

“Of First Importance”  
I Corinthians 15:1–11  
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March 5, 2023 • Sunday Evening Sermon

First, it's an incredible blessing to be able to worship with the Japanese, Korean and Hispanic congregations. It's also a blessing to be able to worship after a preaching conference where Pastor Sandy Wilson gave so many wonderful sermons and our missionaries shared so many wonderful stories. Isn't it amazing that despite being across the globe, they all have something very incredible in common and that common ground will be found here in I Corinthians 15. Before I get to the text, I'd like to pose some questions – why is the resurrection of first important? Why does it need clarity? Why does it need uniformity in what we believe on it? I think knowing that can embolden us to share our faith, can equip us to talk about our faith, and it can encourage us to stand for our faith. Let's look at our text.

I Corinthians 15:1-11 says *[1] 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, [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. [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 toward 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.*

This is God's Word. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You that You've given it to us and without it, we could know nothing of who You are. Father, it's sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces the division of joint and marrow, spirit and soul. So, Father, we're grateful and we thank You for Your infallible, inerrant, and perfect Word. I pray that You would apply it to our hearts for without You we cannot begin to understand the beauty of what You've given us. So guide us in this study for we ask these things in Jesus' Name, for the sake of His Kingdom, Amen.

As we move through I Corinthians 15:1-11, we'll take three headings – the Gospel made known, the Gospel's content and the Gospel Messenger. So let's start in I Corinthians 15:1a where Paul says 'Now, I would remind you, brothers...' By way of context, it's important to know that Paul has written I Corinthians to correct error in the church at Corinth. They're divided on a whole lot and this chapter shows us that they are divided on the resurrection. It's a dangerous place to be divided but Paul isn't merely correcting that theological issue for the sake of just to talk about that point. Corinth has a whole host of issues, and those are stemming from this error. According to this text, Paul reminds this of this Gospel which he has preached to them. It's not new. Paul is reminding them they've heard it before and they received it and he

says that since they received it, they ought to do something. This message is that in which they stand.

What does that mean to stand in the gospel? I think it means that you hold to it. You depend on it and you stand or fight for it. It's that we hold to the story of the Gospel. We're not going to depart from this truth. It's here. I am by it and I will stay with it. I will not move away from it. Not only that, what I think, what I do, what I believe, how I act, my actions, my thoughts, my love are dependent on the gospel. But more than that, I won't depart from it. I depend on it. But when it's attacked, when it's perverted, when it's moved away from, I will fight for it.

The Church of Corinth, in many ways, are not standing next to it. They're not depending on it as much and they haven't seemed to fight for it. Instead, they're suing each other over other things. So Paul says 'this is that which you received in which you stand, and we better stand in it to.' Maybe these simple questions need to be asked to ask yourself regularly, 'Do I stand in the Gospel? Do I depend on it? Do I refuse to depart from it? Do I fight for it?' These are important questions because look what Paul says next – 'it's in which you stand and by which you are *being saved*.' It's also peculiar.

Imagine for a moment, that you are in a large body of water and you don't want to be there. A boat comes and plucks you out of the water. What would you say? "I'm saved." As that boat is sailing you to a dock, you would say, 'Praise the Lord, I'm being saved.' When you get to the dock, step off onto dry land and you kiss it, you would say, 'Praise the Lord, I am safe at last.' That's true for us. If Jesus saved you, you are saved and good news if you're on His boat. He's a great captain. You can't get off if you're on His boat, but there's a whole lot that happens in the Christian life between the deep and the dark. We have a whole lot of glorifying and enjoying God forever to do right now.

The Gospel message, is not just our entry way into the church and our entryway into eternity, as a professor of mine said, "the Gospel is the air we breathe in the house of God." This message is not something we say, "Yeah, I heard it. I'm saved. I don't need to hear it anymore. It doesn't affect me." You're being saved and God is working on you. He's not letting go of you and nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus if you belong to Him. Then Paul says a very short and scary word – if. Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, *if you call upon Him, if you believe you will persevere.*

In I Corinthians 15:2b Paul says, *if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.* If you hold fast, these things are true, but if you believed in vain, it's a dangerous place to be. What is believing in vain look like? I think maybe a good way to say believing in vain would to say I believe about, but I don't believe in. I think the famous illustration is that of a parachute. Many people know what a parachute is. Many people believe a parachute works. I have yet to strap one to my back and jump out of an airplane. The day that I do, I believe in it and what's going on when you believe in vain is you're on an airplane that is actually crashing down. You look out the window, you look at the parachute and you say, "I believe that would work, but I think I'll ride it out on my own."

It's saying 'I believe that Jesus is who He says He is, but I don't think He's for me.' Even the demons can say that. So if you believe in vain, it's not yours, but if you hold fast – good news – that inheritance can never perish. It's kept for you. It's unfailing. It's unspoilable. It will not rust or ruin because God Almighty is holding it for you and He will reveal it to you in the last Day. Its salvation. So that's the first reason that the Gospel is of the utmost first importance.

When you believe in the Gospel, that's how He applies it to you.

Here's another important question I think we have to ask. What is the gospel? Paul says in I Corinthians 15:3-4, [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.* It's the core of the faith.

At Westminster I was instructed to read a missionary biography and I read David Brainard autobiography, and it's become one of my favorite books, but there's a quote in his book that is absolutely crushing if you're a seminary student. He says this; "There are many with whom I can talk about religion, (a lot of seminary students are good at talking about religion) but alas, I find few with whom I can talk religion itself. Blessed be the Lord. There are some that love to feed on the kernel rather than the shell."

Paul is talking about the kernel, the core, the center, the foundation of our faith. It's a first importance that he received, in accordance with the Scriptures, not a cleverly devised myth, not a made-up story, not something Paul thought would be cool to tell people. He received it. The Scriptures predicted it. What was it they predicted? Something incredible, that Jesus Christ would die for our sins. That the wrath that you and I deserved, He bore it. He wore it. He said 'what they deserve will go on me and I will bear it.'

Then Paul says He was buried. That's a really important phrase, because it means Paul just said that what Jesus did was true. He didn't seem to die. He didn't seem to live. He was really alive. He died for our sins and He went to the grave. He was buried. So it's true that He died and then something else happened in accordance with the Scriptures. He was raised on the third day. Praise the Lord for that. It is the plan from eternity past for none of this was a backup plan. God didn't look down and see what was going on in humanity and say, "Oops!" He didn't call an audible. The plan was that God would send His Son as a sacrifice to save His people because He loved Him and then He would give those people to His Son.

It wasn't just death for the plan was victory. It was to rise triumphant from the grave. It was that Jesus could not be contained by death. He could not be stopped by the grave. He rose in accordance with the Scriptures and there's proof of that, too. He was seen. We're not going to go through who all He was seen by, but He was seen by a whole lot. He died. It was true. He rose. It was true. And that is the second reason that the resurrection is of first importance. It's the true story of how Jesus accomplished salvation for us, how He wore what we did, and He gave us what He earned. He bore sin and death. He gave us eternal life. He's the champion. He's the King. And it's a true story that He did these things. It's not make believe. It's not wishful thinking. It's reality that God's plan was that His Son would live a perfect life, born of a virgin, would die on a cross to pay for our sins and would raise from the dead as a Champion. Do you believe that? It's a good thing to believe because it's salvation. If you don't, I beg you believe on Him. Believing saves because Jesus saves.

So what do we do with it? I do wish we could cover all of this, but I think we'll just go straight to verse 11. Paul says in I Corinthians 15:11, [11] *Whether then it was I or they (the Apostles), so we preach and so you believed.* I think we can make an argument from the greater to the lesser. No one now is a capital A, Apostle. Not all are preachers, not all are teachers, not all are evangelists, but all as I Peter 3:15 would tell us "all (meaning servants, wives, husbands and strangers) have been tasked to give a reason for the hope that they have in Christ Jesus. So, we all are to take this message.

I think Paul says something wonderful here. Basically, he says, 'Who cares who said it? It's the message that makes the messenger.' God's messengers are made by that message. So if

you're carrying the King's message, you should run like the King's Herald. Paul says you should see it in their feet. My story is really interesting to me but it doesn't save anybody. It's not my story. I am not the means of salvation, but as a servant of God, the message I carry is powerful to save. So we can go share with confidence.

At our missions conference this week we have seen this for it's the reason that missionaries Wendy and Russell Long can teach students who are over here about the Gospel, knowing that when they go back, they don't have to be experts with seminary educations to deliver the Good News of salvation to the people in their home countries. It's the reason our missionary in Romania, can introduce himself to someone on Instagram and that message can carry over to hiking trails and he can be always ready because the message is what he needs to give to people. It's the reason Kyle shows love to people that who, quite frankly, the people around them don't want to show love to because he's a King's Herald and he has been radically changed by that message. Kyle knows that their value is incredible as image bearers of the King, and also that they need eternal life.

Our Glow mission training for our children was not make believe mission training. Those children are missionaries and evangelists. That's real and do you know why it's real? My son can carry the message and as he can speak it, it still carries weight. The message makes the messenger. That's why we send people to places where death is a reality. How dare we tell somebody this story if it would kill them unless it's a turn of life, unless it really is a reality and that's the paramount reason why this is a message of first importance. It's a message that brings dead to life, lost to found, blind to see, sinner to saint. What other story can do that?

You can see in the world that we like to modify things, to modify the story. Maybe we'll do politics instead of the passion or we'll wage war on culture instead of sin. Maybe we'll say we can do a 25 minute stand up comedy routine with a moral application at the end that will bring people in the door and it's a great way to run business. I have news for you. No one's going to be persecuted to the point of death for that kind of faith, because that kind of faith doesn't challenge the evils in the darkness of this world. Again, What other story can do that?

J.C. Ryle asks the question I think we should ask of those who want to modify the story for in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, at the bedside of a dying parent or a dying child, will that story give comfort? What other story than the King and His cross can give you comfort when you stare out over the abyss that is the grave? What other story demands only the King and the cross? What other story supplies life? It's only the King in the cross. What other story changes people? It's only the King and the cross. As Pastor Reeder said this morning, what other story turns idolaters into worshipers? It's only the King and His cross. When it comes to stories, content is king and when it comes to the Gospel the content is the King. We dare not talk about Him without mentioning His cross or His empty tomb. I don't need to tell you, but death is real and so is the resurrection so we must tell of it for it is of first importance. No other story will do.

So what now? Rejoice in the wonderful story. Praise God for the wonderful story. Share the wonderful story. It is of first importance. Paul received one other thing that he tells us about in I Corinthians 15. He receives instruction on the Lord's Supper and we can share it together as we celebrate the King and His cross for His body was given. His blood was poured out, but we don't celebrate it just because He died. His dying was crucial. We celebrate it because He lives. The resurrection is of first importance. No other story will do. Would you agree with me? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much that You did send Your Son to die for us and that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Father, I thank You that You saved me. I thank You that there are brothers and sisters in this congregation that cry out, 'Thank You,' alongside my voice. I thank You that You did it for Your glory, for Your love for us and for the sake of Your Son's name. So, we ask You to apply it to our heart that we would rejoice, share and give thanks in the name of Jesus and for the sake of His Kingdom, Amen.