

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Key Verses: 15:3–4

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”

What’s the best news to you? Usually good news comes in some form of relief. Like when we’re done with school! Or our debts are fully paid! Or we meet the perfect person to marry! Or our kids are finally out of diapers! Or we can retire at last! But such relief is subjective and doesn’t satisfy us for very long. Today Paul tells us that what happened to Christ 2,000 years ago is still the very best news for all people. This gospel is universal, unchanging and unshakeable. What does this good news mean, exactly? How can we receive the gospel of Christ as our own very best news? How can we be confident in it? And why should we be? May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

Look at verse 1a. “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you...” In the first 14 chapters of this letter Paul has been giving the Corinthian Christians counseling on all kinds of topics. This church had many problems. But finally Paul turns to the original gospel he himself had preached to them. The words “I would remind you” in Greek are literally one word: “Know” or “Understand.” Some translations say “Make it clear.” Paul had already preached this gospel to them. But he wants them to really know and understand it. He wants to make it crystal clear to them. Obviously it takes time to deeply digest the gospel.

Look at verses 1b–2a. “...which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved...” The verb tenses here are past, present and future, giving the impression that the gospel is a living, active thing. The Corinthians had received the gospel in the past, were standing in the gospel in the present, and are being saved by the gospel into the future. They may not even have been aware of how vital the gospel was to them. So Paul concludes with a warning. Look at verse 2b. “...if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” Of course our own effort doesn’t save us. But our response to the gospel is crucial. We’ve got to hold fast to the word of the gospel. The Greek word literally means to “retain” it, and to refrain from being pulled away from it. In this fallen world, various things are working to pull us away from the word of the gospel: distractions, temptations, and heresies. To truly believe the gospel, we’ve got to hold fast to it. Paul considered the gospel a matter of life or death. So he writes in verse 3a, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received...” This wasn’t just theory. Paul passed on the gospel as of first importance because he himself had experienced its life-giving power. Earlier, he said he preached the gospel because “necessity was laid upon” him (9:16). So what is this gospel that Paul is so serious about? Look at verses 3b–4. “...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in

accordance with the Scriptures...” Two facts stand out here: Christ died for our sins, and Christ was raised on the third day. These two facts are the gospel of Christ.

But how can someone’s death, so long ago, be good news today? It’s due to the nature of sin. To many people, sin is no big deal. Many deny that sin is even real. They sin freely and don’t seem to suffer any ill effects. But sin is very real. It’s like a contagious disease, like poison. Sin is invisible, but it cuts us off from God (Ro3:23). It slowly disfigures the image of God in us and makes us sick spiritually. In sin we become powerless to do what God wants us. What’s worse, we become slaves of sin. We keep doing the things we know we shouldn’t (Ro7:7–23). Then we become full of fear and guilt, pride and anger, selfishness and hatred, jealousy and cruelty. Outwardly we may seem fine. No one may perceive our inner state. We ourselves may be oblivious to it. But in sin, our souls become ugly. What’s worse, our sin brings us under God’s wrath and fury (Ro2:8). And there’s no way out. Ultimately, our sin causes us to face God’s judgment and eternal punishment (Heb9:27; Rev21:8). To many people, these things don’t seem real. But they are very real. One day many will find out how real they are, and it will be too late.

God knows how lost in sin we are, but he provided the solution. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” To save us, God sent his only Son to die. It may seem sad, but it’s really good news. We can’t see it because we’re looking elsewhere, at the world or at people or ourselves. So John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn1:29). Peter proclaims: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1Pe2:24). He’s quoting from Isaiah 53:5. On the cross Christ not only was punished for us; he was wounded that we might be healed. The wounds in our soul make us bitter and crooked. But as I look at the only sinless One, wounded for me, my heart is melted by the love of God. As I see how he suffered and died in my place, I experience his healing. I begin to die to my sin and live to righteousness. Peter also proclaims the ultimate purpose of his death: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...” (1Pe3:18). Through Christ’s death, our broken relationship with God is restored. Now we can come close to God, fully forgiven, his dearly loved child. Healed of sin sickness, fully forgiven, and close to God again: this really is good news.

But it’s only half the story. Verse 4 also tells us that Christ was raised on the third day. What does his resurrection mean to us? Throughout this chapter Paul will say more about it. But for now, let’s look at just two other brief passages. Let’s read Romans 6:4–5: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Paul says Christ’s resurrection power enables us to walk in newness of life. Through faith in him, his resurrection power begins to work in our souls. His resurrection power raises us out of our spiritual deadness. His resurrection power enables us to start doing things we could never do before. With his resurrection power we start actually loving God, living for his glory, and really loving our fellow human beings. With his resurrection power we can even start suffering for the gospel like Apostle Paul did.

There’s another passage that shows what Christ’s resurrection means to us. Let’s read 1 Peter 1:3–4: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great

mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you..." When we believe in Christ, raised from the dead, we're born into a living hope in heaven. Think about it: a living hope. It's amazing! Hope is such an issue. As human beings we all need hope. Without hope, what's the point of living? The problem is, this world has so many false hopes. Advertisers and politicians notoriously offer us false hopes, which leave us sorely disappointed. A seemingly nice person, or even children, can be a false hope. Working hard for our health or appearance is a false hope, because no matter how hard we try, we're going to age and die anyway. We may hope to gain material things or some success in the world. Yet even if we get them, they never last. Without exception they all perish, become defiled, and finally fade. This is why, after people achieve all they want, they totally despair. We grab something in this world, only to find that it melts like the snow, or turns to dust.

But Christ's resurrection promises those who believe a living hope in heaven. Sophisticated people can't believe in heaven. It's not because it's too hard to believe, but because they've got too much right now they don't want to let go of. But this living hope in heaven is just as real today as it ever was. It's the hope of the Father's house (Jn14:1-3), the hope to see Jesus someday and enjoy eternal life and eternal glory with him. With this living hope, all the things of this world pale in comparison. With this living hope, we can suffer and sacrifice and persevere to the end. Believing the resurrection of Christ means holding onto this living hope. This is the gospel we need to receive, stand in, hold fast to, and proclaim as of first importance. It's not a gospel for a better life in this world, but the gospel of salvation from sin, a brand new way of living, and a living hope in heaven.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul repeats the phrase "in accordance with the Scriptures." It means the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, points to this gospel. The Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms all predict the gospel of Christ who died and was raised on the third day (Lk24:44). The four Gospels, the Epistles, the Book of Revelation, they're all about the gospel of Christ who died for our sins and was raised on the third day. If we receive this gospel, we get the whole Bible. Also, "in accordance with the Scriptures" means we can be sure the gospel is true. God promised this gospel in the Holy Scriptures, and God fulfilled it.

In verses 5-7 Paul goes on to list the people who actually met the Risen Christ personally. First is Cephas (Peter), next is the twelve, then 500 brothers at one time, then his brother James, then all the apostles. Why does Paul list all these resurrection appearances? It's to prove without a doubt that Christ's resurrection is not a made-up story. We live in relativistic times. They say people create their own truth. It leads people to live in brutal tribalism. But even in such a world we can be absolutely sure about the gospel, because it's a historical fact.

In verses 8-10 Paul shares his own story. He, too, met the Risen Christ, on the road to Damascus. At that time he was an enemy of God, furiously persecuting Christians. He was seeking his own glory, full of pride, self-righteousness and hatred. But when the light of the Risen Christ shone upon him, his spiritual eyes were opened. He realized the grace of God who called and saved even a sinner like him. This grace through the gospel of Christ totally changed him. He

became the most humble, gracious man. With this grace he worked so hard to spread the gospel of Christ. Paul's story is further evidence that we can have confidence in the gospel. The gospel of Christ is the power of God that can change anyone.

When I was a teenager I looked okay, but I was lost. I hated God who let my mother become sick and who never answered all my boyhood prayers for her. I was full of sorrow and rebellion and committed many sins. At the start of my first year of college I looked like an angry dead man. But God led me to his word through UBF ministry. I met Jesus my Lord who suffered and died for me and rose again. Faith in his blood cleansed all my filthy sins. His wounds brought me deep inner healing. Through faith in his resurrection he gave me the living hope of heaven. He filled me with his grace and made me joyful. Only by his grace has he enabled me to serve him as a pastor these past 40 years. Praise God. I pray to hold fast to his gospel and share it with others as of first importance, to the end.

Read verses 3–4 again. May God help each one of us look at Christ on the cross, who died for our sins, so that our deep inner wounds may be healed. May God help each one of us believe the truth of his resurrection that can fill us with new life and living hope. May God help us stand firm on this gospel and share it as of first importance in these dark times.

Written by P. Mark Vucekovich (March 5, 2023)