

1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Easter Sunday
April 9, 2023

Think what it was like for the followers of Jesus on that first Easter. They did not know that Jesus was alive. None were waiting by the tomb to see him emerge. There were no preparations to celebrate with family and friends, to go out for brunch or feast at home. Their hopes were dashed, their energy sapped. If any remembered the prophecies from the Old Testament or words of confidence from Job that we just sang in "I Know That My Redeemer Lives" or the advance statements of Jesus himself, they were not acting on them.

How different it is for us! We look forward to Easter as the Lenten season progresses. If we did not, what use would there be in viewing the sorry scenes of suffering? To mourn what might have been? Easter is in the background as we kneel in repentance beneath the cross. It is the heart of the Christian faith. That's why it is so important to know what Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 15.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS A FACT

- I. Foretold in the Scriptures
- II. Viewed by witnesses
- III. Impacting your life

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact foretold in the Scriptures. The gospel message is everything Paul emphasized in the opening verses of the text. It is what he had taught the Corinthian members, what they had believed and how they were saved. He urged them not to give it up, evidently in the face of false teaching they were exposed to.

Why is the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus, so important? If we knew only God's law we would be engaged in a hopeless attempt to save ourselves. It calls for an impossible perfection. It is what all manmade religions try as well as the distortion of false teachers that lose the gospel. It makes believing in vain as Paul termed it, useless, unable to save.

The Apostle summarized the gospel content when he said, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Jesus came to our earth on a mission. It involved what we celebrated at Christmas, when the eternal Son of God took on human form as one of us. We had blown everything by sinning. Daily we spurn the Lord's ways, often not realizing it, although there are plenty of times when we know better and do it anyway. Not Jesus. He was sinless. He was perfect every moment, obeying God's law in his treatment of others, avoiding wrong thoughts, words and deeds and doing what is right.

Despite his innocence he took our sins (yours, mine and everyone else's) and went to the cross. It happened on Good Friday as he suffered the physical horrors of crucifixion and more. He was forsaken by his Father and endured the pains of hell that our sins deserved. He paid the price in full and called out at the end, "It is finished!"

As Paul noted, "God raised him from the dead." The grave could not hold him. He returned to life. The resurrection was the Father's stamp of approval on the work of his Son. "Paid in full" has been stamped across our record, obliterating the IOU. We are forgiven.

It happened "according to the Scriptures." As Paul penned this letter he was referring to the Old Testament. The message was there. On Easter afternoon Jesus reviewed the prophecies with a pair of believers as they walked to nearby Emmaus. "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." There were the foreshadowing examples. We call them "types". Think of the ram substituted for Isaac when God tested Abraham and asked him to sacrifice his son. Or Jonah, coming out alive from the great fish three days after it swallowed him. There was the bronze serpent Moses formed and hoisted on a pole so people could look to it and recover from snakebite. His death was vividly foretold in Psalm 22 which we used on Good Friday. It told of his being forsaken by his Father, the insults directed at him almost word for word, how they pierced his hands and feet, and the dividing of his clothes. Think of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. It noted the cause of his suffering, that we were like wayward sheep. Our iniquities were on him so he was wounded and afflicted.

His rising was also prophesied. In Psalm 16 David wrote, "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." All these prophecies came to fulfillment. Jesus did what the Bible said. His life and his death were for you and for me. Believe the Scriptures and have the benefits. Be filled with joy this day and every day. Christ's resurrection is a completed fact and cannot be undone.

II.

Promises are easy to make. "The proof is in the pudding," as the saying goes, in what actually happens. There is plenty of proof when it comes to the Easter miracle. The risen Jesus was viewed by witnesses. Paul listed several of them. First he mentioned Peter. We don't have details of that appearance in the Gospel record, but it was important to the Savior to reassure him since the blowhard had denied him during his trial. Because of his leadership among the disciples and in the early church, his is weighty testimony.

Next on the list was the Twelve, a reference to the men Jesus trained to carry on his teaching work. By this time Judas was gone but the name still referred to the remainder. He appeared to that group a number of times during the forty days from Easter to his ascension. Then there were "more than 500 of the brothers" at one time. A possible event was in Galilee at the giving of the Great Commission to go into all the world with the good news. A larger number of believers were in that territory. When the Christians gathered to choose a replacement for Judas there was mention of only 120 as the sum of believers in Jerusalem. Most of the large group was still alive here a couple decades later when Paul wrote. Also listed was James, the one known as the brother of the Lord, who became a leader of the church in Jerusalem. So there were lots of witnesses who viewed the risen Jesus.

They have left their testimony in the New Testament. All four Gospels record events from Easter. Matthew and John were among the Twelve. Mark may have been present in Jerusalem and it's thought Peter was a source of information for his book. Luke came to faith later but mentions talking to eyewitnesses of the events he reports.

The epistles, both the many by Paul and the others repeatedly show the living Savior is the basis for our beliefs. And remember that both Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so they are reliable.

Thus there is no need for doubt or gloom this day. We have an abundance of evidence. The resurrection of Jesus is a fact of history. It shows all is true: Jesus is God. He keeps his Word. Our sins are forgiven. We will follow him in rising from death. As he declared, "Because I live, you also will live."

III.

Paul provided a personal message and it relates also to us. Christ's resurrection is impacting your life. Paul had been a persecutor of Christians. He didn't believe the Easter message. He was convinced Jesus was not the Messiah whom the Jews were awaiting. He wanted to eradicate Christianity as a false message and those believing it. That all changed one day as he was heading to Damascus seeking more believers to arrest and Jesus suddenly appeared to him. If he was able to do that, he had to be alive and was exactly who he said he was. That realization turned Paul around, which is what it means to be converted. He termed himself "one abnormally born" here. That is literally a miscarried fetus.

Afterwards he became a dedicated servant of the Lord and spreader of the gospel. In fact, he noted that he worked harder than the others. He was not boasting but thankful for God's grace, the undeserved love he had received in being brought to faith in Jesus.

Such impact of the Easter message has continued. Paul and more workers spread the gospel on mission journeys throughout the Mediterranean world. Since then it has gone across the continents and around the globe. Millions of Christians are celebrating Easter today.

Lives continue to be changed. It prompted the writing of the familiar hymn "Amazing Grace" with its notation of saving "a wretch like me." The Christian faith has had an impact on society that raised the status of women (once treated as property under the control of the husband). Abolition of slavery was a result of recognizing the brotherhood of all races and classes of people under the love of Jesus. Challenges exist to the God of the Bible and yes, there is open defiance to his ways, but his message still carries power. That's why it continues to spread.

It has spread to you. You have been brought to faith in Jesus as your Savior from sin. We celebrate Easter not merely as a warm childhood memory of new clothes, Easter bonnets and baskets filled with eggs and candy. We celebrate because it has impacted our eternal future. We will be rising from death to life in heaven with Jesus. It affects each day on earth as well. Our priorities and purpose for living are different. We exist to glorify our Savior. Spiritual matters are most important. We feed our faith with the Gospel in Word and sacrament and share it with others. It guides our behavior as we seek to follow his ways and live an upright and decent life. Although we work and go to school and participate in community and leisure activities as does everyone else, our approach differs from the dog-eat-dog world and rat race to pile up goods for ourselves and this life. We use our blessings to help others and to support the spread of the gospel.

So enjoy your Easter celebration. Hear the message of the Scriptures and its witnesses. Christ's resurrection is a fact. Stand firm in that faith. Jesus lives! The victory has been won, won for you now and eternally.