



Of First Importance

Series: Resurrection Sunday 2010

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

April 4, 2010

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Introduction: Resurrection – it is the one word that trumps every other word – including death. It is the word that makes Christianity the one true faith. It is the word that is the climax of Christ’s passion, of His saving work of atonement. Resurrection is the word that makes Christ’s cry from the cross as He bled and died -- “It is finished” -- a cry of victory, of triumph, of redemptive power and of hell-shattering certainty and not one of empty boasting. Unapologetically, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead declares that there is no other God, and there is no other Lord and Savior but Jesus Christ.

Paul is explaining the critical significance of the resurrection, exhorting the Corinthians to hold fast to the gospel as a whole and to the truth of the resurrection in particular. Some of the Corinthians were tempted to abandon their belief in Christ’s resurrection and so Paul is writing to shore up their faith. We cannot look at the entire chapter, but in these first few verses, we need to see first,

1) Paul declares the foundational and indispensable nature of the gospel. (v. 1-2) Paul is reminding these Corinthian believers, these Corinthian Christians, of the indispensable nature of the gospel that he had preached to them and which they had heard, and understood and received with faith. It was this gospel that had transformed them and made alive from death. It was the gospel that Paul preached that made them brothers, which broke down the walls of hostility between them and made them together the sons and the daughters of God. It was the gospel that Paul preached that brought the Corinthian Church into existence. They staked their life on the gospel. The gospel could not hold a place of greater importance in their lives. This is how fundamental the gospel is to the church.

This is the gospel by which you are being saved, Paul says, **if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain.** What does Paul mean here? Paul is saying, “If you hold fast to the word which I first preached to you, the word of the gospel about the death,

the resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus - if you hold fast to that your faith will not have been in vain." The saving truths of the gospel must be fixed in our minds, fully believed and held fast to the end, if we would be saved. We need to hear this in our theologically flabby age. We believe in vain, unless we continue and persevere in the faith of the gospel. **(Mat 24:11-13) (Heb 10:23)**

The doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection is at the foundation of Christianity. Remove this foundation and it all falls apart. The gospel as we said a few weeks ago is a whole. It is not made up of separate modules that can be rearranged, replaced, or interchanged at will. It is a unified body of truth regarding Jesus Christ. I know we live in a post-modern world where everybody's opinion is truth, where everybody just makes up what they believe as they go along. Paul says you can't do that with the gospel. The gospel is God's and it is not open to editing. The gospel is not pick and choose. We profess faith in Christ faith in vain, if we deny the resurrection. Take away the resurrection and you destroy the gospel and make it of no effect, because you steal all hope. The gospel is not open for tweaking. That is why, next,

2) Paul describes the irreducible essentials of gospel. (v. 3-4) Paul says, "I delivered to you the most important thing there is, the most important thing I could tell you. I delivered to you what I received from Jesus Himself, that Christ died for our sins and rose again." Paul preached the gospel and according to Paul what was of first importance was this, that according to the Scriptures, Just as the Scriptures foretold, just as the Prophets prophesied:

Christ died for our sins...Christ, the Messiah of God, the Son of God died for our sins. The death that Jesus died was not a symbolic death. It was not just some inspiring death that showed Christ's selfless love, nor was it an example of self-sacrifice that we should all go out and imitate, nor was His death some motivational tool for using your gifts and life to make the world a better place and live a better life. That is not the gospel. Christ died for our sins. Christ's death for sin is at the very heart of the gospel.

He was our substitutionary sacrifice, our Savior who took our place. He bore the penalty for our sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him, that we might be transformed, that we might be justified, that we might be sanctified, that we might be ushered in to an eternal and living relationship with our heavenly Father. "Christ *died* for sins," Paul

says. But not just any sins, He died for our sins. Christ's death was for His people - compelled by love deal fully with their sin, with our sin who have repented of sin and by faith trust in Christ as Savior and submit to Him as Lord. Church, he received the punishment that we deserved in our place and made us righteous before God. **(Isa 53:5-11)** So, on the cross, Jesus took our punishment and provided forgiveness of our sin. He took our sin and He gave us his righteousness. Christ died for our sins, Paul says,

...he was buried...He really died. He did not faint or swoon on the cross but He died and His lifeless body was entombed. He was buried just like everyone else with no human expectation of anything to come but to the glory of God, Paul says

...he was raised on the third day...The grave could not hold the King of Glory. God the Father raised Him from the dead. Acts 2:24 says: **God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:24)** And as Paul describes in this text, the risen Christ was seen by a multitude of people. It is a fact of history and of vital first importance to the gospel.

3) Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead "of first importance"? As John MacArthur has said: **The truth of the resurrection gives life to every other area of gospel truth.** The resurrection is of first importance because **the resurrection of Christ from the dead...**

Proves the Deity of Jesus Christ -- Paul wrote in Romans 1:4, that Jesus Christ **was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom 1:4)** The resurrection of Christ from the dead is God the Father's own witness to the truth that Jesus Christ was just who He claimed to be. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. He declared that God was His Father, that God the Father revealed to Him all that He was doing, that He did the works of God the Father and spoke words of God the Father. He claimed that whoever had seen had seen the Father. He claimed to have power over life and death. Because of His claims to divinity, Jesus Christ was condemned for blasphemy and sentenced to death by the Jewish High Court. But in His resurrection from the dead, the verdict of the highest human court was overturned by the Highest Authority in heaven and earth. God the Father declared Jesus Christ to be His Son and

even more, God the Father made Jesus both “Lord and Christ.” He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, where he was seated on the throne of God. Jesus, by his resurrection, is invested with kingly power, so that all authority is given to him. Jesus is declared by the resurrection from the dead to be the Son of the Living God, King of kings, Lord of lords, Lord of Life, Great Redeemer, Holy Savior, Destroyer of Death, Lion of Judah and Lamb of God, worthy of worship, worthy of praise, worthy of adoration. It is the resurrection that

Guarantees our justification and forgiveness of sins – In the fourth chapter of Romans, starting in the 25th verse that Jesus **was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom 4:25)** What does this mean? It means that the resurrection is God’s declaration that He has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for human sin. When Jesus was on the earth he claimed that he would atone for our sin. He said to his disciples and all who would listen, **"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."** In time he was crucified, he was sacrificed. The resurrection was indispensable evidence that Christ’s words on the cross, “it is finished” were true. Resurrection was the Father’s way of saying...“Your death accomplished its intended purpose.” It was God raising Him from the dead to affirm that what He did on the cross satisfied God’s holy justice. If He didn’t rise then His death is the death of an ordinary man and has no saving power. But He did rise from the dead and He was raised by the Father for our justification. Those who trust in him receive eternal life... a free and a full salvation because the resurrection declares that God is pleased with the sacrifice of His Son. And the result of this justification, Paul says **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Rom 5:1-2)**

And because of the resurrection, we can declare to you that the cross did not make salvation possible, if man will just try harder and work harder and be better and sacrifice more and do more. That is not our gospel. No, we say Jesus Christ took the sin of his people upon himself and bore the consequences of it in his own body on the tree, so that he died; and having died, and having paid the penalty, He lives again; and now all for whom he died are free from the guilt of sin, as many as believe on him. Jesus has saved his people. He has performed the work entrusted to him. The resurrection of Christ from the dead:

Demonstrates Christ’s victory over sin, death and Satan – Listen to the words of the risen Christ. **"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. (Rev 1:17-18)** The Apostle John says,

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8) He appeared that he might bind the strong man, the devil, and set us free. He appeared that he might condemn sin in his flesh on the cross. He appeared that he might condemn the prince of this world and drive him out. He appeared that he might crush the head of the devil on the cross. He appeared that he might disarm the evil powers and authorities and Satan and make a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. **(Col 2:13-14)** He appeared that he might take away our sins and destroy the work of the devil by dying on the cross and rising again. By so doing, He broke Satan’s power to accuse us before God. The death and resurrection of Christ for us nullified the damning effect of sin for all who trust in Christ. The weapon of soul-destroying guilt is taken out of Satan’s hand. He is disarmed of the single weapon that can condemn us and kill us -- unforgiven sin.

It is the resurrection that

Is the source of our new life in Christ now – Jesus is raised from the dead and it is by Him that we have new life. We are **born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1Pe 1:3)** Paul says in Romans 6 that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, because we are united to Him, we too can walk in newness of life, no longer enslaved to sin. Paul wants us to know **what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places. (Eph 1:19-20)** Do you apprehend the depth of what Paul said here? The very same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, that brought death from life, that broke the jaws of sin and death, that same power is available to you and to me if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. Great, awesome, unbelievable power is available to us today.

In Christ we are a new creation; his Spirit lives within us. We have been renewed, we have a new self -- and the purpose of that new self is to be conformed to the image of Christ, to become like him: truly righteous, truly holy -- to become what God has declared us to be by Christ’s work on the cross. We have power to walk in a way that is pleasing to God – resurrection power. But we need to live in it and by faith trust God to manifest that power in our lives, as we trust in Him and call upon Him to strengthen us, to deliver us from temptation, to make us persevere in faithfulness and loving obedience, to abide in Him and in His love, to reflect His image and to sanctify us by His grace. The resurrection of Christ

Enables His intercession for us – In Romans 8:33-34, Paul asks two questions and then answers them. **Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Rom 8:33-34)** One of the things that we struggle with as we grow in grace and grow in Christlikeness is the presence of sin in our lives. Although we are saved, we are still in a body of sin and we still fail and sometimes it can be hard to believe that we are forgiven by God. And Paul is saying to us that Christ has risen from the dead and is our intercessor before the throne of God. Jesus as the Advocate, as the Lamb slain for the sins of His people, standing before God as the sin-scarred, eternal testament that God's justice has been fulfilled for all who trust in Him through His death, and therefore God can show grace and show mercy and show loving kindness and will not hold anything against the Christian's account. He is our High Priest in heaven who intercedes for us that we will not be tempted above what we are able, who prays for us, who defends us before the accusations of Satan.

Enables the entire ministry of the Holy Spirit -- Over and over again, the Lord promised that He would send the Holy Spirit, but this too was contingent on His resurrection and return to glory. The resurrection enables the indwelling and leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit, the writing and existence of the New Testament, the giving of Spiritual gifts, the sealing of the Spirit to eternal life, the understanding of Spiritual things, the new birth, the preaching of the Word of God with unction. The bottom line is this: no resurrection, no ascension; no ascension, no Holy Spirit; no Holy Spirit, no church. That is how vital the resurrection is. The resurrection

Is our hope of heaven – Jesus declared, **In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (Joh 14:2-3)** If Jesus doesn't rise from the dead, then the hope of heaven is a lie, but He did. The resurrection

Is the hope of our own resurrection in the future – Christ and His people are one. We are united to Christ. In a glorious way that is beyond human comprehension and understood only by faith, we were crucified with Christ, buried with Christ, and we are risen together with Christ. God has **raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6)** Jesus Christ said: **"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."**

(Joh 11:25-26) If Christ is not raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain and our preaching is in vain, those that have died have perished and we will perish too. But beloved, Christ has been raised from the dead and if He has been raised from the dead we too shall rise on the last day and with Job we can confidently say: **For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. (Job 19:25-26)** We shall see Him as He is because we shall be like Him – resurrected to glory. The resurrection

Portends the judgment future judgment of all souls – In Acts 17, starting in verse 30 we read: **The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because 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." (Act 17:30-31)** Jesus Christ spoke frankly about the final judgment of all men and women when he was on the earth, claiming that he would be the judge and the resurrection proves His claim to be true. It is the pledge that the judgment day is coming.

Promises the that all things will find their future fulfillment in God – Paul writes later in this chapter of the connection between Christ's resurrection, our own resurrection from the dead and the future summation of all things in God, when Christ reigns over all and presents His Kingdom to His Father in heaven. He writes: **(1Co 15:21-28)** The resurrection is of first importance. And if the resurrection is true, and we know that it is, then the resurrection, last of all,

Is the death-knell of all other religions – Let's just cut to the chase, if Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, then every other world religion – Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hindu, JW's, Mormons – name it. If Christ did all that He claimed on the cross, if He is all that He claimed to be, if He is the Son of God with power who has truly accomplished the salvation of His people to be received by faith in His death and resurrection then every other religion that says anything else is false – false promises that lead to death – that includes Catholicism and liberal Christianity. None of them can even compare to the truth of the gospel of Christ. And it all hinges on the resurrection. Through the resurrection, Christ demonstrated that He does not stand in a line of peers with Abraham, Buddha, Mohammad, or Confucius. He is utterly unique. The resurrection proves that Jesus Christ was more than just another religious leader, idealist, or philosopher. It marks Him alone as the way, the truth, and the life and therefore no-one comes to the Father except through Him. He is God in the flesh. The bodily resurrection of

Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. If the resurrection did not take place, then Christianity is a false religion. If it did take place, then Christ is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth.

It is this gospel and this risen Christ that gripped Paul. He says in the text we read this morning: **(1Co 15:8-10)**

4) Are you living according to that which is “of first importance”?

Consider the good news of the gospel. Jesus died for our sins. He died to free all who repent and believe from the guilt of our sins. He is not some admirable hero who lay down his life for a cause. His death won for all who repent and believe victory over our own death. We no longer must fear the punishment that once awaited us on account of our sins. Why? Because Jesus took the punishment on the cross. That is what his death was about. And we know that he was successful. How? Because on the third day he was raised from the dead. By whom? By God the Father, who accepted his Son’s sacrifice and has no raised him to glory and to authority over heaven and earth.

And I am not speaking only to those who have not believed on Christ, but to believers as well. Don’t forget the cause and foundation of your salvation. The gospel is not limited to getting us into the kingdom and then we have to keep ourselves saved. The gospel carries us through our earthly lives until we are glorified. Our sins continue to be forgiven because of the death and resurrection of our Lord. Our favor with God is secured only in the work of Jesus Christ. Never, never forget the gospel that saves and sustains you. Jesus died for our sins; he was buried; and, praise God, on the third day he was raised from the dead.

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