

## The Certainty of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)

*"Why do you seek the living among the dead? (Luke 24:5)*

Early Sunday morning, the women had come to the tomb bringing spices with which they were going to anoint Jesus' body. An angel met them there with that critically important question. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Jesus wasn't there. The tomb was empty. Because death could not hold the Son of God.

Jesus said:

*I lay down My life for the sheep. (John 10:15)*

*No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10:18)*

Of course, that is exactly what we celebrate this morning, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No Christian doctrine is more important. Without Jesus being raised from the dead, there would be no Christianity. That is the very argument the Apostle Paul is making in our text this morning. Jesus is resurrected! We do not serve a dead prophet; we serve a living Savior and you need to be very certain of that. If you are to be saved from an eternity in hell, you need to confess Jesus as Lord and believe God has raised Him from the dead. (Romans 110:9)

Satan knows this is an essential doctrine. It's why he has tried to attack the resurrection from the very beginning and he is still attacking it today. But the only thing he can do is lie, because the resurrection is an historical fact. And the resurrection is central to the gospel.

Let's turn our attention now to Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15.

*Moreover, brethren, 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. (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)*

Paul is writing to Christians. This is the church in Corinth. They live in a wealthy city. They live in a worldly city. And if you read First and Second Corinthians, you might get the impression that they couldn't get anything right. This is a corrective letter. We know Paul wrote at least three letters to this church. We have two of them preserved in our New Testament, but he refers to a third and in all of the letters, he has to set them straight about a bunch of stuff they were doing wrong.

Yet still, Paul calls them "brethren". You see, you are saved by the grace of God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and although it is true that once you are saved, you should see some spiritual fruit in your lives, no Christian will ever be perfect while we walk around in these bodies of death. Your piety is not what you do that saves you; it is in Whom you trust. You have to trust Jesus and nothing else. You have to trust Jesus and nobody else. You can't trust yourself, because you certainly cannot live a life that is good enough to conform to God's standard.

Paul had preached the Gospel to these folks. Now, from these first two verses, we can see a list of events that every Christian must experience in order to be saved. First, the Gospel must be preached.

*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14)*

*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)*

The Gospel must be preached, not just by guys like me, who are called preachers, but by every Christian witnessing in his or her sphere of influence. Your duty as a Christian is to tell others about the great things God has done for you.

Then after the Gospel is preached, it must be received. A lot of people hear the Gospel, but don't respond. They don't have ears to hear. In the Parable of the soils, Jesus uses this wonderful metaphor to describe how the Gospel is received. The sower scatters the seed indiscriminately and it falls in various places. Some fell on the path, some fell on rocky ground, some fell among thorns, but only the seed that falls on good ground springs up and yields fruit. And when the Gospel is preached, only those who have been prepared by the Holy Spirit will receive it.

So Paul talks about a Gospel that is preached and received, but those who receive it must also stand in it. The Gospel needs to make an impact in your life. It's not good enough to simply recite a salvation prayer or sign a tract once upon a time and then go on living for yourself. You need to turn from a self-centered life to a God-centered life. You need to hold on to Jesus. If He is your Lord, that means you commit yourself to being obedient. You won't be perfect, but you have to yield to His Spirit. You have to strive for obedience and that means diving into His word to learn what He expects.

Paul says if you heard the Gospel preached and if you received it, and if you stand in it, you will be saved.

*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 ...*

But wait a sec; there is an "if" in there. There is a condition that must be fulfilled.

*...if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

You realize, don't you, that there are tares among the wheat. There are people who claim to be Christians, who really aren't. There are people who think they are Christians, who really aren't. It is possible to believe in vain. The Greek word means "without a cause or effect".

Paul is talking about phony faith. I could yammer on for hours about phony faith ... we see way too much of it in our culture. But let me just summarize: You have to believe in the Jesus of the Bible, not some Jesus you make up on your own. Too many people try to design their own Jesus, creating God in their own image. I hope you know how backward that is!

Don't pick and choose what you want to believe. Believe what the Bible says. And yes, you will find that some of what the Bible says will make you uncomfortable because you still sin. Get over it! Confess, repent, and turn back to the real Jesus Christ.

There were some in Corinth who had this exact problem and they were trying to make up their own gospel. But worse yet, they had become false teachers, bringing others down with them. Basically, they were saying "I believe Jesus died for me, but I can't buy that

resurrection stuff. That's just not reasonable!" So Paul had to set them straight by repeating the basics of the Gospel. What is it that we must believe about Jesus? And here it is:

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)*

Pretty simple, huh? Yes, it's simple; if it were any more difficult, we wouldn't get it. Jesus died for your sins ... and mine. He really died, and He was buried, but on the third day, He rose from the grave. And all this was predicted in the Scriptures ... our Old Testament. It was God's plan of redemption all along.

God is immaculately holy. He is perfectly righteous and our sin offends Him. He cannot stand to be in the presence of sin and He cannot stand to be in the presence of sinners. That's really bad news because all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Not only is God immaculately holy, He is also perfectly just. So every sin must be judged and condemned and the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) That's not just the death of your physical body, it's what the Bible calls the second death. It is an eternity of separation from God in Hell. It is an eternity of suffering, of dying ... but you never actually get to die. It's just a forever swim in the Lake of Fire where your worm will not die and your fire is never quenched.

But despite the fact that we are all despicable sinners who deserve nothing but an eternity in Hell, God still loves us. He loves you!

*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

That's why Jesus went to the cross. He suffered a billion eternities of Hell so you would not have to suffer your one.

*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)*

And all you have to do is just believe.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Just believe it is true. Pray for faith. Ask God to help you believe. Ask Him for the faith to believe. And then step out in faith, trusting Jesus alone for your salvation.

*... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)*

You can try to pay for your own sins ... bad idea. Or you can let Jesus pay for your sins. He's already done everything He needs to do.

*For "WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:13)*

Call on the name of Jesus, won't you?

The Gospel is true. Jesus' resurrection is proof that His sacrifice on the cross was accepted by the Father. We have witnesses ... lots of them. Look at verse 5: Paul tells us that ...

*... He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 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. (1 Corinthians 15:4-6)*

Lots of witnesses! Jesus was seen alive, after the crucifixion by over five hundred brethren at once and Paul says, most of them were still alive when he wrote the letter. He's challenging the Corinthians. "You don't believe me? I can give you names. Check it out for yourself. Jesus is alive. The tomb is empty!

*After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. (1 Corinthians 15:7-8)*

Paul also was a witness – he had seen the resurrected Christ, and who would have predicted that? Paul was the chief persecutor of the Christian Church and he confessed as much to Jesus Himself.

*So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' (Acts 22:19-20)*

But Jesus appeared to Paul and He appointed Paul to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Then this rabid, zealous Pharisee was used by God to write a third of our New Testament. Finally, he lost his head for his testimony of Christ. Literally. He was decapitated in Rome. In fact, all of the Apostles, except possibly John, suffered martyrdom and Church tradition says that even John was boiled in oil, but it didn't take and he survived. They were all willing to give up their lives for the truth of the Gospel, for the truth of the resurrection.

So yes, we can be absolutely certain that Jesus was raised from the dead. He lives today and forever more and you can have a living relationship with Him forever.

By the way, you are going to live forever. That's what Scripture promises. The only choice you have is where you're going to make your crib. Judgment is coming!

*And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:12-15)*

I really want to make sure my name is written in the Book of Life, don't you? If you trust Jesus, it is. And if it is, this is what you get to look forward to:

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself*

*will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*  
*(Revelation 21:1-4)*

I'm going to talk more about what the Bible has to say about our resurrection this evening at 6:00 pm. You're all welcome to come on back, but for now, let me leave you with one last question: Where are you going to spend your eternity?