

How important the resurrection is

Corinthians Explained

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Congregation, you are called to preach the full counsel of God, right? Not just only speak about what I like to speak about but the whole Bible, and that's why we have the Heidelberg Catechism recommended to preach also alongside it so that we don't forget important topics and one of the ways of not missing anything is preaching verse to verse in a series we have started in 1 Corinthians a while ago and I would like to continue doing that tonight.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11, we go verse by verse but the main verses are 3 and 4. 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

So far.

How important the resurrection is, three thoughts. In the first place, the gospel of the resurrection, the gospel of the resurrection in verses 1 through 4. Secondly, witnesses of the resurrection, this is a shorter point, not so long as the first and last one in verse 5 through 7. And then Paul's proof of the resurrection in verses 8 to 11. So how important the resurrection is: the gospel of the resurrection; the witnesses of the resurrection; and Paul's proof of the resurrection.

"Moreover, brethren," the apostle begins in chapter 15, "Moreover, brethren, we have talked about many things before, I'm beginning a new chapter, a new topic, something interesting, something important. I'm going to talk about the resurrection. Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you," and that gospel, as we will see, is the gospel of the resurrection, that's why the first point is the gospel of the resurrection. Apparently, some people in the congregation of Corinth had a problem believing in the resurrection of the dead. They said, "That can't be. That's absurd, someone has died then comes to life again? That's simply impossible! I'm sorry, I can't believe that." When the Apostle Paul spoke like that on that also on Mars Hill, some of the people in Greece just left him and said, "What nonsense! It can't be!" And there is still

the case, right, that people say, "I have no problem being a Christian and believing in Jesus but the resurrection? No, no." The Apostle Paul writes in this chapter that if you don't believe in the resurrection, then the gospel is empty and your faith is vain, and you make a big mistake and you are still in your sins.

So he begins with, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand." So let's talk about a few words: gospel, preached, received, stand.

Gospel, what is gospel? Old word we often don't think about anymore. Gospel is actually abridged of good, good spell, good message, nice message, beautiful message, glad tidings, God's spell or good spell. So the Apostle Paul is preaching the best ever message you can hear. He is preaching something so beautiful and so important and the heart of it is the resurrection. So he feels that calling in his heart, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you that gospel, that gospel which I preached unto you."

The gospel is the message of forgiveness, the message of repentance, the message of a true saving faith, the message on how the Lord converts his people, but the gospel is not just information, the gospel is not just letting you know the facts, the gospel is also preached and preaching is not only informing the people, what is preaching? What is preaching actually? Is preaching just that you know things and describing how it goes in the life of God's people, just explaining things? No, preaching is something more serious. It is a proclamation, the gospel. It is pronouncing people dead and it's also pronouncing people alive like we read in the Heidelberg Catechism on page 64, right? Page 64, that is Lord's Day 31, "How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel? That according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them." So pronouncing that and making it clear, publicly testifying.

The Apostle Paul writes, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you. I brought it close to you. I brought it to your door. I also preached the command to seek and to repent and to seek refuge and to take refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ." So he was putting pressure on the people, not just informing them and saying, "You heard it, you do whatever you think is needed." No. More, he preached it. Do you realize that when the word is preached that in a way the Lord speaks to us, not just a pastor? But the word of God is preached in such a way that the pastor is the mouthpiece of God and that we also take it as God's voice, the Bible says.

Preached the gospel, "which also ye have received." That is beautiful, isn't it? The people did not just only look the other way but when it was preached they received it. Received it and receiving is a beautiful word in the Bible and sometimes has different meanings. Sometimes to receive is the opposite of stealing. Have you stolen it? No, I have received it. And sometimes the word receiving is the opposite of refusing. You refuse it? No, I receive it. And that's the word here. The Apostle Paul writes to the congregation of Corinth, "I preached unto you that which also ye have received." You have welcomed it.

You said, "Yes." You said, "Absolutely, that's my heart desire." And you received the gospel, you received salvation, you did not reject it and refuse it, you did not walk away from it but you came to it and you received it and the Lord said, "Come," and you came, heavy-laden, in your sin, but you came and you received it. Have you? Have you received the gospel of the resurrection? I mean, not received in the sense that it came to you but it came to you. It was offered unto you but did you receive it? And if you don't receive it, that's on our account. And if we receive it, that is only because the Lord has given it. You say, "We don't receive it. We cannot receive it." But we can refuse it and we do, and yet the Lord also comes to unwilling and unable people and says, "Come unto me, enter ye in into the narrow gate."

"I preached unto you, which also ye have received." I hope that day you have not received it, go home tonight and say something, "I must admit it. I have not received it. I have been rejected it all the time." And may you repent of that and tell the Lord, "Lord, I have been unwilling my whole life."

"And wherein ye stand." That receiving was not just a fleeting thing of some moments but they were standing in it, they were holding onto it, they stood forth, they defended it, they did not let it go, and we have to start thinking about that, right, because we live in a time that the consequences of standing and defending the gospel is becoming more dangerous. There is a danger of defamation, of imprisonment, of being fined and being persecuted, and in the congregation of Corinth they were still standing for it. They have heard it. They have received it. And they are standing in it, most of them. Also errors in the congregation as we have seen before and problems in the doctrine but most of them, the majority of the people have received it and stand in it.

Verse 2, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." So let's talk about saved and keep in memory and having believed in vain.

Saved, what is salvation? Have you thought of a mine, you know what the mine is, a coal mine or a gold mine or a diamond mine, they can go quite deep in the ground, they just make holes in the ground and tunnels and railways and carts and they bring the ore to the surface and there is iron and copper and all different things. They are mining it. Now suppose some miners are down there some kilometers down, hundreds of meters anyway, and one of the walls is caving in, and they are in the dark, and they have lack of oxygen, and they have no food and you can't sleep there, and they need to be rescued, they need to be saved out of that dire circumstance. Well, we people need to be saved as well because we fell in that mine. No, we walked into it willingly and we ruined our own lives and we need to be saved by the hand of God.

So how does God save? Do we see it in the text here how? "Which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved." By which. By what? By the gospel. The gospel preaching is the vehicle, is the means of God to save people. Just the preaching. It's not only to make us smart and wiser and civil and good people, but it is to

save us. So that's why we come to church. We need to be saved, to be saved by the gospel preaching.

"By which also ye are saved." Saved from what? Like in the mine, I need to be saved from the darkness and from the lack of oxygen and the lack of food. And what's the problem we need to be saved from? You say our sins, right? So what? Why? Why do we need to be saved from our sins, delivered from our sins, that our sins separate us from God and that God makes, it also makes us God's enemies? So there is God's indignation, God's wrath and we need to be saved from God, and God saves people from himself and God says, "Watch me. I'm coming. Hurry. Be saved because I'm coming." And he sends his only Son to save people from their sins.

"By which also ye are saved," although there is the restriction, "if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you," keep in memory not only that you remember in your head but that you are holding onto it in your heart, that you keep in memory, that you hold onto that which you have heard in the preaching otherwise you have believed in vain. Believed in vain? Is that possible that people believe and it is worthless and futile and nonsense and of no help? Oh yeah, it's happening a lot that people believe in Jesus and they believe in vain. They fake it. They deceive themselves. They don't get it. They are running in their own path. So it is important to understand the preaching and to receive it in the heart and to keep it up and to not give in but to continue in the strife and to continue in the work of perseverance.

And that is hard work for all of God's people. Hard work? I thought that God's people could sit back and say, "I'm saved. I've got something. God spoke to my heart. I'm fine. You don't need to be worried about me anymore." No, but there is always Satan in the world and unbelief and sin so God's people need to work hard in love, work hard their whole life, all of them to keep it up and to keep in their memory "what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." Some people lose their faith. What? Do you know who loses their faith? Them that have never had true faith. It looked like they had faith but it was not true faith.

It's a scary thing, isn't it, and yet therefore the Lord says keep in memory, "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain." The Lord puts a threat there and the Lord threatens and warns and promises his own people in many different ways in order to keep it up and to persevere. The Lord has means for that.

The apostle writes to the congregation of Corinth where there is confusion about the resurrection, so he begins with the gospel and preaching, and receiving, and standing, and being saved, and keep it up, and not believe in vain, and then in verses 3 and 4 an explanation, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." First of all, Christ died according to the scriptures. What does that mean, "I delivered unto you first of all"? Did he first go to Corinth? No. Is it that he wants to bring that message first to all people? No. First, he means something else, first means it is a principal thing, it is an important thing, "I

delivered unto you most importantly, that's a real important thing, that which I also received." It is something so important, so essential that the apostle says, "I delivered unto you first of all, most important, that which I also received." He received the gospel. He did not make anything up himself. He did not fantasize and just come up with his own doctrine. He received it, remember, on the way to Damascus? He refers to that later on.

So he received the truth and he also passes it on. "First of all, this is important, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins." Remember, children, young people, what is it again? What do we call that? Christ died for our sins. He did it for his people. What do we call that? Right, substitution, right? Substitution he for them. So the Lord Jesus, he died for them, for his people, in their stead to take their place; like a teacher, a substitute teacher takes the place of your normal teacher, so Christ takes the place of his people and he obeys for them and he dies for them.

At first, its important, substitution, and that is in the scriptures, "I delivered unto you first of all, most importantly, that which I also received myself, how that Christ died for our sins." What a wonder, Christ died for the sins of his people. He said, "Let me die, not them. I want them to live. Let me die." That's Good Friday. How did Christ die for our sins according to the scriptures? What are the scriptures? The Bible? No, only the Old Testament because the New Testament did not exist then and it's everywhere in the Old Testament. I would say on every page of the Bible you see something of that substitution, of the Lord Jesus dying, in fact, all the sacrifices they ever did, goats and heifers and other animals, all the sacrifices pointed to substitution because that animal was killed and then the person sacrificing was forgiven, at least that was the message.

"According to the scriptures." It's in the Bible. He's brought as a lamb to the slaughter. The Lord Jesus slaughtered for he was cut off out of the land of the living. Cut off so that sinners don't need to be cut off. He made his grave with the wicked, he was to be buried, and with the rich he was in his death in the sepulchre of Joseph of Arimathea, with the rich in his death, he died, because he has poured out his soul unto death. He himself has poured out his soul unto death. He died willingly and that's still the heart of the gospel, first of all.

Also in Luke 24, you remember those two men of Emmaus, right, you do? They were confused as well and the Lord Jesus kept their eyes closed so that they did not recognize him and then he opened the Bible, he opened the Old Testament to them. "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses," Genesis, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures," in all the scriptures, "the things concerning himself." The Lord Jesus explained to them through the whole Bible everything about himself according to the scriptures. So you need that Bible and you need that preaching and you need that message, you need the gospel to be saved.

Verse 4, "And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." So he was buried, he rose, and was the third day, and again according to the

scriptures. Why was the Lord Jesus buried, children? Why? What's the sense of doing that? To prove that he was really dead. And when they wrapped him in those linen cloths, they noticed he is truly dead. They just had no doubt about that. There was something else also when he was buried, he was also buried with this purpose, to sanctify the grave. It's always an impressive moment to lower the casket of a father, mother, child. There are no words for that. But if that child, if that mother, if that father, if that single person, whoever it is, that person has been saved like we talked about, then that piece of soil where they are buried in is sanctified for them. The Lord Jesus went first for that. He said, "I'll go first. I'll make it well. You follow me."

He was buried but he rose again the third day. He was not only raised, he did not only rise, he was also raised. He rose himself also. He also had that power. He was God himself also in his divine nature. The third day, not after three days. The Lord Jesus did not die after three days. He died on Friday. On Friday, and he was in the grave on Saturday and he rose up on Sunday so that's two days after, right? The Lord Jesus was not three days in the grave but on the third day he rose. So not on Friday, number 1, not on Saturday, number 2, but on Sunday, number 3.

He rose the third day according to the scriptures. It was in the Bible also his resurrection. It's remarkable what we read in Acts 26. The Apostle Paul was captured by the Jewish people and had to be interviewed by King Agrippa and he was on his way to Rome, right? He would be testifying in Rome and then the Jewish people accused him that he had a new doctrine and they said, "We don't need a new doctrine. That's offensive to us, Agrippa. He's making us confused, to make the people confused." The Apostle Paul answered, "I don't teach anything new and I don't say anything new. That's in your own Bible." Acts 26, "none other thing I said than those which Moses and the prophets say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles," Paul said to Agrippa. "You see, I don't teach anything different. It's just the old doctrine in the Old Testament."

And there are so many places that we find also information on the resurrection. Psalm 16, "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." And the Apostle Peter in Acts 2 explains that it's not about David, it's about Christ.

Do you see how important in those four first verses the Apostle Paul writes that the gospel is the gospel of the resurrection and it is paramount, it is so important, if you miss it your faith is worthless, vain. Then the second thought in the next verses he explains that the Lord Jesus rose, that they had proof of that. Second thought. The people had questions about the possibility of resurrection and said it can't be, some did. The Apostle Paul did not ignore that. He didn't say, "Well, that's fine with me. You believe what you want to believe." He didn't say that. He could not turn a blind eye to that and he wants to convince the people that the Lord Jesus really rose.

You see, he did not want them to believe in vain so he's doing his best to convince them and he explains that there is a way to prove it. Now when you start thinking about that, what could convince people of that? Well, if a witness is a godly man, if a witness is a man or a woman of integrity, what they witness is something visible and historical, if it is a witness of a sound mind, if the witness is not personally involved and gains from saying one thing or the other, if it is also predicted in the sentence before, and if it is also coherent with the doctrine, I think you can make a real point. And in fact, lawyers have looked at Bible structures like this and they said, "I have approached it from a secular standpoint and I saw so much value in it. If this would be a court case today, they would win." There is so much proof of that, of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

"And that he was seen of Cephas." Cephas, who is Cephas? Do you know who Cephas is? Do you know who Simon is? "Simon, Simon." You say, "That's the Apostle Peter." Right. The Apostle Peter also had an Aramaic name, they also spoke Aramaic in those days. Like, "Eli, Eli Mama Sabachthani," that's Aramaic and also Cephas is Aramaic is for the Apostle Peter.

Consequently, the Apostle Paul reminds the people of Cephas, of the Apostle Peter, that he spoke personally to the Lord Jesus in quite a lengthy conversation and that lengthy conversation you can read in John 21. You remember those questions, right? "Lovest thou me more than these?" And Peter answering, "thou knowest that I love thee." And the Lord Jesus telling him, "Feed my lambs." And again the question, "Lovest thou me?" And again the question and he was also sad and grieved because he said unto him the third time, "Lovest thou me?" And he said unto him, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

Therefore the Lord reveals himself unto Cephas and unto the 12 as well, right, that's verse 5, "And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." The 12? Where is Judas, then? I thought there was 11? Well, the expression "the 12" is a common expression of the disciples. And it is correct, there was actually 11 but they are called "the 12," the standing expression.

"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." 500, a whole congregation of people and they witnessed the Lord Jesus. That's not recorded in the gospels but it must have happened maybe in Jerusalem, maybe in Galilee. The Lord Jesus had predicted, "I go before thee to Galilee where you will see me." So there must have been a huge meeting of 500 saints, God's people, and they all witnessed, "Yes, this is Jesus. This is Jesus. I know him. For sure it's him." And the interesting thing is most of those 500 were still alive. In other words, "Ask them yourself. Go yourself and just ask them, 'Did you see him?'" And most of them are still alive and will say, "Yes, we saw him." Some say that is a hallucination. Wow, that's interesting. 500 people hallucinating at the same time of the same thing. Isn't that something? That does not sit well, right?

"Some are fallen asleep." You know what that means, right? Some have fallen asleep, the sleep of death. Why is it called falling asleep? Because the Christian view on death is that God's people will wake up from it. When you bury a child of God, he is sleeping in the

casket, sleeping there, just sleeping. She will open her eyes again. He will open his eyes again and they will walk again, and they have their body back again. They are only asleep that in between.

So in Jerusalem or in Galilee, I don't know. "After that, he was seen of James." James? I still have to get used to that, get used to the English language here because in the original Greek here it does not say James, it says Iakobos. Iakobos. So in the Dutch translation you see Iakobos but in the King James the names have often been translated like Johannes has been translated to John. When you read John in the Bible, it's a translation of Johannes. We read James in the Bible, it's a translation of Iakobos. Who is this Iakobos? Who is this James? I don't know. There are several options. We think it is probably the leader of the Jerusalem congregation.

And to all the apostles, "After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." The point the Apostle Paul was making is so many people have seen him themselves with their own physical eyes, you don't have to doubt. It's beyond any doubt the Lord Jesus rose and don't deny that. It's important and if you deny it, you are in your sins and your faith is worthless.

Then the next point, he comes by himself. Let us first read those verses, verse 8 to 11. "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." The Apostle Paul comes as a personal witness. The Lord Jesus has appeared unto him as well. When? On the way to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And he had a personal encounter with the Savior, the risen Savior, and he acknowledged him and he was blind and he received the gospel and he believed in the Lord Jesus. He was saved by the word of the living God.

But then he writes kind of from two sides. It sounds very super-humble. He is so honest about himself. At the same token, he is so confident that he has worked hard and more abundantly than all the other apostles. That was God's gift, right? So keep those two together, the humility and the confidence.

Let's talk about this humility first. "I am the least of the apostles, that I am not meet to be called an apostle. I don't deserve that name. I just don't deserve the office at all. I really don't because I persecuted the church of God." That's a page in his journal that he does not leave closed, he just looks that up and he reminds himself of it. It's not the only thing he's doing, he's also doing that, he does not forget. He does not even want to forget. He has been forgiven. He does not need to doubt the forgiveness of what happened but he needed to remind himself of the facts. And it is often in the Bible, not just once or twice, persecuted the church of God, "for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." I be nothing, he says. Ephesians 3, "Unto me, who am less than the least," less than the least, "of all saints, is this grace," of apostleship, "given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." You know, he can preach

about the unsearchable riches because he knows it himself, that he had fallen so deep so he thinks so highly of the riches of God's grace in Christ. "And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. For as we have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it." And 1 Timothy, he "was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief and the grace of our Lord was exceeding, abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

So you don't have to forget the past. Don't forget about it but bring it to the Lord and realize the unsearchable riches of Christ and speak about that and testify about that, at the same time, also realize that the apostle continued with them, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." So he's balanced. Don't forget your sins of the past, to only be shallow. Don't do the other way either, not only talking about the past and figure on the past and drowning in it, forgetting God's grace, the Bible teaches humble joy. Humble joy. How can that joy be humble if you forget? How can that humility be in balance if there's no joy? Humble joy. May the Lord give his people more of that, more of that humble joy. Joy, real joy but humble joy.

Something to keep in mind and the apostle writes in Ephesians 3, "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power." Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is in God. "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me," you see.

And then verse 11, "Therefore," conclusion, "Therefore whether it were I or they," me the apostle or they the apostles, it does not make a difference. "Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach," we preach the same thing, "and so ye believed," on that basis of the death of Christ and his resurrection. It was the first piece, 1 Corinthians 15, about showing how important the resurrection is otherwise your faith is vain and worthless.

So congregation, let's go back to verse 1, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, that you receive it tonight, do you stand in it, do you hold onto that by God's grace because you need to be saved. Younger ones, older ones, you need to be saved and right now there's time to become saved, precious time. Hurry and don't only think of how the Lord works, and not only think of an historical faith, or temperately, you need a saving thing, to receive him. And if you're not saved, then you're exposed to God's wrath and if you die today or tomorrow that way, there are no words to describe that. Then you miss it all. Then you're not falling asleep, then you fall unto your death and you will wake up in horror. And children of the Lord, do you feel the least of all the saints? Do you realize that the Lord is not forgotten, that the Lord is forgiving and the Lord wants his church to be humble and joyful, both? Have you been a beast before God, like Asaph

says, like the Apostle Paul says, "I have been a beast before thee"? The Lord can save beasts.

When I was writing this down, I thought of Putin. Do we pray for Putin? Do we hope that he gets killed as soon as possible? You know, I can see the point, that would be a solution, at the same time we don't want that. We want him to be saved. It's a soul also for eternity. So what would happen if he would repent, repent and feel sorry and just change? But it is possible. The Lord can do that. If the Lord can do that to the Apostle Paul who was threatening and giving people over unto death and a blasphemer and all the things, if that's true, it's true, then anyone can be saved.

So even we can be saved because of the resurrection. The Lord can save people from the state of death, so unwilling, so stubborn, so foolish, but nothing is impossible to the Lord. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and he shall exalt you in due time. And don't forget the joy of God's people is a humble joy. Amen.