

"The Gospel of Hope" 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Introduction

- Before we begin, let me clarify something from last week. Last week in our discussion of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36, the women keeping silent in church passage, I neglected to frame that discussion in the context of the pyramid. That was an oversight on my part. Remember this? We've used this chart a number of times already. While I still hold to my personal convictions on the issue, please don't mistake my personal convictions for dogma—or some kind of cryptic message that if you disagree with me you're not wanted here. Nothing could be further from the truth. This issue, the role of women in ministry, is debatable—it's not dogma. Christians who love the Lord believe differently on this issue. Because we're Free Church, we search the scriptures—yes, and we form convictions based upon the authority of God's Word—yes, but if it's a non-essential doctrine—and this issue isn't in our doctrinal statement—then there is freedom for divergent opinions in this body. We have more important kingdom work to do than getting bogged down with non-essential questions of doctrine. I'm sorry for not making this clear last week. Enough said, let's move on.
- Let's move on and talk about the most important, most essential, most cherished doctrine we have as Christians. In fact, unlike the last number of weeks, the subject this morning is so important that all of Christendom rises or falls on it. The resurrection is the crown jewel in the pyramid. Without it the whole pyramid crumbles.
- Ethan received a domino set from his grandparents for Christmas. We've had fun making a trail of dominoes and then knocking them down. The resurrection of Christ is the first domino. If it falls then everything else falls. There is no more important doctrine than the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Proposition

- **Without this gospel there isn't really much hope for any of us**

Background and Setting

- Not only is the resurrection the crown jewel of Christianity it's the crown jewel of this letter. Paul saves the best for last. The whole of chapter 15 is about the resurrection. 58 verses worth. And the reason Paul spends so much time on this one subject is because if Paul can get the Corinthians to think orthodox thoughts about the resurrection everything else will fall into place.
- The problem wasn't that the Corinthians denied the resurrection of Christ. The problem as they denied their own resurrection. And so Paul's objective in this chapter is to first remind the Corinthians of how central the resurrection is to all of Christianity. And that's what we'll focus on this morning. Then starting in verse 12, which we'll look at next week, he kind of plays a what if game. What if there is no such thing as a resurrection from the dead. But first things first, verses 1-11, and the importance of this Christian teaching. Without the resurrection of Christ there's really no hope for any of us. Everything hinges on it.

Organizational Sentence

- **From verses 1-11 Paul describes three (3) parts to the good news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead**

Transition

From [verses 1 and 2](#). The [first part](#) of the good news. **Without the good news of the resurrection there is no salvation—for anyone.** Listen again. *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

Main Points

- It's good to remind ourselves of the things that really matter. Remember. Remember. Remember. Never forget. *I want to remind you of the gospel* Paul says. The implication is if something needs reminding it's possible to forget. It's possible to forget what the gospel is. Right now let us remember what we know to be true, what we confess, what we've staked our lives on. Salvation comes through the gospel alone. Without the good news of the resurrection there is no salvation—there is no hope for anyone.
- What does the word gospel mean? Seriously. I know it's a simple question but many people, even Christians, aren't clear as to what the word gospel means. Many of us have a fuzzy impressionistic picture of the gospel, we kind of know but the picture is a bit blurry and out of focus. Gospel simply means *good news*. I like how the [New Living Translation](#) treats verse 1 when it says *let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before*. The heart of the Christian message is good news.
- Now here's the more important question. What is the content of this good news? This is the part that's forgettable. What is it? That God loves you? Yeah, that's part of it. That He has a wonderful plan for your life. Yeah, that's part of it. But those statements by themselves are an incomplete picture of the gospel of Christianity. Paul spells out the core of this good news in [verse 3](#). *Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures*. Nowhere else in the Bible is there a more succinct and decisive summary of what Christianity is all about than [1 Corinthians 15:3](#). *Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*. What is the gospel? Christ died for sins. On the cross Jesus paid a debt that you and I were unable to pay on our own. He was buried. In other words, he died. And he was raised. The resurrection. There would be no gospel, no good news, if Jesus had stayed dead.¹ The death and resurrection of Christ for our sins, for all who believe and *hold firmly* to that good news, is at the heart of Christianity.
- For just a second I want to focus on [verse 2](#). *By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain*. There is a razor's edge to this verse. It cuts two ways—both positively and negatively. Positively, the gospel, *Christ died for sins*, is a message of salvation. *By this gospel you are saved*. Salvation from what? From the consequences of sin. Salvation from death and eternal conscious punishment in hell—both of which God is completely justified in meting out because of the seriousness of sin. The means by which salvation comes is holding firmly onto this truth, that Christ died for your sins.

¹ John Piper, *God is the Gospel*, p. 29.

- There are a lot of gospels out there. There's the gospel according to Homer Simpson. There's the gospel according to The Sopranos. People are so desperate for good news of any kind they'll even create their own belief system. One of the newer fad gospels is called Yoism. Have you heard of it? Yoism operates and evolves over the internet. It's based on the open source principle that the combined wisdom of a collective group produces truth. It is a system of belief that is created through a continual process of refinement and dialogue among the believers themselves.
- The razor's edge of [verse 2](#) here says that if you hold to some other gospel, some different kind of good news, some perverted gospel other than the one spelled out here, if your hope of salvation is in something other than in Christ alone then there is no salvation. *You have believed in vain. There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.*² Salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. There is only one gospel. Period.
- There are far too many religious people in this world, far too many religious people in this community who are holding fast to a gospel, some gospel, a different gospel than Christ. And those gospels don't save. If you are holding firmly onto something other than the death of Christ for your sins then you're holding firmly to a raft with a hole. In the end you're sunk. It doesn't matter how much you attend church, how many good things you do, it doesn't matter how unselfish you are, it doesn't matter if you call yourself a Christian, it doesn't matter how moral you think you are. If your hope is in something other than the Christ who dies to pay the penalty for sin then you have believed in vain. All hope is lost. **Without the good news of the resurrection there is no salvation—for anyone.**
- Is that narrow minded? Is that naïve? Is that intolerant? No, it's just the truth. And I beg of you, plant your life in the soil of Christ's death and resurrection, take your stand there and nothing will uproot you—*neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Transition

The [second part](#) to the good news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead comes from [verses 3-8](#). **This gospel is reliable.** *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

- The content of the gospel isn't some pie in the sky, hallucinogenic pipe dream. It's grounded in historical fact. The gospel is verifiable history of the first order—eye witness history. You don't have to turn in your mind to the coat check person to believe in the resurrection. There is a rational, reasonable, historical basis for the resurrection. It isn't hearsay, urban legend, third hand knowledge, grapevine material, or old wives tale. **The gospel is reliable.**

² Acts 4:12.

- What Paul's says from [verse 3](#) on is of *first importance*. In other words, there is nothing more important. What he received as good news he passed on to the Corinthians. By the way, that word *passed on* is a technical word used for the handing down instruction or teaching.³ Basically the word means tradition. In this sense, what Paul's outlining here is the tradition about Jesus. Think about how long it takes for tradition to develop. They don't develop overnight. Or even after several years. By the time Paul writes 1 Corinthians, some twenty years after Jesus' death, what he is about to tell them is well entrenched. It's been handed down, passed on like a well guarded family recipe. It hasn't changed. It's tradition. What he's about to recount to them are things believed by Christians from the very outset of the movement. Sacred stuff. Christians from day one have always believed that Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures. That he was buried. That he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. That he appeared.
- Very briefly let me say something about the phrase *according to the Scriptures*. Let me ask you a question? Who determines what Jesus' death means? Did you know it can't mean whatever we want it to mean? His death means something very specific. And that meaning is controlled by what the Old Testament Scriptures say, *according to the Scriptures*, not a particular meaning we decide to give it. At the core of Jesus' death, according to what the Old Testament says, is a substitution. His death for ours. Isaiah 53:5 *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*⁴ He died for sin. Our sin. In our place. For us. Instead of us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* He died the death we all deserve and we get his righteousness which none of us deserve. That is God's good news.
- But Christ didn't stay dead. The grave couldn't hold him. *He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*⁵ There's that phrase again. The earliest Christian belief about Jesus was formed by what the Scriptures said. Psalm 16:10. Isaiah 53:10. Hosea 6:2. He rose. But if he didn't rise then death wins and there really isn't much hope for any of us. But he did rise. And people witnessed it. Lots of people. Eye witnesses galore. Peter saw him. The Twelve saw him. Five hundred saw him. James saw him. Paul himself saw him. This gospel is reliable stuff.
- As a history major in college I learned a bit about the kind of evidence that matters. Some kinds of evidences are just better than others. My junior and senior years I worked with a professor researching the first 100 graduates of Wheaton College. I spent countless hours in historical archives, poring over primary source materials, searching for the only one kind of material that carries any weight with a historian—first hand, eye witness accounts. And that's the kind of evidence that surrounds Jesus' resurrection. It's first hand, eye-witness, reliable kind of stuff.
- So reliable that Paul, near the end of his life says in Acts 20:24 *I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.* He along with all the other apostles didn't die in their rocking chairs at the old folks home they died testifying to what they saw and witnessed. Does anyone in their right mind die for a lie or a myth or a legend? This

³ Louw and Nida, #3087.

⁴ Other scriptures include Romans 5:6, 8; 8:32; 1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Eph. 5:2; Titus 2:14; Gal. 1:4.

⁵ The phrase "according to the Scriptures" cf. Ps. 16:10-11; Isa. 53:10b; Hos. 6:2.

gospel—Jesus dead, Jesus buried, Jesus alive, is reliable historical fact. Paul staked his life on it. I'd stake my life on it? Have you?

Transition

Look with me now at the third part to the good news about Jesus' resurrection from the dead From [verses 9-11](#). **Without the good news of the resurrection there really is no hope of a changed life.** *For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11 Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

- Every single person, past or present, who has encountered the resurrected Christ can testify to what Paul says in [verses 9-11](#). Jesus Christ changes lives. You heard John's testimony earlier. But if Jesus Christ is still in the grave my life, your life can't change, won't change. But Christ is alive. And that means there's hope.
- Paul summarizes his own personal transformation with the most unusual language. In [verse 9](#) he reminds us of his life before Christ. It was ugly. He was a persecutor, a murderer of those who believed in Jesus. And it that condition he says Christ *appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born*, [verse 8](#). The word Paul uses to describe himself, *abnormally born*, is the word for miscarriage. Paul's life before Christ was so messed up. His life was a miscarriage. But God resurrected his dead miscarried life. God changed Paul's life. *And his grace to me was not without effect*, [verse 10](#). Whatever he was before, he's different now all because God poured out his special favor.
- And Paul's experience of a changed life is the experience of every single person who has met the risen Christ—mine included. No matter how messed up your life might be God is in the business of changing lives. The resurrection is the proof. He brought Christ back from the dead. He can change us.
- But what kind of change does God bring about? I want you to turn to Romans 6:6-11 because Romans 6 describes the kind of change the resurrection is meant to bring about. Listen. *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*
- The kind of life change the resurrection promises is a life free from slavery to sin. Like quicksand sin sucks down and swallows up all who are stuck in it. But the resurrection, if we receive what Christ has done on our behalf, the resurrection is meant to free us from a life of sin.

Conclusion

- The story goes after a service a woman approached a pastor and asked, "So what happened with Jesus after the Resurrection?" "Well, he ascended into heaven and he's still alive," the

pastor said. "I know he was resurrected, but he's alive?" she said. "Yes, he's alive." "Alive? ALIVE?! Why didn't you tell me?!" For the next two weeks, she telephoned everyone she knew and exclaimed, "Jesus is alive! Did you know he's alive?!"⁶

- Not only is he alive but he will change your life.
- [Dorothy Sayers](#) once wrote, "And the third day he rose again." What are we to make of this? One thing is certain: if [Jesus] were God and nothing else, his immortality means nothing to us; if he was man and no more, his death is no more important than yours or mine. But if he really was both God and man, then when the man Jesus died, God died too; and when the God Jesus rose from the dead, man rose too, because they were one and the same person. ... There is the essential doctrine, of which the whole elaborate structure of Christian faith and morals is only the logical consequence. Now we may call that doctrine exhilarating, or we may call it devastating; we may call it revelation, or we may call it rubbish; but if we call it dull, then words have no meaning at all."⁷
- Without this gospel, the good news of the resurrection there isn't really much hope for any of us. But praise be to God. Jesus is alive. Let's pray.

⁶ Eric Reed, Leadership Weekly (4-13-04)

⁷ Dorothy L. Sayers in *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Careless Rage for Life*. "Christianity Today," Vol. 39, no. 4.