

## 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 15 is unusual in that unlike most of this book this chapter is devoted to a doctrine the doctrine of the resurrection. Now this is a very important doctrine for just as the heart pumps life giving blood to every part of our human body so the truth of the resurrection gives life to every other gospel truth. Without the resurrection Christianity would be wishful thinking and it would take its place alongside so many other human philosophies and religions.

Jesus predicted his resurrection on many occasions (Mark 8:31), He claimed to be the resurrection and the life (John 11:25) and the first two sermons preached after Pentecost focused upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:14-36 and 3:12-26). Therefore It is because of the resurrection that a bunch of heartbroken followers of a crucified Rabbi were turned into a band of courageous witnesses and martyrs who in a few years spread the gospel across the Roman Empire and beyond. Christianity is a religion of resurrection, this truth is the cornerstone of the gospel and therefore this truth has been the target of God's enemies since the resurrection. For the enemies of the gospel know that if they can discredit the resurrection of Jesus then all of Christianity comes crumbling down.

The truth is that if Jesus did not live past the grave then all who trust in him cannot hope to do so either. In fact without the resurrection salvation could not be provided for the resurrection is proof that Christ's death for sinners is sufficient to offer forgiveness and is acceptable to God as a sacrifice on behalf of sinners.

Now the doctrinal problem that arose in Corinth concerning the resurrection was not disbelief about Christ's resurrection but one of confusion about their own resurrection. Paul is not trying to convince them that Christ rose from the dead but that one-day they too would be raised with him to eternal life.

However in order to lay the foundation for his argument Paul reviews the evidence in these verses for Jesus resurrection, a truth that Paul acknowledges they already believe (vs. 1, 11). So what is the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?

### 1. THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH (vs. 1-2).

The very fact that the Corinthian Christians and all other Christians everywhere have received the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ and had been miraculously changed is in itself strong evidence of the power of the gospel which derives its power from the resurrection of Christ.

Paul tells the church that what he is about to say is nothing new to them but it is simply the gospel, which was preached to the Corinthians, and the same gospel, which they received (v 1). Not until verses 3-4 does Paul summarise what he means by the gospel, but Paul's point in these verses is that the Corinthian's were the living evidence of the truth of the doctrine of the resurrection.

The fact that they had come out of spiritual darkness and blindness of Judaism and paganism into the light of the Christ testified to the power of the gospel and therefore to the power of the resurrection for at the heart of the gospel lays the truth of the resurrection. It was the gospel of the resurrection that Paul preached to the church at Corinth and it was the gospel of the resurrection that they had received and in which Paul assures them that they now stand and by which they are saved. They have been delivered from sin's power and condemnation because of the power of the resurrection. It is the resurrection power that saves sinners and makes them saints.

The church had taken their stand for the gospel and this gospel had saved them and it is this gospel that they hold firmly too otherwise they would simply prove that their faith was never real but was only a sham (v 2). A faith that does not save is a faith that is in vain (v 2). It is not true saving faith for saving faith saves and that is what has happened to the church in Corinth.

The fact that despite their great immaturity and many weaknesses the Corinthian church continued to exist was a strong testimony to the power of the gospel and to the power of the resurrection of Christ. Who but the risen living Christ could have taken extortionist, thieves, adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, liars, idolaters and such thoroughly pagan people and transformed them into a community of believers in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (6:10-11).

Whose power could do that? No one's except the same power that raised Christ from the dead. Despite the shortcomings and failures of the church, Christ lived in and through the saints at Corinth. Paul was ashamed of much that went on in the church at Corinth but he was not ashamed to call them brothers (v 1) because they were true believers in the gospel, which at its heart lay the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I know that Paul's point is largely subjective proof but surely the endurance of the church of Jesus Christ and His word having survived scepticism, persecution heresy and unfaithfulness is evidence of the power of the resurrected Christ at work in the church. Critics have denounced the resurrection of Jesus as a hoax but they have never explained where the power of such a hoax to change men and women comes from.

People have given up everything including their freedom and their own lives in order to follow their Lord. Where do people get such power to do that? The answer is found in the resurrection of Jesus, which is the same power that raises sinners from spiritual deadness to spiritual life. The church of Jesus Christ is living evidence that Christ himself is alive and He could only be alive if he had indeed been raised from the dead.

Every other religion in the world can point to their dead leader for example Mohammed died at Medina on 8<sup>th</sup> June 632 at the age of 61. His tomb is visited yearly by thousands of Muslims but they come to mourn his death. But Christians point to a resurrected Saviour and on Easter Sunday we celebrate his resurrection.

In fact every Sunday is a celebration of his resurrection for we meet on the first day of week rather than the seventh day because Jesus is raised and we remember and celebrate that fact every Sunday. So the first reason why we should believe in the resurrection is the testimony of the church that is why you should trust in Jesus.

## 2. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES (vs. 3-4)

Paul tells us that the Scriptures are clear evidence in favour of the resurrection of Christ. In particular Paul is thinking of the Old Testament, which is all that was available to the church at that time. The Old Testament clearly predicts Christ's death and resurrection and Paul is passing on what he has received. God authored the Scriptures and Paul was used as one of the instruments to pass it on. This message of the death burial and resurrection of Jesus was of prime importance for the church in the New Testament age. But Paul's point is that the resurrection is not a new message but is the fulfilment of what was spoken of in the Old Testament.

After Jesus' resurrection he met two disciples on the road to Emmaus and he showed them from the Old Testament Scriptures the truth of his death burial and resurrection (Luke 24:25-27).

Do you remember when the unbelieving Jews asked for a sign of Jesus Messiahship? He responded by telling them that no sign would be given except the sign of Jonah. He went on to explain that Jonah was a sign of his own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40).

Once again at Pentecost Peter quoted from Psalm 16 and then commented that David the author of the Psalm was looking ahead and spoke of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:25-31). Paul when faced with King Agrippa said that he was proclaiming nothing new but only what was predicted in the Old Testament concerning Christ's death burial and resurrection (Acts 26:22-23). So Jesus Peter and Paul all referred to Old Testament passages (Genesis 22:8, 14; Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53 and Hosea 6:2) in order to prove that the resurrection of Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament predictions. Over and over again either directly or indirectly sometimes literally or in figures of speech the Old Testament foretold Jesus death burial and resurrection.

No one who believed and understood the Old Testament Scriptures should have been surprised that the Messiah died was buried and rose again. Paul repeats the phrase "according to the scriptures" in these verses as if to emphasise that this is no new thing that has happened but something that for centuries was predicted.

Now anyone who denies the resurrection have to answer the questions concerning the Old Testament predictions, for if they do not refer to Jesus and his death burial and resurrection then what do they refer too?

If we want to give credible evidence for the resurrection then we can point to many Old Testament references that tell us that Jesus Christ would die be buried and rise again and therefore the resurrection is clearly in fulfilment of what was predicted hundreds of years earlier.

### 3. THE TESTIMONY OF THE EYEWITNESSES (vs. 5-11).

In a court of law the account of eyewitnesses is very important for establishing the truth of a matter. If the police have an eyewitness account of a crime taking place then they are in a very strong position as far as securing a conviction is concerned. Well as Paul continues to present clear evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, there is no stronger evidence than the fact that people saw the risen Christ.

The lawyer Sir Edward Clarke said, "As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day. For me, the evidence is conclusive and over and over again in the high court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effort; the gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate."

So let's look at the accounts of the eyewitnesses.

**a) Jesus Appears to Peter (v 5) -** It is significant that Jesus appeared to those who he chose to reveal himself. The gospel accounts consistently speak of Jesus appearing or manifesting himself to his disciples after the resurrection. He was only recognised by those to whom he chose to reveal himself and there is no record that he revealed himself to any, other than his own followers. It was a requirement for being an apostle that one had seen the resurrected Christ and the first apostle that Jesus appeared too was Peter. In appearing to Peter, Christ was showing his grace for Peter had forsaken the Lord but the Lord had not forsaken him. Peter was assured of his forgiveness and was used by the Lord to spread the gospel far and wide as he testified about the resurrected Christ.

**b) Jesus Appears To The Twelve (v 5)** They are called the 12 even though when Jesus appeared to them on that Easter evening there was by now only 11 (John 20:19 & Luke 24:36). Jesus appears to the disciples because the apostles laid the foundation of the church, which from the beginning based its beliefs and practices on their teaching (Acts 2:42). These men whom the Lord used to establish his church on earth all saw the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22), all these men were capable honest reliable witnesses and therefore their testimony is hard to refute if you are listening to their evidence with an open and honest heart.

**c) Jesus Appeared to Five Hundred (v 6) -** Notice that Jesus appeared to all these people at the same time. If you had over 500 eyewitness accounts in a court of law then it would be impossible to dispute such evidence especially if all of these people could be questioned and their characters examined. Everyone would soon know if their accounts could be trusted.

The truth is that the evidence is clear Jesus appeared to a huge amount of people and to men whose character could be trusted. If the church at Corinth wanted to question these eyewitnesses Paul tells the church at Corinth that most were still living although some had already died.

In other words if there is any doubt in the minds of individual Christians within the church at Corinth then they can seek out plenty of witnesses who can testify that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. The truth is that the resurrection was not questioned by the church at Corinth they were simply confused about the implications for them of Jesus resurrection.

**d) Jesus Appeared To James (v 7) -** This is probably the James who was the half brother of Jesus and the James who is the author of the book called after his name. He was a key leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-21). James originally was a sceptic, like his brothers he did not at first believe that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5). But now this James is a follower of Jesus and a witness of his resurrection.

Perhaps it was the experience of seeing the resurrected Christ that finally brought James to saving faith in the Messiah. The convincing testimony of a family member and former sceptic is added to that of the apostles and the five hundred just to show that these men were not easily impressed or convinced. Yet they had no doubt that Jesus appeared to them and were prepared to stake their whole life on such claims.

In fact Paul tells us that over this period of forty days (Acts 1:3) between the resurrection and ascension Jesus appeared to all the apostles on other occasions that are not specifically mentioned to us (John 21:1-14). In other words their testimony can speak of a number of occasions when they saw their risen Lord.

**e) Jesus Appears To Paul (vs. 8-11) -** Paul himself can testify that he saw the risen Christ. In many ways his evidence is special and unique for Paul was not among the original 12 apostles all of whom had been disciples of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Paul was not among the 500 who had witnessed Jesus appearance but for many years he was an unbeliever and a chief persecutor of the church.

He was however allowed to see the risen Christ. His appearance was not only post-resurrection but also post-ascension which makes this appearance even more unique. It was several years after Jesus ascension that Jesus appears to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-8). His term "abnormally born" was used as a term of derision and it probably reflects his own view of himself he was the most unlikely person to become an apostle of Jesus Christ.

But that is what happened because Jesus appeared to him. This truth never ceased to amaze Paul of all the people that Christ appeared to he could never understand why the Lord would choose him. He considered himself to be the least of all the apostles because he was undeserving

to be called an apostle because he was a wicked and vile persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ. Yet God's grace is amazing and Paul was called to be an apostle by the grace of God and as a result Paul was more grateful and worked harder than others in spreading the gospel because of his background.

Yet Paul was not boasting for he acknowledges that his hard work is as a result of God's grace at work within him (v10). It is because of God and his grace that Paul gives himself unstintingly to the work of the gospel.

Therefore and here is the conclusion (v 11) whether it was Paul who preached the death and resurrection of Christ or whether it was any of the other eyewitnesses, the message was consistently the same. Jesus Christ lived, died, rose again and ascended into heaven. This is the very same message that the believers at Corinth had believed and as a result their lives were transformed by the power of God.

This is the same message that we preach today. The resurrection is the very heartbeat of the gospel, it has been believed in all generations by the church of Jesus Christ and therefore all true churches must seek to defend it and of course preach it so that others might be saved. Without the resurrection truth there is no gospel for how could anyone have their sins forgiven if Christ is still dead, Jesus like everyone else would have been overcome by death which is the just judgement of God on sin.

But praise God, He is risen and alive today therefore you can be forgiven and you can know for sure that you are forgiven because Jesus is risen and has conquered sin, death and hell itself. It's a wonderful message; O let us make renewed efforts to proclaim this good news to all that we come into contact with.

Let us do all that we can to help people to understand that Jesus Christ is alive today and offers forgiveness and eternal life to all sinners who repent and believe.

Let us remember God's grace in revealing this salvation to us and then let that be our motivation to serve God with unstinting vigour.

Amen