

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

Today is a special day in the life of the church. It's a day where we remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe that everyday we should remember this not just one day because it is the heart of the Gospel. The resurrection is the key to your life. It is the key to your believing. It is the key to your understanding about God. It is the key to that unlocks the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is the foundation to everything we believe and do as believers in Jesus Christ.

When you examine the preaching ministry of Peter and Paul, you see that the resurrection is at the heart of the Gospel. Paul raised a question in 1 Corinthians 15:12-16 when he said, "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." In other words, if there is no resurrection, why are we preaching there is? If there is no resurrection, why are we preaching that Christ was raised from the dead? Why are we preaching at all? Because if "Christ is not risen,...our preaching is empty and your faith is empty" and we are "found false witnesses of God." If there is no resurrection and Christ did not rise from the dead, then we're liars and the world is right! And we all might as well go and worship the Easter bunny with them. But Christ did rise! And if you don't believe that basic

truth then you are still in your sins—you are not saved.

Listen to what the New Testament proclaims about this wonderful truth that is at the heart of the Gospel: In Matthew 17:9 after Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John he said: “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.” If there is no resurrection then why did Jesus say this? He believed He would rise on the third day. The angel repeated that truth in Matthew 28:6 when he said to the women: “He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.” In the next verse, Matthew 28:7, the angel told the women to “go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead.” In John 2:19-22 Jesus said, “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. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

The first sermon preached after Jesus’ resurrection was on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. In verses 22-24 Peter said, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” In chapter 3 of Acts, as Peter is speaking to the people following the healing of the lame man, he says, “You denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses” (vv.14-15). In chapter 4 as they are before the rulers, elders and scribes, giving an answer to this healing, Peter says in verse 10: “Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom

God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the heart of the Gospel. It is the heart of the Bible. The Old Testament spoke of it as well as the New. In Psalm 16:10 David says, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” “Peter applies David's hope of Psalm 16:10 to Christ in Acts 2:27-28, indicating that these verses prophesied that Christ would be resurrected (Acts 2:24ff.). This was not fulfilled by David because David died and was buried (Acts 2:29); instead, this passage spoke of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:31; cf. Acts 13:35)” (Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*).

The New Testament gives us a fuller explanation of the death and resurrection of Christ and places great emphasis on His resurrection. Paul makes reference to the resurrection of Christ in Romans chapter 6 and 7 when speaking of the new life of the believer. In chapter 6, verse 4 he says, “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” In verse 9 he says, “Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.” In chapter 7, verse 4, he says, “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another--to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.” When Paul writes to the Thessalonians he recounts his time with them and their response to the gospel. In verses 9-10 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, he says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” To Timothy Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:8, “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel.” The

resurrection is the gospel!

And as we have been learning in the past several weeks, it is the message of the church. God left us here for one purpose—to preach Jesus who has been raised from the dead! We have talked about using the law as the convicting power of sin. We have talked about preaching the bad news of coming judgment.

Now I want to talk about the most essential element of the gospel—the resurrection. It is sad that the church uses only this day to bring recognition to it because it is the heart of the gospel. And if we're preaching the gospel regularly then we are speaking of the resurrection of Jesus Christ regularly because we are certain of the resurrection.

I want to invite you to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 where Paul talks about the resurrection with this kind of certainty.

He says, “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, 5 and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 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. 12 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.”

Notice in verses 1-4 *the certainty of the gospel message.*

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.”
 - a) Paul declared the gospel to the Corinthians
 - b) According to Acts 18 there were some who opposed and some who believed
 - c) Those who opposed “blasphemed” (v.6)
 - d) Those who believed were “many of the Corinthians” (v.8)
2. So Paul says when I came to Corinth I did not come “with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect” (1 Cor.1:17).
3. He elaborates further in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 regarding his message to them

He says, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not 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.”

4. In other words, he came with one message and one purpose
 - a) The message was “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” and this was preached “not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”
 - b) His purpose was that “their faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”
5. Paul was not the only one who declared the gospel in this manner

In Acts 6:8-10, Stephen who was “full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.”

6. The gospel is the declaration of the church
 - a) It was declared by the apostles - Mat.10:5-7

“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received,

freely give.”

- b) It was declared by the seventy disciples - Lk.10:1

“After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.”

What was their message? Verse 9 says, “The kingdom of God.”

- c) It was declared by the Jerusalem church - Acts 8:4

“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”

- d) It was declared by Phillip - Acts 8:5-8

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.”

- 7. So Paul says, “I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain” (vv.1-3)

This message is the same message that has been declared for ages.

He tells us in verse 3 that:

- B. Its Source Has Always Been the Holy Scriptures (v.3)
1. Paul says he “delivered” this “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.
 - 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)

C. 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.”
 - 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 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.”
 - c) Matthew 28:1-8

II. The Certainty of Many Witnesses (vv.5-8)

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 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 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 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.”
 - 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 Me in 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)

"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:

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)
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 Its 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)

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.”

CONCLUSION

1. As we conclude our message this morning, I want to ask you to bow you 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. After we pray we're going to share together in the Lord's Supper and "remember" what Jesus did for us.
4. Let's pray.