

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-19 [Slide 1] Jesus' Resurrection Means Everything

We are growing up in a culture that is increasingly post-Christian where fewer and fewer people know and understand the Gospel. That was brought home to me last Friday when I asked each of the boys that I mentor at TW Ogg if they knew what Good Friday was or if they knew what Easter was. They didn't know. One boy thought Easter might have been Jesus' birthday and I said that was Christmas. So I briefly shared the Gospel with them and explained the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Since we are going through the book of 1 Corinthians I decided to skip forward to 1 Corinthians 15 which talks about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. I invite you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians comes after the four gospels, Acts, and Romans. In this passage Paul provides evidence for the resurrection because denial of the resurrection is fatal to the Christian faith.

[Slide 2] Let's begin with evidence for Jesus' resurrection as confirmation of the Gospel in verses 1-11. Paul asserts three things here in the first eleven verses. He asserts that you are saved by holding fast to the Gospel in verses 1-2. He describes the content of the Gospel in verses 3-4 and he provides confirming evidence for the Gospel in verses 5-11. We'll start with verses 1-2. Read.

Paul reminds them in verse 2 that it was by the Gospel that they were saved if they hold fast to the word that Paul preached to them. The Gospel has the power to save us but we are only saved if we hold fast to it. In other words, it is not mere intellectual agreement that saves a person. Salvation comes when a person not only agrees that the Gospel is true, but they also place their faith or trust in the Savior of the Gospel. Faith is holding tight to Jesus Christ and his promises even when you are discouraged, fearful, angry, or doubting. Jesus promised that if we trust in him he will forgive us and give us eternal life. Trusting in and placing one's complete confidence in Jesus and the facts of the Gospel is what saves us.

The phrase, "in vain" that is tacked onto the word believe means something like "without careful thought, without due consideration, or in a haphazard manner." Trusting in Jesus is an important, serious matter. God will know whether we are serious or whether we are joking around. He is looking for a sincere, authentic faith from you. He will know whether you are mouthing words or speaking out of the depths of your heart.

What clues Paul in that some of the Corinthians might have believed in vain? Some of the Corinthians were evidently denying the future resurrection of Christians. Paul argues that if you deny the future resurrection of Christians, then you have to deny the resurrection of Jesus, and if Jesus did not rise from the dead then our faith is truly vain. It is worthless. That is Paul's argument and his starting point is to remind them of the Gospel in which they believed.

[Slide 3] Paul delivered to the Corinthians of first importance what he had received, the content of the Gospel verses 3-4. Read. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Jesus, the Son of God died in your place to pay the penalty for your sins. The Hebrew Scripture that Paul is referring to is most likely Isa. 53:4-6. Read.

The penalty for sin is spiritual death or separation from God. If we have to pay the penalty for our own sin then we will be paying it forever in Hell. Instead, Jesus experienced Hell at the

cross and paid the penalty for you. If you hold fast to Jesus as your God and Savior he will deliver you in the life to come.

Jesus was buried. The full significance of this statement comes when we realize the different ways that people have tried to deny the reality of the Jesus' death and resurrection. Muslims teach that somehow, someone did a great switcheroo at the cross and that somebody besides Jesus was actually crucified. Some great miracle occurred so that everyone was prevented from recognizing that somebody besides Jesus was crucified on the cross. One of their common suggestions is that it was Judas who was killed in Jesus' place. Think about that argument. If everyone was so incredibly deceived to think Jesus died when he didn't, when Jesus' mother and close disciples, and the Romans soldiers, and Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who prepared him for burial, all those close to Jesus, could not detect the imposter, then how did we ever know there was an imposter? That kind of argument is absurd on its face.

Jesus was buried. Since he underwent Roman crucifixion, the disposal of Jesus' body was under the authority of the Romans. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus requested permission from Pilate to take down the body from the cross and Pilate only granted that permission after he had his Roman soldiers confirm that Jesus was dead. Jesus' death was confirmed by the fact that the Romans released his body for burial. They would not release it while Jesus was still alive.

Jesus was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Jesus came back to life with a physical body but not the old body. There was a lot of overlap between the two. Jesus' new body retained the marks the nails had made in his wrists and the spear gash in his side but they evidently were healed and no longer bleeding. He was recognizable in appearance as Jesus although there may have been some changes because some people did not immediately recognize him. He had the ability to suddenly appear in locked rooms and apparently also the ability to disappear as well. He had the ability to ascend into Heaven. His new body could do things the old body could not do and yet there was a kind of continuity between the two.

He was raised on the third day. The Jewish day begins at sundown. Jesus was crucified on a Friday and had to be buried before the Sabbath began at sundown, so Jesus was placed in the tomb late Friday afternoon, day one. Day two ended at sundown Saturday night. So sometime on the third day, Sunday morning Jesus was raised. If you count in terms of total hours it is not 72 hours because Jesus was only in the tomb portions of Friday and Sunday, but from the Jewish reckoning of days, he was raised on the third day.

Paul said this happened in accordance with the Scriptures. Paul was probably thinking of OT Scriptures like Psalm 16:10 on your outline.

[Slide 4] In verses 5-11 Paul provides his evidence for the resurrection. Read verses 5-11. Jesus was seen resurrected by Peter, by Jesus' inner apostolic core, by over 500 brothers at one time, by James and finally by Paul himself. This evidence is impressive for a number of reasons. First, the sheer variety and number of times people saw Jesus was convincing. Jesus was not sighted by one person on a dark night. No, the testimony is that on many different occasions with variable numbers in the audience, people saw the resurrected Jesus. They were all in agreement that they had seen him alive. One or two people might make a mistake about what they saw, but not that number of witnesses.

Paul notes in verse 6 that some of those 500 had already died but that most were still alive at the time Paul wrote this letter. That is key information for establishing the historicity of the resurrection because it means there were still people alive who could contradict what Paul was saying if he tried to make up things about the resurrection. That would mean that many of Jesus'

contemporaries, including his enemies, were alive to set the record straight if the Christians tried to misrepresent any of the facts about the resurrection.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in the mid-fifties. Jesus died somewhere near 30 AD give or take a couple of years. That is a gap of only 25 years, so many witnesses would still be alive. Also, most scholars now believe that Paul actually quotes a portion of an ancient church creed in verses 3-4 based on the lyrical style and arrangement of the grammar. If true, that would make verses 3-4 even older than the date of the letter, meaning that we have written testimony of the resurrection of Jesus maybe less than 20 years after the death of Jesus. In terms of ancient literature that is an outstandingly narrow gap between the event and its first written record. That would make it almost impossible to create the resurrection as a legend or a fabrication because of the short time interval and the presence of so many living witnesses.

Then there is the corroborating evidence that some of Christ's witnesses were known initially to have rejected Jesus. James was the brother of Jesus and while Jesus was alive, James did not believe in Jesus according to John 7:5. James grew up with Jesus and did not believe he was the Messiah while Jesus was doing his public ministry, so why would James change his mind? If anything, Jesus dying on the cross should have convinced James that Jesus was not the Messiah because Jesus dying on the cross meant he died under God's curse. Paul explains that curse in Galatians 3:13. Read.

So what evidence would convince James that Jesus really was the Messiah? It had to be seeing Jesus resurrected.

Consider the case of Paul, who describes himself as one untimely born. The Greek word can refer to a premature birth or a violent birth. Paul's spiritual birth was not under normal circumstances. He was born somewhat in a violent manner because Jesus had to blind him and have him sit in his blindness until a man named Ananias came and restored his sight. Paul felt he was not fit or qualified to be an apostle because he persecuted the church, but that very fact is what makes Paul such a strong witness to the resurrection. He had every intention of destroying the Christian faith and was succeeding pretty well at that until suddenly he reversed course completely and began to preach Jesus as the Messiah. What would cause a man to make that kind of 180 degree turn? Paul saw Jesus resurrected.

There is no good natural explanation for how a small sect within Judaism broke away from the Jewish faith to proclaim faith in a risen messiah, whose key leaders suffered persecution and in many cases death, unless they indeed believed that they had seen Jesus resurrected. No one suffers and dies for what they know is not true. When confronted with the testimony of Jesus' disciples that they had seen Jesus resurrected then there are only a few possible explanations. Either they lied and told what they knew was not true. Or they mistakenly believed they had seen Jesus resurrected. Or they did see Jesus resurrected.

How could that many people be mistaken about what they saw? People can easily be mistaken about what they believe, but how do you get so many people to mistake what they saw, especially when the NT is clear that none of Jesus' disciples expected to see him raised? It is even more incredible to think that so many lied and covered up the truth and then suffered and even died for a falsehood they perpetrated. Neither of those explanations is very reasonable. What is reasonable is that they told the truth about what they had seen, and what they had seen was so life changing that these people in response turned their world upside down, defying Caesar and the Roman Empire, to carry the message of the Gospel throughout the known world of that time. The resurrection of Jesus explains how the church could arise out of Judaism.

Pastor John Ortberg tells the following story: Read.

Paul goes to such lengths to provide evidence for the resurrection because denial of the resurrection is fatal to the Christian faith. Let's read verses 12-19 and see how many reasons you can find for why Christians should not deny the resurrection. Read verses 12-19.

[Slide 5] Paul's first argument in verses 12-13 is that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then that means Jesus did not rise from the dead also. Apparently some in the church were arguing that there would be no future resurrection. Why would denying a future resurrection also deny Jesus' resurrection?

It is because the two resurrections are inseparably linked according to the Bible. Look on your outline at what Romans 6:3-5 says. Read. When we believe in Jesus and are saved we are totally identified with and linked with Jesus. We become "in Christ." We are united with him in the likeness of his death and resurrection. Jesus came to the earth as a human so that he could share with us in death so that we could share with him in resurrection. We will be resurrected because we are in Christ and he was resurrected and we share with him in what he experienced. The Bible says that Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection. He is the first of the harvest. We are the rest of the harvest. If there is no future resurrection, then by necessity there could not have been a first resurrection.

[Slide 6] Paul's second argument in verse 14-17 is that if Jesus is not raised then Paul's preaching is in vain and our faith is in vain and we are still in our sins. Why? How do we know that Jesus's death on the cross actually paid for our sins and simply wasn't a tragic mistake? How do we know that God accepted Jesus' death as a sacrifice for our sins? Thus the resurrection is God's proof that he did accept Jesus's death as a suitable sacrifice. In raising Jesus, God showed that Jesus was no longer under the curse of God, that he had paid the full measure of all sin, and was restored, accepted to the presence of the Father. Jesus' resurrection is God's receipt to you that the purchase price for sin was paid by Jesus.

When you purchase something in a store they give you a receipt. If you decide to do some more shopping in that store and later someone asks you whether the object you are holding in your hands has already been paid for, you just show them the receipt. When the accuser of your soul asks if the forgiveness you are claiming from God has actually been purchased, your receipt is Jesus' resurrection. It is the proof that your forgiveness has been lawfully acquired.

Without the resurrection we would have no confidence our sins have been covered. The forgiveness of our sins through the atoning death of Jesus is the central lynchpin of the Christian faith. If that doctrine is not true, then Christianity falls like a house of cards. It has nothing to offer, just like the rest of the religions of the world. You see, what makes Christianity different from Islam or Hinduism or Judaism is that those religions all teach you must do something to become acceptable to God. Christianity teaches that God has already done something to make you acceptable to God. I don't do something to become acceptable. I receive by faith what God has done for me and that is what makes me acceptable to God.

[Slide 7] Paul's third argument is that if Jesus wasn't raised then Paul and the apostles were liars because they said Jesus was raised. Those so-called Christians who deny the resurrection of Jesus and deny the miracles of the Bible never seem to grasp the idea that by so doing they are calling the Biblical authors liars. They are so steeped in their anti-supernaturalistic world view that they don't seem to realize that they automatically assume Bible authors guilty of lying rather than assuming them innocent until proven guilty. Oh, they usually don't use the term liar. Rather they describe their stories as legends or myths.

Dr. Ray Pritchard tells the following story: Read.

[Slide 8] And if we're still dead in our sins, then it's also true that those who have died before us are also dead in their sins and condemned forever, if Jesus was never raised. If we have hoped in Christ and Jesus was not raised from the dead, then we of all people are most to be pitied. We have sacrificed ourselves for nothing, achieved nothing, and have nothing to look forward if Jesus' resurrection did not happen.

[Slide 9] How is Christianity different from every other religion? Jesus' empty tomb is the difference. Mohammed is dead and in his tomb. Abraham is dead and in his tomb. All other religions teach that if you become good enough, you can enter paradise. The Jews must keep the Law. The Muslims must follow the five pillars of Islam and submit to Allah. The Hindus must keep being reincarnated coming back in multiple lives, trying to live better lives to make up for the evil of the last one. Eastern religions must cut off all desires since desires are the source of unhappiness. All religions teach that if you do enough you might be accepted. Christianity teaches that Jesus has already done enough for you to be accepted. You just need to respond to him and trust him.

[Slide 10] I am going to close by providing you with that opportunity to trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. The reason why Jesus could pay for your sins, and my sins, and the sins of everyone who has ever lived is because he is God. As God he is infinite, without limit, so his death is infinite in its possible effects, capable of saving unlimited numbers of people for unlimited time. However, you are limited. You have limited time and opportunity to respond to Jesus. The Bible provides no hope of a second chance after death. This life is your opportunity to make things right with God and you don't know how much of it you have left. No person can know whether this is their last day or not, but the wise person acts as if it were.

In this moment then, would you call upon Jesus to save you? Would you tell him that you are ready to turn away from your sin and to follow him? I am going to close in prayer. Would everyone please close your eyes? If you would like to trust in Jesus Christ would you quietly raise your hand? I am going to pray a simple prayer of faith in Jesus. I invite you to pray after me using your own words. Close in prayer.