

1 Corinthians Series #38

“The Gospel” - 1 Cor. 15:1-11

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Wellington

1. General Wellington commanded forces that defeated Napoleon at Waterloo
2. He sent news of his victory to England
3. Series of stations sent coded messages by flashing lights over the English channel
4. The message was Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo
5. But the fog rolled in as soon as the first two words were sent.
6. So, the message England received said, “Wellington defeated”
7. The English began to mourn and grieve and were in great fear over what Napoleon’s next move would be
8. It wasn’t until later when the fog cleared that they got the whole message

9. So it is with the story of Jesus
 - a. His followers hoped he was the Messiah who had come to lift the curse of sin and defeat that tyrant the devil
 - b. but they had watched him die one Friday afternoon at a small hill just outside the City of Jerusalem.
 - c. then he was laid in a cold, dark, lonely tomb
 - d. it looked like Jesus had been defeated
 - e. the disciples hide themselves away
 - cowering behind closed doors
 - for fear that they too would be arrested and put to death
 - f. but a few days later, their despair turned into rejoicing as they saw the risen Lord.

B. Chapter 15

1. In Ch. 15, Paul turns from words of stern correction for the Corinthians, to an issue of doctrine
2. The doctrine he writes about is the cornerstone of the whole Christian faith = The Resurrection
3. First, he writes about the resurrection of Christ and then

he turns to the resurrection of believers

- C. The Importance Of The Resurrection
1. Just as the heart pumps life to the rest of the body,
 2. So the resurrection gives life to the rest of the gospel message
 3. The resurrection is the pivot on which the rest of our faith turns
 4. Without the resurrection, Christianity is reduced to the level of a mere religion
 5. As Paul says in v. 17, **“If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”**
 6. Because the doctrine of the resurrection is so central to the gospel, and yet so few Christians clearly understand what it is, we will be spending a few weeks in this most important chapter
 7. As I was in preparation for this sermon, realized that if we can grasp what Paul writes here, it will radically transform our lives
 8. It will breathe a new hope in us that will turn our lives into a thing of great rejoicing and celebration
 9. A few weeks ago I mentioned the courage of the martyrs of the early church as they faced death at the jaws and claws of wild beasts
 10. Their courage came from their firm conviction of what we find in this chapter

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you; unless you believed in vain.

1. From the whole chapter, it's clear that the gospel was under attack in Corinth.
 - a. specifically, what was being attacked was the doctrine of the resurrection
 - b. So Paul calls them to remember the simple message they had heard him preach when he first came to them
2. They had received that message with joy and conviction

3. They had even made a stand in it
4. But Paul introduces a disturbing idea in v. 2
5. He says, “. . . **you are saved, IF you hold fast that word which I preached to you; unless you believed in vain.**”

6. There has been a debate among Christians for centuries over the issue of whether or not a believer can lose his/her salvation
 - a. some say “Yes”
 - b. some say “No!”
7. It is not our goal today to attempt to resolve this debate
8. Rather, what we find here answers the concerns of the issue

9. Paul conditions salvation on present faith
 - a. he says, “. . . **you are saved, IF**
 - b. the word “if” introduces a condition
 - c. in this case, the condition is, “**you hold fast that word which I preached to you;**
 - d. the biblical answer to whether or not a person can lose their salvation is this = “Are you believing In Christ now?”
 - e. if not, then as Paul says at the end of v. 2, “**you believed in vain.**”
10. In John 15:4-8 Jesus said this to His disciples . . .

" Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

- a. life for the Christian comes from being abiding in Christ
 - b. to abide in Christ means to believe in Him
- to put your confidence, hope, and trust in Him
 - c. and as Jesus says, if we are abiding in Him, our lives will bear fruit
 - d. good works will come from the abiding life
11. In John 8:31 Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him,

"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed."

- a. the true disciple is one who abides in the word of Jesus
 - b. sham followers do not abide in His word
 - c. they may profess to be Christians, but they are not obedient to the Lord
 - d. their faith is a vain, empty faith
12. Christian, don't let your confidence rest on some past profession of faith
- a. an altar call
 - b. a prayer, a raised hand
13. Let your confidence be in Christ alone who can save you
14. And ask yourself this important question, "Am I believing IN Jesus now?"

B. Vs. 3-4

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

1. The gospel Paul preached was not something he had made up
2. It was something he too had received
3. He is very careful here to spell out the gospel in its most basic form
4. The gospel has three elements
#1 = **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**
#2 = **He was buried**
#3 = **He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures**
5. Everything about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ was foretold in the OT
 - a. and having been foretold, the Jews should have received him
 - b. but because they rejected God's word, they rejected His Son when He came to them
6. After resurrection, Jesus joined up with two of the disciples as they went to Emmaus
 - a. asked why so downcast
 - b. they told him about their disappointment
 - c. the one they had hoped was the Messiah had been

- executed by the Romans and chief priests
 - d. Jesus rebuked them and said, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.
 - e. after he appeared to the disciples in the upper room, he took them on an extended study into the OT and showed them how all the things he had endured were foretold in the scriptures
- 7. Jesus died for our sin;
 - a. he paid the penalty for our rebellion against God
 - b. he canceled the debt we owed to God
- 8. He was buried
 - a. in the 60's Hugh Schoenfield wrote a book called the *Passover Plot* in which he attempted to discredit the resurrection by saying that Jesus didn't really die on the cross
 - he merely passed out
 - then, when he was laid in the tomb, the cold stone caused him to wake up
 - then the disciples came and let him out
 - but this modern theory only repeats the lie that was first circulated by Jesus' enemies
 - that the disciples had come and stolen the body of Jesus
 - b. Paul says that an essential element of the gospel was that Jesus was buried
 - c. in other words, He really died!
 - d. and when he was buried, some of Rome's finest guarded the tomb
 - e. no handful of cowering Jewish fishermen were going to attack a Roman guard
 - f. no Jesus was truly dead; his burial proves it
- 9. He rose from the dead the third day
 - a. while Jesus died for OUR sins
 - b. death could not hold Him
 - c. He broke down death's door and came forth forever triumphant!
- 10. These three things are the essential elements of the gospel
- 11. In Rom 10:9-10 we read, "If you confess with your

mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

12. Now Paul turns to give evidence for the resurrection

C. Vs. 5-8

5 and that He was seen by Cephas, [which is the Aramaic form of Peter] then by the twelve.

6 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.

7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.

8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

1. It's interesting that as you read the gospels, the first person Jesus appeared to after Mary Magdalene and the two on the Road to Emmaus was Peter
2. Why Peter? After all, wasn't it Peter who had denied Him three times in the courtyard of the high priest's house?
3. That is precisely why Jesus appeared to him first
 - a. after his failure, Peter had wept bitterly
 - b. no doubt he despised himself for his weakness
 - c. probably thought that Jesus would disown him if he were alive
 - d. Peter was truly repentant but felt himself forsaken by God
4. That is why Jesus came to him first
 - a. to comfort him and restore him to fellowship
 - b. God is always tender to the broken hearted
 - to those whose repentance is true
 - to those who see themselves as worthy of the judgment of God
 - c. it is only to the stiff-necked and proud that God is hard
5. Have you played the part of Peter?
 - a. have you denied Jesus in the midst of a difficult challenge?
 - b. have you forsaken the path of following Christ to turn aside to worthless things?
 - c. if you will but turn back, if you will but repent once more, you will find the tender presence of

- the risen Lord bringing comfort to you
 - d. later we will be giving you an opportunity to recommit your life
- 6. After Jesus appeared to Peter, He appeared to the 12 as they were gathered together in hiding in the upper room
- 7. At another point He was seen by 500 people at one time
 - a. neither the gospels nor Acts tell us when this was
 - b. but in Acts 1:3 we read that He appeared at various times for 40 days after his resurrection
 - c. so this could have been at any time during that period
 - d. the majority of this 500 was still alive when Paul wrote this letter
 - e. these people were a powerful testimony of the truth of the resurrection
- 8. After that, Jesus appeared to James, his half brother.
 - a. the reason Paul mentions this is because James was the official leader of the early church in Jerusalem
- 9. Finally, Paul mentions himself as a witness of the Risen Lord.
 - a. he says that he was like one who was born out of due time
 - b. what he means is that his vision of Christ came after He had ascended into heaven
 - c. all the others he mentioned had seen Jesus both before his death and then after his death but before his ascension
 - d. Paul's witness of Christ came in something of a different fashion
 - e. He saw Jesus AFTER the ascension.

D. Vs. 9-10

9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy 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 toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

- 1. Have you ever looked back on your past and said with great regret, "Oh, if I could only go back and live those years over again!"

2. Paul had a very good reason to say that
3. For several years he had made it his aim to destroy the church and stomp out Christianity
4. According to man's wisdom and judgment, if there was anyone who deserved the wrath and condemnation of God , it was Paul
5. But rather than wrath and judgment, God sent His grace to Paul and he was converted from -
 - Persecutor to Proclaimer
 - Destroyer to Distributor
 - Evil-worker to Evangelist
6. And when Paul was saved, he threw his whole life into the service of God
7. Interesting, the gospels follow the life of Christ and His training of the 12
 - a. you would think that Acts would be the story of the 12 as they went out and spread the gospel
 - b. it isn't really
 - c. it is more the story of a man who was not one of the original 12 but instead began as their opponent
 - d. then he is converted and travels around the known world planting dozens of churches in every place he can
8. Many people would say that the reason Paul was so effective as a missionary and evangelist was because of his unique upbringing and gifts
9. But that is not Paul's view
10. His reason for being so effective as a servant of God was this . . .
 - a. **“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.**
 - b. what was true for Paul is true for every one of us as well
 - c. it is only by the grace of God that there is anything good or worthwhile in us
 - d. and whatever we do that is good is not from us from but from the grace of God working through us
11. The number one reason why Christians do not live more effective lives is because they are living by God's grace

12. They are striving and struggling in the power of their flesh
13. The way of victory is through surrender, not strife
14. Give in and give up to the grace of God
15. Abide in Christ and let His life flow through you

E. V. 11

11 Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

1. Whether it was Paul or one of the others who witnesses the Risen Lord who preached to the Corinthians, the important thing is that their faith is based on the fact of the Resurrection

III. CONCLUSION

A. Talleyrand

1. A man was trying to create a new religion and had a hard time getting converts
2. He went to the famous French diplomat and statesman Talleyrand and asked for advice
3. Talleyrand told him to get himself arrested, tried, executed and then to rise again from the dead
4. That would be sure to win him some converts
5. This illustrates the difference between the Christian faith and the rest of the world's religions
6. The Christian believes that Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again

B. Messiahs

1. Following Jesus, there were 14 separate men who came along claiming to be the Messiah
2. Many Jews followed each of these pretenders
3. But every single one of them died and left their promises unfulfilled
4. Only one fulfilled every prophecy and rose from the dead to prove His claim = Jesus

C. Our Resurrection

1. Paul's main point in this chapter is not the resurrection of Christ
2. It's the resurrection of the believer
3. But he begins by affirming the resurrection of Christ and

bases our hope on that