

[United] First Importance; finding hope, courage and victory

1 Corinthians 15

MPS: The gospel is of First Importance because it anchors our lives for eternity in Jesus.

OBJ: Every person should place their faith in Jesus through the gospel because of four eternal blessings.

ILLUS Have you ever wondered why something really mattered? Maybe you've asked about something, "Why does this really matter anyway?"

>**ILLUS** [a 'lite' story of learning that something really mattered].

TRANS Paul begins 1 Corinthians with the foundation of the gospel and applies it to situations in the church. As he prepares to close his letter, he applies the gospel to the biggest issues of life. Here is what he tells us.

Paul begins 1 Cor 15 with a reminder.

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **1 Cor 15:1-5***

The resurrection provides the key that unlocks the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ and new life. .1-11 One author states, "After more than seven hundred hours of studying this subject and thoroughly investigating its foundation, I came to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the *most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men*, OR it is the most fantastic fact in history."¹ Another theologian (William Milligan) stated the resurrection is the one event that harmonizes all other facts of Jesus' history.

The resurrection is the exclamation point of the gospel. God **promised** salvation in His word, "*according to the scriptures*". God **provided** salvation in His Son, Jesus; "*Christ died for our sins...was buried...was raised*". God **proved** His salvation by appearing to countless personal witnesses. Because of the resurrection, Jesus death and burial make sense for us. It demonstrates God's complete authority and power over life and death. Jesus is the only man who ever dared to walk into hell of his own volition, and then walk out by the same. If Jesus had not been raised, God's promise would've been nothing more than a political stump speech, Jesus' death nothing more than the same narrative as any other, and unable to prove anything. "*But*", as Paul will say later in verse 20, "*in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*"

Jesus was not only raised, but God raised him as a first fruit, which means there is more to come! That "more to come" is every one who trusts in Jesus. Jesus' resurrection was an eternal declaration of salvation for all who place their faith in Him. And that brings us back to Paul's beginning and matters of "First Importance". The gospel is of First Importance for your life today because what we have by faith in Jesus is not like anything else. **Jesus provides all we need for life.**

APPL I want you to ask yourself today, "**What is of First Importance to you in your life?**"

Think about a time in your life when you found yourself in what felt like a hopeless situation. **Where did you turn in that moment? When you are forced to face fears or unknowns in life, where do you look for comfort and courage? When you are brought face to face with the questions or problems in your life, where do you go to find answers, solutions or victory? Wherever you go and whatever you turn to when life is hard is what is of first importance to you.**

Paul tells us...

The gospel is of First Importance because it anchors our lives for eternity in Jesus.

¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p203.

By faith through the gospel, Jesus becomes our all in all. No matter what you face in life or what slams against you, Jesus is always faithful, always available, and always able to provide all that we need. Jesus doesn't make our life perfect. He does forgive our imperfect life, and give us credit for His perfect life.

The gospel is the good news that God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Because of our sin, we are separated from God. In his death, Jesus conquered sin and death, brings forgiveness for our sin and reconciles us into a personal relationship with God. **By faith, Jesus forgives our sin, reconciles us in relationship with God, removes our condemnation and fills us with His peace. When we place our faith in Jesus through the gospel, our lives are anchored for eternity in Jesus. And that makes the gospel of First Importance for every person.**

OBJ: I want you to see today, through very personal narratives, **four eternal blessings** to persuade you to make Jesus first in your life today by making the gospel of First Importance for your life today.

TRANS Paul applies the meaning of the resurrection to the biggest challenges of life to show that the gospel is of First Importance for all of life.

The First eternal blessing when we place our faith in Jesus through the gospel, **...the resurrection secures our victory over death and sin.** .50-57

I want to go to the last part of chapter 15 first, and look at 'what Jesus really accomplished through the resurrection'. The first issue Paul applies to gospel to is common for every person.

Jesus conquered sin and death. Jesus' resurrection proved that he held authority of the death and the grave. We have ultimate victory for eternal life in Jesus. Listen to how the Bible states this victory.

but we shall all be changed, ...But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 15:51c, 57

God gives victory over death because he conquered sin in Jesus sacrifice and resurrection. While we are not made perfect in this life, this changes everything for us. We live looking toward the day when Jesus will grant to us ultimate victory over sin and death. One way we see a glimpse of Jesus' ultimate victory is that we can have real victory over sins that entangle and condemn us now.

TRANS Listen to this testimony of a brother who found victory over sin, shame and condemnation through Jesus.

ILLUS Video Testimony: Ben Wright [4:13]

When Jesus becomes of First Importance in your life through the gospel, the resurrection secures our victory over death and sin.

The Second eternal blessing when we place our faith in Jesus through the gospel, **...the resurrection destroys fear of death for God's greater glory / purpose.** .35-49

In verses 35-49 of 1 Corinthians, the people were very anxious, even upset, over death and whether we could be raised. When we look at our physical bodies on this earth and realize that they wasting away in so many ways, it is hard to imagine them being raised and that being a 'good' thing. Our bodies provide us much pleasure and good in this world. But when we consider the big picture it can make us wonder, even question many things about life.

? **Have you ever been confronted with death and mortality in this life, and wondered if the reality of pain, suffering and evil proved that God didn't exist? Or, simply questioned whether believing in Him was worth it?**

Many people in first century Corinth were riddled by the problems these often un-explainable, always un-desirable and, at times, incomprehensible situations create. This was not unique to them, and its not new nor unique for us today. But, it's not ultimate for us either.

Paul doesn't try to dismiss their questions. Rather, he addresses them through the gospel. He gives them courage to keep going because of the resurrection.

⁴²So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.

⁴⁵Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. 1 Cor 15:42, 45-49

The wasting away of this world, the slow decay of our aging bodies, the terminal nature of so many realities in this world press upon us so that we cannot ignore them. The reality of our mortality often causes fear and being overwhelmed when faced with hard questions about life that we don't know the answer to. When faced with the unknown of life, Jesus provides the hope and courage to keep going.

TRANS Listen to this testimony of a couple of were brought face to face with mortality, and found courage in Jesus to live.

ILLUS Video Testimony: Preston & Traci Dial [8:53]

Jesus is the only one in whom we find real courage to walk on, to keep going in the midst of a life full of heartache, pain, suffering, injustice, and evil. For the 'wasting away' of this earthly body and the mortality of this earthly life are not the end for the person who places their faith in Jesus. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we shall bear the image of the man of heaven.

When Jesus becomes of First Importance in your life through the gospel, **the resurrection destroys fear of death for God's greater glory and purpose.**

The Third eternal blessing when we place our faith in Jesus through the gospel, ...**the resurrection fills us with hope of eternity to live now.** .12-34

? Have you ever found yourself asking questions like these?

Is there really eternal life after death? Is there more to life than just "THIS"? Or, is THIS, the here and now, today, all there is to this life? Does this life have more meaning than just the here and now?"

Paul tells us that Jesus' resurrection means there is eternal life after death. But more than only that, this life right now has meaning. We have hope in Jesus now in this life and in eternity because of His resurrection.

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

1 Cor 15:19-20, 22

It may be easy to answer these question when life seems good. **But what do you do when life slams you with unexpected catastrophe?**

TRANS Listen to this testimony of a lady who was faced with the worst tragedy, and found hope in Jesus to live.

ILLUS Video Testimony: Christie Hancock [6:45]

When Jesus becomes of First Importance in your life through the gospel, **the resurrection fills us with hope of eternity to live now.**

The Fourth eternal blessing when we place our faith in Jesus through the gospel, ...**the resurrection gives meaning to life now.** .58

TRANS *So, where do we go from here?* We want, even demand, immediate answers that provide permanent solutions. But, we know that the “value” of what comes to us is usually determined by the “way” something comes. In other words, ultimate answers do not arrive with immediacy. And, immediate solutions never provide ultimate solutions.

Christianity is a terrible quick fix, not because it doesn't work, but because we don't have to trust. But, the point I want you to understand, and I pray, trust with all hope and faith today, is that **because of the resurrection, you can trust Jesus and find hope in the midst of the darkest moments, courage to walk on against the most defeating times, and victory over sin and death in your life.** Jesus is the only eternal, Savior. Only He has power of sin, death and all of life.

Jesus is of First Importance, because when you encounter things in your life that have the biggest impact on you, you need someone that you can hold, that will hold you.

The gospel is of First Importance because it anchors our lives for eternity in Jesus.