



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Cor 15: 1-11

Spring 2024

"The Case For The Resurrection"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. Christ is risen!

[Congregation] He is risen indeed!

Amen. And He's coming back!

Well, it is Resurrection Sunday. The reality is, every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday. The early church began to celebrate that, as you probably know, moving from what was customary to meet with many of them on a Saturday, the end of the week, to the first day of the week in remembrance of the Lord's resurrection.

The reality is, every day for us is Resurrection Day, because we live in the power of the resurrection. That's what Paul informed the Philippians of, (3:10), and it's true for all of us; we have His resurrection life within us. So, while every day is Resurrection Day, we're going to consider this particular text on that subject now with 1 Corinthians 15, beginning with verse 1 through verse 11,

15 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

³ For I *declared* to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. ¹¹ Whether then *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

Father, what a great blessing it is to be able to come together on this Resurrection Sunday and consider this great event of history. And it is an event of history, and Paul certainly establishes that in this text that we have read. And our hope is in the things that Paul has recited to the Corinthians, reminded them of: The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the God-man, and what it means, and what it signifies for us; the hope that we have, and what it's grounded in, the cross of Christ.

LORD, help us to understand the things that he said to them, that he wrote to them and the importance of it. We live in light of the resurrection—and it means we have a living Savior. He is alive today, and He is active in us and in this world. And while we can become discouraged by the news we see on the television, or we read in the paper, and all of the difficulties, this world has been in trouble since the beginning. Nothing new, really, in what's going on. But it is troubling.

And yet we know this isn't the way it's going to go forever, that someday the resurrected Christ will come back and establish His kingdom—and it will be glorious. We don't know when, but we know we have heaven waiting for us if we don't experience that event; and everything is glorious for the person who is in Christ. We thank You for Him and His death for us.

And LORD, You care for us, not only spiritually, but materially. And we thank You for the blessings You give us in the material things of life. You provide for us abundantly, "beyond all that we ask or think." (Eph 3:20). We think of those who are having difficulty; we pray for so many of them lately. We pray that You would give them healing and encouragement, and for anyone else, Father, who's struggling with some physical affliction; bless them and cure them and give all of us thankfulness for the good things You do for us every day. Every day You give us every breath of life that we take. It's all a gift from You, because we live and move and exist in You. And You give us abundantly, "beyond all that we ask or think." (ibid.). And we thank You for that.

Bless us now, LORD, as we continue this service, and bless us as we consider this glorious and great text of Scripture. Encourage us and build us up in the faith. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) On the banks of the Seine in Paris, beneath the great Gold Dome is the tomb of Napoleon. It's a quiet place, a shrine. The words of Napoleon are engraved on marble walls. Around the sarcophagus, are listed the names of all the battles that he won; Austerlitz, the Pyramids, Jena, and many others.

But what the monument actually recalls is his greatest defeat. Not Waterloo—Death. Not even Napoleon, called 'the greatest captain of his age', could conquer the grave. No general or emperor has. That victory belongs to one man—a carpenter. And His resurrection proved that He is far more than that. He is God the Son; and all who believe in Him will also be resurrected. That is our hope.

Paul explained it in 1 Corinthians 15, which is the classic chapter on the Resurrection. He wrote it because there were some men in Corinth who denied it.

So in verses 1 through 11, he shows that Scripture taught it, and men witnessed it: The tomb is empty, Christ is alive, and we have a glorious future.

This is an essential part of the Gospel. And Paul begins the chapter by reminding the Corinthians of that fact, and these facts. This is what he preached to them when he first came to Corinth. "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you also stand," (vs1). It's through "the gospel", he says in verse 2, that, "you are saved." So the right understanding of it is very important, is a matter of eternal life. That's the promise for all who believe, "...if", Paul says, "...you hold fast to the word..." (ibid.)— 'If you continue believing the gospel', 'if you persevere in faith.'

Those who have genuinely believed will persevere in faith. Paul didn't question the reality of the Corinthians' faith. It was only some in Corinth who had denied the Resurrection, not the entire congregation—not them as a whole. The sense of this conditional statement, "if you hold fast", is, 'if you hold fast—and you do'. In fact he says, "you stand in it." So Paul was confident in the Corinthians. He believed they were holding to the truth, and they were saved, "unless", he adds, "you believed in vain." (ibid).

How does a person do that? How can we believe in vain? By believing the Gospel when it is not really true. By believing in the Resurrection when it is not really a hope we have—when it's not true, when it is false. If those teachers who denied the Resurrection were in fact right, then our faith is not in the truth. Our hope is empty; nothing will come of it, and our faith is worthless.

So this matter of the Resurrection is of great importance. If the body of Jesus remained in the tomb, if the Resurrection is not true, then the Gospel is not true and there is no salvation.

Paul believed it is true. It's what he preached. It's what all the apostles preached, and what the church believed—and with good reason. He gives the proof of it in the next verses.

He begins, though, with a simple summary of the Gospel, of the Good News, in verses 3 and 4, which has as its essential features, the death and resurrection of Christ. He introduces those facts as being of first importance, meaning Christ's death and resurrection are the principle things, the foundation, the essence of the Gospel—the 'good news of eternal life.'

That wasn't just Paul's opinion. The Gospel wasn't his invention. It didn't originate with him. It is what he says he "received". In fact, he told the Galatians that he 'received it directly from Christ' at his conversion. (Gal 1:12). Later he learned more of the details from his discussions with other Christians; (and he gives some of those details here in this chapter in our passage).

But because of that, he could speak about what happened, and what was true, with complete confidence. And his explanation and proof of the Gospel should give us confidence as well. That's really why he's saying this; he wants to give these Corinthians who believe it, confidence in it.

The first fact that Paul says is of "first importance" is that, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.'" (vs3). What is of importance is not just that He died, but that He died *for our sins*. It's not enough to believe in the historical Jesus; it's not enough to believe that He died. Many people believe that. Pontius Pilate knew that He did, that He died, and so did Caiaphas. But they didn't understand the significance of His death—that it was for our sins.

The Good News is that Christ's death was for a purpose, which was to save us from the penalty of our sins—by suffering the penalty in our place. Christ's death made *atonement*; it made *satisfaction*. John 3, verse 36, states that, man is lost and God's "wrath abides on Him", presently. On every unbeliever, on everyone who does not

believe and obey the truth. Only Christ could turn away God's wrath from us—satisfying God's justice by His death for us, as our substitute.

He did that. —That's the Good News. And Paul states, this was done "according to the Scriptures", (vs3b), which indicates that the cross was not a mistake of history, it was not an afterthought; it was purposed by God from the beginning. The cross was ordained, and prophesied. Paul doesn't quote specific Old Testament texts here, but there were a number that he could have cited. Most likely, he had in mind Isaiah 53, verses 5 and 6 and 10: He had that passage in mind where the prophet speaks of the Messiah being, "pierced through for our transgressions" and 'our iniquity falling on Him.' (vs5).

But there are others, like Psalm 22, and Zechariah chapter 13, verse 7, that prophesied a suffering Savior—as well as all of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant; the lambs, and the bulls, and the goats, and all of those sacrifices that in themselves pictured the sacrificial death of the Savior.

The death of Christ was not a secret. It was revealed in the Old Testament and it is the very heart of the Gospel. It is the great demonstration of God's love for us and remedy for our lostness.

God could have just abandoned us, and done so justly; could have just left us in our condition of unbelief and rebellion with all the terrible consequences of our wrongdoing. He could have left us in that condition; He wasn't obligated to save us.

But He didn't leave us in that condition. He loved us so much, even in our rebellion, that He gave His Son to die for us. John Stott has written, "It takes a hard and stony heart to remain unmoved by love like that." Which is more than love: It is God's sovereign grace, His unconditional love.

But many are unmoved, or they have reinterpreted the cross as being only an example of God's love for man—to give us a model to follow and so move us that we will love one another, and we will live well. But mankind needs more than an example. We need a Savior to take away our sin and our guilt. Christ did that on the cross, because He

did, Paul wrote, it, (the cross), is of "first importance." (vs3a). And then in verse 4 he added that Christ was "buried," indicating the genuineness of the Lord's death, the finality of the Lord's death—that He had a genuine body, and a reasonable soul. He was a true man—and as a true man, a real human being, He truly died, (He died in our place), and that's evident from the fact that He was laid in a tomb.

But that was not the end of the matter, "...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." (vs4b). Again, Paul doesn't cite a text, but he's probably thinking of Psalm 16, verse 10, where David wrote, "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay."

Peter quoted that in Acts chapter 2, verse 31, when he was preaching on the Day of Pentecost. And he quoted that Psalm to prove the resurrection and prove that that passage, (that was written by David), did not refer to David. 'David died', he said and, 'was buried', and he said, 'his tomb is with us to this day.' (Acts 2:31). David's body turned to dust. But the promise in the Psalm is that God's Holy One would not, "undergo decay." So this was not about David. —This was a prophesy about Christ. Paul interpreted the Psalm in the same way; he also quoted it in Acts chapter 13, verse 35, to prove the resurrection from Scripture. Like the Lord's crucifixion, it too, was planned and prophesied. And it too, is an essential part of the Gospel, because it is the proof that Christ's sacrifice for us was accepted by the Father and that all who believe in Him are saved. We would not know that apart from the resurrection. In fact, if the Lord's body had remained in the tomb, it would mean that His sacrifice for us had not been accepted by the Father and we're still in our sins—and we are without hope.

But He has been raised. He is alive today. We have a living Savior, and His life has a direct influence on our lives now. The importance of that cannot be overestimated. Jesus is not some martyr or national hero whose tomb we can visit like a shrine, and whose memory inspires us. He is alive, and actually lives in us through the Holy Spirit. We share in His resurrection life—and it transforms us now. And because He lives, we

have a future; our life and our destiny is tied to His. We will be glorified and we will be like Him—and we will reign with Him. His future is our future.

And that future is secure. We have no reason to fear death. Now, it is a great enemy, (and I don't mean to take it lightly, or speak lightly of it), but Paul speaks of it later in our text, in verse 26, and calls it "the last enemy." It is an enemy, but it's an enemy that's been defeated—and the proof of that is the resurrection.

But is there proof for the resurrection? The answer to that is, 'Yes, there is much proof.' Paul has cited the Scriptural evidence—the evidence of prophecy. And now he cites the historical evidence. In verses 5 through 8 he gives a list of eye-witnesses to the resurrection. It's not an exhaustive list, (for instance he doesn't mention the women to whom the Lord first appeared as the Gospels do).

Paul begins with Peter in verse 5. He calls him by his Aramaic name, "Cephas". This appearance to Peter is not mentioned any other place but in Luke chapter 24, verse 34, and it may have been that the Lord made a special appearance to Peter as an act of mercy in order to give him assurance after he had denied the Lord three times.

But he appeared to Peter first, and then, Paul wrote, "he appeared to the 12." (vs5b). And in verse 6 he states, "After that He, (*Jesus*), appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time." He doesn't state where this occurred; it could have been in Jerusalem, but most probably it occurred in Galilee, where in Matthew 28, verse 7, He told the disciples to meet Him, and they would see Him there—and evidently a multitude of people did.

This appearance to so many people at one time, is significant, particularly in light of modern critics. A person might be able to dismiss the testimony of one or two people to have seen a resurrection and dismissed that as 'an hallucination.' I say that because that is one of the answers that the skeptics give to the resurrection. 'How do you explain Him appearing to the women at the tomb? Well, they hallucinated.'

Well, that might make some sense if it's to one or two people, but it's difficult to establish a mass hallucination with over 500 people testifying to seeing the same thing at the same time. It's very significant evidence.

And 'most of those people were still alive', Paul wrote, (vs6b). So if the Corinthians entertained any doubts, they could go and find a few of these people, and they could have a personal interview with them. The evidence was there—the testimony was still there and alive, and they could access that.

The second name that Paul lists here is "James", in verse 7. This was the Lord's half-brother who was unbelieving during the days of our Lord's incarnation, during His earthly life, (we know that from John chapter 7, verse 5). None of His brothers were believing. So it was probably through this post-resurrection appearance to him that led James to his conversion.

We know early on they believed because in Acts chapter 1, verse 14, there, gathered in the upper room before the Day of Pentecost, are all of "His brothers". His whole family is there. Then He appeared, "to all the apostles"; not one was missing. This may have reference to the Lord's ascension into heaven from the Mount of Olives.

It is an impressive list of evidence. The great Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, calls the resurrection of Jesus Christ, "The best authenticated event in the history of the world."

Well that's certainly true compared to any other event of the ancient world. Many of them have very little evidence to support them. Gordon Clark, who was a Christian philosopher, and historian, and theologian, wrote a commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, and he gave a couple of examples of the little evidence that supports certain historical events that secular historians believe. Both are ancient battles that he cited; one was fought by Hannibal, and it was a battle with a particular tactic that was noted by the Roman historian Livy in his *History*. And the other was the battle that Caesar fought. It's mentioned in his own *Gallic Wars* and it's about the invasion of Britain.

The evidence for both of those events is very small. Each is mentioned only once in ancient literature, (in those sources that I mentioned), but neither one is disputed. So Clark made the observation that, 'The same historians who accept those events as historical based on just one source in ancient history are those who accept that on slim, slight evidence—yet reject the resurrection of Christ that is not based on historical research, but on their theological presuppositions. (A presupposition is what one believes in faith.) And what they begin with, in their faith, is that *the dead don't rise*. — 'That's just a given.' So they dismiss the resurrection out of hand, because it doesn't fit their frame of thinking.'

Well that's true. And then Clark goes on to quote Paul from Acts 26, verse 8, where he is speaking in Caesarea, to King Agrippa, his consort, Bernice, the Roman governor, Festus, and a whole company of august people. He stands before them and he says, 'Why should it be thought a thing incredible to you that God should raise the dead?' Well they were skeptics, too; those ancients were as skeptical as people are today.

'But why is it incredible to you that God can do that?' There's nothing incredible about that; there's nothing God can't do. The problem people have with the resurrection is they don't believe in God—or if they do, they don't believe a God of much power. No, there's nothing too difficult for God.

And men do think it incredible. It takes more than historical research and piles of evidence to convince people of the truth of the Gospel. In fact, we'll never convince them by seeking to reason with them, (not that it isn't reasonable; it's highly reasonable)—but it takes the sovereign grace of God to cause a stone dead heart to believe.

But He does that. God causes unbelievers to believe the Scriptures and the witness to the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. He did the apostle Paul. He's the greatest example of all, of God's grace toward the sinner. And Paul cites himself as last on his list of eye-witnesses to the resurrection. After appearing 'to all of the apostles' he

writes, "...and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." (vs8).

‘Also’ ...it's like, ‘Even to me He appeared!’

That appearance occurred on the Damascus Road—as Paul, then known as, ‘Saul of Tarsus’, a zealous young rabbi was on his way to that city to kill Christians and to terrify the church. But Jesus stopped him in his tracks with the blinding light of glory and the simple question, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). He saw in that light the resurrected Christ. He confessed Him as “Lord”, and was converted. It was sudden and unexpected; it was a complete and immediate turn around.

He described his conversion as, “one untimely born”—like a birth that occurred earlier than expected, maybe due to an accident. And he was born into his new life and into ‘the apostolic band’—suddenly, violently, when he was snatched out of his sin and rebellion by the glorified Christ. It was an abnormal spiritual birth; and Paul seems to have felt that it was to his shame that he had to be saved in that way—even though it was to God's glory.

But Paul felt he was completely unworthy to be an apostle. In verse 9 he calls himself, "...the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Nevertheless, God chose him. And Paul never got over the grace of it. As he explains in verse 10, ‘It was all of grace, unmerited favor, unconditional love.’ “By the grace of God I am what I am."

The understanding of that grace, (of his own unworthiness and God's unimaginable blessing to him), had an effect upon Paul. He says, "...I labored even more than all of them...", (all of the apostles). That wasn't a boast on Paul's part. He wasn't bragging—it was grace. God made something great out of this persecutor of the church. Christ forgave him, as He can forgive the worst of sinners. He gave him new life, with a glorious future. That's the hope of the Gospel, the Gospel preached by all of the apostles.

He concluded in verse 11, "Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed." What all of the apostles proclaimed, and what the Corinthians believed, (and what the church has believed down through the ages), is the death and resurrection of Christ. That is the Gospel.

And the promise of God is that all who believe in that, (who trust in Christ as the God-man, as the living Savior who died for our sins), will be forgiven and saved forever.

That *hope* is certain because Christ's resurrection happened. He defeated the enemy that no man can defeat. He conquered death because He paid for the sins of all who put their faith in Him; and having paid for their sins, He won the battle of the grave. And that sealed the future for everyone who's put their faith in Him—His resurrection.

Yet so many people ignore that future and the hope that is there for all who put their faith in Him—and instead live for the present in an attempt to find happiness in this world, fulfillment in this world. That's doomed to failure, that's doomed to unhappiness, regardless of all that they might achieve.

I came across this quote from Napoleon. In his last days as a prisoner on the island of St. Helena in the Atlantic ocean, he reflected on his life and his end. He wrote, "I die before my time. My body will be given back to the earth to become the food of worms. Such is the fate of the great Napoleon." Then he added, "What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and is extending over the whole earth."

What a despairing thought, 'The body being given back to the earth to become food for worms.' That's man's destiny outside of Christ—from the least of them to the greatest.

But those who believe in the Gospel that the apostles preached have a share in the eternal kingdom of Christ, and the resurrection to come. We have eternal life now—and forever.

Can you say that you have it? Can you say that you have eternal life now? If not, if you're not sure, understand that Christ died for sinners. God accepted His sacrifice for us and now, all who believe in Him, who put their trust in Him and rest in Him alone for salvation, are saved...at that moment.

If He could save Saul of Tarsus, make him an apostle, and give him the certain hope of resurrection, then He can do that for the worst of sinners. He can do that for you. So look to Him, believe in Him, and be saved. Let us pray.

(Closing prayer) Father, we do thank You for this day, Resurrection Day, which, as I said earlier and which we all know, is every day of the Christian's life—what a blessing to be one of Your people. Life may be difficult; it's going to be difficult for all of us in some way or another, but we have hope—the hope of the resurrection. We have the hope of life to come. We have hope for the kingdom and the eternal state to come.

You obtained all of that for us through the death of Your Son. We thank You for Him. We thank You that You raised Him from the dead and that we have that as our hope and the glorious future that's ours. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

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