

Easter Sunday

March 27, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** Almighty God, by the glorious resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you conquered death and opened the gate to eternal life. Grant that we, who have been raised with him through baptism, may walk in the newness of life and ever rejoice in the hope of sharing his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit be dominion and praise now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Alleluia! (Psalm 118:24)

**Sermon Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

How many of you were alive when the Titanic sank? No one? It did sink on April 15, 1912— some 104 years ago. I guess none of us were alive when it happened. So, how do you know the Titanic actually existed? How do you know it is not some mythological tale? I mean, you were not alive when it sank. You did not stand on the floor of the Titanic. You did not journey deep into the ocean to see if a really big steam-liner is crumpled up on the ocean floor. So, how do you know it existed?

Because there are witnesses, right? There were survivors; they are eye-witnesses of the disaster. They can show you their ticket or life-vest or the boat which rescued them. Because newspapers, radio, and books recorded these eye-witness accounts. You can go to a library or search the internet for photographs of the ship (and the iceberg) itself. You have archaeologists who scour the ocean floor and have found the Titanic. Because of these eyewitnesses, you know a giant ship called “Titanic” struck an iceberg and sunk.

So, how do you know if Jesus actually rose from the dead? The first Easter Sunday happened some 2,000 years ago. You and I were not alive then. You have not stood outside

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

<sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Jesus' tomb. You did not touch Jesus with your own hands and eyes. How do you know if Jesus actually rose from the dead?

The Christians living in Corinth were asking the same question. They did not see the resurrection with their own eyes. Most of them recently came to faith; Jesus already entered heaven by the time they believed! So, how do they know that he actually rose from the dead? How do they know that he is not really lying in a grave somewhere?

They were listening to others who lived in the port city called "Corinth." Merchants from all over the world sail here. They trade spices and fabrics and exotic odds and ends from distant lands. They not only trade goods, but they bring many different beliefs. Some worshipped Zeus or Aphrodite or Hercules or another one of the many Greek gods. Others prayed to the sun and moon for daily blessings. Still others threw bones or searched chicken livers in hopes to unlock the future. No matter what god they worshipped, they believed that (1) divine beings do not die— and if they did die, (2) then divine beings remained dead.

Even those who taught in [higher education] universities believed that. Philosophers debated the meaning of life, what it means to "exist," and what a person experiences after death. They were willing to admit that a person might live on in someone's memory, but the body will never ever leave the grave.

That is what those Corinthian Christians heard. Dead people remain dead. How could they know if Jesus rose from the dead?

How do you know if he rose from the dead? Why is it that we are celebrating Easter today? Why are we sitting in a dedicated church building filled with furnishings? Why are we singing hymns of praise? Why do we read from a Bible? Who are we praying to? Because if dead people remain dead, then that means Jesus is dead and in his grave— and there is one thing you can be certain about: you have hell to look forward to.

There is no uncertainty about that. God definitely says: *The wages of sin is death* ([Romans 6:23](#)). He also definitely says: *All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one* ([Psalm 14:3](#)). You see, God tells you at least one thing is sure: if you are not perfect, if you have not loved him with all your heart, if you have not loved your neighbor (his reputation and property) more than you love yourself, you have sinned and you will die ([Matthew 22:37-39](#); [Ezekiel 18:4](#)). Not just go into the ground, but spend eternity in hell far away from him. You can "think" and have some deeply held belief that life will be better after death, but if Jesus is dead and in a grave, you will never be 100% sure that life will be better.

This morning Paul is not dealing with uncertainty. He is not going to give you his opinion about Easter. Instead, he shares eyewitness accounts of Easter. **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...**

Thousands of years ago, God had already told you what Jesus would do. He used the prophet Isaiah to say: *"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our*

*iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).* Christ did what God promised; he died for your sins.

Notice God deals with the one thing keeping you from eternal life; God deals directly with sin. He does not ignore the wrong things you do. He does not wipe it out. He does not shrug it off. He does not change his mind in regard to what is and is not sin. He hates sin. He punishes it. He kills it. He puts that punishment on Jesus.

Jesus suffers endures a death sentence for your guilt and shame and failures. He stands in your place under God's anger. He is tossed into the dust of death, so that you and I never would have to live life apart from God.

Then he dies. His body laid in a tomb for three days. He was not sleeping; he was not in a coma. His friends buried a real, lifeless body.

People just do not spontaneously come back to life. Yet, God described the first Easter Sunday several hundred years before it ever happened. He promised not to *abandon [His Holy One] to the grave, nor let [Him] see decay (Psalm 16:10)*. On the third day the Father raised Jesus to life. Not that Jesus' spirit lives on, but his body remains in the ground to this day. Not that Jesus is actually still dead and we pretend he is alive. No, God raised Jesus—body and soul. The brain functioned. The heart pumped blood throughout the body. Lungs could breathe again. Eyes opened; ears heard; skin was warm. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy in the Bible.

As if that was not enough, he then proves that he is alive. **He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.** These are not dreams or hallucinations. No, he appeared to Peter in the flesh— his heart beating, brain functioning, skin warm, conversations understandable. He appears to the Twelve—including doubting Thomas— and has him touch his hands and side to prove that he is not a ghost ([John 20:27](#)). Over 500 disciples see Jesus at one single time— with their very own eyes (and not being hypnotized). Jesus appears to his brother James; he opens heaven and blinds the apostle Paul with his presence.

All these people in their very own places saw with their very own eyes that Jesus had died, but now they see him alive again. Undeniable proof that Jesus is not dead and lying in a grave. Undeniable proof to the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

Why does it matter that Jesus rose from the dead? Listen to what Paul says: **Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**

The "gospel" Paul speaks of is the "good news" that Jesus has removed your sins and has promised you eternal life. Jesus is the only person who ever lived sin-free. So Jesus suffers the death you deserve for sin. He pays off your debt of sin. He rises from the dead to verify that payment has been made!

That is rock-solid comfort because Jesus has done it all. You see, sometimes you might wonder if you are saved. You might ask if you feel forgiven. If you try to ask yourself what you think, you will come to one of two conclusions: (1) if you do not feel saved, you must do more good things or (2) if you do feel saved, then you are doing enough to earn God's forgiveness.

The reality of the resurrection is not based on your personal feelings. Some days you will feel great and forgiven. Other days, your deepest darkest sins can lead you to feel hell-driven. Yet, no day will undo Jesus' resurrection. The empty tomb does not change with your feelings. Jesus' sacrificial death does not change with your feelings. This is a one-time, completed fact. Christ died. Once. For all. Done.

Because Jesus lives, you can take your stand on this solid truth. Place your confidence for life in what Jesus has accomplished for you. Trust in it. Cling to it. Let no doubts or fears shake you from what Jesus has done or from what God says has happened. Make sure to continue being grounded in it.

The Corinthian church had received their Bible-training. They learned the Bible's teachings as teenagers. Some took adult instruction classes. Just because they heard these teachings once did not mean they knew it all. In fact, some of them wondered if God raised the dead. Others chased after different beliefs of what Jesus actually did. Still others simply forgot that Jesus alone conquers death. Continue standing firm in these teachings. Hold firmly to everything Jesus has done for you.

Hold firmly to these certain words even in life's most uncertain times. Those who continued holding fast to the gospel word throughout life are saved. It means that every believer who dies now receives in full what God promised them. So, the gravesite is just a holding place. When God determines the time has come, that grave will be opened. The believer lying there will open their eyes and see the face of God. Their flesh will be restored— disease-free, refreshed, never again to break down and age— immortal! Because Jesus lives, it means that God promises your eternal life.

Because Jesus lives, it means that death is not the end. Your guilt is removed. Fears have vanished. You have certain comfort knowing that you stand with God. This comfort is not going to come from something you did, some choice you made, or something you try to hand back to God. This certain comfort comes from God's Word. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. Jesus lives again. Because he lives, you will live forever in heaven. Thanks be to God for such certain comfort for life in an uncertain world! Thanks be to God because **EASTER GIVES A CHRISTIAN CERTAINTY!**