

Sermon 53: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: A Reminder of the Gospel

OUTLINE

The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour saves
The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour is biblical

INTRODUCTION

‘He is Risen!’ ‘He is Risen indeed!’ This was a way Christians in the early church greeted each other. The resurrection is a central pillar of our faith. The Corinthians it seems believed in the resurrection of Christ, but not the resurrection of their own bodies when Jesus comes again. Their view of Christ as resurrected seems correct, but not how Christ’s resurrection impacted their own lives. The Corinthians it seems were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. Greek philosophy viewed the body as bad and the spirit good; Christianity views the body as made good by God, but now fallen in sin and one day will be resurrected when Jesus comes again. Some of the Corinthians influenced by Greek thought were denying a bodily resurrection, v12, ‘Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?’ What we have before us now is the longest chapter in the Bible on the resurrection. Paul tackles the problem of not believing that the gospel issues in our own bodily resurrection in several ways. In v1-4 he reminds them of the gospel of a resurrected Savior that was preached by the apostles which they believed and the Bible teaches. In v5-11 he lists the many eye witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. In v12-34 he shows the truth and implications of Christ’s resurrection, and in v35-58 he explains the reasonability and mechanics to bodily resurrection. Today we look at v1-4 where Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel of a resurrected Saviour which was preached to them. Because we can be influenced by worldly ideas and not fully see the glorious implications of the gospel, we need a reminder of the biblical gospel of a resurrected Saviour. So today we have two points: in v1-2 we will see that: The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour saves, and; in v3-4, The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour is biblical.

The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour saves

V1-2, ‘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.’ In order to fix the Corinthians doctrine of their own resurrection, Paul goes back to first things, back to the familiar gospel that was first preached to them. At least 6 things can be noted about the gospel Paul reminds them of.

Firstly, the gospel the Corinthians received is the gospel Paul preaches. You might have heard of The Gospel of Thomas, the true gospel is the one taught by Paul. Paul as an apostle had the gospel revealed to him from above. In Romans 16:20 he says, ‘Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.’ But in Rom. 1:1 he says, ‘Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.’ Paul’s gospel is the gospel of God. If you hear of a gospel message that does not agree with the one Paul taught it is a false gospel. The devil hates the gospel and wants to see it distorted but Paul tells us that if even an angel comes with a different gospel, let them be anathema. A gospel that teaches that we are

sinner but God is gracious and makes away through Christ through faith in Him, we can be saved by grace, and God freely accepts all who believe and repent, this is the gospel we must be reminded of. This was the gospel the Corinthians heard.

Secondly, we are reminded that this gospel is preached. Jesus commanded that we go as witness to declare the truth of the gospel to all nations. Paul tells us that apart from the hearing of the gospel the sinner cannot believe and be saved. Rom. 10:13-14, 'For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?' The Corinthians have come to saving faith because the truths of the gospel, the truths regarding our sin and Christ as the only Saviour provided by God to pay for sin, that we are saved not by any works of our own, were heard and believed.

Thirdly, the Corinthians received this gospel. There are certain brands of theology called Universalism and Inclusivism that believe that Jesus died for all people, and that it that now they will all be saved. Paul reminds us here through an important verb 'received' that the gospel must be heard and received. How does one receive the gospel? You must hear the basic truths of the gospel, that you are a sinner worthy of judgement, do you agree with this? Are you a victim and all your evil is someone else's fault, or do you know that you are a rebel against God? Do you believe that there is nothing that you can do to remove the stain of one sin, or do one good deed to earn merit with God? Are you putting your confidence in anything of yourself to make you righteous, your religious observance, your good deeds, anything? Do you understand that Jesus has been provided by a God of grace to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves? That it is He alone that can die in payment for our sins and whose payment will be accepted by God and make us righteous in His sight? Do you see that this gift of forgiveness and righteousness can only be received it cannot be worked for? If you see and know these things to be true, and you receive the gift of salvation in Christ by faith, like a beggar receives a gift. This is how the gospel is received. Some think that they will try Jesus out like a consumer; some are pretty excited about Jesus right now because they want a morality that will fix our social problems; some follow Jesus because they were brought up in a Christian home. That is not receiving the gospel.

Fourthly, we must remain steadfast in this gospel. Paul talks about the Corinthians present activity of standing in this, Paul's gospel. Paul does add a warning that believing another gospel is vain, we must remain in this gospel. It sometimes happens that we go through seasons in the Christian life where we desire more holiness and might be tempted to follow a false gospel that puts works into it so that we are saved not by faith alone but by a worksy faith. The Corinthians were in danger of having the truth of the gospel dominated by Greek philosophy about the body. This same word 'stand' is used in the context of spiritual warfare, Eph. 6:12, 'Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.'

Fifthly, Paul says it is this gospel 'by which you are being saved.' Paul speaks in three tenses, that the gospel saved, is saving, and which we will be saved. These are often simplified into justification, sanctification, and glorification, though there is more that is involved in our salvation. But it is in this gospel alone that we are justified, declared righteous before God; it is in this gospel

alone that we are united to Christ participate in His death and are now being sanctified and conformed into His image; it is by this gospel that we are taken out of Satan's dominion and win the victory over the powers of darkness that afflict humanity; it is this gospel which will result in the whole world being made new and all our enemies vanquished; it is by this gospel that we will finally be resurrected and glorified to dwell in a new creation with God forever. This salvation is found in no other gospel, no other religion, no other philosophy.

Sixthly, at the end of v2 Paul writes, 'if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.' In other words, if you go and believe a different gospel, then you have believed Paul's gospel in vain. If you believe the gospel that we have outlined above, but then you move away from it to another, your first faith is vain, empty, will result in nothing, you will not be saved. There is no other gospel that saves, all other gospels are lies.

Now some have come to this verse and said, 'You see, Paul does think that you can lose your salvation!' they look at this verse and think that Paul is saying that someone truly believed and got born again and received eternal life, and then stopped believing and lost all of that and need to get saved again. I hope you can see that this is not what Paul is saying, Paul is saying that anyone who departs from the true faith, proves that their first faith was in vain; it was empty, apparent, not true. If we suddenly make these verses say that you can lose your salvation, we would make Paul contradict Himself. Paul tells us that there is no longer any condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, that our judgement day verdict in justification has been brought forward; the judge has ruled for us who can now raise an accusation against us; those whom God determined to save in eternity past, He has called; He has justified, and on the last day He will glorify. Paul's view of salvation agrees with Jesus own. Jesus said that He has sheep that the Father has given to Him; that these sheep will hear His voice and come to Him; that no one can snatch them out of His hand; that He will lose none of them for no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand, and on the last day each one will be raised up, none of His sheep will be lost. It is best to read this verse in light of 1 John 2:19, 'They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.' All true faith endures, those who do not endure prove their faith was in vain. Or in light of the parable of the sower where the seed sown among thorns and the stony ground appeared saved but proved they were never saved by falling away. the way to apply this verse is not to fear whether my faith is true, but to be reminded that this is the only gospel that saves and we are in it.

Friends, I hope that so far you have heard nothing new. Like Paul we need a reminder of the old gospel. It is easy for us to get distracted by some new idea or philosophy and the best antidote is to remind ourselves that the gospel that the apostle's preach, the gospel which we have received is the only gospel which saves. There is nothing that will help us to stand against error better than going back to the gospel that saved us.

The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour is biblical

V3-4, 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.' Paul now goes on to show the rock solid foundation that the truths he has preached stand

upon. What Paul preached is not some individualistic interpretation of the gospel, Paul uses the same words 'delivered' and 'received' when talking about the tradition of the Lord's Supper. Paul is showing that he along with all the other apostles preach the same gospel. And this gospel we see is 'in accordance with the Scriptures.' Paul wants to correct the Corinthians misunderstandings about their own future resurrection, in order to correct that error he begins with the resurrection of Christ and will show how we will be resurrected because He is resurrected. This he will work out in the rest of the chapter. Here Paul puts the historical truths of the death, burial and resurrection on the firmest footing, the Bible.

Paul begins by reminding us that these things are of first importance. Many modern theologies that are concerned with minority rights and political outcomes downplay the importance of the historical facts of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. But Paul reminds us that they are of first importance. Today the things of first importance are political, Paul disagrees. The looming threat of nuclear war is not as important as the truth of Christ dying and rising for sinners. All things political have to do with the bodies and temporal happiness of our neighbour, which is not unimportant; but the gospel has to do with the body and soul and eternal wellbeing of sinners, this is of first importance.

Paul received what he is about to convey. Many have thought that this might be an early example of a creed that would have been memorized and recited by the early church. What we have here is the gospel in a nutshell.

Firstly, we begin with the who, the what and the why, who is our Saviour, what He did, and why He did it, 'Christ died for sinners.' And this in accordance with the Scriptures. That name 'Christ' is a Hebrew word for the Messiah, the anointed one. This is the One promised through the whole of the OT. From Gen. 3:15 we have a promise of God sending one to succeed where Adam failed; Adam failed as a prophet, priest and king, the three anointed offices of the OT. God promised a king from the line of David; a priest in the order of Melchizedek; and a Prophet like but greater than Moses. But more than that this man would also be God with us, Emmanuel. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man was born of a virgin in fulfillment of the many promises, prophecies and types in the OT.

What did He do, He 'died.' From the promises of Gen. 3:15 where the serpent is said to bruise His heel; to the killing of the first animal to provide coverings for Adam and Eve to cover their shame after they sinned; to the sacrifices of the Patriarchs by which they worshipped and had fellowship with God; to the killing of the ram instead of Isaac; to the killing of the Passover Lamb to save the firstborn of Israel; to the deaths of all the sacrifices of the tabernacle. Christ died. This death was not expected as Israel expected their Messiah to be a great military general that would rid them of their physical and political foes. But Christ had to come first to save them from their sins and from death. This death was no surprise but was foreshadowed as well as foretold in many prophecies. Like Is. 53:9, 'And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death;' or v12, 'because he poured out his soul to death.' His death is portrayed in Psalm 22, and Psalm 16.

Why did He die? 'For sinners!' Christ did not need to die for Himself, He died according to the perfect plan of God to save sinners. The wages of sin is death but God from the beginning showed us that He would provide salvation for us through another dying our death. We as sinners deserve to die, but God satisfies

His own justice towards our sins by allowing a God appointed substitute to take our place. Christ is the only one fit to die and pay for all of our sins. We see this principle of substitution every time a worshipper in Israel brought their sin offering to the tabernacle. They would lay their hand symbolically upon the head of the animal, they would confess their sins, and then the animal would be killed in their place. The blood of the animal would be offered on the altar to prove that a life had been paid for sin, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Because our sins are so serious, because they must be judged, either we die for them unable to pay for them and suffer judgement as long as they are unpaid for; or we can accept Christ as the God provided substitute who will die and pay for them in full.

Not only did Christ die, but He was also buried. The burial of Christ reinforces the fact that He indeed died. Some Greek influenced ideas deny that Jesus died upon the cross that He only looked like He died, being buried proves that He died a real death being fully human. This burial is prophesied in Is. 53:9; and in Psalm 16:10-11; and in the experience of Jonah in the belly of the fish.

And, 'he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.' The resurrection of Christ was clearly prophesied in the OT. The first sermon on the day of Pentecost records Peter quoting Ps. 16 in reference to Christ's resurrection. Jesus before His death foretold His own resurrection, Mark 8:31, 'And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.' He reveals that Jonah was a sign pointing to His own resurrection, Matt. 12:39-40, 'But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'

All of this was done in accordance with the scriptures. Our faith is built upon the word of God, not the word of man. The fact that the OT prophesied and taught these things implies that 'this Jesus, [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.' God who is the author of scripture has made clear that this is His plan by foretelling it, and then in detail fulfilling it that we might know that this is God revealing the gospel to us, that Jesus dying on a cross and rising again, though it seems absurd and to violate all known natural laws is God's doing. It underlines that we are the sinners the Bible tells us we are; that Jesus is the Saviour that we need; and that if we believe in Him we will receive the promise of adoption, eternal life, and a dwelling with God forever in the new heavens and the new earth. When some people come into the church with new ideas, Paul reminds us of this. When Greek philosophy or other ideas of men seem to reinvent some aspect of what we believe, Paul takes us back to these first things and builds from there. Because we can be influenced by worldly ideas and not fully see the glorious implications of the gospel, we need a reminder of the biblical gospel of a resurrected Saviour. Today I have wanted to remind you of something old, if you have not heard anything new today praise God. If you are here today and you are not a believer, and these things are new, then you have heard the best news the human ear can ever hear, that sinners can be saved by a gracious God freely, and by faith because of what Jesus has done. So be reminded that The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour saves; and The apostolic gospel of the resurrected Saviour is biblical

