

Sermon for March 31, 2013 – Easter Day

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Theme: The Resurrection Matters

- 1) *It matters because it happened - as predicted.*
- 2) *It matters because our salvation depends on it.*

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve 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 to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Does it matter whether or not Jesus rose from the dead? Some theologians in major church bodies don't seem to think so - and these theologians are training their students to think similarly.

Yes, these church bodies will still talk about the resurrection. Their theologians are careful to let you believe it if you want too - sort of like the Easter Bunny. But the truth is that they, in their dogmatic text books and scholarly journals, really question whether or not Jesus rose from the dead. They also question whether or not believing in an actual resurrection of Christ is all that important, because to them, the Gospel is all about making humanity better. To them, Gospel is all about caring and sharing, and not salvation from sin.

Does the resurrection of Christ really matter? Absolutely! With the Apostle Paul as our guide, let us see why, under the theme: **The Resurrection Matters.** 1) *It matters because it happened - as predicted.* 2) *It matters because our salvation depends on it.*

Part One: It matters because it happened - as predicted.

The problem of some so-called “Christians” denying the resurrection is not new. It is something the Christian Church had to contend with ever since Jesus’ resurrection. False teachers - whether Greek or Jewish - were trying to confuse and lead the Christians in Corinth astray. And how were they doing that? By questioning the resurrection. Could Christians ever really be sure that it happened? What evidence is there - other than Paul’s saying so? More importantly, is believing in a literal resurrection really that important? Maybe it’s all just a picture of how we should be better people by killing our selfishness, and rise selfless and loving.

The apostle Paul warns against such thinking. He writes: *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared*

to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ *After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.* ⁷ *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,* ⁸ *and last of all he appeared to me also.*

Notice, first of all, that Paul calls the teaching of the resurrection of "first importance." Denying the resurrection of Christ would make your faith totally pointless. We will talk about that later on in the sermon.

Right now I want you to focus on Paul's answer to the question: Did the resurrection happen? Now it would be one thing if just Paul and a few of his buddies said it did - with no other eye-witness - but look at the first hand testimony He provides!

First of all he says that Peter and the rest of the apostles saw him. "Well," a cynic might protest, "Of course the 12 would claim Jesus was alive. They were his closest friends. That doesn't prove anything."

Want more proof? Jesus appeared to more than 500 believers at the same time and the same place. And, Paul says, "You don't have to take my word for it, you can ask them yourself because most are still alive although some have fallen asleep (that is they died physically, but we know they will be raised to life on the last Day, just as Jesus was.)"

Now that is some proof! It's one thing to have 500 people say they saw Jesus over a period of time. They could all make up stories about Jesus doing different things. But the fact that Paul says they saw him at the same time means that all their stories would have to match. You can't easily coach 500 false witnesses to have the same "story". No, if 500 people tell you they saw Jesus alive, and their stories all match, then those 500 people truly saw Jesus alive!

Want more proof? James - Jesus' own half-brother - did not believe in Him during his earthly ministry. But Jesus appeared to him also and now look, He who once wanted nothing to do with Christianity was now a pillar in the Church.

Or consider Paul himself! He hated Christians and persecuted them with the greatest zeal. He had absolutely nothing to gain by becoming Christian. Truth be told - his life became incredibly difficult ever since he became a Christian. And yet there he is - the last person you would ever expect to call Jesus Lord, let alone be an apostle - there he is laboring and suffering so much for the sake of Christ. And why? Because Paul saw the truth. Paul saw and talked to the resurrected Christ!

Now all this points to the fact that Jesus' resurrection is an historical truth. The evidence is so overwhelming that Dr. Simon Greenleaf, a Professor of Law at Harvard in the early 19th Century, stated: "There is **more** evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus than for just about any other event in history."

But wait. There's more! Not only is Jesus' resurrection attested to by eyewitnesses, it was also prophesied about in the Scripture.

Almost 1000 years before He was born, Jesus spoke these words through King David's pen: "*you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.*" (Psalm 16:10) Isaiah wrote (some 700 years before Jesus birth): "*After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.*" We also know that Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish was a symbol of how long Jesus would stay in the grave (cf. Matthew 12:40)

All of this evidence - both prophetic and eyewitness - proves that Jesus truly did rise from the dead! But now the other question: So what? What does it matter to us that Jesus rose from the dead? It matters because our salvation depends on it!

Part Two: It matters because our salvation depends on it.

Let's look at the first and last verses of our sermon text. Paul writes: *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. . . Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

Notice that there is one Gospel that the apostles preached and there is only one Gospel that Christians truly believe - and it's not the Gospel of "caring and sharing." It's not the Gospel of equal rights. It's not the Gospel of self-actualization. What is it? Paul tells us: *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

Every man, woman and child has a serious problem - and that is the problem of sin. And why is sin such a serious problem? Because its wages is death - and not just the separation of soul from the body kind either. No, the wages of sin is eternal death, eternal separation from God and all his goodness in hell. No other problem is greater than this.

And what is more, there is nothing we can do to solve this problem! God demands perfect love and obedience from us. But are we perfect? Can we be perfect? I think the evidence is overwhelming. If the wages of sin is death, consider how many people die - how no one escapes death - and then consider how many sinners there are!

But God did not want us to die forever. He loves us. This is why He promised - ever since the fall into sin - to send a Savior.

This Savior would live the perfect life we all failed to live - and by doing so win the righteousness we need to stand before God. But this Savior would also do something unnatural, something that is impossible: even though He is perfect, he would die. Perfect people cannot die! But this one could. Why? Because God laid on him all our sins, as Isaiah prophesied: *"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* (Isaiah 53:5-6)

And not only did Jesus die for our sin, but to prove that he was dead (which was also necessary to prove that He rose from the dead) Jesus was buried - as prophesied by Isaiah: *"He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death."* (Isaiah 53:9)

The wages of sin is death. Jesus, the sinless Son of God paid those wages - even though He was innocent. And because He was innocent, after he paid for our sins, death could no longer hold him. He rose from the dead - proving that our sins have been completely paid for. He rose from the dead, proving that we have been reconciled to God. He rose from the dead, and because He rose, we can be certain of our salvation. We can confess our sins to God asking for his forgiveness. We can be assured that we are forgiven as we look to Jesus' work in faith. We can be assured that we - who believe in Jesus - will also rise from the grave to live eternally with God in paradise. This is most certainly true - as long as we don't forfeit our faith. And how would we do that? By not holding firmly to the Gospel we have learned - by letting it go through

neglect and spiritual apathy. If that happens, we won't care about sin, and then won't care about a Savior. If that happens, we will be like so many who ask: "Does it really matter whether or not Jesus rose from the dead."

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Yes, Jesus resurrection does matter! His resurrection is your assurance that sins are forgiven. His resurrection is your guarantee that you too will rise, to live with the Lord forever. Amen.