

Christ is Risen! The way you respond to that statement determines whether you have received the gospel in vain, or whether you are holding fast to the gospel and being saved. The Apostle Paul includes in his letter to the Corinthians a reminder of the gospel that he had preached, and which they had received. It had been reported to him that some who called themselves Christians in Corinth were saying that there was no bodily resurrection of the dead. Instead, it seems that they took the resurrection as an important spiritual metaphor, a word picture that was really talking about how the soul lives on after the body is dead. And so Paul reminds them of the basics, the fundamentals, the most important truths of the Christian faith.

Why do you need to be reminded of the resurrection? To help you *hold fast*, so that you don't believe *in vain*. Without these reminders, you will lose your grip on the faith, and it will slip away, and your earlier belief will count for nothing. Also, even if you maintain a tight grip yourself, it's possible to live as if it isn't very important whether those around you believe that Christ rose from the dead. Losing the truth is a life and death matter, but you can lose the truth in more ways than simply denying it outright. *Technically affirming* the facts about Jesus, but *minimizing their importance* is another way of denying the gospel. This is what happens when you treat someone who denies the resurrection as a *different kind* of Christian, rather than a *non-Christian*. For these two reasons - so that you won't believe in vain and so that you will know how important these truths are - you need to hear this reminder. If you release your grip on these truths, you are no longer being saved. This is the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

It is a sad truth that this same mistake that some Corinthians were making is still made today, as many people will claim to be Christians, and yet not believe that Jesus Christ died, was buried, has been raised, and appeared to many witnesses. This isn't just hiccup in church history. This is a constant temptation even today. If this seems strange to you, praise God! *Rejoice* in a legacy of faithfulness, that the truths of the faith were faithfully delivered to you. *Weep* for those who have inherited a bastardized and corrupted gospel that makes the resurrection optional.

In verses three through five, Paul declares four connected truths, and places them in the highest position among all Christian beliefs. There is nothing that Christians believe and hold dear that can compare to these truths. This is an attack on those who would try to extract some different element of Christianity, and give it priority over the resurrection, which is exactly what people do when they claim that the facts of history about Jesus don't matter, or can't be known, but that Jesus serves as a good example, a pioneer in advocating equality, justice, love, or the like.

People who make this claim are opposing Paul; they are saying that Jesus' teachings are *more important* than His life. Or maybe not His teachings, but His community of love. Maybe you

don't believe that He really died and rose. Are you loving people? Is the church are place where you go to serve and love and give and feel connected? That's what it really means to be a Christian – to live in a community of love.

Paul says that this partial truth is actually a lie; it is *something other* than Christianity. It is not the gospel that he preached, that you believed, the gospel by which you are being saved. It is something else entirely, even though it speaks well of Jesus' ideas, even if it seems to move people to be more loving to those around them.

This is what is most important, Paul says. Four truths about Jesus: Number 1, in verse 3 – **that He died for our sins**. This one contains not just a *historical fact* (Jesus' death), but it assigns *theological meaning* to that fact. Many people believe that there was a man named Jesus who died in the first century. Far fewer believe that the reason why He died was to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. But to be a Christian means to believe that combination of historical fact and theological meaning. Jesus died for our sins. Further, this happened **in accordance with the Scriptures**. Not “according to the Bible” - it's not a statement about whether or not the Bible says that He died for our sins, but rather the stronger statement that His death and its meaning were *in fulfillment of* Biblical promises from the Old Testament Scriptures. Not only *did it happen*, but it happened *the way the Bible said it would*.

Number 2, from verse 4 – **that He was buried**. Remember Eutychus, from a few weeks ago? There is a huge debate over whether or not he was actually dead, since he was only non-responsive for a short time. But not Jesus – He was so dead that they buried Him. No one was still clinging to the hope that He might be alive. Christians believe that Jesus was buried in the grave, and left for dead.

Number 3, also from verse 4 – **that He has been raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures**. Paul has shifted his tenses with this one – the first two are facts about past realities that are completed, but this truth refers to a state that is ongoing – Jesus is still living a resurrected life. He's not dead again like Lazarus. His resurrection is ongoing. And it happened **on the third day**. Many Christians get confused and think that Jesus was dead for something like seventy-two hours, dead for three whole days, but the Bible's normal way of speaking is that He was raised on the third day – Friday was the first, Saturday the second, and Sunday the third day, on which He was raised. This too, Paul stresses, happened **in accordance with the Scriptures**, probably thinking of Hosea 6 or Psalm 16.

Number 4, showing up in verse 6, or really 6-8 – Jesus **was seen by, or appeared to** many different people. This fourth element is sometimes skipped over, but that would be fatal to Paul's argument. So why is it *of first importance* that Jesus **appeared**?

It's important because everyone knows that the gospel says that Jesus "rose". What people are claiming is that this "resurrection" is not a *bodily* resurrection, but a *metaphorical* one, a *spiritual* one. They are okay with points 1-3, as long as "the resurrection" means something other than *bodily* resurrection. But a metaphor does not appear to people. And in Luke 24, Jesus appears to the disciples, and they think that He is a spirit, a ghost. But He specifically and directly disproves that idea by physically interacting with them, and eating a piece of broiled fish. Spirits don't eat fish! They do not encounter an apparition, but a flesh-and-blood man. This is why Paul then expands this fourth point by piling up these appearances – to Peter, to the twelve, to the five hundred (hey, they're still alive – go ask them!), to James, to all of the apostles, and last of all, under special circumstances, to Paul himself, in order to turn the Persecutor into an Apostle.

Paul's parenthetical note here in verses 9-10 makes the same point as last week's passage from Isaiah 50 – no matter how disgraceful your past, God's cleansing power can redeem you and make you useful to Him. Your sins can't be worse than Paul's, and he was forgiven! It's not about the magnitude of your sin, it's about the magnitude of God's grace!

But it doesn't so much matter if you heard these things from the greatest apostle or the least. What matters is ***these four truths that were preached about Jesus***, and so Paul concludes in verse 11 what he began with in verse 1: so we preach, so you believed. This is the beating heart of the gospel, the foundational, essential truths of the Christian faith. Believe these truths – that Christ died for your sins, was buried, has been raised, and appeared to many witnesses. That is the gospel. Take your stand in this gospel, hold fast to these truths, and your faith will not be in vain. Believe these things, and you are one of those who is being saved through this faith.

This is the reason why Easter Sunday, Resurrection Sunday is one of the major holidays of the Church, and really, why every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday. Without the resurrection, there is no Christian faith. Not a partial Christianity, not a modified Christianity. ***Nothing***. Without the resurrection of Jesus, we are still dead in our sins. Without the resurrection, everything Christians believe, and *the lifestyle which is based on those beliefs*, is a delusion, a miserable lie, a farce! This is why you can't have Christianity as a system of good behavior, or as nothing more than a loving community: our morality, our community, ***everything*** is based on the truth that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, has been raised to life, and appeared before witnesses in His new body. Take that away, and everything comes crashing down.

But because these things really happened to Jesus, it makes complete sense to live out a morality based on dying to self. It is good, because God vindicates such a life by raising us up again! Of course we live as a self-sacrificing community of love, because greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. But if there is no resurrection, this faith is

nothing more than a weird death cult. But if instead, if our lives are seeds, sown in order to reap a greater harvest, if death is the path to new life, then a resurrection-shaped community is good for mankind and is well-pleasing in God's sight.

So as you celebrate the pivotal event of all of history, the triumph of Jesus that gives meaning and hope to a dying world that will one day be made new, remind one another of the heart of our faith found in these verses. Live your life as if the truths found in these verses are more important than any other – it's more important that your children learn these things than that they obey you. It's more important that your neighbor hears these truths than that he hears that homosexuality is wrong. It's more important that Jesus died, was buried, rose, and appeared than that the Bible supports Christian schooling, male headship in the home, postmillennialism, Reformed theology, Psalm-singing, covenant renewal liturgy, private property, racial reconciliation, and so on.

There are a million other very important and wonderful doctrines, all of which flow out of the gospel, but all of which *are downstream from the gospel* in importance, and which *should be downstream in practical importance* in the way you live your life. Your life should reflect the fact that the gospel is of first importance in the way you treat brothers and sisters who have different convictions on other important but secondary matters. Your life should reflect the fact that the gospel is of first importance by the ministries which receive your financial support and physical energy. Is this gospel, the gospel of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearance of Jesus, being preached and believed? Then your faith is not in vain, and you are being saved.

Believe these truths, and believe that they are of first importance. Place your faith in these words. a celebration of these truths. Stake your life on the fact that Christ died for your sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to many as proof that God raises the dead to life. Sins are forgiven. The grave is empty. Death is conquered. The resurrection of the body is a joyful reality. One day, you will see Jesus Christ in His new body, and your faith will not have been in vain. This is what we preach; this is what you believe: Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed.*

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*