

Easter Sunday 2026

1 Corinthians 15:1-10

What is Christianity *actually* about? It's a pretty basic question, but I guarantee this very Easter morning, pastors all over would give *very* different answers to that question. Many would say that Christianity is about leaving everything behind and following Christ, listening to his Word, living lives of obedience to Christ, and following his example! Some would say Christianity is about love, acceptance, affirmation, and that God is opening his arms wide for everyone to come on in! Some would say Christianity is about God healing our pains and depressions, and granting miracles and breakthroughs! I would like to humbly, yet boldly say this: while those ideas are not *completely* wrong, they are not right. Those are not the center of the Christian faith- and it's important that we nail this down- because if you don't understand the central teaching of Christianity, then you won't understand anything about it! If you are a brand new Christian, or interested in becoming one, or weary of becoming one, then it's incredibly important for you to know what Christianity is *actually* about because it may not be what you think. If you have been a Christian for ten, twenty, forty, fifty years, it is also vital for you to understand this- don't think just because you took catechism decades ago you know all this stuff! We all need to be reminded of what Christianity is *actually* about- which is what Paul is doing to the Christians in Corinth in this chapter. Paul is writing to people who have forgotten the Gospel. If it's possible for them, is it possible for us? I think so. Luther once remarked that the reason he had to preach the Gospel every week is because people forget the Gospel every week! So, that's what Paul, and we, are discussing today: **Christianity is really about the Gospel.** And Paul answers three basic questions: **1. What is the Gospel? 2. Why can we trust it? 3. What does it do?**

1. What is the Gospel? Literally, the word Paul uses is *euangelion* in Greek, which is where we get the word *evangelical*, so we are an "Evangelical" Lutheran church- and the word literally means, "good news." And the good news is this: Christ... Wait- who? Jesus Christ, a man from Galilee, was not simply a popular preacher, but he claimed to be the very God of all creation- the one who controls and knows all things, who can do all things, whose existence is beyond time and space, entered his creation as a member of his creation, a true human being, that Christ, *died*. Wait- God *died*? Isn't God immortal? Yes. Isn't he eternal? Yes. But because God took on human flesh, he became vulnerable, woundable, killable- and he experienced death like any other human being- but in the most painful, egregious, horrifying way- Jesus' back was torn apart by whips first, then he forced to carry a wooden cross to the outskirts of Jerusalem, all while thorns had been pressed into his skull, and blood was gushing from his temples, then Jesus had to have the flesh of his back pressed against the plank of wood, while his wrists and ankles were pierced by large nails into the wood, and then he hung there, with every breath Jesus took, his flesh scraped against the wood, he had to pull on the nails and press on his feet.

Wait- this is good news? Yes- because he did it in our place. Christ died *for our sins*. Paul includes himself in that- which is astounding when you think about it! Paul was a pharisee! I

don't think I'm going too far when I say that no one here reads their Bible, prays, gives to the poor, worships, or obeys God's rules more faithfully, more intensely, more vigorously, than Paul did before he was a Christian. But he admits that even his best obedience was like a filthy rag to a holy God, and the same is true for us! Not only are we hopelessly selfish, dishonest, prideful, self-absorbed, and lost, but even when we do good things- we do them ultimately for ourselves, so we can get the credit or the satisfaction of being so good- God isn't interested in that! And God is angry, so vengeful over our sin- just like you are angry and vengeful over the atrocities in this world- when people hurt you or other, when people commit crimes and lie- you're angry about it! So is God! But his standard is so high that we all are corrupt, liars, frauds, and deserve to die forever in Hell! And that is why Jesus came! God came to suffer what he demands from us! He didn't demand a payment, he became the payment! He died in our place. And it was all predicted in the Old Testament- it wasn't random. David writes in the Psalms about someone being abandoned by his friends and God himself, his hands and feet being pierced, his clothes being gambled away. Isaiah writes about God's suffering servant: "He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was on him, by his wounds we are healed, the Lord laid on HIM the guilt of us all! Throughout the Old Testament, God makes it clear- there is no forgiveness of sins without blood, without sacrifice- the wages of sin is death. But then Jesus comes, and do you remember what John the Baptist said? "Look, the Lamb, the sacrifice, who takes away the sin of the world." We were so evil that we deserved to die, but God loved us so much that he was willing to suffer everything we deserved so we could receive everything we don't deserve. That's why it's good news.

Christ was buried- proof that he was actually dead. Christ *rose* from the dead. Why is that important? Two reasons- firstly- proof that his death actually worked. The fact that Jesus Christ was able to rise from the dead means that he truly is God- who else can do that- and that his sacrifice worked- if he would have stayed dead, then he was just another guy and his death was just another death- but if he raised himself, that means his death was truly big enough and holy enough to pay for all my sins. In Christ's resurrection- we have living, breathing proof that God does not see our past, our selfishness, our sins- even if they are great- because Jesus took them all and we don't have to be afraid to meet him on the final day. It's a bit like when I get my food at Culvers, if they give me my custard, and someone says, "No, wait, that's mine!" I can show them the receipt and say, "step off! This is mine." When Satan shoves everything you did wrong in your face, and he will, you show him the receipt- the Cross and the empty grave, "Step off! He is mine, eternal life is mine, forgiveness is mine, joy is mine, peace is mine." That's the Gospel. Notice- it's not advice for you to implement. It's not another rule for you to follow. It's not life-improvement. It's not that we need to repent, follow Jesus, and love each other, and grow in our faith- those things are all true- but that's not the Gospel. And all those things, while true, will only crush you if you don't first understand the Gospel. The Gospel is not a rule to obey, its news to believe. Believe it. Enjoy it.

2. Why can we trust it? Are we just supposed to just blindly *believe* and *trust*? No. Look at what Paul says next- you can believe this because I didn't make it up. This isn't *my* message. Look at what Paul says- he received it. He didn't create it. And when Jesus rose from the dead, he showed himself to his disciples, but not just to his disciples, but to more than 500 people at once. Then he appeared to James- his brother, son of Mary, who was *not* a believer, and lastly he appeared to Paul. Paul is saying, "I saw him. I spoke to him." If you're sitting here today and you aren't convinced this happened, think about this. Jesus' twelve disciples were hiding scared, and weeks later were boldly preaching that their rabbi Jesus had risen from the dead and were willing to die for it. James was an unbeliever, and then years later was one of the main leaders of the Christian movement- even wrote a book of the Bible! Paul? Paul was actively killing Christians and dragging them into prison, traveling miles and miles to hunt them down because he hated them so much! Now he's Christianity's leading theologian and missionary, preaching about Jesus to people all over the Roman World, being stoned, imprisoned, and beaten for it? How do you explain that? There's ways that unbelieving scholars explain it. Some will say that they all hallucinated, maybe that would explain one person, but twelve, or the hundreds that saw him? That's unlikely. Some claim that perhaps they created this myth over time, but myths like this tend to take more than decades to form- Paul wrote this about twenty years after Jesus rose from the grave- so clearly the earliest followers of Jesus, and some of his most ardent persecutors, believed that he rose. And how do you explain Paul and James? How did unbelievers switch so dramatically? And his disciples as well? You can come up with all kinds of explanations-but if you were to ask them, they would say, "We saw him. We touched him. He spoke to us, and here's what he said. Kill me if you must, it's true." Consider this as well, Paul doesn't ask his audience to take his word for it- he claims that hundreds of people are alive that would back this up- that would be radically foolish if it weren't true. The point is this- the Gospel is not a fairytale we tell ourselves to make it through a sad life. Don't believe it because you grew up going to church, or because you like how it makes you feel. Believe it because it's true. You are not a fool for believing this Gospel, trusting it, and allowing it to change you in radical ways.

3. What does it do? The word Paul uses to describe himself is graphic and challenging. "Abnormally born" isn't quite an accurate translation. The word *ektroma* means "stillborn." For some of us, that word brings up vivid, horrible memories because we know what that looks like. It does for me. But Paul's not being graphic for the sake of it- he's making a powerful point. If the twelve disciples, and the other people Jesus sent to preach the Gospel are like healthy children, Paul was like a stillborn. Paul is saying, "I was dead. I was hopeless. I was the last person anyone would ever think could be redeemed. I do not deserve to be able to write this letter or preach or even live. I am nothing! And the Gospel changed *me*! God forgave *me*! Not only did Jesus die for me, he called *me* to bring others to faith! *Me!*" Radical, unfathomable grace upon grace- God's undeserved, shocking love for people who don't deserve it- that's what made Paul what he was. And he didn't say, "Cool, I'm saved, I'm going to do what I want now." No! He gave his life for the Gospel, sleepless nights, persecution, risking his life- working harder than everyone else, but not really him- God's grace working within him- the Gospel- the message

of Jesus motivating him. The Gospel is not just a message, it's a power that changes everyone who hears and believes it! Because the Gospel is true, God will accept, forgive, cherish, and declare you to be his perfect, holy, innocent, blameless pride and joy- just as you are. But if the Gospel is true- then God will never leave you as you are- he will challenge you, he will show you what you have wrong, he won't just get rid of your depression, or fix your marriage, or give whatever you think you need- he's going to radically change you.

CS Lewis writes: *"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself"*

This is the Gospel- everything Christ has done *for you*, and everything he will do *in you, through you, and to you*. This is what Christianity is about. The Gospel. It's free. It's countercultural. It's scary. It's beautiful. And it's yours. Hold onto it. Trust it. Enjoy it. Amen.