

# Critical Aid for Critical People

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, have you ever had one of those moments where you're in a conversation with someone and they start to tell you something and it's something that you already know? Maybe they don't know that you know it. Maybe you read the same news article that they did or you saw the same thing on TV, but it's something that you've already heard before and you're kind of wondering in that moment, do I interrupt and kind of tell them that I heard that too? Or maybe they even forgot that they had already told you this in the past and they're telling it to you again. Or do I just kind of listen respectfully and kind of, this is the first time I'm hearing this. It's kind of a weird moment in conversation. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, you kind of wonder, well, what do I do here? Well, there's another kind of similar conversation where you might hear something that you already know, but it's not because the person that's telling you doesn't think you don't know it or haven't heard it, but it's because they think that you need to know it, even though you might not think that you do. Maybe your mind goes back to one of those moments as a teenager where your parents were saying something to you and you're kind of thinking in your own arrogant teenage mind, why are they telling me this again?
- [ 1 : 5 6 ] You guys have told me this countless times. Why are you saying the same thing again? And yet from the parents' perspective, it's like I'm telling you this because even though you think you know it, you think you've got this figured out, I see that you don't. The quarter hasn't dropped yet. There's something. It's not because it's because I love you. I want to help you see something in your life that I see that you don't see. And meanwhile, you're kind of like, I know, Mom. I know, Dad. You know, like, just leave me alone already. Well, that kind of moment is not just something that happens between teenagers and their parents. It's something that happened between a church and the apostle that helped to start that church. The apostle that I'm referring to is the apostle Paul, and the church is the church of Corinth. If you have your Bible, please open it up to 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians. Paul has had a very dynamic relationship with this church.
- [ 3 : 1 5 ] He starts off his letter with some wonderful descriptions of who they are. He says that he writes to the church of God in Corinth, to those specially set apart in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, immediately after this, Paul, acknowledges that God has enriched them in every way with all kinds of spiritual gifts. In verse 9, he says that they are those who have been called into fellowship with Jesus. Wonderful descriptions of who they are. But then from there, he goes on to describe this church as a church wrestling with division.

Major conflict going on here. They're fighting over who they follow. They're chasing after worldly wisdom, he says.

He describes them as a church having some in it who are arrogant, having problems with sexual immorality going on in the church, and the church is not even doing anything about it.

[ 4 : 43 ] Disputes are happening in the church, to the point where members of the church are taking other members to court. There's confusion in the church about marriage and divorce, and whether Paul is even an apostle, legitimately an apostle, whether they should eat food sacrificed to idols.

He goes so far as to warn them in chapter 10 that they need to watch. They need to look at their lives. They need to be careful that they're not testing Christ with the way that they live.

He goes on from there to describe how they have been turning the Lord's table into a pig-out session, an opportunity to get drunk.

And then on from there to describe how they have these spiritual gifts, they haven't been using them in a loving and considerate and orderly manner.

And then finally, we come to where we're looking at this morning, chapter 15. He kind of goes right into it, and he reminds them of the gospel itself.

[ 6 : 08 ] He says this, Now, brothers and sisters, I want to make known to you the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

These are kind of striking words. I mean, this is a church, and he said these good things about this church, but now it's come to the point where he feels he needs to remind them of the gospel again.

The word remind is actually, it's kind of an interpretive decision, but the literal is, I want to make known to you.

This is serious. There's a problem here. At one point in this letter, he refers to himself as their father through the gospel. He talks about them as his children, and he goes so far as to say, you guys are immature.

[ 7 : 18 ] You guys are like babies. You're not ready for the meat and potatoes yet. You got to go back to the milk. And Paul said that under the inspiration of the Spirit, so I'm not suggesting that you go home and tell your kids that they're immature, that that may not be the most effective way to get their attention.

But what has happened here that Paul feels the need to take them right back and say, I need to tell you guys the gospel again.

The gospel, I asked my daughter that this week, what's the gospel? And she didn't really seem to get it. I said, what's the good news about Jesus that he died on the cross for our sins?

Suddenly it just clicked. What is the gospel? It's kind of a weird word. The way I remember it is, in the old English, it's kind of God or good spell, you know, good news.

That's what the gospel is. It's good news. It literally means good news. And Paul feels that he needs to remind them of the good news, the same good news that he preached to them back in the day, the same good news that they received back in the day.

[ 8 : 43 ] Why? I think there's at least two reasons. The first is kind of an implicit reason as we just looked at how he's described this church for the last 14 chapters as having all of these issues.

You know, this is how you guys are living. And, I mean, the way that you're treating one another, it's, have you really understood the love of Christ for you?

There's a problem here. Your lives, the way that you're living, it doesn't match up to the gospel. So I want to make it known to you again.

I want to bring you back to that. And, the gospel is, it certainly doesn't, the expectation is not that you're perfect or that you don't sin.

This church has got all kinds of issues. It doesn't stop Paul from calling them the church of God and saying that those, they've been chosen, that they've been set apart as God's holy people.

[ 9 : 49 ] But, there's a sense in which you may think that you, you know the gospel. But, do you really know it? That's why I'm, I'm saying it to you again.

You, you, you may think you know it, but do you know it? I'm looking at your, your life, your, your church, the situations that are coming out of your relationships and it doesn't match up.

And so I think that's one reason why, why Paul goes so far as to take them right back to the gospel, to the, to the beginning. The second reason is what, what follows.

All of chapter 15, it kind of points to this, this problem that's starting to emerge. There are some in the church in Corinth who are having an issue with the idea of resurrection.

That there is a resurrection. And, that's a big problem because that undermines the gospel. people. And so, we're going to be talking about that in the next weeks ahead.

[ 10 : 56 ] We're going to be working through 1 Corinthians 15 as we lead up to Easter and talking about the resurrection and just what, what is the significance of that for our faith? What's the importance of that?

Why is this so critical? verse 2. This is the beginning of Paul's teaching on this issue.

And right at the beginning, the first thing he wants them to know in verse 2 is that this is critical. It's absolutely critical that you get the gospel.

Why? Verse 2. By this gospel, you are saved. By this good news about Jesus, you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you unless you have believed in vain.

The picture that comes to my mind is the picture of a rope. The gospel is like a rope that has been thrown down to us from heaven. It's the way of escape.

[ 12 : 06 ] It's the way that we escape the wrath of God, the just punishment that we deserve for our sins. And it's like he's saying, you need to hold on to that rope.

If you just kind of let go of it and move on to something else, embrace something different, you're in spiritual danger. Because this is the only way.

This is the only way of escape. The way to be saved. The good news about Jesus. Holding on to that. Believing it. Unless, he says, you have believed in vain.

Unless, back in the day when I first communicated all these things to you, you accepted it and now you're moving on to something different and that's just kind of, the gospel's just kind of, that's old news.

Then, then, then what happened back there? Was that, was that all for nothing? You grabbed onto the rope, you believed back then that, that, that was the way to be saved, but now you're letting go of it.

[ 13 : 17 ] I mean, that, what happened there? Was that, was that just fruitless? Was that just, was that nothing? Paul goes on in verse three to describe, to answer the question, well, what is the gospel?

Because this is really what's at issue here. Well, what is it that you are to hold onto? What is that rope? He says this, for what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

So here Paul does exactly what he says he's going to do. I want to make known to you the gospel, and this is it. He lays it out for them. But before he does, look at the little thing that he says there in verse three.

He says, what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance. There it is again, just this statement. This is absolutely critical.

[ 14 : 46 ] It's absolutely crucial that you get this, that you understand this, that you hold to this, that I'm about to say. What is the gospel?

Three statements. There's different ways to divide it up, but three. That Christ died for your sins, for our sins, according to the scriptures, and was buried.

that he was raised on the third day, and that he appeared to a whole bunch of people.

This is Paul's description of what the gospel is. And as I got thinking about this, you know, this is a really bare-bones version of the gospel.

It's kind of a stripped-down version. There's not a lot of detail here. And I kind of, why is that? If they need to know the gospel, why isn't he just taking them into the depths of the glory of the love of God here?

[ 15 : 54 ] And I think part of the reason is because he's already shared all of this with him. This is the same thing he proclaimed in the past. This is, it's kind of a quick way, mental hooks, to point them back to what he already said, you know, that Christ died for our sins, that he was raised from the dead.

This isn't the full story of the gospel. I mean, those of us who were here on Thursday night, we saw closer to the full story of the gospel portrayed.

It's a big story. There's a lot to it. This is kind of the absolute essentials, highlights version, kind of the headlines version given here.

And without these parts, then the news is not much good. If Christ hasn't died for us, then we're lost.

We're in big trouble. If Jesus hasn't been raised from the dead, then we're going to find out in the weeks ahead that that has serious implications. But notice what's missing from Paul's version or description of the gospel.

[ 17 : 12 ] Paul doesn't say anything about what we must do, about the good that we must do to be saved.

Why? Because the good news is not about what we must do to be saved.

It's all about what Christ has done for us. Period. The rope that they need to grab onto is simply the news that Jesus has already done it all for you.

You don't need to become good enough. You don't need to do something well enough to be saved. Jesus has already done it all. That's all that we have here.

This news that they must believe is just that Jesus did. That Jesus did. That Jesus appeared. By this, by believing this story of Jesus and holding to it, you are saved.

[ 18 : 19 ] Isn't that amazing? But I want to dig for a moment into that first phrase. We're going to talk more about resurrection in the weeks ahead, but that first phrase that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

When I asked my daughter, what's the good news about Jesus? That's the first thing she said, that Jesus died for our sins. We hear it so often that's kind of the easiest way to say it that sometimes we just lose the beauty of that.

The meaning of it just kind of goes over our heads. What does that mean? That Christ, the Messiah, died, was executed as a sacrifice for our sins to be forgiven.

That's it. That's the heart. That's what Paul says is what I passed on to you as a first importance.

out of all the things I could have taught, I could have said when I came to you, I made it the top of my list to let you know this good news that Jesus was executed on that cross.

[ 19 : 54 ] Not because he was just a good teacher whose culture wasn't ready for him. He died there so that you could be forgiven.

of your sins, of the things that you have done against God. The other details that Paul includes, I'm only going to mention two of them here.

He says that Christ was buried. Why does he throw that little detail in there? Christ was buried. That doesn't sound like part of the good news to us.

He was buried. The question that we're going to be wrestling with is these guys are wrestling with the truth of whether there really is a resurrection, whether that actually happened.

Paul kind of sneaks that in there. Yes, he died. All of these men, they saw him die. They saw him buried.

[ 21 : 02 ] Real people, they took the body of Jesus and they went through the process of preparing the body for burial and they laid the body of Jesus in a tomb and shut the door.

Yes, he was dead. The next thing that we notice is, I kind of thought this was strange at first.

This is a really weird, disproportionate statement of the gospel. I mean, that Christ died for our sins is half a verse. The crucifixion is half a verse in verse 3.

And then for four verses, 5 to 8, it's all talking about all these people that he appeared to. This big list of people that saw him after he was raised from the dead.

And I think Paul is intentionally, he's reminding them of the part that they need to hear the most. Because they're wrestling with the truth of whether, resurrection is even possible.

[ 22 : 03 ] And so Paul's emphasis here, absolutely, this is true. We all saw him dead. He was buried. And after the third day when he was raised, this is, look at all the people that saw him alive.

Peter, he appeared to Peter. Then he appeared to the twelve apostles. After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time.

Then he appeared to James, the brother of Jesus. And then to all the apostles, and then Paul says, and last of all, he appeared to me.

Think about that statement. I myself, says Paul, saw Jesus dead. and I saw him after he died, alive.

I saw the risen Christ, says Paul. It wasn't in the ordinary frame of time that the rest of them saw him. He uses this abnormally born analogy, you know, kind of the sense of that is, my new birth was a little overdue.

[ 23 : 21 ] It was different. But look at this list. Look at all these people. This wasn't something that just happened in some secret corner of some guy's house that Jesus appeared to some people.

Look at this group, 500 people all at once. 500 people. This wasn't a hallucination. This wasn't just a vision.

This was the real deal. They saw him alive. And I love how he throws in that little detail. Most of them, he says, are still living. You want to look into this?

You want to, you want to, you can find them, you can talk to them, they can tell you what they saw, they can tell you that they knew. Yeah, it was him. This wasn't something that happened in an obscure place.

And it wasn't something that just the followers of Jesus believed. And I think that's the powerful part of Saul's own testimony. I was on the road to Damascus so that I could get some of these guys thrown into jail when the risen Christ appeared to me.

[ 24 : 41 ] This wasn't just bias, this wasn't just weird hallucinations because of grief for those who had known him. I was going after the people of Christ and then I saw him.

After this, Paul goes on to reflect a little bit on that. You almost get the sense that even as he's thinking about his own story and how he saw the risen Christ, I could just picture him there writing this letter and weeping.

He says, for I am the least of the apostles. I do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

I went after the very people of God. I tried to get them thrown in jail. I tried to get them killed. I'm not even worthy to be one of the ones who was sent to make Christ known.

But what does he say in verse 10? He says, but by the grace of God, I am what I am. I'm an apostle. I'm a follower of Jesus because God just gave me a gift that I don't deserve.

[ 26 : 02 ] He says, I worked harder. He says, his grace to me was not without effect. I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Verse 11, whether then it is I or they, this is what we preach and this is what you believed.

It doesn't matter whether you're talking to Peter or whether you're talking to me or any of these people who saw him alive. It's the same news. It's the same gospel.

And this gospel that Christ died for your sins, that he rose from the dead, that he appeared to all these people, believing this is critical.

Why? Back to verse 2. By this gospel, you are saved. if you hold firmly to the word of truth I preach to you.

[ 27 : 10 ] Do you hear the warning in that? There's a danger, church at Corinth, that you guys can move on from this and you can just embrace something different.

If you do, your salvation is on the line. this is the only way to be saved. Holding firmly to this. And it's a very kind of specific thing for their church, dealing with, do we believe in resurrection?

That's possible. I don't think that we're there as a church. I hope not. But it got me thinking this week. What ways are we tempted to move on from the gospel?

What's your attitude towards the gospel? How do you feel about the gospel? Is it old news?

Is it that thing that I think all too easily we get into this mindset sometimes of the gospel is the foundation, it's the elementary stuff, the basics, it's the door that you go through at the beginning and then leave behind and you go on to the more advanced stuff of being a Christian and following Jesus.

[ 28 : 39 ] Sometimes we, I think, we think that way. But as we saw last week, where are we going? What's our future?

What's the snapshot of our future? It's us standing before the throne of God and what are we singing about when we get there? Worthy is the Lamb who was slain for us, whose blood was spilled to wash our robes white.

Salvation is of our God. That's what we're going to be singing about for the rest of eternity. the gospel.

And that's why I asked the question, how do you feel about the gospel? And I want to be careful here because feelings are not always the best indicators.

Feelings go all over the place. Feelings are affected by stress, they're affected by depression, they're affected by trauma, you name it, hormones, there's all kinds of factors that disorder our feelings, that mess it up and so keep that in mind.

[ 30 : 01 ] But when you hear the word gospel, does your heart go immediately to the reality of God's love for you? is your heart stirred?

Or is it something that, yeah, I believe that, but I like all these other things, they're more interesting to me. These other teachings in the Bible, these other ideas, this other theology, this other social issue, listen to the words of Paul, it's critical, that we get this, of first importance, that Christ died for our sins.

This is our main message, this is the core belief, the gospel is the center, it's not something that we are meant to just get at the beginning, grab onto, it's something we're meant to hold onto right to the end.

I've used this kind of analogy before here, but I want to say it again, the gospel is like a bottomless well, and you can just keep letting that bucket down deeper and deeper and deeper, and yet there's deeper and sweeter waters yet to be drawn up.

David and I, we had supper together last night, we had pizza, that's our favorite food, we have that in common, and this is a dim analogy, but pizza is my favorite food, I mean, I could eat pizza every single day, I love it that much, and every time I have it, it just increases my enjoyment of it, it just reinforces how much, yes, this is so good, and the next time my anticipation is just even that much bigger, and I get to eat it again, like wow, this is amazing, and I think that's a picture of how the gospel should be to us as followers of Jesus, it's just, it's something that's not meant to get old, or, you know, well, I've heard lots about that, let's have something else, and so I want to ask you, how do you feel about the gospel?

[ 32 : 34 ] We're coming into Good Friday and Easter in three weeks here, and I don't want to end this message by giving you something to do, because the gospel is that Christ has done it all for you, but how can we increase our enjoyment of the gospel?

gospel? What prevents us from feeling the love of God in the gospel? It's a good question to ask. If you feel like your heart is not connected to that love, that the gospel has kind of grown old or stale to you, what's preventing you from feeling that?

It's a question you need to ask yourself. Is it pride? Is it that teenage attitude? I know that. I don't need to hear any more about that. Is it that you haven't read the gospel or meditated on it in a while?

You haven't been in the word. You haven't been thinking about what it's all about. I don't know what that answer is for you, but one simple thing that we can do in the weeks ahead is as we draw near to Easter to increase our enjoyment of the gospel and to see you fresh is just simply to take the time where we read the word, hopefully that's daily, to read through the story of Jesus again.

Paul gave us kind of the two of the highlights that he died, that he rose again, but the gospel is bigger than that. We watched the movie the other night, but I encourage you in this season leading up to Easter, maybe it's not even in the right order in your Bible reading plan, but you can shift the order around a little bit.

[ 34 : 23 ] Pick one of the gospels, read through it again, ask the Lord to show you just again afresh his love for you.

Maybe you want to read the book of Romans instead, that's kind of like a commentary on the gospel, it explains the details, maybe you want to read the book of Hebrews, all good places to go in the season ahead, and so I would encourage you to do that, not as something to do so that you are in a better standing with God, but faith, deeper faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

God. So if you want to grow in your faith and hold more firmly onto it, get into the word of God this Easter season. And my hope and my prayer, I'm going to do this too, I'm going to read the gospel of Matthew, it's out of my plan, but I'm going to do it anyway, and my hope and prayer is that that will just grow sweeter to us, the love of God.

may we never move on from that. This is critical that we get this. By this gospel, we are saved, if we hold firmly to the word that's been preached to us.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you so much for what you have done for us through Christ.

[ 36 : 12 ] Lord, we confess that it has got old to us at times. We confess that we oftentimes haven't felt about it as we should, but we ask that you would make new and sweeter and deeper your love to us, our understanding of your love to us.

May we not just know it in our heads, Lord, but may you take it right to the depths of our heart. Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, may you bring forth praise from us and a passion to share that news, that gospel with others who also need to be saved.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.