

I.N.I.

Second Sunday of Easter
April 27, 2014
I Corinthians 15:1-11

In Christ Jesus, our Resurrected Lord and Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Is Easter's glorious Light still shining in your hearts a week after the celebration? Is it's glorious light lifting us above our daily battles and putting a spring into our step? Is Easter's glorious light brightening our darkest days and keeping the smile of faith on our lips? Is Easter's glorious light giving meaning and a purpose to our lives and to our service for our Savior and to one another?

I hope so. I pray so. To help that Light continue to shine in our hearts and affect our lives, the Lord willing, we will be looking at Paul's majestic chapter on the resurrection during the next five Sundays of Easter. We will be discussing the bodily resurrection of Jesus with these major thoughts:

- 1) **Paul testifies to the certainty of Christ's resurrection (1-11)**
- 2) **Denying the resurrection of the dead denies Christ's resurrection (12-20)**
- 3) **Christ's bodily resurrection assures us of our resurrection (20-26)**
- 4) **Paul describes the resurrected body (35-50)**
- 5) **The glory and the triumph of our resurrection will lead us to be active in our faith life (51-58)**

The Easter message of a risen Savior is the very heart of Christianity. Jesus' resurrection proves: a) that Jesus is true God; b) that God the Father has accepted Christ's sacrifice as full payment for our sins and therefore declared the whole world to be justified; c) that we too will be raised from the dead. If you take away the resurrection, you no longer have Christianity.

Yet the bodily resurrection of Christ has been under attack throughout New Testament history. Some of the Athenians in the Areopagus laughed at Paul when he declared that God had raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 17:32). The idea of a bodily resurrection was foolishness to the sophisticated Greek mind. It isn't surprising then that some of the members of the Corinthian congregation were also being led to deny or at least doubt and question this essential truth.

Is it any different today? A couple years ago a newspaper article came out that was entitled "Author Finds No Answers to Resurrection." The article reported, "A new investigative report examining the vast and varied accumulation of facts about Jesus finds that the theories attempting to explain away His resurrection are basically flawed, one way or another." That sounds good. But then the article concludes, "But just exactly what happened or how, can't be definitely determined."

That is not surprising. The world will accept the fact that Jesus was a real person, who lived and died, but to say that He was the God-Man, God in human flesh and blood, who preformed miracles and bodily rose from the dead to announce His victory over sin, death and Satan, takes faith to believe which the unbelieving world does not have.

Our theme this morning is this:

HOLD ON TO YOUR EASTER ASSURANCE!

I: Remember what you were taught.

Paul begins this section of his letter by reminding his Corinthian brothers and sisters of the Gospel message that he proclaimed to them. **MOREOVER, BRETHREN, I DECLARE TO YOU THE GOSPEL WHICH I PREACHED TO YOU, WHICH ALSO YOU RECEIVED AND IN WHICH YOU STAND, BY WHICH ALSO YOU ARE SAVED, IF YOU HOLD FAST THAT WORD WHICH I PREACHED TO YOU--UNLESS YOU BELIEVED IN VAIN.**

The Corinthians heard from his lips the Good News and they believed it. They took their stand on that Gospel even against the false teachings in which they had been raised. Through faith in that Gospel message they were saved. But, Paul warns them, if they no longer held firmly to it, they then had lost their salvation. Claiming to believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ while denying His resurrection is a contradiction that would make their faith, their believing in vain. A faith without Easter is an empty, useless faith. It is really no faith!

Paul continues: **FOR I DELIVERED TO YOU FIRST OF ALL THAT WHICH I ALSO**

RECEIVED: 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,... What God had revealed to Paul, Paul also revealed and taught to them. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the very basics of Christianity. This teaching was of the first in importance: Christ died for our sins. He was the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. This was not man's opinion but God revealed fact. Jesus as our Sacrifice offered Himself as the sacrificial Lamb for the sins of all people.

How did Paul know this? It was revealed in the scriptures. The Old Testament clearly records the suffering and death of the Suffering Servant. David writes of the Messiah's sacrificial death in Ps. 22. Isaiah beautifully prophesies of the Savior's suffering and death in Isaiah 53.

The death of Jesus for the sins of the world is the central truth of the Gospel. Paul wrote earlier in this letter, **AND I, BRETHREN, WHEN I CAME TO YOU, DID NOT COME WITH EXCELLENCE OF SPEECH OR OF WISDOM DECLARING TO YOU THE TESTIMONY OF GOD. FOR I DETERMINED NOT TO KNOW ANYTHING AMONG YOU EXCEPT JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED.**

Paul underscores the fact that Jesus truly died, by adding, **AND THAT HE WAS BURIED...ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES.** Again Paul's proof is God's Word of the Old Testament. We read in Isaiah 53:9 **AND THEY MADE HIS GRAVE WITH THE WICKED-- BUT WITH THE RICH AT HIS DEATH....**

ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES... CHRIST ALSO ROSE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY. Once again Paul points emphatically and conclusively to the Old Testament for his proof of this amazing fact. The Messiah speaking through David by inspiration says this in Psalm 16:10 **FOR YOU WILL NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN SHEOL, NOR WILL YOU ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION.** Jesus also tells us that the Old Testament lesson of Jonah being swallowed by the great fish, being in his belly for three days and nights and then vomited up on dry ground was an Old Testament picture or type of Jesus' being in the grave from Friday till Sunday and being resurrected from the dead.

Everything took place according to God's plan and purpose as He had promised in the Old Testament. **THE SCRIPTURES CANNOT BE BROKEN.** If God says it, it must be true. If God promises and prophesies it, it must come to pass and it did!

Hold on to your Easter Assurance! I: Remember what you were taught.

II: Listen to the eye witnesses

Jesus' resurrection is an historical fact also seen by many. Paul now lists some of those who actually saw Jesus alive after He died and rose again. This is quite an impressive list:

- 1) **seen by Cephas (Peter);** sometime Easter afternoon, before Jesus appeared to the two Emmaus disciples. Luke 24:33, 34
- 2) **then by the twelve;** Easter evening and again a week later. The term **"the twelve"** was a term for the group of men who followed Jesus, even though only 11 were left, Judas having hanged himself.
- 3) **by over five hundred brethren at one time;** We have no other reference to this appearance in the Bible. We don't know when this occurred. The importance of this reference is that many of these people were still alive, so if the Corinthians wanted to check the authenticity of Paul's words they could. If Paul were writing today, he probably would say, "go ahead and e-mail them, text them, call them, check it out and verify what they saw. Most of them are still alive."
- 4) **by James;** the brother of Jesus, who became a leader of the Jerusalem church and author of the book of James.
- 5) **by all the apostles;** possibly referring to the Mt. of Olives when Jesus gave the great commission.

Paul's point is clear. The resurrection of Jesus is an historical fact attested to by many eye witnesses. If the Corinthians doubted Paul's word, there were many other witnesses they could ask.

Hold on to your Easter Assurance! II: Listen to the eye witnesses.

III: See the results

The Corinthians really didn't have to ask anyone else for resurrection proof. Paul had the proof. He too had seen the risen Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus to persecute the believers. It was at this time that He was converted and was changed from the great persecutor of the Church to one of,

if not, the greatest apostle of the Church as we heard in our Scripture reading this morning.

To show how unworthy of this special grace Paul considered himself to be, he calls himself one who was **BORN OUT OF DUE TIME**. This term refers to a miscarriage. Paul was as good as a dead, prematurely born or miscarried baby. He does not deserve to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of believers. We read in Acts 8:3 about Paul making **HAVOC OF THE CHURCH, ENTERING EVERY HOUSE, AND DRAGGING OFF MEN AND WOMEN, COMMITTING THEM TO PRISON**. In Acts 9:1 we read, **THEN SAUL, STILL BREATHING THREATS AND MURDER AGAINST THE DISCIPLES OF THE LORD, WENT TO THE HIGH PRIEST AND ASKED FOR LETTERS FROM HIM TO THE SYNAGOGUES OF DAMASCUS, SO THAT IF HE FOUND ANY WHO WERE OF THE WAY, WHETHER MEN OR WOMEN, HE MIGHT BRING THEM BOUND TO JERUSALEM**. Is it any wonder Paul did not consider himself worthy to be called an apostle, or even spoken of in the same breath as John, Peter and the other Apostles?

None of us can truly appreciate the grace of God unless we first recognize how much we deserve to be punished because of our sins. Paul understood how sinful he was. He wrote in I Timothy 1:15,16 **THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTANCE, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF. HOWEVER, FOR THIS REASON I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW ALL LONGSUFFERING, AS A PATTERN TO THOSE WHO ARE GOING TO BELIEVE ON HIM FOR EVERLASTING LIFE**.

Paul knew that he could not do anything to save himself. Remember it was Paul who wrote in Ephesians 2:8,9 **FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES; IT IS A GIFT OF GOD, NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANYONE SHOULD BOAST**. Throughout his epistles we see Paul's amazement at God's grace toward him, that God the Father was willing to sacrifice His Son for him and that Jesus was willing to suffer death and damnation in his place. He was amazed not only by the fact that Jesus would die to pay for all of his sins, but that He also called someone like him to be His apostle to the Gentiles.

Doesn't that also amaze us. That God saved a wretch like me and like you. Steeped in sin, conceived and born in sin, in fact spiritually dead in sin, Jesus died and rose for us to pay for the guilt and punishment of our sins and through the Holy Spirit called us out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of saving faith to serve Him.

That grace of God produced fruit in Paul's life. Paul says he worked harder and accomplished more than all of the other apostles, not to his glory but to the glory of God. Why did he do this? He was driven to this--compelled, constrained-- by Christ's great grace (undeserved love) that assured him that all of his sins were forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Paul knew that all credit and all glory belonged to God, not only for his salvation, but also for everything else that God had done in and through Paul for His name's sake. Paul writes in verse 10: **BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM, AND HIS GRACE TOWARD ME WAS NOT IN VAIN; BUT I LABORED MORE ABUNDANTLY THAN THEY ALL, YET NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS WITH ME**.

That grace of God also produces fruit in our lives. May we work hard to accomplish much for our Lord and Savior and for His Church, not to our glory but to the glory of God.

Hold on to your Easter Assurance! III: See the results.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical fact, whether it is Paul or one of the other apostles that proclaimed it. It is the Good News of Christ's death and resurrection which is **THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES...** no matter who proclaims it, the great apostle Paul or you or me! Don't be led astray by the wisdom of this world, the sophists who proclaim there is no proof of an empty tomb, no records of Jesus' resurrection outside of the Bible accounts, no accurate eye witnesses.

Jesus' resurrection was the heart and core of the apostles' teaching and must remain the essential message of our preaching and of our faith today. No festival of the church year is more important than Easter, no message more essential. Satan knows that if he can undermine the truth of the resurrection, he will take the very heart out of Christianity. So....

Hold on to your Easter Assurance!
I: Remember what you were taught.
II: Listen to the eye witnesses.
III: See the results.
Amen.