

**Lesson 42: “Of First Importance”****1 Corinthians 15:1-11****Craig Crawshaw**

Today, on the first Sunday of 2019, we return to our consideration of 1 Corinthians, and we find ourselves in Chapter 15, which many have called “the resurrection chapter of the Bible.” This is timely, in that our church theme for 2019 is CONFIDENCE in our faith. And there is no more important place to begin in studying the basis for our confidence, than in the resurrection of Jesus from the grave. And we will be spending five weeks in our study of this extremely important chapter of God’s Holy Word.

In context, we remember that Paul is answering questions posed to him by the Corinthians, which he began doing from chapter 7 on. We read in 7:1, “Now concerning the things about which you wrote...” And from this point on Paul answers questions about marriage, about “grey areas” such as eating of meat offered to idols, about spiritual gifts – particularly the gift of tongues and prophecy, and now about resurrection. Regarding the resurrection of Jesus, they apparently had many questions, such as: “is Jesus’ resurrection really that critical to my faith?”, “How is Jesus’ resurrection related to my resurrection?”, “How are the dead raised?” and “What kind of body will I have?” In this monumental chapter, Paul answers these questions and more, giving us the most important portion of Scripture we have on the critical nature and function of the resurrection as relates to our faith.

If there is any question as to the importance of the resurrection, we need only hear Paul’s words to the Roman church:

**Romans 10:9** *If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Here we see that believing in, and by implication receiving the personal impact of, the resurrection is a key component to our salvation.

**OUR TEXT**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-11** *Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.*

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. And that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*

*And last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

**THE RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL (v. 1-2)**

Paul begins this all-important chapter by referencing the gospel message he had preached to the Corinthians. He had (1) preached it to them, (2) they had received it and accepted it for their own, (3) they “stand” or maneuver with confidence through the “stuff” of life because of it, and (4) they are “saved” – not only a one time saving from sin, but a continual saving from the temptations of life.

Let us reflect for a moment on this in regards to our personal salvation. (1) It is helpful to remember that each one of us has had the gospel message “preached” or shared with us by someone or by many someones. And therefore we are a spiritual product of another’s willingness to pass the good news on to us. Praise God for those willing messengers! (2) Then it is important to remember that there was a point in time when we personally “received” that message into our heart and life. We may or may not know the specific time and place, but we should realize that there was a time before we were saved, and a time after we were saved, differentiated by our “reception” of the message personally. We crossed a line from

“bound for hell” into “bound for heaven” at a sincere moment of faith. That moment was our “spiritual birthday,” when the angels rejoiced over our salvation.

**Luke 15:10** *[Jesus:] There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

And (3) We now “stand” firm, where as before we were tossed around by every wind of change. We who are saved have an “anchor” in Jesus, who helps us to withstand the temptations and storms of this life. And (4) we are saved – saved from the consequence and penalty of sin, and saved from the continual poundings of the enemy against our soul. We are bound for heaven, no longer bound for hell. Praise God!

But then in the second part of verse 2, Paul puts an important “if.” This doesn’t mean that we don’t have eternal security. If we are truly saved, we are saved forever with no conditions. But it does mean that we had better be sure we are truly saved – and Paul says that we will know “if” we find ourselves holding fast to that gospel truth. We don’t want to be that spiritual seedling Jesus taught about that found no root and withered away. True faith grows – and by that growth shows that life is alive and well. Some “believe in vain,” meaning they profess a belief but don’t take it to heart.

### **OF FIRST IMPORTANCE (v. 3-4)**

Now in the all-important verses 3-4 we find the source of the title of my message: “Of First Importance.” Still speaking about the gospel message, Paul relates what is of “first importance” in that good message of hope. Namely it is the trio of (1) Christ died for our sins, (2) Christ was buried, and (3) Christ was raised on the third day (resurrected). And he says this trio of essentials is all “according the Scriptures” – in other words, God has revealed the essential nature of these three truths in His Holy Word, the Bible.

And specifically, Jesus predicted these truths multiple times. Following Peter’s profession of “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” until Jesus’ death was about one year. And during that last year of his life, Jesus taught and re-taught this message to his disciples. Here are three specific occasions:

**Matthew 16:21** *From that time Jesus began to show 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 up on the third day.*

**Matthew 17:22-23** *And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.”*

**Matthew 20:18-19** *[Jesus:] Behold we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.*

I think we can understand the critical nature of the death of Jesus. He had to die in order to be the substitution for our sins. His death was essential to our salvation in satisfying the wrath of God (propitiation). Thus it is that virtually every Christian church displays the cross in some form, as a universal symbol of the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf.

Likewise, I think we can understand the critical nature of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul will take this long chapter to explain this more fully. But for now, we can understand that belief in that resurrection is essential for our salvation, as Romans 10:9 has stated.

But it is perhaps less obvious why the burial of Jesus is so essential and “of first importance.” To this I offer the following suggested explanations:

1. Burial is the ultimate consequence and stamp of truly being dead. And it is critical to our salvation that Jesus was really, truly and absolutely dead, in order to pay the price for our sin.
2. The burial of Jesus is an allegory of the burial of our sins.
3. Likewise, the burial of Jesus is an allegory of the burial of our self – dying to self

### **THE RESURRECTION CONFIRMATIONS (v. 5-11)**

An occurrence as spectacular and improbable as a predicted resurrection from the grave – on cue on the third day, no less – must have multiple and indisputable corroborating evidence to give it any chance of being believed. And this is what Paul offers in verses 5-11. In order to accuse someone of a crime, it takes only one eye witness with corroborating evidence, or two or three witnesses that agree. In this case

Paul offers many more, including 500 witnesses at one time! Even the Jewish historian Josephus wrote that it is hard to deny the resurrection of this man named Jesus, because of the multiple accounts of having seen Him alive after death. Aren't we glad that the resurrection of Jesus is so well documented in the Scripture? Here they are, in probable order of occurrence:

### **JESUS' POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES**

- ✓ First to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb  
**Mark 16:9** *Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. (John 20:14-17)*
- ✓ To other women also - Mary, mother of James, and Salome (Mark 16:1-4, Matthew 28:8-10)
- ✓ To Cleopas & friend on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-32)
- ✓ To Cephas (Peter)  
**Luke 24:34** *[Cleopas & friend's report to the disciples:] The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.*
- ✓ To the disciples without Thomas (Luke 24:36-43)
- ✓ 8 days later Jesus appears to Thomas and the disciples (John 20:26-29)
- ✓ To 500 brethren – probably in Galilee (only in 1 Corinthians 15:6)
- ✓ Jesus appears to James, his brother – also probably in Galilee (only in 1 Cor. 15:7)
- ✓ To the disciples in Galilee (John 21)
- ✓ To the disciples in Jerusalem at His ascension (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1)
- ✓ Lastly, to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-7)

And for me, the most convincing proof of Jesus' resurrection are the disciples who endured torturous deaths defending what they knew to be true, and the consequential millions of believers over the last two millennia who defend the same because of the Christ who lives in their heart.

As the old chorus goes, "You ask me how I know He lives; He lives within my heart!"

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

So, the first question Paul answers for the Corinthians and for us is whether the resurrection has any basis of fact and importance in regards to our faith. And the overwhelming answer is "yes, absolutely!"

- ✓ The resurrection of Jesus, along with His death and burial, are "of first importance" in the gospel message of salvation
- ✓ The resurrection of Jesus is verified and corroborated by multiple credible witnesses, including by more than 500 eye witnesses at one time!
- ✓ And finally, says Paul, the resurrection of Jesus is verified by my personal eye-witness encounter.

And we can echo the words of Paul for our own testimony, when he says "*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain.*"

Or to quote a less-Biblical source: If there's no resurrection, then . . .

God didn't make little green apples

And it don't rain in Indianapolis in the summertime

There's no such thing as Dr. Seuss

Disneyland or Mother Goose; no nursery rhymes

*(lyrics by Roger Miller)*