

1 Corinthians 15:1-23

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Preacher: Billy Joe Calvert

[0 : 0 0] And go with me to the book of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 15. 1 Corinthians 15 is where we will be at this morning. It's a very familiar set of scripture to us, but it is one that is so important to look at, especially on days such as this.

We've been making our way through the gospel according to Mark. And if you remember, we were ready for Mark 14 on Sunday mornings. Actually, this past Wednesday night, we looked at Mark 14 and the first few verses there.

And the reason we did that, I know some of our Sunday morning crowds said, well, you preached on Mark on Wednesday. That's not fair. Well, thankfully, the guys up there do their work and they live stream it.

You can go back and catch it. But it was worth looking at this past Wednesday night as we looked at Mark 14. And it was that time of betrayal, that time of scheming and planning where Judas is getting ready to sell the Savior for the price of a servant.

And we looked at that because those events would have taken place on the Tuesday and Wednesday would have been the working out of those events. So it was fitting for us to look at it. But this morning, we don't need to be back in Mark 14 for the time being because this morning is not a time of focusing on the misery and the suffering and the death of the Savior.

[1 : 1 5] But rather, this morning is a rejoicing in the resurrection of the Savior. The death was necessary. Yes, absolutely. The penalty must be paid. But the resurrection is our living hope.

The grave has lost its power. It has lost its authority. And now we have a reason to rejoice, not just a debt that has been canceled, but a promise that has been made. We began looking at that as we saw the resurrection account recorded in Matthew this morning.

We will look at it again from Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 15. We'll be looking at verses 1 through 23. I know some of you have just gotten settled in, and I talked long enough in my introduction to let you do so.

But if you're physically able and would like to join me, would you stand with me as we read the Word of God found in 1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 1. We'll read down to verse 23.

Maybe as you stand up, you can scoot closer to somebody, and, you know, as you're not close enough already, right? But we are reading from the Word of God. It says, Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, and which also you stand, by which also you are saved.

[2 : 2 3] If you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain, for I delivered to you as of first importance that what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the 12, and after that he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me also, for I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God, but by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was our day, so we preach, and so you believed. Now if Christ is preached, that he was raised from the dead, how does some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain. Your faith also is vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not

raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless, and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

[3 : 59] And if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep.

For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive, but each in his own order.

Christ the firstfruits, and after that those who are Christ at his coming. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for the fellowship, the worship, and the opportunity we've had to be together already.

Father, we pray that now as we have read your word, and we've seen your word, Lord, and we hear your word, that it would be the very word of God that would speak to our hearts and minds. That it would continue to mold us, and to shape us, and to conform us, to be more and more like you for your glory.

We ask that you would lead in all these manners, and we ask it in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. This very important passage of scripture, which if we were to continue reading on later, this grand narrative found in the 15th chapter, in which we know it says, O death, where is your sting?

[5 : 19] And we know that it speaks of the resurrection of the dead, when the trumpet will sound, and those who are dead in Christ will be raised to join him in the air. It begins with the assurance of this greatest event throughout history, and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is the focal of the passage, for we cannot get to the removal of the sting of death, and we cannot get to the hope that is found in the sounding trumpet, and we cannot get to these matters if we do not settle this first one prior.

If we do not settle the reality that the greatest thing that has ever happened in the history of the world, the thing that has happened in all of creation, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is the one part of Christianity that sets it apart from all others. Because our faith is not built upon the works that we accomplish, or the matters in which we do, or the things that we can attain to, it is not a record of our good and bad, and it is not trying to tip the scales in our favor.

Rather, our confidence is found in the resurrected Savior who intercedes for us, who died for us and paid the price. It is the thing that sets Christianity apart from all other religions.

[6 : 29] For we alone are the only ones who have a Savior that was both fully man and fully God, that literally died and was dead and buried and laid in a borrowed tomb and raised on the third day.

And it is the one thing that those who have challenged Christianity throughout the years have set their mind to try to disprove for it has been called the linchpin of the faith. That if you can disprove the resurrection, then you can discount the rest of the faith.

But if you cannot, if you look at it, and you say, I cannot disprove the reality of that event, then everything else must be true. It is the thing that holds it together.

It is literally an event of greatest importance. And I want you just to see a number of these things about this event. I look back. Many of you know I keep file copies.

Yes, I'm still that old school guy. I have a filing cabinet in my office. It's got drop folders in it. And there are paper copies of every message I've ever preached. And so if you ever want to mess with a pastor, just take out that filing drawer and then I'm lost.

[7 : 33] Not that it's going to mess me up because I haven't preached the same message twice, save one. I've only preached one message more than one time. I know exactly which one it is. It's my favorite one of all times. I've preached passages multiple times, but only one message have I preached more than once.

And it is man's desperate need for a king. I love that message. I love that series. And I love the way it introduces because I don't use myself. I use SM Lockers. That's my king to introduce it.

Favorite video ever. Best sermon ever preached. It's actually, if you want to look it up, I'm a complete side note here. If you ever want to look up the world's greatest sermon on, not that I'm a big proponent of YouTube, though we're doing that right now.

On YouTube, it's SM Lockers. That's my king. You can listen to the three-minute clip, but if you want to hear something good, listen to the hour and a half sermon. And it's worth listening to

because that is a great, great sermon.

But anyway, I looked back through my filing cabinet of 1 Corinthians, and the sermon I have preached or the passage I have preached more than any other on Easter morning is 1 Corinthians 15.

[8 : 34] It's been a number of years since we've done so here, but more than any other, it's 1 Corinthians 15. And in praying through it, I said, Lord, do I really want to go back to that passage? And Lord, is this where you would have me?

And he reminded me, Paul says this is of first importance. This is a matter that needs to be repeated. It is a refrain that must be sung over and over and over again.

And the prayer is that we would look at it with fresh eyes and see it as it truly is in all of its power and all of its glory. The first thing that we notice about this event is that it is the prophetic word concerning the event.

Notice the prophetic word concerning the event. It says, Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you. Just stop right there. If you were here with me this morning, we looked at Matthew's account of the empty tomb.

If you weren't here, I'll give you a real quick refresher. It only took 30 minutes to preach it then, so we'll be caught up in just a moment. No, I'm just joking. I'm not going to preach those sermons. It's that at the appearance, the angels appeared to the women and they said, What?

[9 : 37] Go and tell. Jesus appeared to the women and said, Go and tell. And then he appears to the disciples and says, What? Go and tell. So the responsibility of those who know the resurrection is to tell others about the resurrection.

It is not to convince them to the reality, but it is to proclaim the truth thereof. And what does Paul say? I make known to you the gospel which I preached. Paul is here fulfilling his responsibility. Paul said elsewhere, Woe with me if I do not preach the gospel. If I do not tell you, it is your responsibility to accept it, but it is my responsibility to proclaim it.

When you know the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, friend, it is our personal responsibility to proclaim that truth. It is not our responsibility to convince others of that truth.

It is not a matter to be mentally convinced of. It is a truth to be heartily accepted. And you cannot change the heart of any individual. I know I'm preaching to the choir a little bit, but people have asked me, Pastor, how do you not get discouraged?

[10 : 41] Pastor, how do you not get downhearted? Pastor, how do you not get upset when you don't see people just flooding the gates? I say, because I have but one job. My job is to tell and proclaim the reality of the resurrection.

I cannot change the hearts of individuals, but I can tell them the truth that has gripped my heart. That is your job. You don't save anyone. You proclaim the truth of what has saved you and you let the Lord take that seed and sow it into their heart and watch what he does.

And notice what Paul says, I make known to you the gospel which I preached. He says elsewhere, unless you believed in vain, but the reality is, is this is what I have proclaimed to you.

And he tells them this word. It is the fulfillment of his responsibility, but it is so much more than that. It is the prophetic word that is surrounding this event. He says that I deliver to you as a first importance what I also received.

Many people would say what follows here in verses three, four, and five would be one of the earliest church creeds, one of the earliest teachings found in Christianity. It is not new to Paul.

[11 : 47] It was something that was handed to Paul. And he says, I make known to you what was made known to me, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

Now, if this is the earliest church creed and it is one of the earliest church teachings, then surely it is not referring to the New Testament scriptures. Rather, what we find is Paul declaring here that what happens on that day in that event is a fulfillment of the prophetic word of all of the Old Testament. And he has the confident assurance that exactly what has taken place was the fulfillment of the scriptures. It was not the opinion of man. It was not the thought of man.

But as Brother Jamie shared this morning, it was the plan and purpose of God from the very beginning. We find the hope of the resurrection from the earliest pages of scripture all the way to the end of the book of Revelation.

According to the scriptures, it is the prophetic word concerning this event. When we speak about a suffering savior and we speak about a resurrected king, we are speaking about what the scriptures have declared from the very beginning of their writings.

[13:06] It was Job who said, though he slay me, I know that I will see my redeemer in the land of the living. It is the hope of the resurrection that resounds throughout scripture.

It is the promise of the resurrection that is the fulfillment of scripture. And what we declare and what we know is that Jesus Christ has fulfilled that prophetic word. This is not God's reaction to man's problem.

This is God's plan from the very beginning even before we had the problem. He did not respond to our crisis. Rather, he was proactive and he knew that we would get into a problem and an issue.

I remember years ago I was working with a phone company. I learned real early on when you hire on as a new guy, I was a lineman with that time was Bell South, eventually became AT&T.;

You pay attention to the old men. And the reason you pay attention to the old men is because if they've been climbing poles for 30 years, they usually know something about it. Now some of the young guys who came in after me didn't learn that trait.

[14:09] And I befriended the old guys really quickly. I wasn't an old guy then, I was still 21, so I wasn't yet an old man. But I would pay attention to those guys and I would work with them and I would do anything they wanted me to do.

And you say, oh well you were just kind of sucking up. Well yeah, because you know, they knew more than I did. And it's humility. And you understand that. If they could still do it at their age, I want to be alive at their age, so I'm going to still try to do it too.

But I worked with one guy, nobody else really liked him. I liked him. He was a great guy. But this is why people didn't like him. And we were working one day and he would just sit there and watch you. Not me, he did it to another guy.

And he would just sit there and watch you. And when you'd mess up, he'd say, ah, I knew it was coming. And then he'd walk off and leave you in a mess. He wouldn't tell you before you messed up. He'd say, I saw that before it happened and then he would go on.

And he would just leave you up there and you'd have to figure it out and get yourself out of that problem. Now that's a big difference than what I did to a gentleman one time. Had a guy who hired on after me and I said, hey, when you get up that pole, you're gonna need this, this, this, and this.

[15:05] And he said, yeah, okay, whatever. And I said, well, I'm telling you, you're gonna need all these things. He said, okay, whatever. And he kept, in his pride, he kept saying, yeah, whatever, whatever. And I kept telling him everything he needed. He got up the pole and we weren't in a bucket truck.

We were climbing and he was standing up the top of the pole and he looked at me. He said, hey man, can you throw me this? I said, nah, whatever. And I went and got in the truck. You know why? It's because I tried to help him on the front end. I was proactive in what I saw was gonna happen. God's response to you with the death of Christ and the resurrection is he knew the mess we would find ourselves in.

And he didn't sit back and say, oh, I saw it from the beginning and didn't do anything about it. As a matter of fact, he provided the means necessary for redemption before we got into a mess. So don't look at him and say, God, what are you gonna do now?

He says, look at the word, look at the scriptures, I've already done it. It is the prophetic word fulfilled and it is the hope of that great event of the resurrection. Notice secondly, the people who witnessed this event.

[16:10] As Paul speaks about this, he speaks of a number of people here and you know it because we've said it over and over again. It tells us in verse five that he appeared to Sapphith, that is Peter.

And then to the twelve. And after that, he appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, which is the answer to how we figure out when we read the book of Acts, how is James, the half-brother of the Lord, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, when James is not even a believer and when Christ is alive?

Well, here's how. He appeared to James. And then to all the apostles. And last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me also. It is the appearance of Christ to people, to witnesses who

understood the reality.

Paul would say when he stood before the kings and governors, these things have not been done in secret, but rather they have been very publicly portrayed and very publicly proclaimed for Christ has ensured that there were a multitude of witnesses.

This is one of the most eyewitnessed events in all of the history of humanity. It was so testified to not only by the life change, but by the living out of those who literally saw him.

[17 : 24] And we cannot overlook the people who witnessed this event for their lives were altered from there, from that point on. For those who believe in Jesus Christ today, we become eyewitnesses too.

We sing that song, you ask me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart. For the unbeliever, that seems strange. But for those who have named Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, we understand the reality.

You cannot convince me otherwise. You may call me crazy and you may say I'm fanatical, but you will not change the reality for I know that I know that I know that he is alive. And I know it to the very core of my being.

It is a conviction that I hold on to. Why? Because I have seen the risen Savior. You say, Pastor, you're seeing crazy visions. No, I've seen him in my life. I've seen him in the life of others. I've seen him being lived out among the people of God.

And we are the people who witness this event. Third, we notice from the passage before us the priority of this event. Paul says, this is of first importance. Something that must be established before we can do anything else.

[18 : 33] It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we must confront at the very beginning. For if he is indeed the risen Savior, then we must accept everything else. He goes on in verse 12.

He says, Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised.

And here we begin to see the priority. Why is it so essential that Christ has indeed been risen from the dead? Notice what it says. If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain.

And your faith also is vain. Listen, if Jesus Christ is dead and still in the tomb, I have no reason to stand before you. It's all vain. Vanity of vanity is what the preacher said in the book of Song of Solomon.

Why? For he did not know the reality and the presence of a risen Savior. Your faith is vain for our faith rests upon the fact that the tomb is empty. Our faith rests upon the fact that he is indeed the risen Savior.

[19 : 35] For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless and you are still in your sins. This is important.

For he died on the cross to pay the penalty of your sins. But he lives to intercede daily for the sins that come after. How many of us after accepting the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ can honestly say, from that moment on I have never sinned again.

We know that that's an absurdity. For when we come to him and we say, Lord Jesus, would you forgive me? Would you wash me as white as snow? Would you cleanse me of all of my defilement? Lord, I want to give my heart to you. We have this wrestling and this struggle and that which we want to do, we do not do and that which we do not want to do, we find ourselves doing and we beat our chest and say, this wretched man that I am.

Who will set me free from this? Praise be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ but if Christ is not raised from the dead, then friend, what praise do we have?

[20 : 42] For if he died once to atone for our sins, what hope do we have for the rest of our living? He is the one that we need and we need him not as only the atoning sacrifice, we need him as the living intercessor.

For we stumble and we fall daily but he daily stands at the right hand of the Father interceding for us and if he is not, then our faith is worthless and we are still in our sins and then he says in verse 18, then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. I love what this text says over and over again, just the text that we have and if we were to continue reading through this

15th chapter, Paul's continual reference to the death of the believer and how he uses the word sleep.

Those who are asleep, those who are asleep and those who are asleep. The reality is that right now many of us long for sleep. Some of us have been up very early but some of us just in the physical tolls of this life, sleep sounds wondrous.

The death of the believer is always referred to as sleep. The death of the unbeliever in scripture is referred to as death and dying. And the word sleep there, I've said it before, is the same word that we get our word hotel from.

[22 : 06] It is a temporary place of rest until we move to our eternal home. That is always the reference for the believer. That is not the reference for the unbeliever.

We see that all the way back in the book of Genesis where you have the lineage of the just and the lineage of the unjust. We read of the lineage of the unjust after Cain slew his brother Abel and we read the lineage of Cain.

This one lived and he died. This one lived and he died. This one lived and he died. This one lived and he died. And then we go and we read the lineage of the just. There was yet another child born. You remember to Adam and Eve and we read that lineage and it is this one lived and had children and prospered and lived this many years and this one lived this many years and had this many children and it is the focus on life. It is the focus on fullness.

It is the focus on continuing and ongoing in the promise. But for the unjust, it's just an end. It is an eternal death that will never stop. For that is the condemnation.

[23 : 06] But to those that in Christ, it is sleep. It is a temporary place of rest. Why? Because of the priority of this event. If Christ is not raised, then where is our hope?

Fourth and finally, though, look at the powerful working of this event. Look at the power that is working in this event. The great transition in verse 20, but now Christ has been raised from the dead.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead. And I love this. The first fruits of those who are asleep. The first fruits. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order. Christ the first fruits. And after that, those who are Christ at his coming. The festival of first fruits is one of those odd festivals that we find in the book of Leviticus.

We're reading the first few chapters of the book of Leviticus. And we come upon all these festivals that the Jewish people were to observe. And for a number of us, we've seen those. And we saw that in those festivals that each of those have an imagery of Christ.

[24 : 20] One in particular that Paul is referencing here is the festival of first fruits where when your garden came in or the produce of your land came in, the first harvest would be gathered together and you would bring that harvest and you would present it to the Lord.

You would say, Lord, here is the first fruit of my garden or the first fruit of my field. Lord, I'm going to give you priority and I'm going to give it to you first. But the reason for giving it first was because you were saying, Lord, not only are you worthy of receiving it, but I'm also trusting you that more is to follow.

If I give to you first, I'm going to trust you for the increase that comes later. Because the heart of the issue is if we will not give to God first, it is because we doubt that he will give us anything after.

We say, I'm going to hold on to that because what if nothing else comes in? What if nothing else is there? I have to hold on to it, but the first fruits is to say, Lord, here you can have it.

I'm trusting that more will come. And Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection. That is, he is the assurance that more is coming to follow. And the more to follow, friend, is those who are in Christ.

[25 : 34] He is the first fruits, but he's not the only fruit of the resurrection. The power of the resurrection of Christ is the reality that someday we would join him in the air. That someday those that are his will become part of the fruit of the resurrection.

That the tomb no longer has control over us. That the grave is not the end result. That you may lay me there someday, but there will be a day where this fruit will come out of the ground and the dead kernel will rise and put on the new flesh and the new robe.

And I would join him in the air. And I know the assurance of it because he being the first promises that more will follow. And those who are in Christ are the fruits that will follow him in the

resurrection.

Look at the power of this event. No longer do we dread death. No longer are we held captive to the grave. For that is just the doorway into the resurrection.

It is a gateway into eternal life in his presence. And we find it because of the event of greatest importance found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Would you pray with me?

[26 : 35] Friend, as we come before the Father, Lord, would you join your hearts together. And Lord, we love you and we praise you. Father, you are worthy of all of our adoration and all of our love.

Lord, as we consider the hope of the resurrection, Lord, may our lives be committed completely and totally to you. May you be glorified in the manner in which we follow you.

May you be honored in the things we do. And may the hope of the resurrection be an ever-present reality in our life on a daily basis. And we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.