

Session 1

April 12, 2020

THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

If the *center* of Christian theology is the atonement of Christ (and it is), then the *hope* of Christianity is the resurrection. The living resurrection of the once dead is distinctly Christian. So profound is this doctrine that no other ancient philosophies contain even a hint of it. Of all the world's religions, only Christianity proclaims a complete salvation; one that justifies the eternal soul *and* glorifies the physical body.

First Corinthians 15 represents the most comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of the resurrection found in Scripture. But before the apostle Paul describes all that will happen in detail, he reminds readers that the resurrection of Christ is an essential part of the full gospel message.

The importance of the gospel (vv. 1-3). After a dozen chapters dealing with the church's issues, immorality, and improper doctrine, Paul took them back to their beginnings, and the very foundation upon which they were formed: the simple gospel. Six characteristics are mentioned. First, the gospel was *proclaimed*. The church was birthed in Acts 18 when Paul "was occupied with preaching the message" that Jesus was the Savior among them (Acts 18:1-11). Second, it was *received*; that is, it was embraced, accepted, and believed. Third, it was the *basis of their faith*. The church body was founded upon the truth of the gospel. Fourth, it *saved*; that is, the gospel is the profession through which salvation comes. Fifth, the simple gospel message is of the *utmost importance*. The Greek word means "foremost," and can apply to first in time as well as first in priority. Finally, the gospel is *to be shared*. What Paul received, he passed on, just as we are supposed to do (see Matt. 28:19-20).

The elements of the gospel (vv. 3-4). In a nutshell, the gospel contains three essential elements. First, "Christ died for our sins" (v. 3). The idea here is *on behalf of* our sins. The atonement was clearly substitutionary. Simply put, Christ paid the penalty for our sin (2 Cor. 5:21). In a very real way, He died in our place (1 Pet. 2:24). Second, "He was buried." This seemingly insignificant detail is often overlooked even by the commentators; yet it's actually quite crucial: it indicates Jesus was actually dead! The events on the cross assured it (see John 19:32-34); the burial of His body proves it. Third, "He was raised on the third day." The Old Testament *prophesied* of this event (Ps. 16:10; Dan. 12:2-3 et al.); Jesus *predicted* it (Matt. 12:39-40; Matt. 16:21 et al.); the angels *proclaimed* it (Mark 16:6); Peter *preached* it (Acts 2:24ff); and the church *promoted* it. The very reason that we meet on Sunday (rather than Saturday) is in commemoration of the resurrection (see John 20:1; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10 et al.). Finally, believers claim the *promise* of it (1 Pet. 1:3-5; 1 Cor. 15). Paul is quick to point out that the monumental events of the gospel were not by happenstance, nor by conjecture. But all happened according to God's plan, or as Paul points out, "according to the Scriptures."

The evidence of the gospel (vv. 5-8). In Paul's defense before King Agrippa, he declared, "For I am convinced that none of these things escapes [the king's] notice, since this was not done in a corner." In other words, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that Paul so passionately proclaimed was not carried out in secret, but in plain sight. In these verses, Paul presents his slate

of eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ. Cephas is Peter, and the Twelve were the disciples as a group; five hundred followed (likely at His appearance in Galilee; see Matt. 28:10), and then James, the brother of Jesus, saw the risen Lord (although this meeting is not recorded). “All the apostles” is mentioned then (apart from the upper room event when Thomas was missing), and Paul humbly adds himself to the list as the last of the apostles. That most of them were alive at the time of his writing, adds to the credibility of the report. Could so many really be deceived? How could some in the church doubt? (see vv. 12-15).