

Resurrection Sunday Service

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Covenant Waterfall, 4 April 2021

Read

Pray

Introduction

Like clockwork, every year around Easter time, the Discovery Channel or National Geographic, will come out with a new documentary containing a “new archaeological discovery” that’s aimed at discrediting the Gospel account of Jesus’ life and death. The latest documentary movie, produced by Discovery Channel, claims that a family tomb was found in Israel with the names “Jesus and his wife Mary” along with the remains of a child. They claim that this suggests that not only did Jesus not rise from the grave, but that he was also married to Mary Magdalene and had a family.

What is the motivation for propagating these sorts of things? Perpetuate the claim that much of Christianity is really a bunch of myths. In particular Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Rationally speaking, it is simply impossible for a dead and decaying corpse to rise again to life. Surely there is no possible way that ever happened?

The reality is that Christianity stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul himself says so just a few verses after our text in 1 Corinthians 15:17,19: **“If Christ is not raised, then we are to be pitied above all people... If Christ is not raised, then our preaching is in vain, our faith is futile and we are still in our sins.”** Sobering implications if Jesus has not been raised – all pointless, no hope, no salvation, remain dead in our sins and because of that doomed to eternity in hell.

Everything hinges on the historical reality of what happened on that first Easter morning, some 2000 years ago. What we’re going to see this morning, from our text, is that because

the gospel is indeed historical truth, it is absolutely central. And because it is central, it is infinitely personal too.

- The Gospel is historical
- The Gospel is central
- The Gospel is personal

A. The Gospel is historical

If you've meaningfully engaged with family and friends about the gospel, you'll know that many people see Christianity merely as a faith that's based on mythology and ancient tales. Perhaps this is even how you still view Christianity. Don't see it as historical. Limited to the realm of subjectivity and feelings. If you acknowledge some historicity to Christianity, it may be that you believe that a man called Jesus existed as an enlightened Jewish teacher, much like Buddha and Mohammed. That he lived and died, and uttered some universal spiritual truths that pointed a way to God, along with many other ways.

Contrast this with the biblical record, which itself claims to be historical. The Scriptures testify to the uniqueness of Christianity. You cannot seriously read the Bible and come to the conclusion that Christianity is one among many equally true faiths. What then is unique about Christianity? The gospel. This is why the first verse of 1 Corinthians 15, reads:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand...”

What does the word “gospel” mean? Original Greek – euangellion. Two Greek words combined. “Eu” = good, “angellion” = message. Good message, good news. Pre-Christian use in the ancient world – declaration of victory in a battle. It is good news about an actual event in history. In this case – good news about a Person: Jesus Christ. What is the nature of this good news, this gospel, pertaining to Jesus?

Vv. 3-8:

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the

third day in accordance with the Scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Succinct outline of the gospel. Contains historical facts of the gospel message:

Firstly gospel fact: ***Jesus Christ really existed***, implicit in this text. He was fully man, but also fully God, as many other Scriptures like John 1 declare. He lived on earth some 2000 years ago. He was an historical figure, his existence is corroborated by many other trusted historical texts other than the Bible. He lived a sinless life (1 Peter 2:22), in perfect obedience to God's law. Only truly Righteous man to ever live.

Second gospel fact: ***Christ died*** (v.3). He was crucified **"for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures."** He was sinless, but the wages of our sin was Jesus' death. Jesus died as a substitutionary atonement on our behalf. He died a, excruciatingly tortuous death by brutal execution. We deserved this death because we have all rebelled against God, lived lives independently from him, and broken his laws repeatedly. Instead of us dying for our sins, Jesus took our place, forgiving us our sins and reconciling us to a holy God.

His death for our sins was **"in accordance with the Scriptures"**. Meaning that Jesus' crucifixion was not a random event. Instead this event was planned by God before the creation of the world and it was foretold in the OT Scriptures, hundreds, thousands of years before it took place. Whole sweep of OT Scripture points to Jesus' death for our sins.

Specific Scripture – foretells with clarity the death of Christ and its purpose? Isaiah 53:5-6 (750 BC):

"But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.⁶ 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."

Third gospel fact, ***Christ was buried*** (v.4). His death was not an illusion, he didn't appear to die, nor was his body switched at the last minute, like the Gnostics and Muslims believe. He

actually died. His heart stopped beating, his body went into rigor mortis – it was a corpse, it started to decompose, it was wrapped up in cloths and had to be buried in a tomb.

Fourth gospel fact, ***Christ was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*** (v.4). On the third day, that decomposing corpse was miraculously raised from death to life. Jesus wasn't resuscitated, no, he was resurrected. Death and sin could not hold him down, as he had committed no sin, therefore death had no hold over him. So God raised him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11).

And his resurrection, like his death, was "in accordance with the Scriptures." It had been planned by God, and foretold in the OT. Clear example, Psalm 16, text which the Apostle Peter uses in his Pentecost sermon, referring to the resurrection of Christ. Verse 10 of Psalm 16: **"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol (the realm of the dead), or let your holy one see corruption."**

Fifth gospel fact, ***the resurrected Christ appeared to many*** (vv.5-8). Texts says that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), the twelve disciples, a group of 500 people – many of them still alive at the time of writing, then to James and all the apostles, including Paul himself.

Jesus appearances to many after his resurrection demonstrate that he was actually raised from the dead – there were witnesses to the fact! This was not a made up story. They did not see an apparition or a ghost. Jesus was really raised from the dead in a physical body containing flesh and bones, as Luke 24:39 says.

This list of witnesses to Jesus' resurrection is evidence that the event is historically verifiable. If you read this letter at the time it was written, and you were still in doubt of the resurrection, you could go and chat to one of the 500 people who were still alive who witnessed it for themselves. If this had all been made up, it would have been refuted immediately. But because it really happened, and there were hundreds of eye-witnesses to the fact, the truth and reliability of these gospel claims endure to this day.

B. The Gospel is Central

We've just seen that the gospel is rooted in historical events. Because this is so, then it must also be central. Verses 1-3:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of *first importance* what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

One of the tragedies plaguing much of the contemporary church is that the gospel is no longer seen as central. Instead it's seen as something you believed when you became a Christian, but now the main thing as a Christian is focussing on living the Christian life. "In by grace, stay in by works." Gospel – something of importance back then – got me saved, but now, move beyond the gospel, got to "do stuff" – this is the main thing. Anything from miracles, grasping prophetic revelations, living your best life now, "living / being the gospel". Problem with all of these things? De facto salvation by works.

If there is one thing that separates Christianity from every other faith, it is that everything else – you need to do stuff in order to get right with God. The gospel, on the other hand is not stuff we must do. Not even something we must live or be. No – the nature of the gospel is that it's news about Jesus which needs to be preached and received and believed – as 1 Cor 15:1-3 clearly says. All other religions = you must do stuff. Gospel = Christ has done it, so believe.

Note v. 3, **³ For I delivered to you as of *first importance* what I also received.** Gospel = first importance. Can never graduate from the gospel – move on to deeper things. The gospel is always "of first importance". It must always be central. Why?

Not only has the belief in the gospel saved us, forgiven our sins, justified us before God, but verse 2 says that we are also still "being saved" by the gospel. The power of the gospel is ongoing in our lives as believers in Christ. How so? Because of Christ's death and resurrection, all our current struggles against sin and temptation, doubts, every tragedy that we face, every challenge that it placed in our lives – in the light of the gospel, God gives us the resources to stand firm through all these things. We can know his peace and strength, as it's because of the truth of the gospel that God promises to be faithful to us, even when we are unfaithful. He's set his steadfast love upon us, he's sealed us with his Spirit, he calls us his own sons, and welcomes us to enter his presence with boldness. Because Christ has

forgives us our sins, the truth is that God will never cast us out of his presence, and we will never fall out of God's favour. Romans 8:38-39:

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

See how central the gospel is. Through the gospel, Christ has saved us, is busy saving us – by giving us immense security and peace with God, and will certainly save us in the future.

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, in him, we have the guarantee that he will raise us from the dead on the last day to eternal life with him.

C. The Gospel is Personal, vv. 8-11

⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

We've just seen that the gospel is "of first importance" – it remains central, at the heart of our faith – never be made an accessory to Christianity! Because it is central – also deeply personal. The historical events of the gospel have a bearing upon us.

How so? See this vividly illustrated in Paul's life. Verse 9 tells us that he sees himself as unworthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God. Paul had Christians executed for their faith. In 1 Timothy 1:15, he calls himself the "worst of sinners". He actively opposed Christ.

On his own merits, Paul was not deserving of God's grace. Instead – completely deserving of God's wrath because of his sins. Yet, despite all his evil actions, despite the fact that he wasn't even seeking God (in fact doing exact opposite), in Christ, God reached down to Paul, appeared to him, found him in his sins, forgave him, transformed his heart of stone to a heart of flesh, raised him from death to life by the power of the Spirit. Paul received God's

sovereign gift of grace that he didn't deserve at all! This is why he writes in verse 10, **But by the grace of God I am what I am...**

This is the nature of the gospel – it is all God's work through Jesus Christ. We contributed absolutely nothing to our salvation. Only receive it as a gift of grace. Because it's all from God, it therefore de-centres us from the centre of our lives. Through the Spirit's conviction, we are able to recognise the gravity of our sins – our utter unworthiness before our holy and righteous God. That on our own, God owes us nothing, we don't deserve God's love, nor his kindness and mercy.

Our salvation in Christ, our life in Christ – the truth that in Christ he has chosen us for salvation before the creation of the universe, that he has set his love upon us – is all undeserved, it's all a gift of grace to us. We've been restored in relationship to our Father, we know Christ and his benefits, not by any of our own efforts, works, level of spirituality – no – it's all through the sovereign work of Christ.

Conclusion

So is this Easter story still just a myth for you? Have you "graduated from the gospel"? Perhaps you have lost sight of the power of the gospel and God's grace and are trusting more on your own works, your supposed "living out the gospel"?

Friends, brothers and sisters, repent of your sins – your unbelief, your self-righteousness, your pride, your desire to live independently from God, in your own way – which is rebellion. It's middle-class suburban sins like these that send people to an eternity in hell. It's sins like these that make us deserve to face God's just wrath.

Leave you in despair, no hope? There is good news. On a Sunday morning some two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He had been crucified and killed, facing God's wrath – endured the death that you deserve because of your sins. But because he was raised from the dead, he is alive now, reigning in heaven with the Father and the Spirit. Trusting in him, he forgives you your sins, he gives you a new heart of flesh, peace with God, seals you with his Spirit and he when we returns, he will raise your corpse from death to glorious life eternal with him – he our God, and we his people.

Amen.