

RESURRECTION!

AT THE HEART OF GOD'S STORY

Weekly
Discussion
Guide

April 4, 2010

Where we start . . .

When you think of the “good news” of the Gospel, what do you typically see as the center of that good news?

When you do think of the resurrection of Jesus, how do you understand the part His resurrection has in the good news?

What we read . . .

In Paul's first letter to Corinth, he reveals some of his thinking about Jesus' resurrection. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-19.

Where does the resurrection “fit” in Paul's understanding of the Gospel?

If we don't grasp the reality of the resurrection, what does Paul tell us that means for our faith?

From what Paul says here, why is the reality of the resurrection so critical?

Why this matters

Christians rightly celebrate the “triumph o'er the grave” that we see in the resurrection of Jesus. But this resurrection event is more than a “divine seal of approval” on Jesus' sacrifice. What fresh insight grips you as you think of what it means to share in the resurrection life of Jesus?



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What are we focusing on?

Obviously, being Easter, we are focusing on the resurrection of Jesus. But as we think and talk about the resurrection, it is clear that for many Christians the resurrection is sometimes treated as an "add-on" to the cross. When we talk about the Gospel—the good news of what Jesus has done for us—much of the attention goes to the cross. We think of Jesus' saving work and rightly think of His death on behalf of sinners for the procuring of our forgiveness. If that is all we grasp about Jesus' saving work, then we can end up thinking about "being saved" as merely "being forgiven." But there is profoundly more to it than that. As we press in and look at 1 Corinthians 15, we will see that, for Paul, without the resurrection, *there really is no good news!* The resurrection is no mere "add-on"; the resurrection is at the heart of what God is doing in and through Jesus.

What will we be discussing?

There is no need to press the opening questions beyond what arises out of the conversation. Although the resurrection might well come up as your people talk about what is at the heart of the Gospel—which wouldn't be entirely surprising seeing as we are right in the middle of the Easter celebration—the resurrection doesn't always seem to get into our "sharing the Gospel."

Many who share their faith talk about: 1) having a personal relationship with Jesus; 2) Jesus' death as the payment for our forgiveness; and 3) going to heaven when we die if we have accepted Jesus as our savior. Now all of that is both good and true. But what is so surprising is that such an approach to the Gospel tends to leave out (or leave as an "add-on") the resurrection—and Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that without the resurrection our faith is in vain and we are still in our sins! Again, no need to

belabor the point; only raise awareness about how often the reality of the resurrection gets "left behind" when we share the good news.

When you turn to 1 Corinthians 15:3-19, you will find there is more here to mine than you will be able to cover in one evening's discussion. What kinds of things might you and your group highlight?

Notice the importance, in Paul's mind, of anchoring his Gospel message "in the Scriptures" (15:3-4). Jesus not only "died for our sins according to the Scriptures" but He was also "raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." If you have time and interest, you might turn to Acts 2:14-36 and read the first "Gospel message" preached; Peter's message at Pentecost. He seems to join Paul in placing a huge emphasis on not only the death of Jesus but the resurrection of Jesus—all "according to the Scriptures."

Another thing to notice in the Corinthian passage is the attention Paul gives to physical eye-witnesses to the resurrection. Why does that matter? Clearly, for Paul, this is not a matter of a "wonderful idea" but a certain fact of history—the resurrection did, must, had to, actually happen! We are not talking about some grand thought but an amazing transformative act of God.

Perhaps the most challenging thought arising from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians is his insistence on the centrality of the resurrection. If Jesus has not been raised, then all proclamation of "good news" about Him is useless. If Jesus has not risen from the dead, then our faith has no value. If Jesus was not raised from the tomb, then we are still in our sins! But if we are living with the resurrection as an "add-on," we are apparently thinking about the resurrection the way Paul was.

Why would the Gospel be hollow "good news" without the resurrection? Perhaps we could say: Without the resurrection, Jesus' death could have provided for our forgiveness, but for all eternity the world would be devoid of the Son of Man! That is hardly good news.

Why would our faith be without value without the resurrection? Perhaps we could say: Without the resurrection, then we who believe that God can and does life-changing things are left with a God who didn't do what would be the capstone of all His great acts! And what then would we be believing?

Why would we still be "in our sins" without the resurrection? Perhaps we could say: Without the resurrection, then we might have been forgiven the penalty for our sinning and had the debt cancelled, but without being united to Jesus' resurrection life the new life that God intended for us to enjoy would be beyond reach! And we would never be free from our sinning.

So much here! Don't feel the need to unpack it all . . . but richly enjoy the good news that the one who died for us did not stay in the grave! We are not "of all men most to be pitied" because we have believed the truth: Jesus has been raised! Hallelujah!