

Everything Hangs on the Resurrection!

Scripture text: 1 Cor. 15:1-11, 12-20, 53-55

(Sermon summary – March 31, 2024)

Introduction: What a tremendous defense of the resurrection the apostle Paul gives us in 1 Cor. 15. We want to look briefly at the structure of our text and see how important it is to the meaning of the passage. Paul says he wants to remind them of the **gospel he preached**, which in Greek was the “evangel” (good news) with which he “evangelized” the Corinthians (**same Greek root** for both “Gospel” and “preach”). It was the good news they had received (embraced); the good news on which they took their stand (tied their boat to this mooring, staked their lives here); the good news by which they were *being saved* (rescued/delivered, in the present continuous tense); the good news to which they needed to hold fast (lay hold of/take possession of/appropriate).

Paul’s introduction should whet our appetite for the content coming up, because next he dedicates several verses to a brief description of the essence of the Gospel. It’s probably the oldest Christian creed on record, clearly predating Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (~54 A.D.): it represents one of the first attempts to summarize the Gospel. So it likely goes back to those first years when the Gospel was circulating primarily in Jewish circles, when the church was grappling with its message under the influence of the Holy Spirit – how to proclaim and teach it so that new disciples could grasp it clearly and succinctly.

We find four basic elements: Christ died for our sins [on acct of/on behalf of/because of our sins], according to Scripture; He was buried [so He was truly dead, His body having been handled and wrapped, according to Jewish tradition, by multiple witnesses whose names are recorded]; He was raised on the third day, according to Scripture; He appeared to... At this point Paul launches into a litany of names and groups of multiple eyewitnesses, and concludes with himself [from Cephas and the twelve, to over 500 at once, and Paul writes at a time when most of these people could still be consulted personally; James, the brother of Jesus, all the apostles, and finally as to one untimely born, to Paul himself]. Do you get the impression that Paul understands this event to be of supreme relevance to the Gospel? To your *salvation* and mine?! **The historical accuracy of the biblical accounts matters!** The Gospel would be unintelligible apart from this rooting in history! It really happened, and it really affected their whole outlook and life course! But if it’s going to do the same for you, you’re going to have to **connect the dots!** And if that’s the case, do we see why one of the enemy’s most vicious attacks will be leveled precisely against the veracity and trustworthiness of the resurrection and the biblical accounts? And does history bear this out? In Paul’s own day, there were already naysayers claiming that Christ didn’t rise from the dead, and down through the centuries. The great irony is that in the 19th-century Christian theologians of liberal stripe began to parrot what skeptics and non-believers were saying, somewhat thanks to the scientific revolution that claimed “no human being can rise from the dead – anybody knows that!”

So what evidence can we give for the resurrection? Lessons from the resurrection:

1) Our God is alive and able to help us overcome in our trials, by the same power Jesus displayed at the cross is what He has made available to us through His resurrection and Holy Spirit. What power did He demonstrate there? Turning the other cheek when wronged, forgiving the worst crime in history, defeating sin, defeating the enemy of our souls, then defeating death by dying (Heb. 2:14-15) – what genius! But He’s the Author of life. When He walks through death’s gates, they fall at His feet. In the face of all the devastation wrought by humanity, God persevered with His plan, and He overcame – and He’s still doing so!

2) Evidence of the resurrection: **A)** Those women who served as first witnesses of the resurrection – the biblical writers would never have included these episodes if they could have avoided it. In their scheme of values, female testimonies weren’t important or valid (culture); it’s why the men had to go check it out and validate the women’s testimonies. But historically, the writers of the NT story could NOT avoid it – that’s the way it happened and they were committed to telling the truth! The women’s testimony in Scripture is living proof that it really happened! Ladies, take heart – your witness matters – to God and to history! You will be vindicated. So be convinced by the biblical witness and by the Holy Spirit – that is your hope!

B) The New Testament itself – its very *existence* is living proof of the resurrection. How deeply valued was its testimony because it changed lives, changed how people did “community” (family, tribes, nations), changed the course of history itself! The impact that it has had worldwide points to a power far beyond appearances; it’s the power of God’s own life-giving Breath that breathed on and through those who bore their witness in a way that this message breathes new life into those who receive it, stake their lives on it, and hold fast to it – it is our salvation! There is so much fake news today, complications in communication, breakdown in social trust, in belief systems, in

the concept of truth; so much greed, envy, unscrupulous seeking security in money, character assassination – really makes everything more difficult. Is there any wonder that Jesus asked whether He would find faith on the earth when He returns? But He has assured us that though heaven and earth will pass away, His Word will never be obsolete.

C) The Christian tradition of Sunday worship – those “little” people, the Christians of the first century were not the shakers and movers of society; they were by and large the underdogs, the marginalized, slaves, etc. But before the century had ended, they had already accomplished, under the influence of the Gospel, a social transformation of enormous significance: their day of worship was no longer the Jewish Sabbath, but the day of Jesus’ resurrection, the first day of the week, which in spite of European calendars is NOT Monday, but Sunday (Rev. 1:10, Greek, ἡ κυριακὴ ἡμέρα = Latin *dies dominicus*; the day of Pentecost also fell on Sunday; 1 Cor. 16:2, Acts 20:7).

Yet even after we see that the historical record is very clear and there are excellent reasons to believe that Jesus really rose from the dead, why then are there still so many skeptics? Why is humanity so hard-headed? Or is the problem more about hard hearts? According to the Bible, the ultimate question is not the one in the head – it’s not ultimately the intellectual questions that keep people from God, but the questions of the heart – stubbornness, preferring our own ways over God’s, ignorance and prejudice about what the Bible really teaches, and an unwillingness to seriously investigate and connect the dots!

Paul goes on to write in this passage, “If Christ is not raised, your faith is in vain; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). “Yet Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (v. 20). “Firstfruits” are always a promise regarding the rest of the harvest that’s yet to come. Because Jesus was indeed raised, this is **why we celebrate** the Lord’s Day on Sunday. It’s **why we have hope** even in the darkness. It’s **why we can keep going** even in the tough times. It’s **why life has meaning** and purpose, even in the face of tragedy and suffering! It’s the **why** of everything! Everything hangs on resurrection.

But you have to connect the dots! We have to see the **divine logic** in it, an inner coherence that, once perceived, leaves you permanently impacted! This is what makes sense of life itself: only the Author of Life could overcome death, i.e., swallow it down to its utter destruction! And because “God is love,” that’s exactly what Jesus was doing on the cross for our sakes! (cf. Isa. 25:7-8, 1 Cor. 15:53-55). What was happening at the cross had nothing to do with satisfying a “blood quota” or pacifying God’s wrath, or paying a penalty, as if God “needed” someone to suffer punishment in order for Him to forgive (that’s NOT the God of the Bible!). In dying on the cross, Jesus wasn’t “enabling” God to forgive, but faithfully enfleshing God’s forgiveness personally under the most stressful circumstances possible, representing the compassion and mercy that had always been in the Father’s heart. So in effect, Jesus was carrying out Isaiah’s vision (chp. 25), the banquet for all peoples where the main course was the destruction of the shroud that covers all nations: the Sovereign LORD was swallowing up death with His own indestructible life (Heb. 7:16), devouring it (1 Cor. 15:54), though the news would not become public until Easter morning: “The Lord is risen!”

3) So add your voice to the chorus of worldwide historical testimony! *This* is the invitation of Easter! Any other message you try to transmit or contribute to is ultimately going to be lost in the emptiness of space, drowned out amidst the cacophony of other voices, muted by the raging winds of time. **Only one message** is going to *survive to the end*. Jesus said “Heaven and earth will ultimately pass away” – so how much more will you and I pass away, and our little momentary voices raised against the storm! But “*my Word,*” says Jesus, “will never pass away!” Won’t you join your voice to the great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, gathered around the throne?! We merely rehearse His praise here, and it’s glorious! So what do you think it will be like there in His very presence as we “Praise the Name of the LORD our God”?