



“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain,” I Corinthians 15:14.

The Capstone of the Gospel

Lesson Aim: To motivate believers to rely upon the power of the resurrected life.

L135. Date: March 1975. **Text:** I Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-25.

Topic: Jesus: Resurrection of; Resurrection: Of Christ.

Which doctrine is the very heart of the Christian religion? Is it the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin conception of Jesus, the nature of the church, the forgiveness of sins, or some other? We believe the heart of the gospel is the truth concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For that reason, a study of the Bible doctrine of resurrection is entitled, “The Capstone of the Gospel.”

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was a major theme in early Christian preaching. Read the sermons recorded in the book of Acts. They testify of the wicked men “who killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead,” Acts 3:15. At every opportunity they “preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead,” Acts 4:2.

Why does the New Testament place so much emphasis upon the resurrection of Jesus? Romans 5:10 explains, **“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”** We are reconciled because He died. We are saved because He lives. Blessed truth of resurrection!

Read once more the familiar records of the resurrection of Jesus. They are found in Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-16; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:1-31; I Corinthians 15:1-26. As you read, pause to thank God that you have a living Savior whose resurrection life is being lived in you day by day.

1. THE FACT, 15:1, 2

The gospel includes the announcement of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (verse 1). Paul preached the “full gospel” in Corinth. That gospel was received. That gospel became the foundation of faith. What was that gospel? The apostle summarized it: “. . . **Christ died for our sins . . . he was buried . . . he rose again the third day,**” verses 3, 4.

In such a statement of the gospel, there are hidden all the doctrines of the Christian faith. Therein is the doctrine of God who provided salvation, the doctrine of atonement which procured salvation, the doctrine of grace which offered salvation, the doctrine of substitution which permitted salvation, the doctrine of resurrection which completed salvation, and those other precious truths which are dear to believers.

There can be no salvation without a declared gospel. There is no gospel without the atoning death and victorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The gospel, when faithfully declared, is received and believed to the saving of men (verses 1, 2). Paul referred to the gospel of death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as that “by which also ye are saved,” verse 2.

What is meant by “believing the gospel”? It means more than an intellectual acknowledgement. It means more than to believe the events announced in the gospel happened at a point in history. To believe the gospel is to have such confidence in Him of whom the gospel witnesses that one commits himself in total dependence upon Him. Such an act is more than mere believing; it is trust and commitment. Those who believe in such a way receive immediate and eternal salvation.

The gospel is the announcement of the redemptive deed which Jesus performed for sinners (verses 3, 4). The “full gospel” is that “Christ died for our sins . . . was buried, and rose again the third day.” There can be no fuller gospel than that.

The “social gospel” (dealing with social problems and not spiritual needs) is not the real gospel of Jesus Christ. The social application of the gospel comes after its spiritual redemption effected in believers. Never get away from blood redemption. To do so is to be moved from the true gospel to an untrue declaration which is no gospel at all.

II. THE PROOF, 15:5-8

The resurrection of Jesus was hesitantly accepted by His disciples and rejected by His enemies. Its truth became confirmed to the disciples when

“ . . . He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,” Acts 1:3. Even so, His enemies still reported that His body was stolen from the grave (Matthew 28:12-15). Many who profess to believe in Him have problems with the fact of His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:12).

Certain women, at least five in number, went to Jesus' tomb early upon the first day of the week. They saw and spoke to angels who announced to them the resurrection of Jesus. In haste, they returned to tell the apostles, but **“ . . . Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not,”** Luke 24:11.

The same day, two male believers were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus when Jesus came to walk with them. He showed them how His suffering, death, and arising therefrom were the fulfillment of the prophetic announcement, **“and their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight,”** Luke 24:31. They hastened back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive; **“ . . . neither believed they them,”** Mark 16:13.

It is no wonder that Jesus afterward appeared to the disciples, **“ . . . and upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him . . .”** Mark 16:14. It was because of the disciples' slowness to believe that it was necessary for Jesus to “show himself alive . . . by many infallible proofs,” Acts 1:3.

Jesus wanted the disciples to be fully convinced that He was alive. He invited them to touch His resurrected body, to look upon His pierced hands and feet, and He ate in their presence to prove He was not mere spirit but flesh bones (Luke 24:36-43). He appeared to them over and over again at different times and in different places, to prove He was alive. During a period of forty days, Jesus appeared at least five times, more than five hundred people, in order to assure His disciples that He is truly alive from the dead.

They believed. At last they believed. They believed because they saw and heard, and felt (I John 1:1-3). You, too, can believe. You can believe without seeing His form, hearing His voice, and feeling His body. You can believe with His own benediction upon your faith: **“ . . . Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed,”** John 20:29.

III. THE IMPORTANCE, 15:12-19

It is difficult to understand why any person would doubt the fact of

Jesus' resurrection from death. Not only do some men doubt, but some Christians also doubt. Paul acknowledged that fact when he wrote to the Corinthian church, “. . . **How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead,**” verse 12.

“What difference does it make?” do you ask. It makes a great deal of difference. There are seven blessed consequences which follow upon the fact of the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus gives power to Christian preaching (verse 14). There is no gospel unless there is an announcement of salvation. There can be no security offered through preaching a message which is false. There is no salvation in a message which does not include the vicarious death and victorious resurrection. Just as absence of the fact removes all power from preaching, the presence of truth makes the gospel the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes (Romans 1:16).

The resurrection of Jesus gives validity to faith (verse 14). What benefit is it to believe something that is untrue? There is no benefit. What can be accomplished by faith in a proclamation which lacks basis in fact? Nothing! Faith in a gospel without resurrection is, therefore, empty and profitless. The truth of the thing believed gives power to faith and accomplishes the saving of the believer.

The resurrection of Jesus gives content to our message (verse 15). To teach His resurrection when He has not risen, and to do it in the name of God, is to be a false witness of what God has done. The doctrine becomes devoid of truth; it will be a lie. Preaching must include the crucifixion, but it must not stop there. All the truth is not declared unless the resurrection is presented. Christians have content in their witness for Christ. Jesus is risen!

The resurrection of Jesus gives deliverance from our sins (verse 17). A dead Jesus can save no one. If Jesus is still in the grave, still held by the powers of death, the gospel is as powerless as the tales of mythology. Remember Romans 5:10. (1) We are reconciled to God because Jesus died for us. (2) We have salvation (security) because He lives in us. Those who reject the resurrection of Jesus cannot declare a Christian gospel of forgiveness of sins. We are forgiven because He lives!

The resurrection of Jesus gives hope for our beloved dead (verse 18). If He is not risen, those who died with faith in Him as their Savior are eternally perished. Since He lives, His promise abides for the dead “. . . **Because I live, ye shall live also,**” John 14:19. He is the “first-fruits” of the dead. His resurrection guarantees our resurrection. Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have not perished.

The resurrection of Jesus gives hope for the future (verse 19). If our

hope in Christ is limited to this world only, we are truly miserable. Christian life becomes meaningless. Hope becomes empty wishes and self deception. Such would mean believers are to be pitied. Under such circumstances, one might as well live materialistically and forget about spiritual values. Jesus is alive! There is hope today and for all the tomorrows. Christ is raised and remains in the fullness of His resurrection life. He promised, “. . . **Because I live, ye shall live also,**” John. 14: 19. There is hope for the future!

IV. THE CONCLUSION. 15:20-26

The resurrection of Jesus is an established fact (verse 20). Write it in capital letters across the tablet of your heart: “CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD!” So wonderful is that announcement, the Apostle Paul did not try to embellish it with high-sounding phrases. With simplicity and assurance, he testified, “Christ is risen from the dead.” There is no doubt at all about the truth of the statement. He used a verb tense which indicates that not only did Jesus arise on a certain day, but He continues permanently in His character as the risen Lord.

Jesus was not the first one to rise from death. He had raised some who were dead before His own death, but He arose to a new kind of life. Others were raised only to die again. “. . . **Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him,**” Romans 6:9.

The resurrection of Jesus is a logical necessity (verses 21, 22). Death entered into human experience as the consequence of one man's sin (Romans 5:12). In like manner, deliverance from death via resurrection is made available to man by one Man's obedience. Kinship with Adam brings death. Kinship with Jesus brings resurrection into a life beyond death. All who are in Adam die. All who are in Christ live. God overcomes sin by giving victory through a Man just as Satan had brought defeat through a man.

The resurrection of Jesus was the first of an orderly process of resurrection (verse 23). The resurrection of all does not occur at once. There is a “marching order” assigned. What is that order? (1) Christ was the first to arise to post-resurrection life (verse 23). (2) Christians will be raised to meet Christ when He comes again (verse 24). (3) The unsaved will not be raised to judgment until after a millennium, following the resurrection of believers (Revelation 20:5). In a very real sense, therefore, Jesus' resurrection was the “first fruits” of a great resurrection harvest to follow.

The resurrection of Jesus was related to His ultimate purpose (verses 24, 25). Jesus intends to reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. That purpose necessitated His resurrection. He overcame death, hell, and the

grave in His death, burial, and resurrection. He will overcome them in the fullest sense when He brings all things to their intended end.

The resurrection of Jesus guarantees His final victory (verse 26). **“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”** There will come a blessed day when it will happen. After the believers have been received into God's presence and the unsaved are consigned to hell fire, “death and hell” will be “cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death,” Revelation 20:14. At last, His victory will be complete!

Do not permit your faith to be attacked by philosophical speculation. Men will try to take you captive with their philosophies, their wrong and shallow answers built upon their own thoughts rather than upon what God has said. There is not a more certain fact in Christian history than the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. Satan attacks that doctrine with fierce intensity. It is his downfall, and he knows it. Do not be led into doubt.

Accept the fact that Jesus is eternally the living One. Accept the equally established fact that the life of the risen Christ is now lived in you, as a Christian believer, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Live in the joy and sufficiency of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, your Savior.

Questions

1. Why is the resurrection of Jesus basic to Christian faith?
2. What does Romans 5:10 mean?
3. Where are the Bible passages telling of the resurrection of Jesus?
4. By what “infallible proofs” did Jesus show Himself alive?
5. Why were the disciples so slow to believe in the resurrection of Jesus?
6. Why are many slow to believe in it today?
7. How is His resurrection related to your faith?
8. What does John 14:19 mean?
9. How is Christ the “first fruit” of the resurrection?
10. What is your hope of resurrection?