

Finally Some Good News

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-6; Acts 1:3

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This morning as you're being seated, how about some good news? Y'all want some good news this morning? Let me encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Corinthians 15. Now that's where we're going to spend the majority of our time today in 1 Corinthians 15 but there's also another passage in the book of Acts 1:3 that we're going to address just in brevity in a moment. But today we're going to talk about some good news because I know that you know how much bad news is out there, but you may not realize how prolific it really is.

Allow me to give you just a few numbers and statistics to show you "what a grave situation we find ourselves in." Did you know that according to the latest research, that if you're reading a headline of the news, that if it is a negative headline, you're actually twice as likely to read the story than if it's positive. That's how conditioned we've gotten. In fact, not in our country but in another country, over the last year where we've been inundated with so much negativity, there was a news source that decided to do an experiment. What if we did nothing but print positive stories for 24 hours? Obviously it was an online publication. For 24 hours nothing but positive stories. Their readership dropped by 66% throughout the day.

Over the last year particularly, we've seen and heard nothing but negative news. We've been walking through what is our first as a people, and hopefully a last of a national global pandemic. It's the first time we've ever experienced this and I hope we never do again. It probably won't surprise you that a study has been done of every story that was printed, published or viewed regarding the pandemic. Out of all those stories, 87% of them were negative in nature. 87%. You may be surprised to find out, though, that the virus actually did well this year, though, because the same study decided what if we took all the other stories outside of the pandemic and evaluate them because over the last year it hasn't just been a pandemic, it's been societal uprising, political discord, economic peril. There's been a lot going on out there and believe it or not, the pandemic, the headlines were 87% negative but if you remove and take all the other stories, believe it or not right at 90% of the rest of the stories were discovered to be negative in nature. Who would have thought that the pandemic did the best out of anything the last year?

But then here's the frightening one. The same study discovered that if you look at the headlines or the ticker going across your tv, that 95% of those headlines were sensationalized, meaning the content of the story was actually not as dire as the headline that was printed. You and I today live in a world not just in recent days and not just in the last year but in the totality of our culture, of an onslaught of negativity. Every time we turn around, we're being fed negative information, negative this, negative that. So today I thought what better day for some positive news.

Turn to the book of 1 Corinthians 15 and I want to share with you a brief passage of scripture that testifies on a positive note that which can supersede all the other information I've shared with you combined. Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 15 it says,

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 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: 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

Now when we look at this passage, obviously it regards some factual information that we have gathered today to celebrate but I want to break it down for you in just some manageable pieces here so we see really how good a news this is.

First, let's begin with the possibility. What does it share with us there in verse 1? It says this is the gospel. Now that's one of those words that in our culture is kind of just a part of our vernacular, is it not? How many times has somebody made a statement into the affirmative to you and you say, "Well, that's the gospel truth"? Or in a context such as this, the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, Luke, and the gospel of John. The word is one that we throw around sometimes seriously, sometimes flippantly, but by definition it just means good news. That's what the word means, and so when you open up your New Testament and the very first page says "The Gospel According to Matthew," the Bible is actually saying "The Good News According to Matthew." So allow me to reread verse 1 for you inserting the definition rather than the word. It says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the good news which I preached unto you."

So what is this good news? Notice what it says in verse 2, that you can be saved. Now that's a word, again, we use a whole lot in our culture, but every single time we use it, it is shrouded in peril, it is shrouded in some type of detrimental situation that we find ourselves in that we desperately need to be rescued from. Even in the sports world, they will talk about somebody "saved the game." Or how about in more serious matters, they saved the day. I mean, hypothetically if you were to find yourself in a very traumatic situation whether that's a medical condition, whether that's an accident, whatever you find yourself, and those who are equipped to respond to you, when they come and they

administer the expertise that they're gifted in and everybody comes and gathers around you, what is the thing that is always communicated? "They saved my life." It is a term that means one who is in peril or one who is a very treacherous situation being delivered from, being removed from that situation.

Now I think you would agree with me that at least the last year if not the totality of life, has been pretty perilous of late, has it not? It's been treacherous as of late. You heard the statistics about the news story, according to them it's all bad news. But can I share with you the pandemic, the uprisings, the discord, the chaos, all the things that we've walked through corporately and individually just this last year are simply an outward manifestation of the real problem. You see, the real problem goes all the way back to the beginning of the Bible when humanity's forefathers, whom we know as Adam and Eve, made a very conscious poor decision that they knew better than God did. Isn't that what we do each and every day of our lives? We find ourselves in peril because we say, "God, I got this." We find ourselves in a treacherous situation because we say, "God, I know what I'm doing."

The Bible has a very specific word for that, it's called sin. It simply means to miss the mark. You've missed the mark. I've missed the mark. All of us have "missed the mark." But what's the good news? The possibility is that we can be saved. We can be delivered. We can be removed from the mess that we created even in our own lives. But there's a problem. I know what you're thinking to yourself, "Well, I thought this was a good news day? Why are we talking about problems here?" Look in verse 3 and 4. It says, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." You say, "Pastor, what's the problem?" The problem is that according to what you just read, the means by which you're saved is not all of a sudden doing a lot of good stuff or stopping doing a lot of bad stuff, it's not about becoming altruistic and giving everything away or somehow, someday becoming more religious or churchy, so to speak. In fact, it says that it's because of Jesus and Jesus Christ alone, and two times in those verses it says "according to the scriptures."

Now why is that a problem? Because according to the scriptures, you and I's opportunity to be saved is very exclusive. In other words, we don't have the right or the privilege to draw our own parameters or make up our own rules. Jesus said in John 14:6, he said that he was the only way to the Father. It's pretty exclusive. Later in Acts 4:12, it says neither is there salvation in any other but the name of Christ Jesus. It's pretty exclusive. You go into 1 Timothy 2:5, it says that there's only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. It's pretty exclusive. In other words, the Bible makes it very clear that when we recognize our perilous sinful state, that the only way to be rescued, the only way to be saved is through Jesus Christ, and yet even though it is exclusive, there is mountains of evidence because it's usually at this point that those of you that are skeptical, those of you that are questioning, those of you that are complacent take a step back and say, "Are you sure that it's that exclusive? Are you sure there's no other way to pull this off?"

Can I just go there for a moment? You know, the Bible says in the book of Revelation 19 that the testimony of Jesus, in other words, if you want to know if Jesus really was who Jesus claimed to be, it's the spirit of prophesy. In other words, statements were made hundreds of years in advance of who he would be, where he would be, and what would take place without his interference. The fact that he would be born in Bethlehem. The fact that he would come out of Egypt. The fact that when they crucified him on a cross, they would pierce his hands and his feet. They would gamble for his garments and, yes, the prophesy that after three days he would raise from the grave. 48 very specific statements made hundreds of years in advance, and for those of you who like me like to nerd out occasionally, can I give you the math behind that? The odds of all that happening the way the Bible said it would happen according to the scriptures is 1×10 to the 157^{th} . Yeah, you'll spend the rest of the service just writing all the zeroes out of that number.

But can I make it more personal for you? We can talk about the math, we can talk about the prophecies, we can talk about all the statistics, but have you ever thought of this? Nobody in the Bible and very rarely in history does anybody question that Jesus did what he actually did. Now think about it. When those who were skeptical of Jesus, when those who, can we say, were the enemies of Jesus came to him, they never said statements like this, "How did you walk on water? What kind of trick did you pull? How did you heal that man's arm? How did you cure that blind man's eyes? How did you take a sack lunch and feed thousands?" They never asked the "how," they always asked him the source. In fact, in Mark 3 and Matthew 12, they accused him of doing it according to the power of Beelzebub, the power of the devil. Now why is that significant? Because if the enemies of Jesus and the critics of Jesus didn't dispute the actions of Jesus, it accentuates our problem. You say, "How?" Because all the evidence points to the fact it doesn't matter how good we become, how less bad we become, how much we give or how "religious" we get, if it's not about Jesus, then there is no salvation from our peril.

So what's the process? What was it that Jesus Christ accomplished? What was it that he did to provide this answer, this means to our problem? Notice we read in verse 3 and 4 three very clear things: that he died, that he was buried, and that he rose again. Now we know that historically when you look back 2,000 years on the life of anybody, we know that they perished, we know that they died, but Jesus' death was very different than anybody else's. Oh sure, there are thousands of people that were crucified upon a cross but before he went to the cross in John 10 he made a very unique statement, he said, "Nobody takes my life lest I give it." And you remember that final statement he made on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." You see, Jesus' "life" wasn't taken from him, Jesus' life was offered by him. He died in exchange for our sins. He died to bear the punishment for our sins. He died to bear the wrath of our sins.

So when it says there that he died, he didn't die a death like any other human being, he died a death with the purpose of exchanging our sin for his righteousness. But then it says he was buried. It's interesting, we talk about the skeptics and the critics, those who questioned Jesus for a multitude of different reasons. They came to him in the gospel of Matthew 12 and they said, "Jesus, we want a sign. I mean, we want something bigger than walking on water. We want something more than healing the blind." Do you

remember what Jesus said? "Okay, I'll give you a sign but I'm only going to give you one. As Jonah," the great prophet in the Old Testament, "was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of Man," speaking of himself, "will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Interesting that Jesus draws the line in the sand. He says, "Oh yes, I'm not only going to die but for three days and for three nights." Now do you understand why those individuals who were so critical of Jesus gathered the Romans around, the military around, the guards around? They wanted to make sure because it's the only thing he said that would separate him from everybody else.

Ah, but then there's the proverbial linchpin. Notice it says that he rose the third day. Now this is where Acts 1 is going to come in a little bit handy. For those of you who have access to it, Acts 1:3, Jesus has been walking, talking and teaching the apostles for about 40 days after his resurrection. It is in Acts 1 that he will ascend on high and there's this little verse in verse 3 where the Apostle Paul through the writing of Luke makes this statement about that I've written to you in the past, I'm going to write unto you in the future, and it's one of those statements that just kind of goes by the wayside but I want you to notice that the line in the sand that the Lord gives us even gets broader. Notice what it says in verse 3, that this Jesus, "by many infallible proofs." Isn't that interesting? You talk about setting the standard high. The Lord said there is nothing that you can bring to the table that can question the validity that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

You know, later in 1 Corinthians 15, it says if Jesus Christ is not risen from the dead, then our faith is in vain, and yet the Bible according to the scripture says infallible proofs. Now remember, even those who opposed Jesus didn't question if he walked on water, they just wanted to know, "How are you doing this?" So let's talk about the resurrection because according to the Bible, if Jesus Christ didn't raise from the dead, then quite honestly we have no need to be here. If Jesus Christ didn't raise from the dead, there's no reason to sing the songs that we've sung, to hear the message that we're hearing, or to study the scriptures, to pray, or to anything that we affiliate with Jesus Christ.

But the Bible says many infallible proofs. We just read that 500 individuals, that Peter and the other apostles, eyewitness accounts, but what about those who never believed? What about those who never became a follower, never gave their life to Jesus, whatever words you want to use? Do you realize that some of the greatest historians the world has ever known actually have written to the validity of the resurrection whether it's Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, a multitude of other early historians thousands of years ago, though they never believed – listen to this – they make statements like tens of thousands of people have personally testified to seeing Jesus raised from the dead. Now notice what we just read in 1 Corinthians 15, it says 500 at one time, and yet the secular historians claim thousands of people came to them and said, "Oh, I saw him."

But you know, it's the testimony of the apostles that really strikes a nerve. Those 500 that we just read about in 1 Corinthians 15, we don't know what beheld them in their latter days. Those tens of thousands that Josephus and Pliny and Tacitus talked about, we don't know the end of their stories. But we do know the end of these guys' stories. Not just the biblical record but history tells us that every single one of them, now we'll remove Judas

from the equation, can we do that? But all the rest of them died a martyr's death. They physically allowed their life to be taken because they believed that the resurrection was true. Now I want you to think about that. If we include Matthias who was included after Judas was replaced, and even the Apostle Paul who says he was an apostle out of due time, we're talking about 13 men who one by one were willing to breathe their last breath based on the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the grave. Don't you think that after the first one went, if it wasn't true the rest of them would say, "Hey, we need Plan B"? Don't you think that after a few of them starting losing their lives, if it wasn't true the rest of them would gather up and say, "Guys, we've got to do something different. This story is not working out real well." But the very last one whom we know as the Apostle John, personally speaking, I think he had the worst fate. It wasn't the removal of his head. It wasn't a crucifixion account. He was left on an island by himself to starve to death. While he was there, he didn't recant the story. He didn't change his song. He gave us the final book of the Bible that says he's coming back again.

Let me put this in perspective. You and I live in a culture where every time a scandal happens, we put the word "gate" on the end of it. For those of you who are young, that started with Watergate in the early '70s. When that event took place that eventually led to not only the removal but the resignation of a President, Watergate became synonymous with scandal, became synonymous with thievery. One of the men who was implicated and died in prison because of Watergate is a man known as Charles or Chuck Colson. The reason that many of you may find his name familiar is that while he was in prison, somebody shared the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ with him and he got saved in prison, and then after he was out of prison, he began to tell other prisoners and the world at large what Jesus had done for his life. Can I paraphrase for you a statement that Chuck Colson made about the resurrection that I think has incredible implications for you and I? He said that 12 men, speaking of the early apostles, held onto the story of the empty tomb for 40 years without anybody changing the story. He said, "I conspired with 12 men in Watergate and within three weeks we were all changing our story." One of the most famous crimes in the history of our culture, he said, "We couldn't hold onto the story for three weeks much less 40 years."

You see, what we discover is the process by which Jesus Christ endured and accomplished is the solution to our sin problem which tells us that you and I, there is a possibility that in the midst of all the negativity there's actually some good news, that there is an empty tomb of a Savior who loved you enough to pay the price for your sins and to raise from the grave so that whatever you're walking through you can be delivered and you can be saved from it. In a world of nothing but negativity, you and I today have the availability of some good news. We can be saved. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.