection. That is, eternity does not consist of a disembodied state of existence, but that salvation means my soul is saved, so also will be my future body. God has a

plan for the human body, and it has all been made certain by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the point that is being made here in 1 Corinthians 15—victory over death! The key verse could very well be:

15:54—“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most important event in human history. It is the fulcrum upon which all of history turns, for it literally changed the course of human history. The gospel is not simply that Jesus died for sins. Were it not for His death, my sin debt would not be paid. But if He is not raised from the dead, I would have no righteousness. Jesus died, but Jesus is not dead. The full gospel is that Jesus died for sins and rose to life again. We are saved by His endless life. Romans 4:25 says that He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Hebrews 7:25—“He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”

Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who trust in Him have no need to fear death. The truth that Jesus conquered the grave gives confidence to our lives. For this reason, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the lynchpin of Christianity. Without it, we would have no gospel. Nor would we have any hope for life beyond death. If Jesus Christ were not raised, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that we would still be in our sins. And those of us who believe would be, of all people, the most pitied. (read)

For the last 2,000 years, the one ultimate question for the Christian faith and for our individual lives is this—Did Jesus Christ actually rise from the dead? Either He did, or He did not. If He did not rise, then we as Christians are wasting our time gathering here this morning. If He did not rise, our faith is nothing more than superstition. If He did not rise, there is no need for you to give sacrificially to His cause, no need for you to engage the world with His message, and no purpose

behind our relationships with one another. But if Jesus did in fact rise from the grave, then the situation is drastically different. If He did rise, nothing is more pressing than the proclamation of His message. If He did rise, nothing is more important on earth than the local church. If He did rise, His mission demands we sacrifice everything that we have. If He did rise, there is hope for every man, woman, and child. That is precisely the point Paul makes in this chapter. From the first 11 verses, I want to show you how our gospel is indeed a ‘resurrection’ gospel.

1—The FOCUS of apostolic preaching (15:1-2)

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”

In verse 1, Paul puts the Corinthians in remembrance of the message that he had preached when he had been with them. In no uncertain terms, he reminds them that it was the gospel—literally the ‘good news’—of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This was the point he made in the very beginning of his epistle. He had said in chapter 2:1-2, “When I came to you, brethren, I didn’t come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The gospel alone had the power to save those who believe. Now, Paul had to deal with a lot of ‘stuff’ in his letters to the Corinthian church. Their deviation in belief and behavior had shown a subtle drift away from this apostolic focus. Evidently, there were some in Corinth who had denied the truth of bodily resurrection.

The city of Corinth was a Greek city, and Greek philosophy did not allow for the resurrection of the dead. When Paul had preached the resurrection at Athens,

which was only 45 miles to the east of Corinth, his message was met with a skeptical response.

Acts 17:31-32—“He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.’ Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.”

In the first century, the Greeks held to a philosophical approach that the body was material, temporary, and a distraction from one’s true being—the soul. Thus, what happened to the body was irrelevant to the soul. The Bible teaches that the physical body was part of God’s original good creation and is an essential part of humanity. Though the body is now subject to corruption, sin, and death in a fallen state of existence, God’s plan is not to annihilate the body or free our souls in a disembodied existence. Rather, God’s plan is to restore and glorify the physical part of our humanity through bodily resurrection. (see Acts 18)

Chuck Swindoll—“Located near Athens, Corinth was greatly influenced by this Greek mind-set. Being a city that valued pleasure above learning, Corinth left the thinking to her Athenian neighbors, adopting without question their attitudes toward the resurrection of the body.”

An eagerness to appear ‘wise’ in the eyes of the world had been a constant snare for the Corinthian church. Evidently, some within the church were tempted to succumb to the pressure of philosophical respectability by denying the truth of bodily resurrection. Such refusal to be swept up by the predominant philosophies of the day is a constant battle for the church that prioritizes the gospel.

Colossians 2:8—“See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”

And so you can well imagine the concern Paul has as he is writing. Notice a couple of things:

The gospel reminder

He says in verse 1, “Now I would remind you, brethren, of the gospel which I preached to you.” The word ‘remind’ means to gain thorough knowledge of something. It is the idea of making something clear. He had been clear in his declaration of the truth. The ‘good news’ he preached is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures. Had Jesus only died, it would not have been good news. Paul says that it is good news because the One who died for sin also conquered death by His own resurrection.

They had ‘received’ his message, which is another way of saying that they welcomed it in their own hearts. In other words, they had believed it and were continuing to stand in its truth. These faithful believers were not to cave into the pressure coming from outside influences who were seeking to undermine and weaken their faith.

The gospel result

They had received the gospel that he preached, they were continuing to stand in it, and he goes on in verse 2 that it is this gospel “by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”

“Are Being Saved”— *present tense verb*

Belief in the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection not only means that I have been saved, as in past tense. It also means that I am being saved, present tense, and that I will one day be saved, future tense.

Those who are being saved ‘hold fast’ to the gospel. There is an endurance that is characteristic of their faith. It is not merely something that they believe in an intellectual sense. It is genuine belief that is demonstrated through a life that has been changed. Again, you can go back to Acts 18 and see how the church had been born in Corinth in what was one of the greatest evangelistic harvests recorded in Acts.

“Vain”—*word means without success; no yield*

Not all professions of faith are genuine. There are always those who make superficial responses to the gospel that are not authentic. This is the point that Jesus made in the parable of the soils. As for the church in Corinth, their faith had not been in vain, but was legitimate and was bearing fruit. The fact that so many lives had been changed during Paul’s ministry there was evidence of Christ’s resurrection power.

2—The FULFILLMENT of divine promise (15:3-4)

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

All of Scripture points us to the focal point of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is contingent upon our faith in the fundamental truth that Christ died for our sins and that He rose again. It is all “in accordance with the Scriptures.” The resurrection was direct fulfillment of Old Testament truth and was clearly argued to be such:

- Peter’s preaching (Acts 2:22-32)

Acts 2:22-24—“Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the

definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it.”

He then references David’s words in Psalm 16:8-11.

- Paul’s preaching (Acts 13:26-37)

Acts 13:35-37—“Therefore He also says in another psalm: You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, and was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.”

The point that both Peter as well as Paul make in Acts is that the Old Testament pointed to the fact that Christ would die and be gloriously resurrected. Christ died according to the Scriptures, He was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

To take it a step further, consider the prophetic statements made by Jesus Himself that points to His resurrection. As a perfect prophet, every word that He spoke was true and accurate. The Old Testament demanded that if a prophet said something that did not come to pass, he was a false prophet and was to be stoned to death. Jesus mentioned so many times during His ministry that He would rise from the dead that He would be an impostor if He had not risen as He said He would. No less than seven times He is on record in the gospels:

Matthew 12:14—“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Matthew 16:21—“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the

elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Matthew 20:18-19—“We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!”

Matthew 26:32—“But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

Luke 9:22—“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed and on the third day raised to life.”

John 2:19-22—“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ The Jews replied, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and You are going to raise it in three days?’ But the temple He had spoken of was His body. After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said.”

John 10:17-18—“The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”

After His resurrection, He appeared to two of His disciples while walking on the road to Emmaus and said:

Luke 24:25-27—“How foolish you are, and how low of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.”

This is what Paul meant when He said that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and rose on the third day according to the Scriptures. The resurrection was not God's reaction to the death of Jesus—it was the plan of God all along. The law and the prophets point us to this pivotal moment in redemptive history.

Consider how the 'third day' is of monumental importance:

- In the creation narrative, it was on the third day that life sprang up with plants bearing seed (Gen. 1:11-13)
- When Abraham was told to offer up Isaac at Moriah, it was on the third day that they arrived (Gen. 22:4)
- It was on the third day that God descended upon Mt. Sinai in the sight of the people (Ex. 19:10-11)
- The first fruits were to be offered on the third day after the Passover (Lev. 23:11)
- Hezekiah was healed on the third day (2 Kings 20:5)

Jesus said that the prophet Jonah was a sign that pointed to His death and resurrection, for Jonah had experienced a resurrection of sorts when it was on the third day that he emerged from the belly of the fish. Other prophets wrote:

Psalm 16:10-11—“For You will not abandon My soul to Sheol, or let Your Holy One see corruption. You make known to Me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Isaiah 53:10-12—“When His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul he shall see and be satisfied;

by His knowledge shall the righteous One, My Servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the many, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Hosea 6:1-2—“Come, let us return to the Lord; for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him.”

Whether it was direct prophecy, or through prophetic type and imagery, the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day is fulfillment of divine promise. Something else:

3—The FACT of eyewitness testimony (15:5-8)

“And that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me.”

Not only is there the testimony of the Scriptures, but the eyewitness evidence that supports the resurrection is well established. The New Testament records at least ten post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Notice those that Paul mentions here in verses 5-8. Others include appearing:

- to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)
- to the other women at the tomb (Matthew 28:8-10)
- to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)

- to Peter (Luke 24:34)
- to ten of the other eleven apostles (Luke 24:36-43)
- to all eleven apostles (John 20:26-31)
- to seven apostles on the shore of Galilee (John 21)
- to more than 500 at once (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- to James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- to the apostles at the ascension (Acts 1:3-11)
- to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-9)

Prior to the resurrection, the disciples were huddling in fear in an upper room. After encountering the resurrected Lord, they were sent forth into the world with power.

Ken Latourette—*“It was the conviction of the resurrection of Jesus which lifted His followers out of the despair into which His death had cast them and which led to the perpetuation of the movement begun by Him. But for their profound belief that the crucified had risen from the dead, and that they had seen Him and talked with Him, the death of Jesus and even Jesus Himself would probably have been all but forgotten.”*

Without the resurrection, the best we could hope for is a crucified martyr who died for a lost cause. But there is an empty tomb outside the city wall of Jerusalem to prove to our world that He is alive. He cannot be avoided, nor will He be canceled. The testimony of the gospel stands for itself, as there is plenty of evidence that leads to the truth that Jesus Christ, rather than the grave overwhelming Him, He overwhelmed the grave. The resurrection was the focus

of apostolic preaching, it is the fulfillment of divine promise, it involves the fact of eyewitness testimony, and notice also how it produces:

4—The FRUIT of a changed life (15:9-11)

“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

One of the greatest witnesses to the resurrection was Paul himself. As an unbeliever, he had been soundly convinced that Jesus was dead. So great was his animosity toward the faith that he determined to rid the world of the fledgling church. But something happened that forever changed the course of his life. Paul gets personal in verse 8 and tells us what the resurrection means in his own life.

Paul tells us his own personal testimony of how the risen Savior had appeared to him. Apart from the truth of the resurrection, there is no explanation for radical change that transpired in the life of Saul of Tarsus who becomes Paul the Apostle. Paul’s own salvation story represents the fruit of a changed life, a man who had been transformed by the gospel, a man who had gone from being the leading persecutor of the faith to its leading proponent. Formerly, he had been a committed antagonist, but he is now a commissioned apostle. And he attributes it all to the wondrous working of God’s grace. In grateful response to his calling, Paul determined that the grace of God would not be in vain. He worked harder than any, not in an effort to earn his salvation, but to show his love toward the One who had saved him.

Luke 7:47—“He who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Paul goes on to describe the reality of the resurrection and the great theological importance it has for life and for the hope of salvation. If Christ is not risen, we have no message to proclaim. If Christ is not risen, we are still in sin. And if Christ is not risen, we are to be pitied as fools. But Christ IS risen, and is become the 'first fruits.' That means if you are a Christian, your life is secure. Your salvation is steadfast, kept by the enduring power of the living Christ. You have nothing to fear in life and death, for your future is secure.

There's no need to fear death, and there is no need to fear the encroaching darkness of the hour. Why? Because we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, gave His life for us, and ever lives to make intercession for us.

There is no one here this morning who has not at some point felt the pain of death, perhaps while standing beside and looking down into a gaping hole in the ground, soon to be a loved one's grave. The gospel means that He knows every ounce of heartbreak, felt every hot tear that streamed down your cheeks. At the cross, God took on every pain and every disappointment and every sorrow you have ever or will ever experience out of the broken existence of this fallen world. He felt it all, He controls it all, and Easter is proof He is making all things new. When tragedy strikes, the likes of which we have never seen before, it is only the truth of resurrection that gives us hope. In a world of turmoil, this is our consolation as the people of God:

John 11:25—"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live."

The promise upon which we stake our lives and hope is a Person. Jesus is my resurrection life, and no matter what happens to me in this life, or to the ones I love who are in Christ, I am saved and eternally secure. Folks, we need to understand the very practical implications this has for us. What does it mean?

- First, we have **confidence** for our lives

The fact that Jesus is risen brings great confidence to my life as a Christian. It means that Christianity is not simply some religious system that was founded by someone who lived, died, and convinced His followers of a lie. The truth of Christ's resurrection makes Christianity unique. You can pretty much visit the grave of every other world religion's founder, and there you will find his remains. The religions are not dependent upon the founder's resurrection. But without the resurrection of Jesus, you have no Christianity.

The resurrection is proof positive that my sins have been forgiven as someone who trusts in Jesus. It gives me the confidence that I need to know that I will never cease to have a High Priest who gives me complete and total access to God. It provides me with the confidence that I need to know that I have an Advocate who always lives to represent me before my Father. It gives me confidence to pursue personal holiness in my life, knowing that I am being changed into the likeness of Christ.

Romans 6:1-13—“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe we believe that we also will live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but

the life He lives He lives to God. So you also must reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

- Second, we have **power** for our ministry

Before the resurrection, the disciples are huddled in fear in an upper room. After the resurrection, the disciples will see Jesus and soon be indwelt with His Spirit. The mission of taking the gospel into the world and making disciples would be bookended by the promise of Christ’s power and by the reassurance of His presence.

The resurrection empowers you and sends you to a world that desperately needs to hear the truth of its message.

- Third, we have **certainty** for our future

By His resurrection, Jesus Christ has emptied the grave of its power and has rendered death defeated once and for all. Because He died, my sins have been crucified and buried and are no longer remembered. Because He lives, I too now live through faith in His name. My future is secure, and I have no need to live my life in fear or worry about what might happen. Because He lives,

I can face tomorrow!

All fear is gone!

Because I know He holds the future!

And life is worth living just because He lives!

The enduring life of Jesus Christ reminds you and me that this world is not all there is. If all of our hope is bound up in the temporal things of this world, then we have no hope in the face of tragedy, no expectation for the future.

Without the resurrection, nothing makes sense in life.

Tim Keller—*“Each year at Easter I get to preach on the Resurrection. In my sermon I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can’t believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? However, if the resurrection of Jesus happened, that means there’s infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world.”*

Has the truth of Jesus Christ gripped your heart and changed your life? I’m talking about something that is far more than an abstract understanding. I am referring to personal application of this truth. I’m not talking about mentally assenting to a set of facts—I’m talking about personally surrendering your life to Christ. There is a huge difference.

Romans 10:9—**“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”**

After looking at the evidence for yourself, have you come to personally believe that Jesus Christ is risen? Know that the gospel says that there is more involved here than just ascribing to the facts. All over the Bible belt, the majority of people will say that they believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but undoubtedly there are plenty of them who are not saved from their sins. Mere intellectual assent does not save. If you were to ask Satan himself if he believes the facts, he would say ‘yes.’

Scores of professing Christians have only believed half of Romans 10:9, and they think that they have been saved from their sins, when in reality they are not.

They give lip-service to Jesus as Savior, but they have yet to surrender their life to Him as Lord that He is, worthy of their worship and full devotion. The crucial question to be answered is this one—“Will you repent of your sin and surrender your life to Jesus Christ as Lord?”