

The Resurrection of Jesus – 1 Cor 15:1-20

Introduction – “The great difficulty is to get modern audiences to realize that you are preaching Christianity solely and simply because you happen to think it is true; they always suppose you are preaching it because you like it or think it good for society or something of that sort” - C. S. Lewis. The declaration and celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not an event chosen by Christians to celebrate because it gives us something with which to amuse ourselves. The Resurrection is an historical event which happened and remains the pivotal event in the history of the world. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changed everything.

First of All (1 Cor 15:1-7) – Paul is answering questions throughout his letter to the Corinthians and it appears that in Chapter 15 he is answering a question about whether or not Christians will really one day experience a physical, bodily resurrection. To begin his reply, he reminds the Corinthians of the gospel which he (along with all of the apostles, see v11) declared as of first importance: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what the Corinthians had believed and through which they had been saved, unless they “believed in vain” (v2).

But this is what had been clearly preached (vv3-4) and had been attested to by many and multiple eyewitness accounts (vv5-9). While the chief evidence for the Resurrection is the Word of God itself, Paul is here giving evidence to bolster the assurance of the Christians. Jesus was raised on “the third day” which eliminated the possibility of a mere spiritual resurrection but a physical one. Specific people saw Jesus, people who could be interviewed at the time Paul wrote this letter. At one time, five hundred persons saw the resurrected Christ and many could be called to witness (v6). Notice, Paul does not have to prove this evidence. It is accepted, historical evidence in his day that can be used to argue the point he is making, which is the reality of our future physical resurrection.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is, first of all, the declaration of an historical event, widely accepted in its day.

Euangelion/The Gospel – The Greek term, euangelion, has the prefix “eu” meaning good, and you can see our word “angel” in it as well. An angel was a messenger or a herald who brought news of events or declarations. Hence, the “good news” of Jesus Christ. This is not philosophic illumination, knowledge, mysterious wisdom, or some higher level of transcendence. The Good News is the declaration of an event, a public event that had public ramifications. The gospel, therefore is not good advice on how to improve one’s life and reach God; it is a declaration about what God has already, historically done to reach us.

Gospel (v1) – Interestingly, this word comes from the Old English word “godspell” which was a combination of “good” and “spell.” In the old days, you knew you had heard a good story because it put you into a “spell” cast upon you by the storyteller. And this is just what the perfect “Storyteller” does by means of the Holy Spirit – making the gospel not a set of dry historical facts. Someone once said the gospel is “history on fire.” It is the Word of God and penetrates the souls of hardened men and women.

According to the Scriptures (vv3-4) – The terrible event of Christ’s death was the result of both the wicked actions of men and the predetermined plan of God (Acts 2:22-23). What happened in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ was the unfolding of God’s eternal counsel. Again, what this means is that we are talking about an actual, historical event in the history of men planned and brought forth by the sovereign God of history. God sent Jesus to save the world from its just condemnation (John 3:16-17).

From Broad Plan to Individual Situation – Here is the universal application: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and is the only means by which we may be forgiven and redeemed (John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Individually, this becomes practically true and applied – in real time and space – when one places their faith in Jesus Christ, trusting that this gospel about Him is true and historically personal for each one who believes (Rom 10:9-10).

From One Resurrection to the General Resurrection (vv12-20) – We strayed a bit from our text, taking a detour to explain what Paul was assuming (and assuming that his hearers also assumed – that is, took as historical truth). In a detailed “if-then” argument, Paul now argues that since Christ has been raised from the dead, it necessarily follows that there will be a resurrection of the dead, which he goes on to explain even more in vv21-28. For our purposes here, let’s bring out three implications –

1 – Because Jesus has risen, our hope is not in immortal souls floating around forever, but in resurrected bodies and in the final consummation/resurrection/glorification of the entire created order.

2 – Because Jesus has risen, your life in Christ is and will be completely justified and vindicated, just as Christ’s life was, is and will be. Every wrong against you, every consequence of sin, every shortcoming due to the Fall, will be made right at the Resurrection and beyond into eternity.

3 – Because Jesus has been raised, and we have not yet been raised, we are not yet sure of *how* this will all work out. But because Jesus has been raised and we can see Him (declared in the gospel), we can be sure *that* this will all work out. God grants us faith (a “good-spell”) and a hope which changes the way we live (1 John 3:2-3).

The Corinthian Christians needed to again embrace the hope of the future, bodily resurrection, based on the historic, bodily resurrection of Jesus – and all that the resurrection promises. In celebrating Easter, we are embracing the same. Here is hope for you.