

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 - Delivering the Essentials

This morning we are back in **1 Cor. 15** looking at the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. And I think this is going to be incredibly encouraging this morning as we think about the Lord Jesus. This is Palm Sunday - the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the crowds proclaimed him to be the King of the Jews. Five days later he was crucified.

And what we celebrate every Sunday morning is that Jesus is just as alive now as he was the week before he died.

We sing that death could not hold him, the grave could not keep him from rising again. Jesus has conquered the grave. All that sin and sorrow and loss that we experience due to Adam's sin, Jesus has reversed exponentially by rising from the dead.

In **Vss. 1-2** here, Paul says he reminds us of the gospel, preaches the gospel, we stand in the gospel, and are being saved by the gospel. And then we learn in our section this morning that the central feature of the gospel is the resurrection of Jesus. All our hope is in Jesus and specifically that he rose again.

And what you should take away from this section this morning is that God specially has chosen to use unworthy sinners to preach the most sacred gospel message. As imperfect as we are, he has entrusted you and me to proclaim the most important message that could ever be proclaimed.

First we're going to look at the message, then we'll look at the messengers.

1) The message. Read 3-8

Paul says that when we proclaim the gospel, these few elements are of first importance. Primary importance. As we've seen over the last few weeks, these are not the only things that are important, but removing any one of these elements of the gospel is to deny the entirety of the gospel.

These truths were **delivered to** Paul as of first importance. Paul did not decide which elements of the gospel were most important. God did. God decided which elements were critical to his saving message in Christ. And especially when there is resistance to the gospel was the most, these are the truths that Paul continued to preach.

Look back at 1 Cor. 2:1-5. Read

This is how central these truths were. Paul wasn't trying to be fancy with what he said. He had been beat up and stoned and attacked and faced mobs who wanted to kill him. By the time he got to Corinth he was gun shy. He was afraid. This was a pagan city that was wild.

And Jesus himself in **Acts 18** tells Paul: Don't be afraid, go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you and no one will harm you for I have many in this city who are my people.

He's afraid. But he preaches the most important thing he can: Jesus Christ and him crucified. His whole message is the gospel message that the world finds foolish but that God says is power.

Listen, we do the same thing as Paul. We just deliver to people the message we received. We don't tweak it, we don't doubt it, we don't add to it or take away from it.

As someone once said, we're like a waiter at a restaurant. The whole job of a waiter or waitress is to deliver what the chef has prepared without changing it in any way. That's our job with the gospel. We simply deliver what God has told us -the whole gospel message - without changing it at all.

We simply deliver what we have received. Okay, back in **1 Cor. 15**, what does Paul deliver?

A) That Christ died for our sins. Read 3

You ever gotten a toy or a gadget or a car that when you first got it, it was absolutely amazing? And then in a little while you realize that it's just ho-hum?

In 2008 I got the top of the line BlackBerry phone. Internet, texting, pictures - it had the whole shabang. But I'll be honest the excitement wore off pretty quickly. The amazement ceased because I got familiar with it.

Well, that's actually what can happen with the message of the gospel as well. And especially this part of the gospel: that Jesus died for our sins.

But here's what we're talking about: We're talking about the eternal, glorious, holy, almighty Father sending his eternal, glorious, holy almighty Son into the world. Jesus who created the ground we walk on and air we breathe became human.

And he did so for the purpose of dying in the place of humans who had rebelled against him. God's own holiness requires that he punish all sin. God can't simply let people get away with sin, if he did he would be unjust. It would be like a judge letting a convicted serial murderer go scot free. God can't do that. Someone has to pay.

And in his grace, God sent his own Son to pay the penalty we deserve for sin. Because of our sin we deserve eternal damnation, eternal hell, eternal suffering and torment.

And the good news - that's what the word gospel means - is that God himself took that punishment we deserve. Jesus died in the place of all who believe in him. He suffered the torment and punishment we deserve for our sin. That's what happened on the cross. The eternally holy God suffered in the place of his sinful creatures.

In the OT we see this in the sacrificial system. When someone would sin in the OT, they would get a sheep or goat without blemish. It had to be perfect. And they would take the sheep to the Temple. And they would lay their hand on its head to symbolize that their sin was transferred to the animal. They were crediting their sinful guilt to this innocent and perfect sheep. And then they slaughtered the animal. It was slaughtered so that the wrath of God was removed and the sinner could go free.

John the Baptist says of Jesus: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Those lambs in the OT actually didn't take away sin. But they pointed to Jesus - the true lamb of God - whose sacrifice that does take away sin.

This is central to the gospel. This is called penal substitutionary atonement. It's penal - like penalty - because Jesus pays the penalty for sin, which is death.

It's substitution because he died in our place, **for us**. And it's atonement because his death satisfies the wrath God had for us.

This is a first importance of the gospel.

B) The primacy of the Scriptures. Twice here Paul mentions the Scriptures. **Read 3-4**

The Scriptures are of first importance because it is the Scriptures that help us understand Jesus.

Look at John 5:30-47 We're just going to breeze through it. But this little section is packed. And what Jesus is doing here is confronting the religious leaders about who he is. He's God and they keep wanting to stone him for saying that. And in this section there are 3 witnesses to the fact that he is God: there's John the Baptist, there's his own miracles which are the works he does, and there are the Scriptures. And he says most important of those witnesses are his works and the Scriptures. **Read 36-40**

The religious leaders believed John. But Jesus says he has an even greater witness to who he is. First, the works he does. All the miracles and all the teaching. But second, he says the Scriptures. **Read 39**

He says all of the Scriptures point to him. The whole OT is about Jesus. Either showing the need for him, prophesying his coming, giving types of who he is, or giving types of what he will do.

And the Scriptures are there to give eternal life. That's the point of the book you have in your hands. That you would understand the entire course of history so that we can know Jesus.

Eternal life is not just living forever in heaven. That's part of it. Eternal life, according to Jesus in **John 17:3** is that we would know God the Father who is the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. It's an intimate knowledge of the triune God.

If you want to know God more, you need to know his Word more. In **Luke 24:27** when Jesus was talking to the disciples on the road to Emmaus it says: and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

That's talking about the OT. Jesus was explaining to his disciples who he was using the OT. That's how they would know him more. And obviously, we look to the NT as well to understand who Jesus is.

The Scriptures not only give us truth - that's important. But they give us knowledge of God through his Son Jesus Christ. This is primary importance when we are talking about the gospel to go back over and over to the Scriptures.

2 Tim. 3:16: All Scripture is breathed out by God and useful for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness.

When we say that the Bible is God's Word, that's what we mean. It is his Word to us. BB Warfield once said: "What God says, Scripture says, and what Scripture says God says."

That might seem obvious to us, but that's of critical importance to the gospel.

So penal substitutionary atonement is first importance. The Scriptures are first importance. Back in **1 Cor. 15** the next is

C) That Jesus was buried. Read 3-4

This maybe seems like an unusual one: why is it important that Jesus was buried? Is burial important?

Well, let me ask you: who do we bury? Dead people. That's why it's important. What Paul is getting at here is that Jesus actually died. Like, dead dead.

Didn't he already cover that in **Vs. 3:** That he died for our sins? Well, yes. But there the issue was primarily **why** he died. **Vs. 3** is all about the purpose of Jesus's death - that he died for our sins. **Vs. 4** is emphasizing that he did actually die.

The literal death of Jesus is a central part of the the gospel. There many people who deny the gospel by denying that Jesus actually died on the cross. This is usually called the swoon theory. When you swoon you faint. You pass out. And that's what some people will say happened to Jesus: that when Jesus was on the cross, he didn't actually die, he just fainted. And later he was revived and restored to health.

First of all, that's really physically not possible. The way a person dies when they're on a cross is that they suffocate to death. The cross is brutal because it's like drowning. The hands and feet are nailed to the cross and your body can't take breath without you pushing up with your legs to grasp a breath. And every time you push up, you're pushing against the nail in your feet - it's excruciating. And it goes for hours and sometimes days until eventually you can't push yourself up anymore. And if you can't push yourself up, you can't breathe and you suffocate. It's like drowning in air.

Furthermore, the Romans were really good at killing people. They were brutal and efficient. And if you remember the scene from the gospels they were going to break the legs of the 3 people being crucified that day to speed up the process, but when they came to Jesus they saw he was already dead. But even then they double checked it, you remember how? By piercing his side with a spear and water and blood gushed out. He was dead dead.

Why would anyone believe that Jesus didn't actually die? Here's the amazing thing: the reason they'd say that is because it is undeniable that people saw him alive **after** his crucifixion. We'll see this in a minute that all the apostles saw him, other believers saw him, a crowd of over 500 saw him.

Everyone saw him. The only explanation that makes sense to some is that he didn't actually die! Ironically, those who deny that he died actually make some of the best arguments **for** the resurrection. They just fail to put the pieces together.

Jesus actually, really, truly died.

Isa. 53:5, 8: He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities...and they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death..."

Messiah had to die. Had to. **Heb. 9:22:** without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

This is essential to the gospel.

D) The Resurrection of Jesus is Critical to the gospel. Read 4

The resurrection is also critical to the gospel. Jesus didn't just die for sins. That's part of it. But he rose again. And really he had to: he's God in the flesh. He has to rise.

He promised he would rise over and over in the gospels. Jesus himself said that Jonah was just a type of Messiah: as Jonah was in the belly of the fish 3 days and 3 nights, so too the Son of Man would be in the earth 3 days.

There are some who think that Jonah being swallowed by a fish and living to tell about it is unbelievable. Wait til you see Jesus! Jesus, who was brutally beaten and murdered on a Roman cross, he's alive and reigning in power after 3 days in the grave.

Friday, Saturday, Sunday. He wasn't in the grave even a full 72 hours; by my math it was about 39 hours: 3pm Friday to maybe 6am Sunday. But that wasn't the point. The point was that he was in the grave over the course of 3 days.

And then he rose back to life. His resurrection proved that he has intrinsic authority over life and death because he is God. Jesus said "No one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord. And I take it back up again."

That's an amazing statement. No one took Jesus's life against his will. Even though he was sinfully murdered, he did so willingly - he laid it down. And he took it back up. Interestingly, the Bible attributes the resurrection to all 3 members of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was a triune work to raise Jesus.

And his resurrection proved that everything he did and said was true. It verified that he was who he said he was. There were several people in that day who had said they were Messiah; they claimed to be there to deliver Israel. That's why the disciples were so dejected when Jesus was killed. What happened? What happened to their great hope that Messiah would rescue them? They thought they lost because their Messiah was just like all those others: dead.

Except that Jesus rose again. And the Scripture said this would happen. Most notably David in Psalm 16:

Psa. 16:10 you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor let your holy one see decay.

David was not talking about himself because his body - the dust that's left anyway - is still in the grave. His body decayed. No, he prophesied that Messiah would die, but he wouldn't be dead long enough to decay. He would rise.

Hos. 6:2 has an allusion to the resurrection: after two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

What's interesting about Hosea's prophecy is that he is talking about people who turn to the Lord that the Lord would heal them. He's talking about believers. And he says that after 2 days we'll be revived, after 3 days we will be raised.

How does that relate to Jesus? Because our resurrection is tied to his resurrection. How does God raise up repentant sinners to new life? How does he revive us? Through the death, the burial over 3 days and the resurrection of Jesus applied to us.

And without the resurrection of Jesus, Paul says everything we have is worthless. **Read 12-19**

We are the most pathetic people on the planet if Jesus didn't rise. Our faith is worthless, God is a liar, and we're still in our sins.

And just to be really, really clear: we have to believe that Jesus actually rose in space/time. It's not enough just to believe that he rose, but maybe he really didn't rise literally.

Some people believe in the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. They believe in these things, even though we know they don't actually exist. That's not how it works with Jesus. It's not enough just to believe even though we might think it's actually fiction. No, the resurrection truly happened in space and time.

Read 5-8

Paul says over and over that Jesus appeared. He appeared to Cephas, he appeared to the 500, he appeared to James, he appeared to me.

Paul grounds the resurrection in space and time. He appeared to the original apostles, then to a huge crowd, then James. Then he appeared to the rest of the apostles. That sounds odd, but there were more than just the original 12 apostles. There was also Matthias from Acts 1, Paul from Acts 9, Barnabas is called an apostle, James and likely Jude were both apostles. That's 15 or 16. Paul gives a list of how to tell an apostle in 2 Corinthians, part of that list is seeing the resurrected Jesus and doing signs.

He gives ways to tell who an apostle is rather than just name them all, probably because there were quite a few initially. There are no more apostles now, of course. But they had all seen Jesus alive.

Not just wished he were alive, not just hoped he were alive, not just believed a little fairy tale in their heart. No, they had seen him raised in space and time and history.

The resurrection, along with the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus, his burial, and the Scriptures are critical to believe for salvation. This is the sacred gospel we preach.

I started by saying that you should take away from this section this morning is that God specially has chosen to use unworthy sinners to preach the most sacred gospel message.

We've talked about the sacred gospel message. But who does God send to preach it?

2) God almost always uses unworthy messengers to preach. **Read 8-11**

I don't know if you caught that, but at first glance his description of himself seems a little self-deprecating. Almost like "Come on, Paul."

But if you actually track Paul's conversion through his death you get why he says this.

You remember that when Paul was converted no one believed he was actually a Christian. He was so feared in Jerusalem because of all that he had done to persecute the church prior to his conversion that no one would get near him. It was Barnabas who finally took Paul to the apostles and vouched for his conversion.

That's why he says in **Vs. 8**: I am like one untimely born. He didn't hang out with Jesus during Jesus's earthly ministry like all the other apostles did. He started out life attacking the church. Untimely born is actually a very graphic word. It means someone who was aborted or miscarried. How they came into the world was very unnatural.

Paul became an apostle through very unnatural means. He says I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle. I persecuted the church. He was throwing people in prison. He was there overseeing the martyrdom of Stephen. Who's going to listen to this guy?

And most believers nowadays think highly of the apostle Paul. But if you follow his life and ministry through Acts, you realize that everywhere this guy goes he either starts a riot or people attempt to kill him. In fact if you add up the time Paul spent in prison from the time he's converted to the time of his death it's like 25% of his converted life is behind bars. What kind of missionary spends 25% of their life behind bars?

And when he's not in prison he's not much to look at. He was probably small, probably had bad eyesight. He had been beaten and whipped and stoned so many times that he likely had visible deformities and difficulty just walking.

And at the end of his life churches in entire regions of Rome had turned their back on him.

Let me ask you: Do you ever feel like you're not worthy to preach the gospel? You ever feel like who you are or who you were has disqualified you from preaching the gospel? That your sins and your baggage make it impossible for you to tell other people that they need to repent from their sins and trust in Jesus to escape the wrath of God? Or you can't speak clearly, or you get confused, maybe you're just awkward to be around, or you've got a physical thing.

Let me give you some encouragement: that was the apostle Paul. But God. **Read 10**

Here's what Paul concludes. First, he was who he was by the grace of God. He didn't choose to be an apostle. Frankly, he didn't even choose to be saved. Jesus upended his life. Jesus saved Paul and said: I've got a ministry for you.

That was all the grace of God. Nothing Paul did. And Paul says that grace was not in vain. God wasn't wasting time with Paul. God picked the biggest enemy, the most violent opponent and poured out eternal grace on this man who would then go proclaim his excellencies.

And Paul says, not only did God in his grace save him, but it's God's grace that was working through him. **Read 10**

Did Paul work hard as a missionary apostle? Absolutely. But even his own effort wasn't his own. He recognized that every effort he gave was really only possible by God's grace.

It's like when we jump in the car to go somewhere. We turn the key and we press the gas pedal. But is it really us working? Well, sort of. But it's really the engine working.

Same thing when we do ministry of any kind. Is it us working? Sure. But really it's the grace of God through us. And what's the result? **Read 11**

He says the bottom line is not who worked or what they're background was. The gospel was preached and people were saved.

Do you feel incompetent to preach the gospel or like your background might prevent you from that? Good. God's got you right where he wants you. Because God uses broken vessels - jars of clay - to preach the infinite mercy and glory of God.

So go preach that gospel, that people will hear and be saved and give glory to our God.

Pray