

April 21, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Easter
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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**HE WAS RAISED IN ACCORDANCE
WITH THE SCRIPTURE
1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Fake news is a legitimate problem in the world today. It is true that fake news has been around since Satan spoke through the serpent in the Garden of Eden telling Eve that God's warning about death from eating the forbidden fruit was totally wrong. Imagine the boldness of Satan's statement, "You will not surely die." We live in a world sunk in sin that demonstrates the consequences of believing fake news.

The problem with spreading falsehood has intensified with the world wide web. Now anyone can disseminate error, misleading statements, and outright lies that can be read by millions of people. Whole national movements can arise from error like the Arab Spring a few years ago in the Middle East. Now someone can propose something as absurd as the statement, "The earth is actually flat after all," and can be pretty sure that several thousand people are going to read the article and too many will believe it.

Satan, the master of lies and fake news, has propagated the falsehood about the gospel ever since God introduced the concept in Genesis 3:15. In response to sin wrecking His perfect creation, God promised that there was someone coming who would be born of a woman, but who would be powerful enough to destroy Satan and his work that was pictured in the serpent. God's promise couched in that simple phrase was that wicked men, governed and motivated by Satan, would bruise (torture and kill) the divine Son of God who was born through a woman. However, that wound was not permanent. The Seed of the woman would, however, figuratively crush the head of Satan and thereby destroy the work of sin.

Theologians call that statement the "Protoevangelium," which simply means "the first statement of the good news, the gospel." The rest of the Bible is the story of how God brought His people, the nation of Israel, into being to serve as a conduit for the incarnation of the promised Seed. To those people, God gave His law which is the precise description of His character. Through God's law, we learn how far short of God's righteousness we fall. When we finally admit that we fail miserably to meet the standard of God's character, we also realize that God will justifiably condemn us to live forever away from Him, being punished for our sins.

This is where the good news becomes so important, so refreshing. In great mercy and grace, God, the Eternal Judge, has provided a sacrifice sufficient to cover our sins. That sacrifice was the "bruised heel" of the Seed of the woman. It was, more precisely, the blood that Jesus Christ spilled on the cross. But, even more important, the sacrifice sufficient to pay for our sins was affirmed as sufficient when Jesus of Nazareth walked out of the tomb on the first Easter morning.

As the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth about the importance of Christ's resurrection, he prefaced his arguments with the thoughts in our text. The most important truth to the Christian faith is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scripture. Do you believe it? Satan has presented innumerable fake statements and conflicting accounts of this important truth in order to keep sinners from trusting in Christ alone for salvation. How important is it that Christ rose from the dead?

Important Truth (vv.1-4).

Our text begins with a great reminder of the truth (vv.1-2). It is good to be reminded of the gospel. And so Paul wrote, *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you (v.1a)*. The people in Corinth were brothers and sisters. No doubt when Paul first arrived in Corinth there were likely no brothers and sisters in the Lord, no fellow members of God's family. They were pagans – Corinth being not only a typical Roman city but an especially wicked culture. The city was home to and protector of the temples to Apollo

and Aphrodite, places of extreme immorality. In fact, the term “Corinthian girl” referred to a prostitute. The city was so thoroughly sinful that even after sinners became Christians, Paul had to warn them to stay away from the sins of their past.

But that sinful lifestyle changed for some of the people because Paul had preached the gospel to them. The Greek text has an interesting arrangement here. We read that Paul, *euanggelisamein* the *euanggevlion*. The words both refer to the gospel as the Good News and because it is Good News, it is right to announce it.

This reminder to the beneficiaries of the gospel can only be a reminder after the people have received it. Paul proclaimed the Good News *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 (vv.1b-2)*. Some of the very sinful people in Corinth had received this Good News. They received, that is, “picked up the Good News and took it” along with them in life. The news changed them. So that their lives became characterized by the news. They were no longer characterized by sin but were standing within the scope and teaching of the gospel, which is the continuing result of believing it.

This is the means for being saved. Isn’t the term “saved” such a past century, old school kind of out-of-date religious term to describe the result of someone believing the gospel? Well actually the Greek word is *sozo*, which means “to be saved” (or maybe delivered from). So, “saved” is still a good word to describe the new birth even after all these years. The word is used consistently to talk about experiencing divine salvation. Here the present tense, passive voice verb is an accurate way to describe this process by which the truth of the gospel has taken hold of us, has delivered us from the penalty of sin, and is presently delivering us to heaven.

The gospel is very effective, unless someone has believed in vain. It is possible to assent to the facts of the gospel such as, “I’m a sinner, Christ’s blood is the covering for sin, I need to believe it.” But even while giving intellectual assent, our hearts are unchanged. An unchanged heart is an unsaved heart.

The apostle reminded the Christians in Corinth about the truth (vv.3-4). Notice that the messenger does not invent the truth. *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received (v.3a)*.

Paul received the most important message. Where? In seminary? It is true that he had been trained in the most reputable Jewish school “the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3). But we can be quite sure he did not receive the important message there.

Paul actually received the message from the Author of the message. Read his testimony in the letter to the Churches in Galatia. *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus (Galatians 1:15-17)*. Paul learned about Jesus Christ at the Arabian Seminary, where he was the only student and Jesus was the teacher. We have learned the good news from faithful teachers who were taught by faithful teachers who have been taught by faithful teachers.

Paul delivered that message as he received it. See here the picture of the delivery boy delivering the package from the King. We should be so thankful for those who received and delivered the message to us.

What is that Good News, the truth of first importance? The gospel is the truth of first importance. It is the news *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 (vv.3b-4)*. First, the gospel is the truth Christ died for our sins. The term **Christ** is critical in this definition. Christ the anointed and chosen Savior in eternity past. The Triune Godhead already determined that God the Son would be the Savior. He was incarnate, took on human form as Jesus of Nazareth. But only faith, given by God, was able to recognize Jesus as the Christ.

Spiritually blind sinners mocked Him saying, “Prophecy to you Christ” (Matthew 26:68). But when God reveals the truth to our blinded spiritual eyes, we confess with Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). This Christ died for our sins. He didn’t die because He got contrary to culture. He didn’t die because the Jews and Romans were more powerful than He and His followers. He laid down His life on purpose because of our sins. We are guilty of stepping over God’s law. We are deserving of eternal

punishment because of our rebellion against God. The Beloved Son never sinned against the Father in the smallest infraction. He was innocent of sin and perfect in obedience to God's law. But the Christ was killed.

The second critical truth to the gospel is that Christ was buried. To prove that Christ was killed, the Father ordained that He should be buried. Seven hundred years earlier Isaiah the prophet promised: *And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9)*. And even this proof is not accepted by faithless sinners who propose that the Christ was actually alive, but swooning in the tomb.

The Christ was buried to prove He was dead, but He was also raised the third day. How do the faithless deniers propose that a beaten, battered, swooning Jesus was strong enough to knock down the sealed stone from the covering of the tomb? Would a squadron of Roman soldiers really be too weak to hold off a handful of ragged Jewish fishermen who intended to steal the body of Jesus? In a display of supernatural power, the Christ walked out of the tomb. He who demonstrated divine power and authority in life displayed that same power in resurrection. He who taught that He is the author of eternal life overpowered death by His life.

All of this (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ) was according to the Scriptures. That would be a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, there are over 300 specific promises about the Christ in the Old Testament. Dozens of those statements promised He would be killed but rise again. That is the Good News. The gospel. We have the necessary Savior. He was killed and rose again to prove that His sacrifice is sufficient to atone for sin.

Yes, but what if He really didn't rise from the dead? Paul's argument in this chapter is that, if Christ did not rise from the dead, our preaching is pointless and our faith is worthless. But Christ did rise! How do you know?

Proven Truth (vv.5-7).

The risen Christ appeared to intimate friends (vv.5,7), that is, He appeared to particular individuals. Verse five states that *He*

appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve (v.5). Cephas of course is Peter. So the other disciples reported, *"The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (Luke 24:34)*. Then there were the women on the resurrection morning, and separately He appeared to Mary Magdalene. And there were two unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13). Later in that same day Jesus appeared to other of the disciples. *As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" (Luke 24:36)*.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples without Thomas being there. *On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19)*. Eight days later Jesus appeared to the disciples with Thomas present. *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you" (John 20:26)*. And it appears that some days later Jesus appeared to the men who had gone back to fishing. *That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea" (John 21:7)*.

We also read that the risen Christ appeared to James, then to all the apostles (v.7). We are not exactly sure when or where this took place. Did that constitute enough witnesses to affirm Christ's resurrection?

There were more sightings. The risen Christ appeared to multiple witnesses (v.6). In fact, the verse set the number at five hundred witnesses. *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep (v.6)*. We are not sure when or where this took place. Maybe a possible reference to this event is found in Matthew 28:10. *Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (Matthew 28:10)*. That would be a likely meeting place for the large group because so much of Christ's ministry had been in Galilee.

Based on the testimony of all these witnesses, the resurrection has been verified. Old Testament law required two or three witnesses to affirm a situation. Here were individuals, groups, multitudes at multiple times. They touched Jesus. They ate with Jesus. The evidence of Christ's resurrection is abundant. He appeared to so many witnesses. But Paul argues along with most of us that the real proof of Christ's resurrection is the truth revealed to me.

Truth Revealed to Me (vv.8-11).

By grace Christ appeared to Paul, who believed he was unworthy to know Christ. He claimed that he was an apostle born at the wrong time. *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (v.8)*. By his word choice, Paul pictured himself as born prematurely, sickly, too weak to be valuable. Possibly this could even be a reference to an aborted baby since that is the most literal meaning of the word used here. Why would that great preacher have such a negative view of himself?

He was unworthy to be called an apostle, *For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God (v.9)*. On one hand, to be an apostle, he had to have seen Jesus. We know that was the case on the Damascus road. The man's story reads: *Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:3-5)*. It is also possible that Paul saw Christ in the Arabian desert where Christ taught him (Galatians 1:15). But he felt unworthy because he had persecuted Christ's Church. He felt unworthy to be included among the chief building blocks of the Church.

Nevertheless, as is true for all of us, God's grace toward Paul was not vain. God's grace meets us where we are. *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain (v.10a)*. That was not an excuse for weakness, fleshliness like some people use the phrase. They say, "I'm sorry, but this is just the way I am." Why not let Christ change you to something better? God's grace saved him, taught him, gifted him, put him in the ministry. And

it was God who chose to make Paul among the greatest of apostles. So that he would conclude, *"I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5)*.

In fact, it would be wrong for Paul to disparage the work God would have him to do. God's grace motivates work. *On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (v.10b)*. Paul was not bragging about how much he did or how hard he worked. He did all that He did through Christ who gave him strength (Philippians 4:13). He did what He did because God worked in his heart first to compel him to do (Philippians 2:13).

Ultimately, God's grace is about believing the gospel. *Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed (v.11)*. We preach by the grace God gives. People believe through the grace God gives.

Applied to modern ages, the principle is still the same. By grace we know the risen Christ. How do I know Christ? We know Christ by the same process, the same grace. God reveals all we need to know about Christ in the Bible. We know that He is the Savior from sin. We know that His sacrifice is the one acceptable payment for our sins. We know that those who trust Him will live forever with Him.

But knowing about Christ is not the same as knowing Christ. To know Him is to experience the overwhelming need for the Savior. To know Him is to experience the overwhelming relief of guilt removed. To know Him is to experience daily fellowship with Him.

So the pressing question of the moment is, "Do you know Christ?" Or it might be possible that Easter is just a holiday and the idea of the empty tomb really isn't important to you. Does it matter to you whether Christ is actually risen? Knowing the risen Christ is the result of God's miracle of grace in opening your eyes to your spiritual need.

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).