

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 - The Centrality of the Gospel

As we look to 1 Corinthians 15 this morning, Paul is turning his attention from spiritual gifts to the issue of the gospel itself. And the main issue he's going to be addressing throughout the chapter is the issue of resurrection. This is called the resurrection chapter of the Bible.

This is the passage in the whole Bible that most thoroughly expounds on the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead. And we also learn here that just as Jesus rose bodily from the dead, so we will rise bodily from the dead when he returns. The Corinthians were denying a future bodily resurrection of believers, and Paul says that if you deny a future bodily resurrection you are essentially denying that Jesus himself rose from the dead. That's how connected Jesus's resurrection is with our future resurrection.

That's the larger context of the chapter. But before he dives into all of that, Paul sets up the chapter by talking about the gospel.

And he does so in a couple of different ways. This is going to be a little longer introduction than normal, so bear with me. I think it will be helpful.

Vss. 1-11 talk about the gospel in general. In **Vss. 3-11** he will talk about what he calls "first importance" issues when we're talking about the gospel. **Read 3-6**

So when we're talking about what we believe as Christians, there are some things that are most important, and things that are not as important. And as Christians we need to understand these distinctions. Not all things are of first importance. The resurrection of Jesus is more important than the identity of the Sons of God in Genesis 6. Those are not the same level.

That Jesus died for our sins - substitutionary atonement - is more important than whether we sing hymns or contemporary songs.

And there are other issues related to the gospel specifically that have differing importance. We'll unpack that more next week. This week, though, we're looking at just **Vss. 1-2**.

What I want you to walk away with this morning is that center of our lives is the whole of the gospel. Now, even as I say that, I think most of us would say: yes! The gospel is the center of my life!

But what I want you to understand is that, for the Christian, we don't start with the gospel and then go on to something else. As someone has said, "the gospel isn't the ABCs of the Christian life, it's the A-Z of the Christian life." Everything we talk about, revolves around the gospel.

Is your marriage in trouble? You know what you need to be reminded of? The gospel. Because marriage is a picture of the sacrificial love between Christ and the church who submits to him.

Are your kids driving you nuts? You need to be reminded of the gospel because our job as parents is not to save our children - we can't do that, only the Spirit can do that. Our job is simply to train our children in the fear and admonition of the Lord Jesus. We teach them what God wants and doesn't want in the gospel.

Are your finances a wreck. Two guess at what you need to be reminded of? The gospel. That you have been redeemed. You've been purchased, not with gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus and you are now a child of God entrusted with the riches of God to bring glory to God. Nothing is yours, it's all your generous Father's who has made you a co-heir with Christ and now wants us to steward his money faithfully.

The gospel impacts absolutely every aspect of our lives.

When I was in high school, I remember that at the end of almost every sermon my pastor would tell everyone the gospel. Every head bowed, every eye closed. Christians praying. You're a sinner, deserving hell. Jesus died

for your sins and rose the third day. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. And if you believe that slip up your hand and God will save you. Thank you, sister, I see that hand.

And, I'll be honest, when that came around I started to roll my eyes. It felt formulaic. It felt forced. You want to know why? Because it was. It reduced the gospel to this little thing we believe so we don't go to hell, but it didn't really affect any other area of our lives.

The gospel was like your ticket into the Super Bowl, once you got through the gate with your ticket, you throw that away and go on to bigger things.

But the gospel isn't like the ticket that gets you in to the Super Bowl. The gospel is kinda of like a ticket that gets you into the Kingdom, but it's also the big thick program you get to help you understand everything about the Super Bowl. Where you go, where you sit, who you are, how you act, what is expected. The gospel is all of that.

So what Paul is going to do here as he launches into the resurrection and the importance of the resurrection in the gospel message is to step back and remind us of the power of how we should look to the gospel. He does that in 5 little statements in these first 2 verses.

1) We need to remind each other of the Gospel. Read 1

Paul says he reminds them of the gospel that he preached to them. Although it might seem odd that we would have to remind ourselves of the gospel, this is essential to the life and well being of every Christian.

One of the effects of the fall is that we simply forget things, maybe even the most important things. Not completely, but functionally. It's easy to become a function atheist throughout the day, where we go long stretches not praying, or even having thoughts of God. We need to be reminded all the time of truths we know.

This is part of the reason the Lord calls us to do the Lord's Supper so frequently. It's not that we've forgotten the content of the gospel, it's that we need to be refreshed in it. We need to see and taste and smell and touch a reminder that Jesus died for us and his blood was shed for us. We need that refresher.

And, interestingly, that's what this word "reminded" means. There is an aspect of reminded that is used here, but it's also the idea of giving greater information about something.

Acts 7:13 - speaking of story of Joseph from Genesis - "On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh.

They knew the this guy was the leader, but even greater truth was also made known when they found out this was their brother.

Phil 4:6: Paul say do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Tell God what's going on, remind him. It's not that he forgot. It's that we are encouraged to give more and more information. To apply the gospel to different situations, to understand the gospel in light of other biblical truths, to enjoy the grace of God more as we draw nearer and nearer to God. Our understanding of Jesus gets deeper as we are reminded and refreshed in these truths.

So we remind each other of the gospel.

2) We need to preach the gospel. Read

The gospel message that we have is something that has to be preached. Obviously Paul preached it. We have that account in **Acts 18**.

And I think this seems fundamental to us all: we know that we have to preach the gospel. In order for someone to come to saving faith in Jesus, they have to hear through us telling them. And that's often a difficult thing to do.

But let me just show you a few passages to encourage you.

Turn to Matt. 28:16-20. This is the Great Commission. Jesus has been raised from the dead and he sends his disciples out into the world. **Read**

So a couple things here. First of all, Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth. He is supreme, not only over believers - what we do. But he is supreme over unbelievers. We go out making disciples, commanding people to believe in Jesus because he is their Lord whether they acknowledge it or not. You realize that, right? Jesus is our Lord. But Jesus is also **the Lord**. He is the Lord of all creation whether or not people believe it. We preach because we know the King is coming and will hold them to account.

Christian preaching is preaching from the high ground. It's preaching from a position of authority. We don't say, "Please, my friend won't you accept Jesus into your heart he'll be nice to you?"

No, we say, "Jesus **is** the risen Lord and King of the universe and he will come back to judge all people. Every knee will bow to him and every tongue cry out his Lordship in ultimate submission and the only way to escape his wrath is to repent from your sin, beg him for mercy and follow him. And if you do, he will pour out his grace on you."

That's a different message. This is why it's important to remember that all authority has been given to Jesus. That is the basis of our preaching. We go knowing he has the authority.

And we go to make disciples, learners. That's what that word "disciple" means. We're not after people making decisions, per se. People do need to believe in Jesus. But our mission is much bigger than simply getting people into the Kingdom. Our mission is to bring them from babies in Jesus to fully mature believers who also go and make disciples. **Read 20**

This command didn't just apply to the first 12 disciples. Those disciples were called to teach their disciples to obey all the commands. And those disciples were to teach their disciples all the commands and so on and so forth down to us, and we are called to go make disciples, baptize them and obey them to obey all the commands as well.

All of us are called to do this. All of us are called to make disciples who go make disciples. What if we don't?

Turn to Rom. 10:9-17. The reality is that we're called to do this. We have the upper hand, we have the advantage because Jesus is the Lord who has all the authority. He has all the power. He has all the bargaining chips.

We also preach because without preaching people go to hell. **Read 9-13**

People have to hear the content of the gospel to believe. This is why we do missions. People who have never heard the gospel and die have no chance of salvation because they've never heard of Jesus. **Read 14-17**

So how are people saved? Someone has to send a preacher. And that preacher has to preach. And the people have to hear and believe and call out to Jesus for mercy.

Without the preacher and without the preaching and without the calling out there is no salvation. Maybe just to be really clear: we have to open our mouths and tell people the gospel.

Praying is good but it's not enough to pray.
Loving them is good but it's not enough to love.

You can drop all the hints, wear all the Jesus t-shirts you want, be the nicest, kindest person in the world. But the gospel has to be preached. The message has to be communicated clearly and effectively.

And preaching itself assumes authority. You don't have to be preachy. You don't have to cram it down their throat. You can be very polite and nice. But you have to say something. And it's only by saying something that they will hear and believe.

Let me show you one other passage to encourage you. **Turn to 1 Cor. 1:18-25.** I don't know about you, but I often feel like telling people the gospel message is almost worthless sometimes. Like I'm spinning my wheels because it's falling on deaf ears.

What I want you to see is that when we preach the gospel, the message itself has power. **Read 18-25**

Do you get what he's saying? The very message of the gospel has power. It's foolishness to those who are perishing - to those who will never be saved. But for those who God calls - those he chose - it is

Okay, I rarely use movie analogies. But in the movie Men in Black Will Smith is given this gun called the Noisy Cricket. And when he gets it he looks at it and is thinking "Really, this is all I get?" He doesn't think it's powerful until he actually uses it and realizes it is devastating weapon.

I think that's how we are with the gospel. We think, "Really, this is all we have? We need to add some stuff to it." But when we preach the gospel to those who are being saved it is devastating in its power. It destroys the so called wisdom of the foolish. It destroys the debaters. It destroys the strong of the world. It brings them to nothing, just like it brought you and me to nothing.

The message of Jesus on the cross is no small thing. It has eternal power in and of itself to raise people from the dead.

Turn back to 1 Cor. 15. We'll go on to the 3rd thing in just a minute, but let me just say this first.

I think it's actually a good exercise to actually think through what you would say to someone if they asked you about your beliefs.

Someone: "What do you believe with all this God stuff?"

So what I believe - in short - is the main gist of the Bible. That every person is born with a sin nature and also sins by choice. That because of our sin we deserve eternal punishment from a holy God. That's the bad news. But the good news - what the Bible calls the gospel - is that God in his love sent his Son Jesus into the world to save sinners by dying on the cross in their place for their sin. Three days later he rose from the dead and later ascended into heaven where he now reigns over all creation. And the Bible says that if we will repent from our sins and believe that our sins are only forgiven by Jesus dying for them, we will be saved. It's not doing good works that saves us, only believing in Jesus. And I'd encourage you to follow Jesus as your King and be saved."

Now, that's quick and dirty. I didn't talk about the second coming or virgin birth or the Trinity or creation. Are those important? Yes. But I tried to hit the high points. What Paul calls the things of first importance.

I'd encourage you to literally write out what you'd say in your own words and memorize it. Even practice it.

Now here's what you'll find out: rarely will people ask you: "Hey, tell me what you believe in 60 seconds." I've never had that happen to me. But I've had plenty of situations where I'm in some kind of situation to tell people about the gospel and I can sneak it in. But sneaking it in only works because I have a plan.

One thing as we preach the gospel we need to remember is that it's very unlikely we're going to "close the deal" right then and there. It's pretty rare that someone goes from an unbeliever who's never heard the gospel to a believer in a matter of 10 minutes. I'd be a little suspect of that kind of transformation, actually.

Most people need to wrestle with things for a time. But that little 60 second overview gives just enough for them to wrestle with some big issues.

But the bottom line is we need to preach the gospel. We need to remind people of the gospel and preach the gospel.

3) We need to stand in the gospel. **Read**

What does it mean to stand in the gospel? The NIV says “on which you have taken your stand.” That’s the idea, we take a stand for the gospel. We’re not ashamed of the gospel. We plant ourselves on these truths and we don’t waiver when people press us.

2 Cor. 1:24 Paul says “You stand firm in your faith.”

1 Pet. 5:12: Peter says we stand firm in the true grace of Jesus.

We have these truths about the gospel and we need to stand firm on these truths about the gospel. One of the most disappointing things you will experience in your life is when you see people you look up to not standing in the faith. When they waiver or capitulate.

It could be they deny the gospel itself. Probably the most shocking thing to me was seeing Billy Graham at the end of his life essentially become a universalist. This was after joining forces with Roman Catholics for decades.

Dave Ramsey mentioned this week he’s preaching at Stephen Furtick’s church. Stephen Furtick is a prosperity preacher - he teaches the health and wealth false gospel. This is full endorsement of a false teacher. Come to find out Dave’s preached at Joel Osteen’s church, as well. This is nothing new. But it is sad that he’s not standing on the gospel.

You know I love JI Packer. Knowing God is one of the most transformational books I’ve ever read and would commend it to you. But he supported Evangelicals and Catholics Together 20 years ago. What fellowship does light have with darkness or Christ with Belial? How can we agree with those who believe salvation is based on works?

Today, we see people we look up to applauding BLM or woke theology or capitulating to transgender nonsense or a dozen other sins in line with the spirit of the age. This is not something new. This has always happened in the church. And will continue to happen.

Demas, a trusted friend of Paul, fell in love with the present world.

Don’t be surprised when those you look up to and are encouraged by fall.

You know what we need? We need people who stand in the faith. Unwavering. Unmoving. Uncompromising. Unflinching.

We stand there in the gospel like a granite statue unmoving no matter what happens.

There’s a lot in the world right now that can seem a mortal threat to Christians. What about social credit scores? What about online surveillance of our beliefs? What about mandates? What about our views of gender that are offensive to the world?

You know what we do? We stand. We stand like Daniel stood. We stand like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood. We stand like Elijah stood. We stand like John the Baptist stood and the apostles stood and Stephen in **Acts 7** stood. And most of all we stand like Jesus stood.

I've never been worried about anything that's coming because it's no different than anything that's come before. What we are called to do in light of all of it is to simply stand in our faith. Stand there unmoved and unshaken and uncompromising in the Lord.

So we remind each other of the gospel, we preach the gospel. We stand in the gospel.

4) We are being saved by the gospel. Read 2

This is a little unusual at first. Isn't salvation a one time event, not a process? That's true.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be what? Saved. Done.

We read in **Romans 10** just a moment ago: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

So there is an aspect of salvation that refers to the moment someone believes and their sins are washed away. That's how we usually use the word.

But there is also an aspect of salvation that is being worked out in our lives. We usually call this sanctification. It's the process of becoming more like Jesus day by day. Where we put off sin, we grow in our understanding of the Word, and we put on obedience.

In that sense - the sense of maturing in our faith - we are being saved. What is it that God uses in that sanctification process? It's the gospel. It's the truths of the gospel applied by the Spirit in our lives.

See, a lot of times we think we need to just do more stuff to be more like Jesus. And there is an aspect where we do need to obey. But more than that we need to believe and look to Jesus.

Look at Gal. 3:1 for a moment. Here the Galatians were struggling with not only believing the gospel alone, but staying in the gospel. **Read 1-6**

Here, he reminds them of the gospel: Jesus Christ was crucified. That's the center of the argument. Then he says: did you receive the Spirit by works and Law or by faith? It's by faith.

Initial salvation is all by faith in the crucified Jesus. But did you notice he didn't end there? **Read 3**

What's the answer? The answer is no. You're not perfected - sanctified - by the flesh. No one is. It's all faith.

It is the gospel that saves us, but it's a continual deeper understanding of the gospel and a constant applying the gospel to our lives that sanctifies us. It's the same truth by which we are being saved.

So we remind each other of the gospel, preach the gospel, stand in the gospel, we're being saved by the gospel.

5) We need to hold fast to the gospel. Read 2

Hold on to the gospel.

Many have walked away. Many will walk away from the faith. There's nothing new under the sun. This will happen until Jesus returns. They believed in vain.

What does that mean? Does that mean they believed and lost their salvation? No.

1 John 2:19: They went out from us but there were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, But they went out that it might become plain that there are all not of us.

They were never saved. There may have been some type of faith. Some type of belief. If you read the gospels, maybe people believed in Jesus and then later tried to kill him. Not all faith is saving faith.

Vain faith is worthless faith. It doesn't endure. It's not genuine and saving. True faith endures. And, interestingly, one of the ways it seems to endure is to be encouraged to endure.

We don't throw our hands up and go "Well, I guess if you're elect you'll just keep believing and I don't have to remind you of anything." We never see that idea in the Bible. We see "Well, if you're a true believer you need to be encouraged over and over to hold on because it can be a rough ride and one of the means of grace God has given us to endure is to encourage people to hold on."

So hold fast, hold on to the gospel. Never let it go. Hebrews says don't drift away. Don't throw away your confidence. Don't be alluded by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hold fast forever. And your faith will be made sight.

The gospel is our all in all.

Pray