

Resurrection Day

The Most Important Thing**1 Corinthians 15:1-8**

"In these verses Paul reiterates the basic content of the gospel which he had proclaimed to the Corinthians from the beginning. However much he unfolds further insights as he develops the theme of resurrection, it is important to note that here he is repeating the facts not adding to them. When there is doubt in people's minds about certain theological issues, it is easy to conclude that these fundamental facts are either insufficient or untrustworthy. Paul entertains no such ideas: he reminds the Corinthians of the gospel which they heard him preach and which they received."¹

**1. The gospel is focused.**

Vv. 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..."

- The gospel is not a general thing. The gospel speaks in specifics. And while there are many doctrines and ethical implications that flow from the gospel, the gospel itself is quite focused. Here the Apostle reminds us the central components of the gospel message:

a) *Jesus died for sinners.*

- That Jesus died is an historical fact. That he died "for sinners" is the meaning of his death. Jesus died to save sinners.

b) *Jesus was raised on the third day.*

- That Jesus was raised is an historical fact. That he was raised "on the third day," is a reminder that his resurrection was part of the plan from the beginning. He died for our sins. He was raised for our life. The efficacy of the cross lies ultimately in the fact of the resurrection. If Jesus was not raised then we are still in our sins (vs. 17). The resurrection of Jesus sealed the cosmic victory of his atoning work on the cross. His resurrection was the death warrant for death itself and the defeat of the powers of this dark age (vv. 25-28). Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that all of those who look to him will themselves be raised up incorruptible to eternal life in the age to come (vv. 21-22). Later in this chapter Paul will argue that our only hope beyond this life is that Christ has been raised and therefore he will raise us up as well (vv. 35-49).

2. The gospel is historic.

Vv. 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."

- The gospel is not an aesthetic or a spiritual exercise. The gospel is the message of real, historic events. It is centered in facts. The apostles were not interested in following myths. They did not leave their previous professions and offer up their lives as martyrs for something they knew was a lie. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians about 20 years after Jesus' resurrection. There were plenty of witnesses to the resurrected Christ still living and giving first-hand accounts.
- "The resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent appearance to a long list of witnesses is at the heart of the gospel proclaimed in the church; without this foundational truth, there would be no church because there would be no gospel."²

¹ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1985) p. 259

² Richard Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997) p. 255

3. The gospel is biblical.

- Notice that in verses 3 and 4 Paul is careful to point out that Jesus' death for sinners and resurrection happened "according to the Scriptures." Of course Paul is referring to what we know as the Old Testament. The Person and work of Jesus Christ were not New Testament innovations. Jesus was not God's "Plan B." The eternal Son of God is present throughout the Scriptures. We do not read him back into the Old Testament. He is there organically, so to speak. The Old Testament is filled with "types" pointing toward Jesus and his redemptive work on the cross. The whole of the religious practices that God prescribed for Israel from the priesthood, to the sacrificial system, to temple itself, and the feast days were all signposts pointing to Jesus Christ. So, when Paul writes that Jesus died for sinners and was raised "according to the Scriptures" we are to conclude that Christ and his redemptive work are present in the Old Testament just as surely as in the New.

4. The gospel is necessary.

Vs. 2 – "And by which you are being saved."

- The means that God has ordained to bring sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus is the proclamation of the gospel. This is made clear in the example of the apostles whose mission it was to proclaim the gospel. The gospel is the center of the message which has been entrusted to the church. Indeed, the gospel makes up the center of the plot-line of all redemptive history. And the gospel is necessary for the salvation of sinners.

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (**Romans 10:14-17**).

5. The gospel is hope-filled.

Vv. 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."

- For everyone who has "received" (believed) the gospel, it has become the foundation upon which they "stand" and the power by which they are "being saved." And how can this be? Because of what the gospel is. It is the message of Christ's death for sinners and his victorious resurrection. Christian, Jesus died for your sins. That means that your sins have been paid for. God's justice has been satisfied fully.
- The final clause in verse 2 acts as both a warning and qualifier for what constitutes saving faith. As a warning those words cause us to examine our faith to see if it is genuine. "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (**2 Corinthians 13:5**).
- As a qualifier we're told what sort of belief constitutes saving faith. After all, the apostle James tells us that even demons believe (**James 2:19**). Jesus warned about those who "believe" for a while but then fall away. The sort of belief which saves, however, is that which will "hold fast." It's not a here today, gone tomorrow sort of faith. Certainly it is a faith that is tested. It is a faith which can and does waver at times. And it may also be a faith that is very small – mustard seed small. But it is a faith which holds.
- Though the quality of our faith matters, our faith is not in our faith. Our hope is not grounded finally in the quality of our belief. Rather, our hope is grounded in Jesus Christ who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory?"

O death, where is your sting?"

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (**1 Corinthians 15:51-57**)*