

## **“The Gospel in Which We Stand”**

### **I Corinthians 15:1-8**

Easter Sunday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019

When I reflect on my childhood, I realize my Mom made Easter special. The week leading up to Easter Sunday, mom boiled eggs, and my siblings and I would dye and decorate several dozen of them. When we woke up Easter Sunday morning, those eggs would be hidden all around the house. We also knew there would be Easter baskets for me, my two sisters, and my brother. The baskets would be hidden in various places in the house; and when they were found, they'd be full of candies – Fannie Mae chocolate bunnies, jelly beans, Peeps and even small trinket toys.

Then, we'd get cleaned up in our finest Sunday clothes and head off to Sunday School and worship – my sisters would be wearing brightly colored dresses with frilly socks, gloves, and bonnets. My brother and I would have on slacks and a tie, maybe even a suitcoat, too!

The special day many call “Easter” is upon us. Unlike Christmas or the New Year, Easter is a “movable feast” and does not have a fixed date. Instead, at the First Church Council at Nicea in 325 AD (from which came the Nicene Creed that we read at the Good Friday service), the church fathers agreed that Resurrection Day would be observed on the first Sunday after the first Full Moon occurring on or after the Vernal Equinox (the range beginning with March 21<sup>st</sup> and going through April 25<sup>th</sup>).

The English word Easter likely comes from a pagan term; but, it's surely appropriate for believers in Jesus Christ to refer to this day as “Resurrection Sunday.” After all, every Sunday is actually a resurrection day since there would be no Christianity if there were no resurrection of Jesus Christ from the realm of the dead.

According to John MacArthur, “The resurrection is the pivot on which all of Christianity turns and without which none of the other truths would much matter. Without the resurrection, Christianity would be so much wishful thinking, taking its place alongside all other human philosophy and religious speculation.” (Quoted by George Grant, *The World and Everything in It* podcast, Friday, April 19, 2019)

Or as Tim Keller has asserted, “If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that He said; if He didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what He said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like His teaching but whether or not He rose from the dead.” (Quoted by George Grant, *The World and Everything in It* podcast, Friday, April 19, 2019)

Today, we take a break from our sermon series in the Book of Proverbs to focus upon arguably the greatest day in the annual Church calendar – Easter (Resurrection) Sunday. To do so, we'll look at the first 8 verses of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth. As we do so, I'd ask you to consider – seriously so – what impact the resurrection of Jesus from the grave has on you. *What are the implications that a dead man, who called Himself the Son of Man come from heaven, woke up from death sleep, left the tomb, and was walking around!?*

### **I Corinthians 15:1-8:**

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, <sup>2</sup>by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

Paul wrote these words to Christians. The Corinthian Church had some very serious problems – among them divisions and sexual immorality. But, the problems were more than external; they were also doctrinal. Evidently, there were some in their number who denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as their own future resurrection from the dead. Later in this chapter, Paul refuted such thinking when he writes, “For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (**I Cor. 15:16-19**)

Paul begins with an assertion that what he has preached to the Corinthian Church was the “gospel”, a word that appears more than 100 times in the New Testament. Sure, it’s a familiar term, you’ve probably used it several times yourself, *but can you define and describe what the gospel actually is?* In its most basic form, “gospel” means “good news.” The gospel is a message – it is news – that must be declared by believers in Jesus Christ to those who are not Christians. People come to saving faith when the disciples of Jesus Christ tell others that the cure to life’s ills – chief among them a future eternity in hell – is trusting in Jesus Christ, God the Son, and what He has done for the elect of God.

*What, specifically, did Paul preach to the Corinthians?* Turn back with me to the second chapter of 1 Corinthians, and we’ll see. This is **1 Corinthians 2:1-2** - “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. <sup>2</sup>For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The gospel is God’s testimony – a witness that Jesus Christ was crucified!

Such is also the substance of Paul’s message in Chapter 15 before us this morning - “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” (**I Corinthians 15:3b-4**) This is a powerful listing of why the gospel is good news! Jesus lived, He died, He was buried, and He rose again! **He’s risen, Hallelujah!**

McKenzie wasn’t trying to start a theological debate, she just wanted to make a point about Jesus’ resurrection. Her Sunday school teacher had tried to encourage her class with the assurance that Jesus is everywhere. But for McKenzie, that didn’t sound right. So she said, “I know one place where Jesus isn’t.” The teacher curiously replied, “Oh, really? Where is that?”

The bright little girl declared, “He’s not in the grave!” What a great reminder. Our omnipresent God has chosen to keep His presence absent from the grave. For just as the angel said, “*He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*” (**Matthew 28:6**).

But, the gospel message also contains bad news. It strikes me that if I were to take people to the gospel in the Bible, I’d take them to this very letter – 1 Corinthians. However, the substance of this letter was taking place in Paul’s life – he didn’t have a 1 Corinthians to go to. Twice in this passage – in verse 3 and verse 4 – he mentions these things had taken place “according to the Scriptures.” *What were the Scriptures to which he referred?*

Paul was referring to the scriptures of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the bedrock foundation of the New Testament. We cannot rightly understand the New Testament without first understanding the Old Testament. Among the Scriptures Paul may have had in mind are:

\* **Psalm 22** which begins with the words Jesus cried out on the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (**Psalm 22:1**)

\* **Isaiah 53:5-6 & 9** – “He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, or *was any* deceit in His mouth.”

\* Paul’s reference to Jesus’ burial and resurrection on the third day takes us back to the Old Testament prophet Jonah who, in foreshadowing the Messiah to come, “was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (**Jonah 1:17**)

Paul wasn’t the only New Testament writer to quote the Old Testament – both Peter and Jesus also quoted such passages as **Genesis 22:8 & 14**, **Psalm 16:8-11**, and **Hosea 6:2** in addition to others. As one author writes in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, “Apostolic preaching about Jesus is true because it finds its roots in the Old Testament.” (Naylor, 418)

So Paul asserts here that what he has preached to the Corinthians was the gospel of God. The gospel includes the bad news that every man, woman, and child is born into this life in sin – at enmity with God. Each of us was born dead spiritually, though alive physically. To remain in sin at the conclusion of one’s life is to punch your ticket to hell. If this is you, friend, you will spend the rest of eternity in the unspeakable horror and torture of hell. To escape that frightening reality, there is also good news. The good news is that you must trust in Jesus and what He had done for you in His life, death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. To trust in Jesus is to be saved (Paul says in verse 2) from hell.

But, the gospel also instructs us how we are to live. Paul describes this living as standing on the gospel message (verse 1 – “...which also you received and in which you stand...”) To stand on the gospel is also to “hold fast” to it (verse 2).

I'm not one to love heights. *Have you ever been up to the observation deck of the Willis Tower (the former Sears' Tower)?* There is a see through platform you can go out, and look down to the streets 103 stories below. **(SLIDE)**

Well, not long ago, the clear plastic coating over that platform cracked. *Can you imagine?* That's enough for me not to ever go out on such a thing! I need something firmer to stand on!

The announcement that Jesus rose from the dead has become the foundation of (Christians') lives: Christ lives for (us) and (we) for Him. Paul speaks of standing firm in the faith in several other places. Here are three of them:

\* Later in this very letter, **I Corinthians 16:13**, he writes, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong."

\* **Galatians 5:1** – "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."

**Ephesians 6:11** – "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

To stand for Jesus, we must believe that Jesus will do as He promised. *Has He ever proven unfaithful to you, dear ones?* No, he has not; nor will He ever! Even in the most wretched circumstances, in the deepest valley, when we don't think we could ever get out of the messes in which we find ourselves, Jesus has proven faithful. We can stand on His promises because He is our rock, our fortress, and our foundation.

The most amazing promises Jesus made had to do with His rising again from the realm of the dead. We recently completed a lengthy study of the Gospel according to Mark. You'll remember that three different times, Jesus clearly told His inner circle that He would die and come back.

\* **Mark 8:31** – "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

\* **Mark 9:31** – "For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

\* **Mark 10:33-34** – "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

And, what do you know, the third day after He was executed, Jesus rose from the dead! The tomb in which His dead body was placed was opened, and He was not there! **He's risen, hallelujah!**

“A follower of Buddha writes of that religious leader, ‘When Buddha died it was with that utter passing away in which nothing whatever remains.’ Mohammed died at Medina on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 632, at the age of 61, and his tomb there is visited yearly by tens of thousands of Muslims. But they come to mourn his death, not to celebrate his resurrection.” (MacArthur, 401) So, do we and every true church, celebrate the victory of our Lord Jesus over death and the grave! **He is risen!**

So, there we have it. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He reigns at God’s right hand, and all authority has been given to Jesus in the heavens and the earth. He is the risen and reigning Savior. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! He has conquered sin and death, and though we may die before He returns to earth for His Church, we know, absolutely and without reservation, that we will be with Him forever and ever. And, I look so forward to continuing with you into heaven, dear ones, but that can only happen if we both are standing on the gospel. I am...*are you?*

In his day, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin was one of the most powerful men on earth. Bukharin was a Russian Communist leader who took part in the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, was editor of the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* and was a member of the Politburo (the principal policy making committee of the communist party). His works on economics and political science were big sellers.

A story is told about a trip he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd, he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity hurling insult, argument and proof against it.

After an hour of haranguing, Bukharin was finished. He looked out at what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men’s faith. “Are there any questions?” Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium. But then one man stood. Surveying the crowd, first to the left then to the right, he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: “CHRIST IS RISEN!”

En masse the crowd arose as one man and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: “HE IS RISEN INDEED!” I say to you this morning: THE LORD IS RISEN!