

1 Corinthians 15:1-19 – “The Validity of the Resurrection”

Throughout the book of Corinthians Paul has been answering various questions that have been posed to him by some in the church at Corinth. Here in chapter 15 we have another of these questions that Paul is looking to give clarity to. This time it centers around the resurrection.

A woman looked out of her window and to her dismay saw her German shepherd shaking the life out of their neighbor's rabbit. Her family did not get along well with these neighbors, and she knew this was going to be disastrous.

She grabbed a broom, pummeled the dog until it dropped the now extremely dead rabbit out of its mouth. She panicked. She did not know what else to do. She grabbed the rabbit, took it inside, gave it a bath, blow dried it to its original fluffiness, combed it until that rabbit was looking good, snuck into the neighbor's yard, and propped the rabbit back up in its cage. An hour later she heard screams coming from next door. She asked her neighbor, "What's going on?" "Our rabbit! Our rabbit!" her neighbor cried. "He died three days ago. We buried him, and now he's back!"

- Now we don't need to prop things up when we discuss the resurrection of Jesus. We don't have to try to devise some plan for this to be true.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is indeed the greatest thing that has ever happened. And what it means for us today has great importance and relevance. We will cover these aspects in this chapter.

1. The Fact of the Resurrection – 15:1-11

15:1-2 - *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

As Paul gets ready to wrap up his letter he looks to finish on a high note. As he gets ready to discuss the validity of the resurrection, he starts with the gospel. Because the gospel is based on, and tied to, the resurrection!

He says I ***declare to you***... This means that he wants them to have a very thorough and working knowledge of what the gospel is all about. Notice, he says: ***which I preached to you***... This is something Paul has no doubt laid out in full

to the church at Corinth, but it is worth repeating. In fact, I think it's necessary for us to remind ourselves daily of the greatness and beauty of the gospel. It's to be the very thing on **which you stand**.

- You see, we need this repeated often because the gospel is so foreign to us, it's so 'other worldly', that it can take a long time for it to sink in and really begin to be comprehended.
- If you don't have a good grasp of the gospel, you're going to be unstable, easily moved and rocked when difficulties come.

So, what is the gospel?

First of all the word **gospel** is the Greek word *euangelion* (ev-on-gel-e-on). It originally meant a reward for good tidings. Today we simply refer to it as good news! And it's good news that has no greater reward.

How so? Because the gospel lays out for you your condition, your lostness and separation from God, but it also lays out what God has done to bring you into a right condition with Him and how to be with Him for ever and ever.

We see the essentials of the gospel laid out in vv. 3-4.

15:3-4 - For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

Now notice something, this is not some story that Paul is making up. He's not trying to create some doctrine and begin a new following. He is delivering up that which he **also received**. Remember when he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was radically saved, but he also tells us that he went into Arabia and then to Damascus for 3 years where he didn't confer with anyone, but rather was just getting reprogrammed by Jesus Himself. He was getting a 3 year degree with the Holy Spirit as the teacher (Galatians 1:11-12; 15-18).

And we first of all see that **Christ died for our sins**. This was the essential theme of Paul's preaching. To many, the message of the cross was foolishness, but Paul understood this was the avenue to salvation, redemption and reconciliation. In a time when the cross was not flattering, Paul made it the central focus.

- **1 Corinthians 2:1–2**, *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."*
- You see, the message does not need to change, because the plight of man has not changed. We are born sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation. It is sin that has brought death into the world, and it is sin in our lives that will bring the ultimate death – spiritual death, which is separation from God.
- **Romans 6:23**, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*
- How is this eternal life received? By believing that Jesus died for your sins.

And this was all **according to the Scriptures**. The Bible is so amazing in the number of prophecies it contains and how they so accurately spoke of things yet to come.

- **Psalms 22:14–18**, *"I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; ¹⁷ I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. ¹⁸ They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."*
- **Isaiah 53:4–5**, *"Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."*
- **Isaiah 53:12**, *"Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors."*
- **Zechariah 12:10**, *"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."*

Paul makes note that Jesus **was buried**. That's important because some may think that Jesus never really died fully on the cross. That perhaps He just passed

out and later needed to be resuscitated. But He ended up in a sealed tomb where if He managed to survive the crucifixion, He wouldn't have survived the 3 days in a tomb after the effects of the crucifixion.

Isaiah 53:9 also spoke of this.

- **Isaiah 53:9**, *"And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth."*

He rose again the third day. This is what separates Christianity from all other religions, beliefs, and faiths. We serve a real and living Savior who not only told the way, but showed the way. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many (**Mark 10:45**).

according to the Scriptures. Now Scriptures aren't as exact in referencing Jesus rising again in three days. But we see many great pictures of this through Scripture. Abraham had to take his son Isaac, his only son, whom he loved, and sacrifice him on Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22).

- **Hebrews 11:17–19**, *"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," ¹⁹ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."*
- Jonah is a picture Jesus used to reference His own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:38-40).
- One of the clearer verses in the O.T. referencing Jesus not remaining in the grave is in **Psalms 16:10**, *"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."*

This is the very gospel that can save you. This is the only good news that can deliver a person out of death and into life. And it absolutely hinges on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are a lot of ways that people can say you can be saved. There are a lot of leaders that have come and gone that have expressed a way to be fulfilled. But there's only one way to have the promise of eternal life, and only One person has risen from the dead to validate that promise.

This is the good news by **which you are saved** (vs. 2), but notice, you need to **hold fast**! There were some in the church at Corinth that were beginning to question the resurrection. They were wondering if Jesus was enough. Paul says

you need to hold fast; you need to remain in that place of faith that Jesus provided all that you need to be saved. And it begins by placing your faith in the work He did, and it ends with you keeping your faith in the work He did for you. Don't move away from that good news.

- "...life has its dark places where there seems to be nothing to do but hold on. Faith is always a *victory*, the victory of the soul which tenaciously maintains a tight grasp on God. ¹

Now this sounds good and all, but how can I know this is true??

Witnesses! Witnesses are always needed to verify a truth.

In any court of law there needed to be at least 2 witnesses for a matter to have any substance. Now Paul is going to bring up 6 different witnesses who have personally seen Jesus Christ after He was crucified and buried.

15:5-7 - *and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. ⁶ After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.*

1st Witness: Peter

We're not really sure when Jesus met with Peter personally after His resurrection, but we do know He did. The 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus returned after understanding it was Jesus who walked with them and they told the disciples: "*The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!*" (**Luke 24:34**).

I wonder what that encounter was like between Jesus and Peter? Imagine what you would have wanted to say to a guy who denied knowing you three times at your darkest hour.

- *'I have every right to never speak to you again!'* Or, *'You really owe me big time now!'* I mean, I think a lot of us would have been wanting to avoid Peter, make him suffer a little.
- But I think Peter was probably the first guy Jesus sought after to comfort him and encourage him. I don't think Jesus came with anger and rebuke, but rather with gentleness and love. Letting Peter know he's forgiven.
- And we need to understand that when we mess up, this is the Jesus we encounter. A God of love and kindness, not just glossing over sin casually,

¹ Barclay, W. (2002). *The Letters to the Corinthians* (3rd ed., p. 169). Westminster John Knox Press.

but forgiving our sin and cleansing us when we confess our sin and turn to Him with a repentant heart.

Jesus would later publicly restore Peter to the ministry, when He said three times for Peter to feed His sheep.

2nd Witness: The Twelve

These were the ones that walked closest with Jesus during His earthly ministry (though they were down one after Judas' fateful account).

Mark 16:14 and Luke 24:36 tells of this first meeting with the disciples. But I love the account given in John 20:19, telling us of the disciples who had gathered together in a locked room and then Jesus comes and stands in the midst of them. Can you imagine the shock?

And then He said to His disciples, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (**Matthew 28:20**). I'm sure the disciples were thinking He could just pop in on them wherever they are. Wouldn't that put the fear of God into us?

3rd Witness: over 500 brethren at once

At this point you could say these guys were just collaborating the story. But then you have over 500 brethren all see Jesus at once. This was no collaborated story or just wishful thinking of a few. Over 500 people had the same testimony.

Paul says, *You can go and ask them yourselves, many of them are still living today!*

But some might think, but these are all believers. Maybe they just wanted this to be true. Well, bring to the stand the next witness.

4th Witness: James

This would most likely be the half-brother of Jesus, who previously did not believe in Jesus being the Messiah. He knew Jesus was brutally beaten and crucified, but now James saw Jesus alive! The cross and resurrection changes everything! James couldn't deny Him any longer. And in fact James went on to be a leader in the early church!

5th Witness: The Apostles

There weren't just the 12 apostles, there were many more. And they attested to the proof of a resurrected Jesus.

6th Witness: Paul

15:8-9 - *Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

Paul says that he was born out of due time, which speaks of a miscarriage or untimely birth.

- He could be referring to how he was saved before the time of the future conversion of Israel.
- It could be that he is speaking of how he was born in an untimely way because he became an apostle late in the game. He didn't get to go through the natural gestation period of being with Jesus and learning and growing as the other apostles did.

Either way, Paul recognized that he was the ***least of the apostles*** because of how he wrongly treated the ***church of God***.

- It's interesting because Paul will say 3 years later that he's the least of all the saints (Ephesians 3:8)
- Five years after that, he will write in 1 Timothy 1:15 that he is the chief of sinners. Paul grew in humility the older he got. He grew in humility because he grew in grace!

15:10-11 - *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. ¹¹ Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

Paul owed everything to the grace of God. Grace says, I don't deserve this, it's the free gift of God. That's why this gospel is like no other. This is why it's so foreign to us.

Paul was saved by God's grace, and he served God by God's grace. Again, the gospel is as linked to grace as it is to the resurrection of Christ.

Grace is not always rational. It keeps us from getting puffed up with pride because we know our successes are not due to ourselves, but to the grace of God. Our salvation is not based on our performance, but on Christ's propitiation.

Whoever preached this gospel, the message stayed the same. Jesus died for your sins, He was buried, and He rose again. He's alive today. And those that believe this and have put their trust in Jesus, will be saved!

2. The Significance of the Resurrection – 15:12-19

15:12 - *Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

This was the main question and concern brought to Paul's attention regarding the resurrection, and in the next few verses (vv. 12-19) Paul will lay down the consequences there are if there's no resurrection.

Evidently, some were clearly preaching that there was not a resurrection of our bodies. Which is odd because they believed that Jesus has been raised from the dead.

- The Jews believed in a bodily resurrection. The Greeks however did not. Many of the Christians in Corinth seemed to be aligning with the Greek view of the afterlife.
- Paul brings some needed correction here and he reveals how denying the resurrection strips the Christian message of 7 key elements:
 - i. Christ has not been raised – v. 13+16
 - ii. Our preaching is empty – v. 14
 - iii. Your faith is empty – v. 14
 - iv. We are false witnesses – v. 15
 - v. You are still in your sins – v. 17
 - vi. The dead have perished – v. 18
 - vii. We are of all people most pitied – v. 19

- i. Christ has not been raised – v. 13+16

15:13 – *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.*

To deny the resurrection of the dead logically would mean that you don't believe that Jesus is risen then either. Paul looks to show how this is all intertwined.

- ii. Our preaching is empty – v. 14

15:14 - *And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.*

If Christ has not risen again, then what kind of power does your preaching have? What are you leading people to? What kind of hope are you delivering!? If there's no end goal and hope, then what good is your preaching?

You can only talk about your best life now for so long. People are eventually going to wonder what comes after that?

- The very gospel must provide an answer for death. There's no good news if you don't have hope over the most certain thing you will face.

- This is what separates Christianity apart from all other religions!

iii. Your faith is empty – v. 14

In the same way, ***your faith is also empty*** (other translations: useless; in vain). If your faith is in a person who is as powerless in the face of death as you are, then your faith is empty! And if there's no guarantee of inheriting something better than you have in this lifetime, then why bother living out that faith?

iv. We are false witnesses – v. 15

15:15 - *Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise.*

The apostles are nothing more than liars and false witnesses if in fact Jesus didn't rise from the dead. In fact that's what many said to try and disprove the resurrection, that the apostles were just liars. But nobody willingly dies for a lie. In the face of death, people come clean!

But the apostles put their life on the line because they knew the truth and could not deny the truth! And there was power in this truth – life saving, grave raising, heaven blazing power!

v. You are still in your sins – v. 17

15:16-17 - *For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. ¹⁷ And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!*

Jesus came as fully man, so if the dead aren't raised, then neither has Jesus. They're linked together. And we're not just talking about some ethereal afterlife. This is a literal bodily resurrection. These will be raised new and changed!

You see, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then He couldn't have brought us forgiveness of sin and power over sin.

But because Jesus rose from the dead, He showed that He defeated the effects of sin! Sin brings death, but Jesus has overcome the grave, the enemy, and sin! He's alive and we are made alive in Him, overcomers of sin.

vi. The dead have perished – v. 18

15:18 - *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*

If Christ is not risen, then the dead died in vain. They've just perished if there's no hope of eternal life.

vii. We are of all people most pitied – v. 19

15:19 - *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

If the apostles are going through trials and persecutions for Jesus, and doing so without any hope of eternal reward, then what's the deal?? Why?? You are indeed the most pitiable if you do all these things for Christ without the understanding of an eternal value.

But we know there is reward coming – eternal life!

2 Timothy 1:12, *"For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."*

2 Timothy 4:6–8, *"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."*

“When you know what rests on the resurrection, you know why ***if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.***

- i. The *divinity* of Jesus rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 1:4).
- ii. The *sovereignty* of Jesus rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 14:9).
- iii. Our *justification* rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 4:25).
- iv. Our *regeneration* rests on the resurrection of Jesus (1 Peter 1:3).
- v. Our *ultimate resurrection* rests on the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 8:11).”
(Guzik)

“The fact is, that the silver thread of resurrection runs through all the blessings, from regeneration onward to our eternal glory, and binds them together.”
(Spurgeon)

“Some of the Christians at Corinth are saying there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead (15:12–34). They believe that the Christian faith is for this life only, without any hope of a future beyond the grave.

Paul strongly disagrees. He argues that if there is no resurrection, the Christian faith collapses. Without resurrection, Jesus must still be dead. If Jesus is dead,

then the gospel message is a lie. If the gospel is a lie, then there is no forgiveness of sins, no new life with God and no hope for the future. If there is no resurrection, says Paul, we are all helpless sinners facing eternal judgment. If there is no future hope, the apostles are pathetic creatures preaching an empty, powerless gospel. They are either criminal liars or deluded and mad.

But now Paul states what he truly believes—that Jesus Christ *is* raised from death. He is raised, not just for his own victory, but for ours as well.”²

² Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed., pp. 589–591). Augsburg.