

The Gospel

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[0 : 00] Alright, well we're starting a new series tonight called Resurrection Hope.

It's going to be focused on the whole of 1 Corinthians 15. We're going to spend the rest of the Sunday nights in January looking at it. And 1 Corinthians 15 is a chapter about the resurrection. But as you saw when we just read a moment ago, this is really kind of an intro to that topic. Paul, at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15, talks in general about the gospel.

And actually what we read there when it talks about the fact that he died and he rose again and he appeared, according to the Scriptures, that is thought by most scholars, biblical scholars to be one of the earliest creeds of Christianity.

So it's very likely that Christians, when they came to faith in the Roman Empire, would actually recite what Paul writes here at their baptism.

[0 : 59] And they would be baptized and initiated into the visible people of God. And so this is one of the very earliest things that the Christian community would confess. And that is exactly why Paul is repeating it here to them because he's talking to a Corinthian church who has in large measure forgotten the gospel.

It's a church, if you've read through the book of Corinthians, that's divided. And there's grave, big time public sin all around that everybody knows about in the midst of Corinth coming out of the church.

And they were mistreating the poor and they were doing all sorts of things. And so he says at the beginning of the passage, I'm reminding you, brothers and sisters, of what you had heard lest you begin to drift away from it because they were in real danger of actually because of a false teacher in their midst abandoning the gospel that they had heard from Paul altogether.

And so here he gets back to the basics and to the foundation to remind them of what they had first believed. And it's so important that he does that and to see that because the gospel for Christians is something that you never graduate from.

It's not as if in Christianity you start with the gospel and then you move on to the meteor things later on. But actually in the Christian religion, in Christianity, the gospel is the foundation that everything comes from.

[2 : 22] And actually everything goes toward it or comes from it and goes through it all at the same time. The gospel is the heartbeat. It's the foundation. You never leave it behind.

You never graduate from it. And even if you've been a Christian for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years, we as Christians and sinners at the very same time are always prone to drift away from the core of the faith and to drift away from the basics of the faith, which is the gospel itself.

And so we can take nothing for granted because Paul says we can take nothing for granted here. We always have to come back and revisit the gospel again and again and again. The basics are always so critical and important for us.

It's very possible that everybody in the room tonight is in one of three different places. You might be here tonight and you've been in the church for years and years and years and you've never really grasped hold of this gospel.

It's very possible. And it's also very possible that you've been a Christian for years and years, but you feel that maybe you've drifted away from the core of the faith itself, from the gospel, from that being the foundation of your daily life.

[3 : 37] Or it's very possible that you're here tonight for the first time ever in a church or you've hardly been around Christianity at all and you're really coming to explore the content of the gospel.

But what that means is that this is the gospel, it's for everybody. It's for everybody. There's no getting out from under it. It applies to all of us tonight. And so the question Paul's addressing here is

what is it?

And that's what we're going to ask and we're going to see two lessons that he gives us. First, the gospel is history. And the second is that the gospel is for us. And you might also say there's an objective element to the gospel and a subjective element to the gospel.

So first, the objective element. In verse three, if you have a Bible, you'll see in verse three, he says, I delivered to you as of first importance.

Now that first importance little phrase he uses is not quantitative. So it's not as if he's saying there's a first, second, third, fourth thing that's important, but it's a term in Greek that's entirely qualitative.

[4 : 42] So he's saying I delivered to you the most qualitatively important thing, that this is the most important thing. You know, anybody that's coming and searching for some hope in life that they haven't yet found and they come and explore different religions will ask all sorts of questions of those religions.

But ultimately, every single one of the religions points us to a foundation of that which is of first importance at the center. I'm sure the religion scholars at Edinburgh Uni might debate about this, but you might say in Hinduism that which is of first importance is living a life that will get you outside of the cycle of reincarnation.

Or in Islam, that which is of first importance is observance of the five pillars, the confession of Allah and Muhammad and the other four pillars. That's what's first and qualitatively the most important thing.

And in Christianity, Paul comes here in the most succinct explanation of Christianity in the whole Bible perhaps and says that which is of the most qualitative importance is one word verse one, the gospel.

And this word gospel appears 134 times across the New Testament in the particular form that we have it here. It's the Greek word even Galeon.

[5 : 58] And that's actually really important to know the short version is the evangel, which is why we talk about evangelism and things like that. And that this particular word we're reading appears 74 times across Paul's corpus.

So it's it's all over the place in Paul. And the first thing I just want to say it's so important just to know what the word itself means.

The word evangel, you'll hear it one commentator points this out the back half of the word is the word angel in evangel. It's the word angel. Then that's because an angel is not fundamentally first that word does not fundamentally mean one of God's heavenly messengers.

Actually the word angel in Greek just means messenger or it can even also just mean message itself. And so God calls his heavenly host sometimes angels, messengers.

And the beginning of the word is an EV or an EU, evangel, which means good in Greek. And so all it means is good message or as we often say, good news.

[7 : 01] Now it's so important to get back to that foundation and to say that because in the first century when Paul uses this term Christians did not invent the term gospel.

Evangel. This was word was used all around and outside of Christianity. We see the word gospel, evangel being used 500 years before Jesus was ever born.

And the way it would have been used was something like this, you know, in the Roman Empire, Rome would go out as they do and they would win a great victory over the barbarians and the commander of the army would send an angel, a messenger with an angel, a message and he would come over the hillside outside of the city of Rome.

He would wave the victory flag and the city would erupt in celebration. And what he was doing was delivering the gospel. That's the word they would have used the good news that Rome has one another victory.

So this is a term that Paul appropriates. He takes up and he stuffs with religious meaning and he says, good news is actually a word we can take from the Greco-Roman world and used to describe what is at the very center of Christianity.

[8 : 14] And as one pastor puts it like this and this is where the rubber hits the road, it means what Paul is saying here is that in just using this word that the gospel is more like opening the morning newspaper and reading the first page than it is going to see a therapist or counselor, a pastor or doctor.

You know, you go see a pastor, you come meet with me or Derek or you go see your doctor or your GP and we might offer good advice maybe.

You might get good advice. The gospel is totally different than that. The gospel is not advice. It is news. It is proclamation of history.

The gospel is history. It is what has happened at a given point in time. It is not advice, it is news.

Martin Lloyd-Jones says it like this, the gospel is the proclamation of what God did.

Good news from God to man. Now then you have to ask of course what is the content of that news and that is exactly where Paul goes here. He tells us exactly what the message is about.

[9 : 26] What is the messenger, the angel come over the hill to shout like the newspaper boy to shout and this is what Paul says. There's four elements he gives us and in each of them it is the facts of Jesus Christ.

It is all about Jesus and what he did. In 1 Corinthians 15 it is going to get into so much about how important it is that it really happened, that the facts are at the center.

It is objective, not subjective first. That what happened really did happen and this is what he says, he died. Jesus Christ died.

And that means there is no gospel, there is no good news apart from the cross of Jesus Christ and he says he was buried. There is no good news without Jesus being really dead and it says he rose again on the third day.

There is no good news apart from the resurrection and it says then he appeared, he revealed himself in a resurrected state. There is no good news apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ after his resurrection.

[10 : 27] Now as we close this point what I want you to notice is this. He doesn't talk at all about the teaching ministry of Jesus. There is not a single word about Jesus' miracles, there is not a word about anything he said.

What Jesus did at the Sermon on the Mount is so important. All of Jesus' teaching ministry is so important and when Paul says let me tell you what the gospel is, it is not there.

Because if there has ever been good advice it comes from Jesus' teaching ministry. Jesus' teaching ministry gave great advice, in fact he gave law, he spoke to us exactly how to live life. He showed us through parables and all sorts of things in the Sermon on the Mount exactly how to live life.

But Jesus' teaching ministry is not the good news itself. The good news is that he died on the cross and he rose again on the third day.

It's history, it's news, it's what happened to him. You see what Paul is doing. He's saying, well you can never neglect the teaching ministry of Jesus but the good news, the good news is that he died and rose again.

[11 : 33] What is Paul saying? He's saying Jesus Christ did not primarily come to be a great ethical teacher. The first order of business in Christianity is not come and find great moral teaching.

It's not come and find great, a great path for life. It's not come and rediscover ethics all over again in a fresh. That's the other religions. Paul says that Jesus Christ came first and foremost to be a savior.

And so the good news is what he did to save. Why? That's the next question I'm pointing to. Why not his teaching?

And why is it that his death has got to be here? Why is it that his resurrection has got to be here?

And the answer in that comes through considering the subjective aspect of it, the second point and our final point tonight.

Paul's big emphasis as we have seen is what happened. He died and he rose again on the third day. It's news, it's not advice. But then he adds here the subjective element.

[12 : 40] He says that he died for our sins in verse three. So he combines the objective history of Jesus with the subjective reality that it's for our sins.

Now if you've been a Christian for any time or maybe if you're exploring the claims of Christianity, this might be a question that's popped up to you.

And I think it's a really important one that everybody has got to consider and think about. And that's this. How can, you know, if Paul is saying that the gospel is what happened, it's history, it's news about Jesus Christ, it's that he died and he rose again, if that's what Paul's saying, how can what happened to a man who lived between 4 BC and 29 or 30 AD approximately be powerful in any way for me in 2022?

How can the life of a man so long ago have power over my actions and what I've done to forgive my past or forgive my future to change my life from top to bottom?

How can that history be a part of my history today in the 21st century? And when Paul says here, in fact, he died for our sins, maybe one of the questions to ask is, well, who's the hour?

[14 : 06] Because we know, right, that Paul is, of course, talking about himself and he saw Jesus Christ. And you say, well, Paul, you saw Jesus. Of course, it's for you. You got to see him in the first century.

But one of the things to know, who else is he talking about? He's talking, of course, about his reader and his readers are the Corinthians. And it's very probably the case that all of his readers, despite maybe just a few that would ever read this letter, never saw Jesus Christ in his life on earth, not once.

The Corinthians, many of whom would have not even been born when Paul wrote this letter, or sorry, when Jesus lived before his death and resurrection, they would have never seen Jesus. And Paul says he died for our sins, he's saying you need not have been there.

The power of this gospel can be for anybody in any season, at any age of life, from the beginning of history all the way to the end of history.

Now the question he addresses here very subtly is how? And the answer is in one little phrase.

Paul says that this gospel, he died, he rose again, he was buried according to the scriptures.

[15 : 25] And why is it so important for Paul to add that? You say I understand that the gospel is news, it's what happened in history, but why does Paul need to also say the gospel is according to the scriptures?

He's saying that when you read from Genesis all the way to the end of the Old Testament, that that history, that inscripturated history, everything that happened during that time period was always about getting to Jesus Christ, foreshadowing Christ, prophesying Christ, moving humanity towards the moment, the fullness of time when Christ would come.

And you see what that means? That means that when Jesus Christ went to the cross and he went to die for my sins, this is God's plan. He's always determined that Jesus Christ would die for my sins.

He's always determined that Jesus would rise on the third day. It's according to the scriptures, meaning it's right there as the heartbeat of the book of Genesis itself.

It's always been the plan from the beginning of time. Nothing has changed. This is all, when Jesus Christ goes to the cross and we ask the question, who is it that sent Jesus Christ to the cross?

[16 : 36] Yes, our sin, but also God sent Jesus Christ to the cross. God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit, this was the plan from the fullness of time.

And you know what that means? That when Jesus went to the cross, he died to stand before the eternal God and fulfill the plan from all of eternity to be in our stead, to be for our sins, to be judged in our place.

And God accepted that justice and resurrected Jesus Christ precisely because of it and offers the hope of new life to anybody.

Now, the idea here, and this is what really gets to the question, can God really extend the power of forgiveness and eternal life to me in 2022 based on the history of this man, this God man at the beginning of the first century?

How does that happen? You see, if this is God's plan and God stands outside of all time, God has the power to see his Son and extend his justice forward and backward into every age.

[17 : 50] And the way that Paul tells us that he does that, and I'm going to use this word and then we'll explain it, is that he federates us to Jesus.

Now I heard somebody use this illustration to explain this once. What does it mean to say that God federates or covenants, is the other word, us to Christ?

If you're married and you have a joint credit card with your spouse, and one of the partners, one of the spouses goes and racks up a whole load of debt on that credit card.

That saying could be a woman, could be a man, either way, it works both ways, of course. You go, you receive the bill, you go, you call the credit card company and you say what?

You say, you know, I'm not paying this. I did not purchase any of this. Every ounce, every pound represented on this bill is not things that I purchased.

[18 : 54] And what are they going to say to you? You're federated, you're covenanted, you're in joint union together. Whatever is hers is yours and whatever is his is yours.

And so that means his debt is now your debt, and your debt is his debt. And from the eyes of God the Father looking at the Son, he says, for anybody who would come to believe on Jesus Christ, anything that is true of Jesus Christ is true of you, if you believe, because you're federated, you're in federation, you're together.

He sees you as one, he sees you as one person, he sees you in him and he in you. And so when he dies, you died on the cross, Paul says, it's past tense.

And when he comes to live again, you now live again, past tense. And at the very beginning of this passage, as we start to turn towards the close, at the very beginning of this passage, Paul says, I want to tell you about the gospel, I want to remind you of the gospel that I received.

And that's the key, that anybody can receive it. And if you're a Christian today, maybe you've forgotten this, and if you're not, this is the instrument of reception.

[20 : 12] It's faith, and what is faith? Faith is three things. Faith is knowing the good news, hearing the good news, knowing it, understanding it.

It's saying, yes, I believe that really happened. And thirdly, it's trust in the God of the good news, Jesus Christ, as your salvation.

It's knowledge, it's saying yes, and it's trust, and that's faith. And today, if you're a Christian, the question that Paul I think is asking us, like he was saying to the Corinthians is, have you drifted away from the foundation, the core of the faith at all in your life, is the gospel actually the heartbeat of your daily existence?

Do you wake up and remind yourself of the gospel? Do you wake up and bathe in the gospel again? Do you wake up and pray about the forgiveness that is yours in the gospel and give thanks to God every day?

That's for the Christian. And if you're not sure today about that, well, do you understand the gospel, that Jesus Christ died and rose again for your sins, and believe that it really happened and say, that's my God.

[21 : 29] And if you do, then you're a Christian. You're a Christian. You can take hold of this gospel. Now, I want to close by just addressing two issues very briefly that also come up in relation to the gospel here, one at the beginning of the passage and one towards the end of the passage.

The first is this, Paul deals also here when he tells us what the gospel is with just the difficult concept of the assurance of faith.

And you see something a little bit tricky in verse one and two. He says, I would remind you, brothers of the gospel I preached to you in which you received. They received it because the power was not in Paul.

They received the power from the gospel itself, from the work of God and the gospel itself. And now in which you stand, you believed it, and so you're safe and secure. You stand in it.

But then he says something a little confusing, and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word. So he said, you've received it and you stand in it. That's a military verb.

[22 : 33] You stand in it, secure like armor. If you hold fast, and that might raise up nervousness in us about assurance of faith.

And what I want to say is this, remember the context. Paul is writing to Corinthians who are actually in grave danger of abandoning the whole message of the gospel altogether.

And what he's saying to them is, if you believe the gospel, you stand in the gospel. Be assured, you're a Christian and you're forgiven today.

And so don't abandon the gospel. If you hold fast to the gospel, meaning don't leave the gospel behind. Don't let it not be the core of who you are, the core of your faith.

He's not saying, he's not saying that the determination of your salvation stands in the quality of your faith. Because your faith might be really good tonight, and then tomorrow morning when you wake up, it might have dropped down a little bit.

[23 : 33] The power of salvation is not in the quality of your faith. It's in the object. Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. And so he's saying, do you believe that at all?

Then rest assured in the gospel. Rest assured in the gospel. And one of the things to notice before I go to the second issue is this. There's nothing here about a supernatural experience, a visible public extraordinary moment where you finally come through.

And finally, because of God's great visible power, the gospel is yours and it's true for you. That doesn't happen here at all. He simply tells us over and over again in the New Testament, do you know it?

Do you say yes to it? And do you believe? Do you love Jesus? Then you're a Christian today. I've had friends who have come to faith in really extraordinary ways.

One of my friends at uni, just after uni, who had lived a prodigal sort of life, was driving a food delivery truck and he was overwhelmed with the weight of his sin at work one day while he was driving.

[24 : 46] And he didn't know why, he didn't know what was happening to him. And his grandfather had slipped a Bible in his glove box and he did not know it.

And he opened his glove box while he was driving and saw the Bible there and he pulled over on the side of the road and he read through one of the gospels. It was a hot Mississippi day that had had been the Holy Spirit.

And he came to faith. And another one of my great friends came to faith while he was at a party in the midst of all sorts of public sin and he walked out from the party into the pasture as teenagers often have parties in rural places.

And he came to faith right then and that moment having been an atheist prior. And almost every other Christian that I've ever known cannot tell you the day, cannot tell you when and cannot tell you how they came to faith in Jesus Christ.

The question tonight, the most important question, it's so important to give your testimony, but the most important question is that Paul is saying is do you believe the gospel today?

[26 : 03] And if you do, then you're a Christian. And if you haven't come to join the church and you say yes, I have faith, then come on and join the church.

Now the second issue and the final issue as we draw to a final close is this. He also addresses this other problem. Some of us might say today, I want to come to believe, but I'm really struggling with the things that I've done in my past.

Or you might be a Christian today and you say I want to grow in faith, but I really am struggling with guilt over the things that I've done in my past and that I continue to do and struggle with.

And you see, that's what he does at the end of the passage. He says in verse 10, he goes through his own testimony and he says, by the grace of God today, I am what I am.

And that's so important because you see what he's doing. He's doing two things. He's on the one hand, putting himself up as the great example of what it means to be the worst.

[27 : 07] You know, if you're here today, it's probably the case that Paul was worse than you morally. He murdered God's Jesus's people. That was his job.

And then on the other hand, then he's saying, and I also became the greatest of the apostles. He tells us. And so, as you see, on the one hand, Paul is saying, I was the worst sinner.

And on the other hand, now I've become the greatest of the apostles. And you see what he's saying in verse 10? That the gospel, the gospel forgets your past and it relativizes all of your future accomplishments.

The power of the gospel is that it puts away your past, present, and future sins and also relativizes your accomplishments.

And let me say that there's real freedom in that. There's real freedom in that. You see what Paul says? He says, the Corinthians, they're fighting. Some follow Paul, some follow Apollos.

[28 : 09] And he says it, verse 11, it doesn't matter who preached to you. We preach the gospel.

The power is not in the person, it's not in the unconscious. I'm the best apostle, he's saying, but that doesn't matter. That's not where the power of the gospel resides.

He doesn't matter who delivers the gospel. You see what the freedom in that is. The freedom is this. The gospel gives you freedom from your past, present, and future sins.

And you, 21st century, people of 2022, we need to hear that now more than ever in a world, a world of toleration where you can be destroyed by one email that you sent 10 years ago.

A culture without mercy, without any mercy, Jesus Christ comes and says, I don't tolerate sin, but I'll come to die for you to put it away.

He's that merciful. That's the power of the gospel. And on the other hand, the gospel gives you freedom from your successes and accomplishments because they can be slavery too. You know, you neither, if you believe the gospel tonight, you neither need to be defined by your failures, nor by

what you might achieve.

[29 : 18] Your identity doesn't have to come from either of those. You can work and live in peace and not in frantic strivings by the power of the gospel. You can have freedom because the most important work in your past and future and today is his work.

And so it relativizes your accomplishments and it frees you from all your sins. One of my seminary professors used to come into our classroom.

This is in an intro to ministry class. It was kind of a, what is ministry all about course? And every day he would write, quite often he would write on the board, the key gospel personality, colon.

And he said, the more that you believe the gospel and make it the core of your life, this is the personality it creates. And this is what he wrote. He would write, ultimately humble plus fully confident.

And that's, you see what the gospel, the gospel by grace you have been saved, not by faith. It's not of your works. You have nothing to brag about. The power is entirely in Jesus Christ. And so the gospel gives you the freedom to be ultimately humble.

[30 : 25] But also because of the gospel, you can be okay. You can have peace. You can have rest from your frantic strivings to achieve an identity.

The gospel makes you so humble and at the same time gives you the power to be so confident because your confidence is in him. No matter what the circumstances around you are doing to suck you underneath the waves of despair, the gospel gives you the power to float, to be buoyant, no matter what's happening in your life, even to pass through death with gospel joy.

And that's real power. So let's pray together and ask God to give it to us. Father, we ask now that you would give us great faith or weak faith and grow us in faith.

That we would understand, say yes, and believe and trust the Savior tonight. Whether we've been Christians for 70 years or we don't know where we are, right now, Holy Spirit, would you come and meet with us and do a work in our hearts so that we might believe and be people who live through faith in the gospel.

And so we ask for these hearts in Jesus' name.