

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 divorced 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.