

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Introduction

As man becomes increasingly aware of the brevity and uncertainty of this life, he asks questions about the future. Is there life beyond the grave? Is there anything more to come? People like to think and hope, but this chapter provides the Christian answer. It is not based on pious hopes, but on solid evidences, reasoned argument, solid comfort, detailed teaching. **Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel** (2 Timothy 1:10).

Because Christ arose, we have a flood of light and truth about future life. Even the Old Testament saints had faint glimmerings. Now all has changed. There is life beyond the grave. We are not just speaking of spiritual survival, personality endurance, or reincarnation. But our bodies are going to be affected - bodily resurrection. Whole person to be raised from dead – body and spirit. If we deny this, we deny the Gospel.

As with so many other things, this valuable teaching came because of problems in the Corinthian church. Some people denied the resurrection, and just believed in the survival of the spirit.

Paul begins with the resurrection of Jesus. Our resurrection is to be like His. Believe this teaching and take heart. To begin with facts of history. (1) The place of the resurrection in the Gospel, (2) historical evidence, and (3) Paul's personal experience of the resurrection.

The place of the resurrection in the Gospel

Paul begins with the resurrection of Jesus and puts it in the context of the total Christian message. The Christian message is not his own invention. He received it and passed on what he received to Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:1). And there is only one Christian message. **Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed** (1 Corinthians 15:11). And right at the centre of that message is the resurrection of Christ.

The two basic truths of the Gospel – **That Christ died for sins according to the Scriptures, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures** (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). On the Cross He was made sin for us, though personally He was sinless. **The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all** (Isaiah 53:6). When He arose on the third day He demonstrated God's approval. He is a living Saviour. This is the Gospel by which we are saved.

There was a bodily resurrection. The body which was crucified was buried, and three days later it was raised. It was not just His spirit that survived, or His influence that lives on. But His body was raised. The tomb was empty.

The death and resurrection - the outworking of God's plan of salvation drawn up in eternity. Foretold in the Old Testament scriptures, executed in history in A.D.30. These truths were at the centre of all the early church's preaching and witnessing.

Be clear about the heart of the Christian Gospel. So little is known in many places, and in other places these truths are even rejected. We are not talking about human ideals, or Jesus as the noblest pattern of a good life. Easter morning is not a reawakening of earth and Easter eggs and bunnies. The Gospel is the mighty acts of God in history. Christ died for us. He rose from the dead on the third day and is alive forever more. **He is able to save completely them that come to God through Him** (Hebrews 7:25).

The death and resurrection of Christ are the heart of the message. They were not an epilogue, an afterthought, a happy ending. They are at the heart and the core of the Gospel. Here it is. Believe it, grasp it, and apply it. Deal with fear of death and every other fear. The Gospel gives stability and strength and confidence to life. It puts our feet on a rock, and a new song in our mouth. It causes us to praise God. **Many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord** (Psalm 40:2,3).

Historical evidence

This is not a bit of make-believe, or wishful thinking. It happened in history. There were eyewitnesses. Paul writing to the Corinthians encourages them to examine their accounts and evidence. Peter saw the risen Jesus. In His grace, Jesus appeared early on to Peter, the very disciple who had denied Him. Then He appeared to the Twelve, and later to 500 brethren at once, many of whom were still alive at the time Paul was writing (1 Corinthians 15:5,6). He urges the Corinthians to ask them. Interrogate them. Then He was seen by His own brother, James (1 Corinthians 15:7). Jesus' family had been hostile to Him when He was on earth. But it all changed now, probably because of this resurrection appearance. Later James became the leader of the church at Jerusalem.

Then He was seen by all the Apostles, probably at the time of the ascension. This is not a complete list - we know this from the records in the Gospels. But it is enough for Paul to make his point and show how important and well founded this truth is. There was an impressive array of witnesses. Did they all suffer from hallucinations and visions? Maybe Mary Magdalene might have been susceptible, but what about a hardheaded businessman like Matthew? And sceptical Thomas who took a lot of convincing? Or unbelieving, hostile James, who was hardly biased in Christ's favour? Yet many, from different backgrounds, with different temperaments and attitudes, touched Him, spoke to Him and saw Him eat. Perhaps it was a made-up story - but do men in their right mind make up stories they know are lies, and die for them? They earned themselves no money or fame by saying Jesus was alive - only jail and death.

And to back up these claims - why did the Jews not produce the body and stop the Christian movement at the very beginning? After all, they were preaching the resurrection only seven weeks after the event, in the very city where it happened.

And how do we account for the amazing change in the disciples from being frightened mice into bold lions? And if these witnesses and their testimonies are wrong, how do

we explain the existence of the Christian church, the day of rest being changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, the writing of the New Testament books? Indeed, the resurrection is one of the best-attested facts of history. Sir Edmund Clarke K.C. wrote, "As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidence. I find it conclusive. Over and over again in the High Court I have secured a verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling."

There is the story of another lawyer in Britain, Frank Morrison, in his early 30's. The resurrection to him was a fable and fantasy, and he was determined to do the world a favour by once and for all exposing this fraud and superstition. He discovered his case was not as good as he thought. He wrote the book "Who moved the stone?" In the first chapter, "The book that refused to be written", he confessed how the evidence had persuaded him, against his will, of the truth of the bodily resurrection.

"The resurrection is the Gibraltar of Christian evidence, and the Waterloo of infidelity and rationalism." The evidence for the resurrection is always an embarrassment for the sceptic. Indeed, it is usually ignored rather than answered. The resurrection of Christ is a more certain historical fact than that Julius Caesar once lived and invaded Britain in 55-54BC.

Paul's personal experience of the resurrection

Having shown the importance of the subject and produced impressive witnesses for his case, Paul reaches his climax with personal testimony. He expresses his own personal conviction and personal experience. **Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born** (1 Corinthians 15:8). *εκτρομα* literally means a miscarriage or abortion. This may be a reference to his violent and unnatural entrance into the apostolic band. Or it may be a term of abuse since Paul was not a handsome man, some might have said, "He was an abortion of a man". Or it could be criticism of the doctrine of free grace – so far from being "born again", Paul felt he was an abortion.

Paul is overwhelmed by the wonderful grace of the living Christ to him, Paul the persecutor. Here is another proof of the resurrection, and to Paul, the most amazing and convincing proof. Paul was not expecting the resurrection or wanting the resurrection, so he was not in the right mental condition to be a victim of hallucination. But God had broken into his life when he was hostile and resisting and hating the very name of Christ, on the road to Damascus.

Faith in Christ and submission to Him transformed Paul's whole life. He could not have done it, not had he wanted it done. The grace of God alone had done it. **By the grace of God I am what I am** (1 Corinthians 15:10). Grace made him what he was, and when he started to live for Christ, grace enabled him to labour more extensively than all the others. Paul is the last to claim himself a self-made man, in fact, he is the very opposite.

Paul's life and direction was totally revolutionized. His personality changed. He was indeed a "new creation". His boundless energy and extreme enthusiasm and zeal were redirected into the service of Christ by the grace of God. The Gospel he preached was no theory. It had got a hold of him and changed him. It redirected him. The things he once hated and loathed, he now passionately believed and lived for. Christ, whose

name he hated, and whose followers he hated and spent his life trying to imprison and kill, he now loved with his heart and soul. **That I may know Him** (Philippians 3:10). **How greatly I long for you all** (Philippians 1:8).

This is most convincing line of evidence about the resurrection. It is personal, immediate and vital. It is possible to be indwelt by the living Lord. **Christ lives in me** (Galatians 2:20).

*“He walks with me and he talks with me
Along life’s narrow way.
He lives, salvation to impart.
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.”*

Other evidence is impressive. But this clinches it all. Assurance and final certainty from within the Christ-filled heart. The experience of the burning heart is the final evidence.

Conclusion

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is basic to the Gospel. We need to hold onto it tenaciously, for it is so well attested, the evidence is strong and compelling. The final proof is open to all. Knowing Christ, yielding to Christ, submitting to Christ. Being open to this is costly – we have to turn away from self, sins, self-importance, and self-righteousness. But then we find our all in Christ – salvation, direction for life, a master, a guide, strength and confidence.