

Throughout the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote about a sequence of serious difficulties in the church in Corinth, such as lawsuits and immorality in chapter 6, marriage and singleness in chapter 7, idolatry and personal rights in chapters 8-10, worship services and The Lord's Supper in chapter 11, and spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues in chapters 12-14. Now here in chapter 15, the issue was doubting that the resurrection of Jesus guarantees our resurrection.

We learn this is the issue in chapter 15, verse 12, where Paul wrote "...*how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*" None of the other difficulties in Corinth was as vital as this issue. Paul kept the most significant matter to the end of the letter.

**The bodily resurrection of Jesus is indispensable...**

**For preaching, for being saved, and for being Biblical.**

Just look at this last year. From last Easter Sunday to today. Even though we could not gather together last year to celebrate Easter Sunday, it was the fact of the resurrection that kept us going through this pandemic, and the political tensions, the racial tensions, the economic struggles, and the string of violent actions. The resurrection is our stabilizer for our lives.

### **1. For preaching. (v.1)**

In verse 1, Paul introduced his teaching on the resurrection of the dead with the words, "*Now I would remind you, brothers...*"

This is not new. He is reminding them of what they had already heard and already knew.

Consider the contrast with what Paul wrote in Chapter 12:1, "*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.*"

The teaching on spiritual gifts was new to the church in Corinth.

But the teaching on the resurrection was not new. Paul was reminding.

Do you know why the resurrection is not new to the church in Corinth? Because they heard Paul preach on it many times.

Paul would never preach without preaching the resurrection.

Look at verse 1, Paul wrote, "*the gospel I preached to you, which you received...*"

They received the gospel of the resurrection.

They currently stand in the gospel of the resurrection.

And now they are being reminded of the gospel of the resurrection.

### **2. For being saved. (v.2)**

The gospel is that through which we are being saved.

Verse 2, "...*and by which you are being saved.*" The present tense form of this verb tells us a lot. It tells us that salvation is a continuing process as well as an

accomplished fact. The Savior is now actively saving us.

This is the important thing to grasp – Paul is showing not just that Jesus rose again in the past tense on that first Resurrection Sunday, but also that Jesus continues to live.

Paul had more to say within verse 2. It was a pastoral care for the souls of the believers in Corinth. Since the resurrection is under attack by some in Corinth, Paul was concerned that others not fall away from their faith. This concern is exactly why Paul wrote in verse 2, “*if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.*”

This is a probing question Paul has for them, that we can ask ourselves - did you embrace Christianity at the beginning, but since then you have loosened your grip?

In the beginning, they believed. But they need to continue believing. To hold fast.

Paul is concerned that they may not be holding fast to what they had initially believed. Drifting away from the gospel was a matter of perpetual concern for the church. Hebrews 2:1, “*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*”

Here Paul was urging them, with their salvation at stake, to hold tenaciously and purposefully to the resurrection of Christ physically from the dead. It is necessary. You cannot be saved without believing in the physical resurrection of Christ.

### **3. For being Biblical. (v.3-4)**

Verse 3, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received...*”

When and where and from whom did Paul receive the gospel? In Acts 9, the conversion story of Paul shows that his name was Saul, it seems that it was then that Paul was given by Ananias the form of the gospel that is written here. Paul started preaching Jesus right away. Later, Paul visited Corinth and spent a year and a half preaching there.

There are 2 reasons Paul knew what he had preached to them 5 years earlier: 1) this was the same form of the summary of the gospel that Paul was initially taught to memorize, and 2) Paul described it with the words “I delivered to you...” which is a technical phrase for a rabbi officially entrusting his disciples a set of teaching. They all had it memorized! It goes like this,

“*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,*  
*that He was buried,*

*that He was raised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in accordance with the Scriptures...*”

and it includes what we will look at next time from verse 5, “*that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*”

Each of the four phrases begins with the word “*that*.”

The grammar shows that Christ is the center. Christ died, Christ was buried, Christ was raised, Christ appeared to people.

Two of the phrases have this additional phrase, “*in accordance with the Scriptures.*”

The first line is supported historically by the second line. He died and he was buried. The burial confirms the historical fact of his death.

The third line is supported historically by the fourth line. He was raised and He appeared alive to a sequence of persons. When Christ showed Himself to witnesses, those appearances confirmed the historical fact of the resurrection.

The word “and” joins the lines together to form one complete statement. Christ died and was buried and was raised and appeared. No part of the statement can be cut out, or it all unravels.

The first phrase shows who it is – Christ the anointed one, and what He did – He died. Why he died. For our sins. Jesus said at the Last Supper “My body was given for you.” He stood in our place for us. Jesus died because the punishment for our sins fell onto Jesus as our substitute.

Then Christ was buried. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each wrote about the burial. In the law of God given to the Jews, a day ended at sunset, and a new day began at sunset. So, at sunset on Good Friday, it would become Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath Day, a day of rest. The law of God said that a deceased person must be removed from the cross and buried prior to nightfall to avoid a defiling of the land.

Jesus was buried in the tomb of a powerful man. The urgent task of burying Jesus before the evening when the Sabbath started was a task that fell to a man named Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Council. He was a secret follower of Jesus. The disciples of Jesus had already run away, as the Bible tells us. Joseph completed this task, with the help of a man named Nicodemus.

Jesus’ burial was not in a 6 foot deep hole in the ground the way we think of burying in graves. Instead, it was in a vault cut into a cliff or wall of rock. The door of that vault was closed by rolling a huge round stone shaped like a wheel in front of the door to block the door and seal the dead body inside. Paul’s Greek word “buried” here is close to the Greek word for “tomb.” Jesus was entombed in a tomb, where His body was encased in rock. No one could steal His body.

Jesus was buried in the tomb of an eminent member of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council, and the placing of the body into the tomb was witnessed by several identifiable persons – Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of Jesus, and a woman named Joanna, the wife of a high official named Chusa, the chief of staff in the reign of King Herod Antipas, who had the royal title of Tetrach of Galilee. The reason the Bible gives us all of this information is that the burial of Jesus was a

well-attested historical fact, not a legend.

The Bible provides us not only with the names of the women who witnessed the burial of Jesus in Joseph's tomb, but the Bible also provides us with the names of the women who came to the tomb early on the morning of the first day of the week, Sunday, as the first witnesses to the fact of the resurrection.

A ruckus ensued. Let me read Matthew 28:11-15, "*... some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.'*" So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day."

Do you see why the Bible tells us this? Even the opponents agree that the tomb was empty. Since both the supporters and the opponents of Jesus agree that the tomb was empty, it is verified.

Because Jesus' burial was verified, His resurrection was verified. Before His body had time to decay, Jesus was raised by God the Father. Jesus had died of his own volition, but He was raised by God the Father.

What about the words, "on the third day"? Paul did not write that Christ was raised 3 days later, which would be 24 hours times 3, which is 72 hours. We often assume He was raised 72 hours later? NO. That is not what Paul said, and that is not the memorized statement, and that is not the historical facts. Look at it carefully. It says, "That He was raised on the third day." Let me explain. The Jewish day began at sunset. Christ died and was buried on Friday afternoon, but just a few hours later, Saturday began, in what Americans today would call Friday evening. And when the sun set on Saturday, at that moment was the start of the third day. But sometime before the women arrived, and before the sun rose on Easter Sunday morning, Jesus was raised alive. The resurrection occurred sometime after sunset on Saturday night and before sunrise on Sunday morning. He was raised on the third day.

**Conclusion** Let me tell you a story about how relevant the resurrection is to us.

SI – this past week, I was supposed to pick up my daughter from school. Before I left home, I was supposed to get something out of the freezer for her, that she needed to give to her brother as an April Fool's day joke, before she gave her brother the actual birthday present. A few days before this event, she came up with this idea and we talked about how I was going to remember. She put a note on the freezer, and she was also going to tell Siri to remind her just prior to my departure to take that item out of the freezer and bring it along. Well, Siri did remember to remind my daughter. My daughter remembered to remind me. I received her text. I even replied to the text. But just a few minutes later, when I arrived home, I

walked right past the freezer with the note on it. I did not remember to open the freezer and get my daughter's package out of the freezer. I got to school and she said, "Dad, did you remember my package?" I said, "Oh no, I cannot believe that I forgot." I was really upset with myself. I am good with administration and details. So, when I showed weakness in the area that I thought was my strength.

What kept me from ruining the rest of my day? The resurrection. Without the resurrection, there would be no gospel. Without the gospel, there would be no answer to false guilt for God Himself to say my mistake does not define me. My mistake does not have the power to hijack the rest of my day.

What sees us through our personal failures, our disappointments in ourselves or in another, our struggle with anger, fear or lust? What carries us through the disillusionment of seeing humanity's evil on public trial? What can you hold onto through a marriage fight, a sibling fight, stress at work or at home, a pandemic, a contentious election in the middle of a pandemic, plus personal loneliness and loss and grief? What do you take a grip on? If you hold on tight to the wrong thing, you won't have any stability at all. We can hold fast to Christ who rose, because He is holding fast to us.

The gospel is intended to be the central power around which your life revolves. The resources of the gospel are sufficient to meet every challenge you face. The resurrection is our stabilizer for our lives. The centrality of the resurrection brings balance to a sinner's life.

The gospel is something outside of us, what we call objective truth. Our relationship to God does not depend upon how we feel about ourselves, nor on our sense of our progress in the Christian life at this moment or at any given moment.

The gospel does not depend on how sorry we are for what we have done, or what we have not done, as the case may be.

Let's take a more serious case. How about Paul our author? He used to kill Christians, before he became an apostle. How was he supposed to overcome that true guilt? Listen as Paul wrote about it in 1 Timothy 1, starting with verse 13, *"...formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."*

By the gospel, the risen Christ Himself becomes our functional identity. Without our effort or work, we are put into perfect relationship to God. Not by our

own contribution, we gain for free a precious access to all the benefits of union with Christ. Christ meets us where we are.

The resurrection is indispensable. The resurrection cannot be left out, disregarded, or neglected.