

In Christ We Have Hope

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[0 : 00] So we're reading 1 Corinthians chapter 15 from verse 1 to 26. Here now God's word.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved. If you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

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.

[1 : 26] Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And so if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

[2 : 34] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order. Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Then comes the end when he delivers the kingdom of God, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Amen. This is God's word. That was a mouthful. But Paul here, 1 Corinthians chapter 15, they call it the resurrection chapter because this chapter, more than any other place in the Bible, gives you the clearest picture of what the resurrection is and why it matters.

And all I want to do for the next few minutes is to answer two questions that I think Paul gives us. The first one is, what is the gospel? And I don't mean necessarily, you know, if you were to explain the gospel in one minute, what would it be?

What I mean is, what kind of thing is it? And then the other question I want to look at is, based on what the gospel is, what does that say about faith?

[3 : 48] What does that mean that faith is? And if you want to ask what is the content of the gospel, Paul gives one of his best summaries here in the whole Bible. You see it there in verse 3.

He says, I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with Scripture, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with Scripture.

All right, so that's the gospel. If somebody asks you, you could say that's what the gospel is. But what I want you to think about for a moment is, what kind of a thing is it? You know, because when you look at that, what you can see is it's not a moral code.

You know, if the gospel is the heart of Christianity, then what Christianity is, it's not first and foremost a moral code. It's not about what you need to do to be right with God.

It's not good advice. What is it? If you look at that, what is that? It's news. That's what Paul says the gospel is. It's news. And most of you know this, that the word gospel is a Greek word that just means good news.

[4 : 52] And so everywhere Paul went, he was giving the good news to the people. And that may sound like such a small thing. Why are we talking about this on Easter? We've got more important things to do. There's roast in the oven. But it's important because so often one of the temptations is to think that the gospel is not news, but that it is a moral code or that it is good advice.

And that it's all about if you want to be right with God, here's how you need to live your life. And that's just not what the gospel is. It's first and foremost news. And that makes it different from almost every other world religion because almost every other world religion says, here is our faith.

And our faith teaches you what you need to do to be right with God. And what Christianity does is it says our faith is news. It's about what Christ has done to make you right with him.

You see? And if you get that wrong, then Christianity can so often become about, well, what do I need to do to prove myself to God? And Paul's saying, oh, no, if that's the case, then you and I are in trouble.

Because what does Paul say here? He talks about his own life. He gives us a little bit of bio. And one of the things he says is, Jesus appeared to me last of all, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

[6 : 06] If you know anything about Paul, Paul was, he was a professor. He was a lawyer. He was a smart guy. And he was a guy that spent all of his life trying to prove himself to God, trying to be a good Jew.

And then he meets Jesus Christ. And everything changes. And suddenly he realizes that the only way that you could ever relate to a God that's this holy is not by proving yourself to him.

It's not by obeying the moral code, even though the gospel has moral implications. But it's about seeing and accepting what God has already done. That's what Paul is saying here.

And, you know, for Paul, you know, to say that the gospel is news is to say it's more like opening a newspaper than the advice you get at a therapist's office. Like it's really and that's how it was for Paul.

You know, Paul, what made Paul a Christian? Do you remember the story? What made him a Christian? It wasn't it wasn't a moral enlightenment. It wasn't a eureka moment. What happened?

[7 : 06] The risen Jesus came and showed himself to Paul so that Paul, he couldn't deny it anymore. Something something historically had changed and he couldn't act like he hadn't seen it. You know, I think in my life, the most important historical event, I think, was 9-11.

I think it's the most important world event that I've lived through. Some of you have lived through bigger things. And, you know, you know, in those years after 9-11, how often did you hear people remind us that we live in a post 9-11 world?

And 9-11 was the kind of news that after the fact, you had to accept that things were going to be different. Life could not be the same. And you couldn't go to the airport and expect to get through security as quickly as you used to.

And even, you know, there were awful things that went along with it. Things that used to be so normal suddenly are filled with fear. You know, you're in a big crowded place and you're saying, well, somebody could do something terrible here. Or you get on a plane and suddenly the thought occurs to you something really, you know, a terrorist could be on this plane.

It was the kind of news that changed everything. And Paul, when Paul talks about the gospel, he says it's the same thing, but the opposite, right? Where suddenly there's, Paul says, I live in a post-resurrection world.

[8 : 22] I live in a world where a dead man has risen from the dead and I can't live like that's not the case anymore. God forced the facts upon him and he couldn't ignore it anymore.

And so for Paul, the question wasn't, is this true? For him, the question was, how do I live in light of the fact that I can't deny its truth anymore? And so let me stop here for a second, because Paul here is addressing a problem in a church.

He's writing to the Corinthians. And the problem he's talking about is he's saying there's people in the Corinthian church who say that actually the resurrection is not true. And that sounds really strange in a Christian church.

And people aren't really quite sure why a Christian church would deny the resurrection. Some people think it was because the idea of a resurrection in the ancient world was just so odd. You know, did you know that?

That in the ancient world, no other religion believed that it was possible for a person to be resurrected in the middle of history. Maybe there's a resurrection at the end of time, but not in the middle of history.

[9 : 23] No other religion believed that. And because of that, no one expected it. And when Christians started to say that we've seen this man rise from the dead, people said, that can't be true. They weren't even prepared for the idea.

Some people think that the Christians in Corinth were denying the resurrection because they thought the resurrection was all spiritual. And you know that, right? You know, when you have a great idea come upon you, it almost feels like you've been born again.

Like you've had this rebirth, a novel idea has come to your mind. And so some people might have said, well, you know, Jesus to me is a great example. And he's such a good example that he's actually transformed who I am and how I see myself.

But I don't have to believe that he actually rose from the dead. And Paul's saying, oh, no, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, Christianity is dumb. It's foolish.

He says it's futile. And there's that temptation in our world today, too, right? To say, can't Jesus just be a good example? Can't we just say, what a great person, what a great human to aspire to?

[10 : 26] You know, this week, the prime minister of India, not somebody I follow very often, but I saw this tweet. The prime minister of India, he tweeted this about Christianity on Good Friday.

He said, Now, those are beautiful words.

And I'm happy to hear him say that because India is a country where Christianity is often persecuted. But at the same time, you have to say what Paul would say to that is those are just fluff words.

Because if if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, if it's if Christianity is just about inspiring compassion, then it's all foolish. It makes no sense whatsoever. And Paul camps out on that because what does it mean if the resurrection isn't true?

What would that mean? One thing it would mean is that Christianity offers no answer to the reality of death. And that's Paul's main point here is you and I, all of us have to face the reality of death.

[11 : 38] It is inevitable. Unless Christ returns, every single one of us is going to be buried one day. And Paul is saying, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then you can't look at Christianity as any kind of answer or any kind of hope in the midst of a world where people die.

And, you know, when I was in the graveyard where most of my family are buried, on a lot of the tombstones, there's this beautiful line where it's just two words.

It says only sleeping. So many of the gravestones in my family's graveyard say only sleeping. And that's a uniquely Christian idea.

And Paul says it a lot in this passage. A beautiful idea, this idea that the people that we love who are laying in the grave one day, if you believe in the resurrection of the dead, they will rise up right where they were buried and come back to life in a life that's better than they had ever known before.

But at the same time, Paul says, if Christianity is if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, don't say that. That's just a placebo.

[12 : 50] It doesn't mean anything if he didn't really rise from the dead. And it's, you know, because you couldn't you say, well, you know, isn't Christianity at least nice in the sense that it makes gives people meaning in their life?

Like even if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, wouldn't it be nice to just have something that you could kind of believe in while you're alive? And then when you die, it'll all be it doesn't matter what happens after you die. Right. That's what somebody could say.

And the reason that doesn't make sense to Paul is because Paul, well, he suffered. He believed he had faith in the resurrection of the dead and he suffered because of it. There's a great there's a great place in Second Corinthians where Paul gives this laundry list of all the things that he went through.

He says just to give a couple, he says five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones.

Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move. He goes on and on and on. Basically says my life's been horrible the last few years. Knowing Jesus has not made things easier for me.

[13 : 54] And he talks about the joy that he has in the gospel. But he would also say, listen, if this isn't true, there's better ways to spend your days than to be beaten and tortured and put in jail. That's why he says faith is futile, because, you know, if you believe in Jesus and you're really putting all your hope on him, and it's costing you.

Why believe in that if he didn't really rise from the dead? And later on in chapter 15, Paul gives this quote. He says, if the resurrection isn't true, then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.

Now, that sounds like something a college student might say who loves to party. But really, that was the greatest philosophers of Paul's age were saying that. They were saying, listen, we don't think there's anything after death.

And if that's true, why not just party? Why not just live the best life you can live now? Because there's no hope afterwards. And there were historians have found a lot of tombs from this time period that all had this same phrase on it.

And it was this. It said, I am not. I have been. I am not. And I do not mind. In other words, life is meaningless.

[15 : 09] And I don't care anymore because I'm dead and there's nothing after the afterlife. And Christianity thrusts itself onto this world and says, death is not the end.

Death need not be the end. And that's what Paul says here. He goes on to say, but in fact, Christ has risen from the dead, the first fruits of those who've fallen asleep. And Paul said Paul saying here, one reason to believe in Christianity is that it offers a credible response to the reality of death.

It tells us, you know, that feeling in your inside of you that says, surely there must be something after this life. Like Christianity says, yes, that the gospel is rational.

It's good news in the midst of a world that is covered in death and dying. And, you know, Paul reads like a lawyer here. That's why I mentioned that earlier. He wasn't really a lawyer, but he reads like a lawyer. There's all kinds of if then statements.

And he goes so deep into theology here. But one point that he's making here is he really gives the whole scope of human history in two or three verses.

[16 : 21] And what he says is the story of human history is death comes into the world because Adam first sinned. And so in Adam, in Paul's mind, sin in your life and in my life and death are perfectly connected.

Where the reason every single one of us dies without fail is because every one of us has been tainted with that reality of sin. And what Paul's saying here is all of us are, you know, the descendants of Adam and all of us have death because of that.

And then he says, but because of what Jesus Christ has done, all of us have the opportunity to have life. The way that C.S. Lewis put it was like this. He says, Jesus has forced open a door that had been locked since the death of the first man.

And Paul is saying, this is why you this is why it's worth hoping in the gospel, because it's news that death is not the end. That because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, it's not the end.

Now, briefly, for just a moment, let's that's all the news. But let's think about what that means practically in our lives. What is it? What is the meaning?

[17 : 34] The fact that it's news, what does that teach us about faith and what for you and me to have faith? And two two main things. Number one, based on everything Paul says, faith does not mean leaving your brain at the door.

Faith can't mean leaving your brain at the door. You know, Paul is trying to convince these people that a man really rose from the dead, something that they are not inclined to believe. And the way that he the way that he convinces them is not to say, hush your doubts, be quiet and just listen to what I tell you.

No, what does he say? Did you notice? He said he tells them what the news is and then he tells them how they can find out that it's true. He says, so he rose from the dead. He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time. Most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Did you ever notice that line? Most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

What's he telling them? He's saying, listen, the resurrection has verifiable evidence that you can go out and you don't have to take my word for it. You can speak to these people.

[18 : 40] He says there's 500 people that saw the resurrected Christ. And the reason he says most of them are still alive is because he's saying, listen, the evidence is out there. If you want to go find it, this is real.

This really happened. And one of the most beautiful things about all the resurrection stories, you know, Jesus meeting the women at the tomb, all these things, is how is the length to which Jesus goes to help his disciples face their doubts.

You know, these men, these disciples who on the day that Jesus died abandoned Jesus, Jesus shows up three days later to convince them that he rose and that he still loves them and cares for them.

One of my favorite scenes. So this morning in our sunrise service, we talked about how the angels appeared to the women at the tomb. The next scene in Luke or the two scenes later, Jesus appears to his disciples and they don't believe they don't believe it.

They're looking at it and they don't believe it. And it says that they thought that he was a ghost. And what does Jesus do? He doesn't walk right back out the door and say, if you can't believe this, you won't believe anything. No, what is he? He gets closer to them.

[19 : 51] And he says, he says, feel, see my hands and my feet. Touch me. See. And the best part of it, my favorite part of that whole scene, because he's trying to convince them that he's a real body, not just a ghost.

And there comes a point where he looks at his disciples and he says, does anybody have any food? And someone produces a fish and he just sits right in front of them and eats it. Now, I don't think he was doing that because he was hungry.

What he was doing is he was showing them that he was a real, a real body, that he really was risen from the dead. The same man that they saw die on the cross. So, you know, if any of you, I'm sure some of you are.

If you're struggling to believe in the gospel this morning, at least hear Jesus say, see in these stories that the gospel is not about leaving your brains at the door.

Jesus Christ says, come, come and see, come and see the evidence. How, for instance, is it possible that this man who all historians would at least say died on the cross?

[21 : 01] How is it possible that all these people so quickly after the fact believed, came to believe that he was risen and were willing to believe in that so strongly that they would themselves go on to be martyred for it and die for it?

You know, any of us could be could possibly believe in something that wasn't true just because we thought it was true and we were wrong. But just these these men saw it.

You know, they had the chance to say, I really saw what happened and they stake their lives on it. OK, so if you find yourself struggling, don't run away from that. Go towards go ask the questions.

Seek out the answers. And Jesus is offering himself to you. OK, but secondly, faith also means if I can use an Easter reference, it means putting all your eggs in one basket, making making the resurrection of the dead, the compass of your life.

Whether you're a Christian or not, every single one of us knows if you've ever had this moment where you're stressed and you're trying to figure out how can I make myself not stressed in this moment?

[22 : 07] And one of the things that people always often do is they tell themselves, you know, I don't need to be stressed because I know that 10 years from now, I'm not going to care about this moment.

You know, you're struggling to find a parking spot and you're angrier than you have a right to be. And you tell yourself, you know, this doesn't matter. This doesn't matter at all. Or maybe the opposite. You know, 10 years later, after you go through a hardship, you look back and you say, you know, I was really anxious during that time period.

And I didn't need to be because now it doesn't mean anything to me. What the resurrection can do for us is it can take our deepest griefs and our deepest sorrows and make even those things seem small.

You know, some of us go through griefs where 10 years later, it still can feel like an open wound. Right. There are some griefs in this life that are excruciating and can stay that way for years and years.

And we wonder, is it ever possible to get over something like this? Or is it ever possible to overcome something like the fear of death that stands out in front of all of us? But think about it.

[23 : 15] If you if you live a thousand years, how small does death seem in the rearview mirror if you were to live a thousand years? Is it not possible that the longer you the longer you are on the other side of the resurrection, every hardship in this life, your worst day becomes smaller and smaller?

That's the hope of the resurrection. And really, the way that Paul talks about that hope is not about getting distance from the things that make you sad. It's about it's about getting close to something that is so great and so powerful and so big that even though what's sad is so close behind you, you hardly see it anymore because of the glory that you found.

Paul, we just read that laundry list of Paul's sufferings. And there's a point in one of his letters where he says this. He says he's talking about his own life and the sufferings of his life.

And he says this light momentary affliction, that's what he called all the things he went through. This light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient. But the things that are unseen are eternal. You see, Paul, even in the middle of his suffering, he would catch these glimpses of life after the resurrection.

[24 : 40] And they were so powerful to him that even when he was suffering, he said, these things I'm going through, they're light momentary afflictions. It doesn't make the pain go away, but it transforms how we see the pain.

It also means putting all your eggs in one basket, making the resurrection in the compass of your life.

It also frees us up to love in a way that we never could have before. You know, so many of us, if we begin to think that this life is all there is, we fear anything that would cause disruption to it, right?

You know, even if we believe in the resurrection, we get narrow-minded and we think, you know, what is in this life is what's most important. It's hard to see beyond it. But if you can get to a place where you see the glory that's on the other side of the resurrection, suddenly you're able to love in this life unselfishly in a way that you never could have before.

Jimmy Elliott, the famous Christian missionary who was killed when he was 28 years old in Ecuador, his most famous line you've probably heard before, he says, He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

[26 : 00] He's no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. But to believe that, to live in the light of that, you have to believe, to give up some of the best things in this life, you have to believe that what you're getting in the next life is so wonderful that it makes everything, every good thing in this life pale in comparison.

Let me just close with this. One more thing about faith and the light of the resurrection. It's just a pattern I want you to think about.

Everyone who saw the resurrected Christ, when they saw him, they walked away not just believing that a man rose from the dead. They also walked away believing that he was a king.

You see, Paul, towards the end of this passage, he talks about how the reason that Jesus is able to conquer death is because he is a king and how he must reign over everything.

And I bring that up because Paul and Thomas, remember Thomas, didn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But when he finally gets it, what does he say?

[27 : 10] He bows down and he says, my Lord and my God. All that to say, faith is not about just believing that Jesus rose from the dead. It's seeing that the only one who could have risen from the dead is the true king, the one that we were all made to worship.

And when you see him for who he really is, the right response, the right implication is to bow down to him and say, all that I am belongs to you because you've given it to me and I deserve none of it.

So the question that you have to ask yourself is, is the gospel news? Did it really happen or is it a lie? Is it news? And if it's news, then doesn't it have to change everything?

Let's pray. Lord, help us to see the resurrection and all of its glory and in all of its implications for all of who we are, for all of our lives.

In your son's name we pray. Amen.