

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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INTRODUCTION

1. Today we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. As we do that, I want to take you to a text of Scripture where the apostle Paul had to address a doctrinal problem in the church.
3. The problem was not about Christ's resurrection but their own.
4. Since Christ rose from the dead, they too would be raised with Him to eternal life.
5. The text I'm referring to is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.
6. Please take God's Word and turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15.
7. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-20.
8. Jesus resurrected from the grave on the third day after he was murdered on a cross.
9. That is the testimony of Scripture.
10. Matthew 20:17-19 (NKJV) 17 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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11. Earlier in Matthew 16:21, Jesus told them the same thing after Peter had confessed Him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
12. Matthew 16:21 (NKJV) From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.
13. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith.
14. And it is key to our resurrection.
15. 1 Corinthians 15:17-23 (NKJV) 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile (worthless); you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (most to be pitied). 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.
16. This is the message to the Corinthians.
17. Because Jesus rose so will they, and so will we.

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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18. He gives 3 certainties of this in our text.
19.
 - I. The Certainty of the Gospel Message (vv.1-4)
 - II. The Certainty of Many Witnesses (vv.5-11)
 - III. The Certainty of the Truthfulness of Scripture (vv.12-20)
20. Let's look first at *the certainty of the gospel message*.

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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I. The Certainty of the Gospel Message (vv.1-4)

A. Its Declaration Has Been for Ages (vv.1-2)

1. Paul says in verse 1, “Moreover, brethren, I declare (make known) to you the gospel which I preached to you.”
2. He identifies what the gospel is in vv.3-4 that “Christ dies for our sins...that He was buried, and that He arose again the third day.”
3. This is what he *declared* to the Corinthians
 - a) According to Acts 18 there were some who opposed and some who believed
 - b) Those who opposed “blasphemed” (v.6)
 - c) Those who believed were “many of the Corinthians” (v.8)

Acts 18:8 (NKJV) 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

3. So when Paul came to Corinth he did not come “with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Cor.2:1-5).

4. In other words, he came with one message and one purpose
 - a) His message was “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”.
 - b) His purpose was that “their faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

This is still true today...

5. The gospel is “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”
6. The gospel is that your “faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”
7. The first church, according to Acts 8:4, “went everywhere preaching the word.”
8. The church today is to do the same

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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Jesus told His disciples after His resurrection in Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) to 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

9. The gospel is the declaration of the church

Since it is such, it is also the greatest target from Satan.

John MacArthur aptly says, “If the resurrection is eliminated, the life-giving power of the gospel is eliminated, the deity of Christ is eliminated, salvation from sin is eliminated, and eternal life is eliminated” (1 Corinthians).

B. Its Commitment to It Has Always Been the Same (v.2)

Paul says that this gospel which he preached to them, which also they received and in which they stood, was also the gospel “by which also you are saved.”

The gospel message is so simple that it is “foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (NKJV) I Cor.1:18.

The Corinthians were to “hold fast” to “that word which

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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(Paul) preached.”

The words “hold fast” (katecho) means to “continue belief” “possess,” “occupy” (DBL Greek) or “hold firm” (EDNT)

This is the perseverance of the saints.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (NKJV) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The gospel has been declared for ages, its commitment to it has always been the same and...

- C. Its Source Has Always Been the Holy Scriptures (v.3)
 - 1. Paul says he “delivered” this gospel “according to the Scriptures” in vv.3-4 (he mentions it twice)
 - 2. Our gospel presentation is “according to the Scriptures”
 - a) The “Holy Scriptures” is a reference to the OT

I mentioned already that “The Old Testament spoke of the suffering and resurrection of Christ” (The MacArthur Study Bible) as we saw in Psalm 16:9-10.

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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- b) The gospel that Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians was “according to the Scriptures” and “not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead” according to Galatians 1:11.

- c) This “gospel” has been referred to as:
 - (1) “The gospel of the kingdom” (Mat.4:23)
 - (2) “The gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mk.1:1)
 - (3) “The gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24)
 - (4) “The gospel of God” (Rom.1:1)
 - (5) “The gospel of His Son” (Rom.1:9)
 - (6) “The gospel of Christ” (Rom.1:16)
 - (7) “The gospel of peace” (Rom.10:15)
 - (8) “The gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor.4:4)
 - (9) “The gospel of your salvation” (Eph.1:13)
 - (10) “The glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim.1:11)

D. Its Content Has Always Been the Same (vv.3-4)

- 1. “Christ died for our sins” (v.3)
 - a) Rom.5:6 says, “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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b) Rom.5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

2. Christ was “buried” (v.4)

Mark 15:42-47 says, “Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. 45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph observed where He was laid.”

3. Christ “rose again the third day” (v.4)

a) Mat.12:38-40 - “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

- b) John 2:18-21 - “So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” 19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.”

II. The Certainty of Many Witnesses (vv.5-11)

A. Cephas (v.5)

“And that He was seen by Cephas”

1. This is a reference to Peter

John 1:40-42 says, “One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone)."

2. There are only three references to Jesus' appearance to Peter after His resurrection
 - a) 1 Cor.15:5
 - b) Lk.24:34 - "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"
 - c) John 21:14-25

B. The Twelve (v.5)

"Then by the twelve"

1. It was actually the eleven but often they were still referred to as the twelve before Judas was replaced
2. Three references are given
 - a) Luke 24:33-36 (Thomas absent) - "So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" 35 And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. 36 Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you."

- b) John 20:24-26 (Thomas present) - "Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

- c) John 21:14-25

C. Over Five Hundred Brethren at Once (v.6)

Scripture gives no indication of who these people were or where Jesus appeared to them.

D. James (v.7)

"After that He was seen by James"

We are not told which James Jesus appeared to. It was "either one of the two so-named apostles (Son of Zebedee or son of Alphaeus; cf., Mk.3:17-18) or even

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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James the half-brother of the Lord” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

It is very probable that it was James the Lord’s half-brother because before Jesus’ resurrection he and his brothers did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah (cf. Jn.7:5).

E. The Apostles (v.7)

“Then by all the apostles”

1. Calling the twelve or eleven “apostles” speaks of their commission
2. The first appearance was to confirm to them His resurrection (Lk.24:33-36)
3. The second appearance was to commission them
 - a) Lk.24:46-49 - “Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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- b) Acts 1:1-9 - “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. 4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Mein Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”

F. The Apostle Paul (vv.8-11)

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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“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. 10 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.”

1. Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus

Acts 9:3-6 - “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. 4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." 6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

2. Paul was saved and commissioned to preach the Gospel to the “Jew first” and then to the “Greek” (Acts 9:6)

So we have the certainty of the gospel message and the certainty of many witnesses to the resurrection. Now notice:

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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III. The Certainty of the Truthfulness of Scripture (vv.12-20)

“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? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 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. 16 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! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

- A. The Scripture is on Trial with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - 1. If Jesus didn't rise then the Scripture is a lie
 - 2. And if the Scripture is false then you are not saved and we have no hope

- B. The Scripture Affirms with Accuracy and Detail that Jesus Resurrected from the Dead
 - 1. You have the testimony of those who saw Him after He rose (vv.5-11)

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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2. You have the testimony of the women in Luke 24:2-3
3. You have the testimony of the writers of Scripture (Jn.20:2-9)
4. You have the testimony of the angels who said, “He is not here, for He is risen, as He said, come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Mat.28:6).
5. You have the testimony of the guards which is the lie that proves the resurrection (Mat.28:4, 11)

“And the guards shook for fear of Him, and became like dead men...now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened.”

- C. According to 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 if Jesus Did Not Rise from the Dead It is All a Lie
1. The preaching of Christ is unnecessary (v.12)
 2. The empty tomb is a mystery that is explained away (the guards) (v.13)
 3. All preaching is worthless (v.14)
 4. Saving faith is no different than common faith (v.14)

The Certainty of the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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5. The testimony of the apostles cannot be believed (v.15)
 6. The testimony of God cannot be believed (v.15)
 7. The resurrection of the dead is not possible (v.16)
 8. The issue of sin is not resolved (v.17)
 9. The dead in Christ perish (v.18)
 10. The hope of all believers is “most pitiable” (v.19)
- D. But Jesus Did Rise (v.20)

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

1. This is the heart of the gospel
2. Paul said in Acts 17:30-31 - “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

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1 Corinthians 15:1-20

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CONCLUSION

1. As we conclude our message this morning, I want to ask you to bow your heads and pray with me.
2. And as we pray ask yourself “Do I know the resurrected Jesus of the Bible and have I committed my life to Him?”
3. Let’s pray.