



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st Corinthians 15

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I. Introduction to this Study

This weekend we celebrate Easter, that surprising event that no one saw coming – though Jesus was crucified and buried, three days later He was raised, and He Lives! As we will see in our study, this miraculous occurrence is the climax of God’s story.

II. Connecting with One Another

What is your favorite movie or play? Why?

Describe the plot’s climax. How is it significant to the story, developing the meaning of the movie or play?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read 1st Corinthians 15.1-2. There is a similar situation in Galatians 1.6-9. The church in Galatia has been “thrown into confusion” by others, however.

Why do you think the Corinthians needed to be “reminded of the gospel” Paul preached to them, if they had received it and taken their stand upon it?

- b. Verse 2 has an If, Then clause. Put in your own words what Paul is saying here:

- c. Read 1st Corinthians 15.3-8.

It may seem strange that Paul calls the resurrection “of first importance,” since he’s only getting to it in chapter 15, though New Testament scholars note that he has been building his case since the outset of this letter, and in fact, that this letter is from its outset resurrection-based. Time permitting, scan through 1st Corinthians, noting each of times you see an implication of resurrection. Also, the phrase “of first importance” could also be translated “at the first” – perhaps referring to his preaching the gospel to them in person.

How is the resurrection central to the gospel? Why can’t there be good news without it?

- d. Twice Paul uses the phrase “according to the Scriptures.” When he is writing this, of course, the New Testament – the Christian Scriptures – did not exist. What, then, is he referring to?

- e. The phrase “according to the Scriptures” is used alongside “died for our sins” and “raised on the third day.” That Jesus “died for our sins” brings to mind the Hebrew understanding of sacrifice and atonement. Perhaps two of the most striking passages that foreshadow Jesus’ sacrifice are Isaiah 52.13-53.12 and Psalm 22.

How does this Suffering Servant song and Psalm inform your understanding of the events of Good Friday?

- f. In his book [*The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited*](#), Scot McKnight writes,

Paul says Jesus died for our sins “according to the Scriptures,” and it is my instinct, and perhaps yours, to dash back to the atoning passage of the Servant in Isaiah 53.10-12. But Paul does not chase to that text in 1st Corinthians 15 because he appears instead to be pointing us to the whole of the Old Testaments witness to atonement. Here, then, we’d have to begin with the sacrificial system and Moses, and Yom Kippur and even Passover. Only then can we get into texts like Isaiah 52 and 53, though we want to include such a passage as particularly clear.

What do you think Scot McKnight is getting at? Do you agree or disagree that the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures points forward to Jesus?

- g. Paul also specifically notes, “he was buried,” as prophesied in Isaiah 53.9. David H. Stern writes, “Why is this an essential part of the Gospel? It shows that he was a human being who truly died and needed resurrection in order to live again, and that he was not some spiritual entity masquerading as human.”

Have you ever heard someone discussing Jesus as “a spiritual entity masquerading as a human”?

In Western culture and tradition that questions the reality of miracles, it’s common for people to question the Resurrection – perhaps at times, we’ve doubted it too. How does 1st Corinthians 15 reframe our belief in Easter?

- h. Paul writes, “he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” But what Scriptures!? See Ezekiel 37.1-14, Job 14.14, 19.25-27, Psalm 16.9-11, 49.15, 73.24, Daniel 12.2, Isaiah 26.19, 52.13, 53.10-12, 66.22-24, Hosea 6.2, and Jonah 1.17.

Do you think any of these passages were on Paul’s mind as he wrote to the Corinthians?

- i. The ancient culture in which the Corinthians lived did not doubt the reality of the afterlife, though bodily resurrection was another thing altogether. How are verses 5-8 evidence for Easter? What is the significance of Paul writing that more than 500 people saw the Risen Christ?
- j. Note also that Jesus appeared to his brother James and to Paul himself, either of whom followed Jesus’ before His crucifixion (see Mark 3.21-35, John 7.1-5, Acts 9.1-19, 1st Corinthians 15.9-11). How is this more evidence for Easter?
- k. Read 1st Corinthians 15.12-19. What do you think Paul means when he writes in verse 17, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins”?

Isn't Jesus' sacrifice on Good Friday what forgives us of our sins? Why – or why not? How is this related to Paul's earlier discussion of Jesus fulfilling the story of the Scriptures?

- l. Read 1st Corinthians 15.20-28. How do these verses engage and comment upon the first chapters of Genesis?

What do you think Paul means by the word "first fruits" of the harvest? What does that have to do with the promise of resurrection for Christians?

How does the idea of first fruit relate to other passages in the Christian Scriptures (see, for instance, Romans 7.4, Galatians 5.19-26, Ephesians 5.8-14, Philippians 1.9-11, Colossians 1.3-14, Hebrews 13.11-16, James 3.13-18)

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Have you "received and taken your stand" upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, centered upon His resurrection?
- b. How do you confess your sins?
- c. Have you ever experienced your own "evidence for Easter," somehow sensing the Risen Christ's spiritual presence?
- d. How has your life shown fruit of Jesus' – and in one sense, your own – resurrection?

V. Pray

- a. Lift up our new series beginning next week, called "The Art of Battling Giants," asking God to help us recognize and be equipped to battle the giants we face,
- b. Pray for those who will visit us this Easter – and for those that will welcome them – that they would feel at home, and would be drawn to join us in worship again,
- c. Ask the Holy Spirit to instill in us boldness to live a "fruitful" faith!