THE GOSPEL OF THE RESURRECTION (1)

(What Good News!)

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Key Verses: 15:3,4

**"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."**

Look at verse 1a. "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you." Verse 1 tells us that the Cor­inthian Chris­tians had already received the gospel. Once they had been very zealous believers. But in the course of living in this real world, they had be­come lukewarm Chris­tians. So the Apostle Paul wrote them a long, 16-chap­ter letter. He wanted to help them live lives worthy of the gos­pel.

Corinth was a city of mixed cultures. Jews and Greeks lived there together (1:22). It was an important seaport and a busy commercial city (1:26,28). God had begun a great gospel work among the Corinthians, and through them he shamed the wise and strong worldly people. But where God works powerful­ly, Satan also works. So many problems arose in the church. There was the problem of strife and division (1:12; 11:18). The problem of free sex arose (5:1). There were problems about eat­ing (8:1; 11:21). Some of the poor could not bring any food to the "love feast," while some of the wealthy brought much food and enjoyed it to their fill. The "love feast" is the same as the "Lord's Supper," or the "communion cere­mony" in modern terms. Chap­ter 12 mentions that there was much "showing off" and human competi­tion for recog­ni­tion in the church. Paul gave clear ad­vice for solving their problems in chapters 1 through 12. Paul thought that all of these prob­lems could be solved with the love of God. So he wrote chap­ter 13, which is called the "love chapter," or the best love poem in the Bible.

Even after writing the love chapter, Paul was not con­vinced that the problems were cleared in their hearts. The basic prob­lems could not be solved by advice. Paul realized that only the gospel of the resurrection could solve their basic problems. His own heart was moved as he thought about the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. So he wrote in verses 1,2: "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gos­pel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are sav­ed, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Other­wise, you have be­lieved in vain." The Corinthian Christians were mostly people on the bottom of society. They must have been strug­gling to survive and to maintain their gospel faith. But Paul stresses the fact that, in the last analysis, the only thing they really needed was the gospel of Jesus.

Paul explains in verses 3,4 the contents of the gos­pel. Read verses 3,4. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins ac­cording to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." Here we find a concise summary of the gospel. There are two main events: First, Jesus Christ died for our sins; second, Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day. Paul tells us that these two events are the gospel. The gospel is the best news to anybody, no matter who he may be (Lk 2:10b). Let's think for a moment about just why Jesus' death and resurrection are such good news to all the people of the world.

I. Jesus died for our sins (3)

Look at verse 3. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first impor­tance: that Christ died for our sins accord­ing to the Scrip­tures..." Verse 3 says that Christ died for our sins accord­ing to the Scriptures. By the way, why is the death of Christ good news to all people of the world? We can under­stand this when we think about what sin is, and what its results are.

**First,** sin. In Romans 3:23 Paul says, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." Ac­cording to this verse, sin separated man from God. When man was sep­arated from his Creator God, he became like a cut flower in a vase. In Romans 3:23, the word "glory" has in it the idea of a scale or balance. To "fall short of God's glory" means that when God weighs a man or his actions on the balance, his weight does not come up to God's standard. Those who should have been heavy­weights were drained to mosquito-weights be­cause of their sins. Those who should have looked like the children of God looked like porcupines or old monkeys, whose desire had been only for bananas. Those who should have looked like heavenly princesses looked like weary pros­titutes. Man became worthless before God. (Ro 3:12) In short, sin disfigures the image of God in man. Sin makes man very sick with sin.

The words, "all have sinned," explain how sin spread to all mankind. One man, Adam, sin­ned. Then he became very sick with sin, and his sinsick­ness spread to all mankind. Sin is like a contagious disease (Ro 5:19a), such as the bubonic plague, AIDS or leprosy. Sin also causes man to have only sinful desires (Ja 1:15). Sin makes man very sick with sinsickness­es all his life, and he finally dies in sin.

But many people don't take sin so seriously. Many people think that sin is enjoyable. Many people think after commit­ting sin, "If I forget about it, that's all." When they are tormen­ted by their sinsick­ness, they try to solve their problem of sin by depending on psychoanalysis or by making excuses. But they only waste money, having no way to cure their sin­sick­ness. When they do so, they be­come too ner­vous and sen­si­tive to maintain their lives. Women become like men, and men like women.

**Second,** the wages of sin. Look at Romans 6:23a. "For the wages of sin is death..." The wages of sin is the second result of sin. Sin is not free of charge; it demands payment. It does not de­mand al­mighty U.S. dol­lars; it de­mands only blood. Before dying, not only do the car­riers of the wages of sin suffer be­cause of their sin­sick­nesses, but also they make other peo­ple suf­fer by spread­ing their sinsickness to others. The carriers of the wages of sin are likened to the carriers of many kinds of fatal diseases. One woman com­mitted many sins and became a carrier of the wages of sin. Then she left the society where she ruined her life and crept into a Chris­tian fellow­ship to live a new life. But she did not repent her sins. As a result, she spread her sinsick­ness and made oth­ers chew and eat her wages of sins toge­ther with her. The Bible says that all activities of men, whe­ther they be phil­anthropic work or edu­cational work or some other seem­ing­ly good work, bring the wages of death if they leave God out.

**Third,** judgment. What comes after death? After death, judgment comes. Most peo­ple hope that death can be the end of every­thing. Sorry! Death is not the end of everything. Hebrews 9:27 says that man is destined to die once, and after that to face judg­ment. This is the third result of sin. It is a uni­ver­sal truth for mankind that man is destined to die once. No matter how mis­erable a man's existence, he does not want to die. Two mil­lion people die in the United States every year. This means that every day five thousand people throughout the country die of various causes. Those who died had done their best not to die. But they died. The unanimous wit­ness of his­tory is to the inevita­bility of death. Genera­tions have come and gone, and each suc­ceeding generation has laid its dead in the grave. It is cer­tain that each of us has an appointment with death. Death makes man fall into nihilism and pes­simism and finally brings men to utter despair before the authority and power of death. How nice it would be if death were the end of every­thing. But the Bible says, "...and after that to face judg­ment." 2 Corin­th­ians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear be­fore the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whe­ther good or bad." All men must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Each person must account for what he has done on earth. God judges man according to his life motives and pur­pose. Romans 2:7,8 says, "To those who by per­sis­tence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eter­nal life. But for those who are self-seek­ing and who reject the truth and fol­low evil, there will be wrath and anger." There is no hiding place at the time of judgment.

**Fourth,** the second death. What comes after judgment? After judg­ment the second death comes. Look at Revelation 21:8. "But the coward­ly, the un­be­lieving, the vile, the murder­ers, the sexu­ally im­moral, those who practice magic arts, the idola­ters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burn­ing sul­fur. This is the second death." In this verse, "second death" means spiri­tual death or eternal pun­ishment after the judgment. Those who are pronounced guilty at the judgment have to suffer eter­nal punishment in "the fiery lake of burning sul­fur." Those who have a first-class ticket to this terrible place are the cowardly, men and women of fear and calcula­tion. The opposite of faith is not doubt, but cow­ardice. We are living in a world where evil men seem to rule the world. So most people be­come so cowardly before evil men that they cannot identify them­selves as God's people. It is tra­gic to live a hard life in this world and die, and then be assigned to eternal punishment after the judg­ment.

**Fifth,** the gift of God. What did God do for the per­ishing people? The Bible says that God gave us the gift of God, that is, eternal life in his one and only Son Jesus Christ. Look at Romans 6:23b. "...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Bible assures us that God gave us his one and only Son as a ransom sacrifice to save us from our sins. John 3:16 says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever be­lieves in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

John the Baptist, who realized this, said in John 1:29, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" God, in his great mercy, sent his one and only Son to save men from their sins. When Jesus came into the world as God the Son, he humbled himself. He healed the sick and preached the kingdom of God. But Jesus was despised and rejected by evil men. Because of our sins he was crushed and smitten. Fin­ally, he was cru­ci­fied on the cross in our place to save us from our sins. He shed his blood on the cross. By his blood our sins are washed away. By his blood our sins are forgiven.

**Sixth,** the way of salvation. How can we be saved from our sins? John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who be­liev­ed in his name, he gave the right to become child­ren of God..." We are too weak to save ourselves. But when we be­lieve in Jesus he gives us the power to become the children of God. John 5:24 says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be con­demned; he has crossed over from death to life." The way of salvation sounds too easy. But we are saved simply by hear­ing his word and believing in the Son. Then God gives us eternal life right at the moment we be­lieve, and we will not be condemned.

**Seventh,** the only mediator. In history many saints were concerned with man's salva­tion from death. Why then can only Jesus save us? It is be­cause Jesus is the only mediator between God and men. Nobody died for man's sin. Nobody shed his blood to wash away man's sin. But Jesus died for our sins. Jesus shed his blood to forgive our sins. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God and one media­tor be­tween God and men, the man Christ Je­sus..." Not only so, but also, nobody has ever men­tioned the way of salvation. But Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus is the only mediator between God and men.

II. He was raised on the third day (4)

Jesus shed his blood and died on the cross for our sins. Thus, he saved us from our sins. Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood. Thus he forgave our sins. However, if everything had ended with his death on the cross, he would have been no different from other holy men. His sto­ry on the cross would have been just another beautiful and sad story. But Jesus rose from the dead. Look at verse 4. "...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." What does the resurrection of Jesus mean? Now we want to think about three things concern­ing his resurrec­tion.

**First,** the resurrection of Jesus shows that God is living. Genesis 1:1 says that God created the heavens and the earth. Our God is the Creator God. At the same time, our God is the God of love. When men disobeyed God they were cursed. They became evildoers. They only piled up the wrath and anger of God. So God should have destroyed them all in a flash. But God, in his great mercy, sent his one and only Son to this world to die on the cross to save sinners. God laid all our iniquities and transgressions on him when he was crucified on the cross (Ga 3:13). God sacrificed his one and only Son on the cross to save men from their sins. But if God had not raised Jesus, he could not have proved that he is the living and Al­mighty God who created the heavens and the earth. But God raised Jesus from the dead. Thus he proved that he is living. Read Acts 2:24. "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, be­cause it was im­pos­sible for death to keep its hold on him." Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days; then, he was vomited out on the land near Nineveh. Likewise, Jesus was swallowed up by the power of death. But God raised him on the third day.

**Second,** the resurrection of Jesus guarantees us the final vic­tory. When Jesus was hung on the tree, receiving cap­ital punishment like a criminal, evil seemed to triumph over righteousness. But God raised him from the dead on the third day. Thus, he showed us that the final victory is ours, be­cause God made the Risen Jesus the Judge of the living and the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is the final vic­tory over evil men and the evil world. The other day we heard the story of a woman. An African boy pro­posed to her and she married him. As soon as he received per­manent resi­dent sta­tus he di-vorced her. We trem­ble at the evil­ness of men. Whenever we think about one person, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, we tremble at the evilness of mankind. But there are so many Judas Iscariots in this society because of the influ­ence of prag­matism. Many God-haters make false accusa­tions against sincere Chris­tians or Chris­tian organi­zations. Sorry to say, Chris­tian leade­rs are too silent before the evils of the world. But God was not quiet; God raised Jesus from the dead and showed us that evil and evil men are already de­stroyed by the resurrec­tion of Jesus Christ. At the same time, through his resur­rection, God assured the children of God of the final victory. Peter said in Acts 10:40,42b: "But God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen...(and) he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead." They judged Jesus and killed him on the cross. But God raised him and made him the judge over them.

**Third**, the resurrection of Jesus gives us a living hope. There is no greater attachment to every man than his attach­ment to his own life. Most people make great ef­forts to be bet­ter off. But the sad news is that all people die once, no matter how hard they try not to. We can see this same agony in King David's life. He was a poet. He was a mighty warrior and a king. He lacked nothing. But whenever he was captured by the thought of death he felt he was being eaten by maggots and earthworms lit­tle by little (Isa 14:11). Because of this he trembl­ed (Ac 2:27). But he could have hope when God showed him that his body would live.

Men put their hope in stocks, bonds, gadgets, pleasures and thrills. Actually we have no hope, because we must die someday. We cannot put hope in the things of the world be­cause all of them slowly and steadily perish, spoil or fade. Everything will be swallowed up by death. But we have a liv­ing hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Look at 1 Peter 1:3,4. "Praise be to the God and Fa­ther of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has giv­en us new birth into a living hope through the resurrec­tion of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you..." In the past we put our hope in the things of the world which will soon perish. But when we believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we no more put our hope in the things of the world, but in the kingdom of God. Frankly speaking, when we believe in Jesus we feel that we suffer too much loss. But we lose nothing, because the kingdom of God is our inheritance. Wow! It's unbelievable that the kingdom of God is our inheritance. But God promises us so.

III. Resurrection witnesses (5-11)

Paul repeated the words "according to the Scriptures," twice in verses 3,4 to emphasize the historicity and authen­ticity of the Scriptures. But if no one had seen the resur­rected Jesus, if there had been no witnesses, how could the resurrection be believed? So Paul introduces wit­nesses who could attest to the truth of Jesus' resurrection. They were once clumps of worldly desires, but when they met the Risen Jesus, they were changed into spiritual men. The greatest and most indisputable testimony to the resurrection of Jesus is the changed lives of people.

The resurrected Jesus first appeared to Peter, the top disciple (Mk 1:16; Jn 1:40,41). When Jesus called him, he left everything and followed. (Mk 1:18; 10:28) He followed Jesus until he made a confession of faith, "You are the Christ" (Mk 8:29). At the time of Jesus' crucifixion, Peter denied him three times and despaire­d. There on the shore of the Sea of Galilee Peter met the Risen Jesus again (Jn 21:12). After meeting the Risen Jesus personally, he was changed into a new man, a courageous man of faith. He became a witness of the resur­rec­tion as a matter of life and death (1Pe 1:3,4). How can we meet Risen Jesus? We must believe in our hearts that Jesus died for our sins and rose again on the third day. Then God can change us into new men and women.

The Risen Jesus also appeared to the 12 disciples, then to more than 500 brethren at once. Then he appeared to James, one of his disciples. He was a man who had a habit of chas­ing rainbows (Mt 20:20,21; Mk 10:35). But when he met the Risen Jesus, his inner desires were changed. After this, he wit­nes­sed to Jesus' resurrection through his martyrdom (Ac 12:2).

Paul, too, met the Risen Jesus. He was a scholar, well-versed in the philosophies and in the Jewish Law. In his zeal, he persecuted the church of Jesus Christ. He approved the stoning of Saint Stephen. But on the way to Damascus, he was met by the Risen Jesus. At the light of the glory of Jesus, his eyes were blind­ed for three days. On the basis of this ex­perience he claim­ed that he was one of the apostles. When Paul tried to fix himself up to be a great man and be happy, he only became a murderer. But when he met the Risen Jesus Christ, he was com­pletely changed into a new man, a spiritual man. Paul lived out his life as a for­giv­en sinner and faith­ful witness to the resur­rection of Jesus. From that time on, he only lived by the grace of God. He said in verses 9,10, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve 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 to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Paul was abundantly happy, always saying, "But by the grace of God I am what I am."

At this time, may God help you to believe the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. When you do so, may God forgive all your sins and give you a living hope in the kingdom of God.