

This morning, I am continuing in my sermon series called The Gospel Changes Everything, based on the New Testament book 1 Corinthians, Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, a church he started around the year 50 AD. He has since left the church in the hands of other leaders so that he might start other churches, and he writes this letter around the year 54-55 AD in response to what he is hearing about some of the issues in the Corinthian church. So far he's addressed the **pride and arrogance in the church that has led to division and rivalry, the sexual issues that are rampant in the church and culture, how they should interact with the idols and false gods in the city, some of the problems happening in their worship gatherings, and their misunderstanding of spiritual gifts**. In chapter 15, he turns to instructing them about the resurrection. It seems that some believers in Corinth who are denying that there is such a thing as life after death, and others that are having a hard time understanding how an earthly body can live in a heavenly dwelling. Paul takes this opportunity to remind them of the gospel, the main Christian message, and to explain the resurrection to them.

Now, seeing as how I just preached an Easter sermon two weeks ago which outlined evidence for the resurrection, I'm not going to repeat that aspect of discussing the resurrection. If you have questions about whether or not the resurrection is a historical event, you can listen to that sermon on our website or watch it on our Facebook page. This morning, I want to discuss Paul's explanation of the gospel, briefly outline Paul's teaching concerning the resurrection, and then focus on his concluding statement in 1 Corinthians 15:58 – "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, for you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Paul concludes this discussion of the resurrection by drawing out a very important conclusion – if the resurrection is true, and if those who believe in Jesus will be raised from the dead to eternal life, that should completely change the way in which you live your life, in the same way that changing the destination that you are going to would completely changes the journey you take. I pray that you would take this to heart this morning, for if you are willing to listen and obey, it will transform your life.

Let's read chapter 15, one section at a time. I will offer commentary on each section before focusing on his final concluding statement in v. 58:

*1 Corinthians 15:1-58 - 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. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you **hold firmly** to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that*

he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.⁶ 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.⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

This section is the clearest definition of the gospel in the Bible, and the first creed, passed down from the apostles to Paul. Eight brief but essential things we learn about the gospel.

1) It is news – good news – not good advice.

Gospel is the Greek word “euangelion,” where we get the word evangelism or evangelical. It translates to English as good news. It is news about what Jesus has done for us. It is not good advice about what you must do in order to be saved, reach heaven, etc. Yes, we must receive and take our stand on it – that’s our response to the gospel. But nothing we do or can do is the basis for our acceptance. The good news, according to Paul in v. 3 is that Christ died for our sins, in our place, as our substitute, taking the penalty we deserved.

2) We are sinners in need of salvation

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

First of all, we are sinners in need of salvation. That is our fundamental problem. Not that we are bad people who need to try harder to be good. Not that we are ignorant people who need to be enlightened. But that we are sinners in need of a Savior. We have broken God’s laws and left the relationship. We have put ourselves in the place of God, acting as if we are our own creator and master.

3) Jesus died for our sins

³ *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*

Jesus came to die for us, as our substitute. On behalf of, in the place of. He took our place. He paid the debt we owe. Although we put ourselves in the place of God, God put himself in our place to save us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

4) He was buried, and was raised again, and many of the eyewitnesses are still alive.

⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ 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. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Paul lists the appearances of Jesus to let them know that many of the witnesses are still alive, so that it can be verified.

5) It was foretold in the OT

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

He tells them that it is according to the Scriptures; it is taught in the OT. Think of Jesus on the road to Emmaus telling the disciples all that was in the OT concerning him.

6) This gospel saves those who trust in it

² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.

He tells them that this gospel saves them – from sin and death and eternal separation from God – if they hold firmly to it.

7) It is a gift of God's grace

¹⁰ *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.*

And he tells them that this salvation is a gift of God's grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.*

8) It is life-changing

⁹ *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. ¹⁰ 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.*

And he tells them that it is life-changing, transformative. **If there has been no transformation, you need to question whether you have truly given your life to Him.**

Do you believe this gospel? Have you trusted in Christ's death for you? If not, then put your faith in Him today. Hold firmly to the gospel – trust in it like a life preserver that can save you. Devote yourself to him.

Paul moves on to address those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

¹² *But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God*

the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. ²⁹ Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? ³⁰ And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? ³¹ I die every day-- I mean that, brothers-- just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. ³² If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." ³³ Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character." ³⁴ Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God-- I say this to your shame.

This is central to our faith. If there is no resurrection, then:

Christ has not been raised
 Our preaching and our faith is useless
 We are liars, false witnesses about God
 We will not be raised
 We will die in our sins
 We are to be pitied more than anyone
 Why baptize? Why preach? Why endure needless suffering?

Not baptized in place of the dead. Dead as a metaphor for the condition of those who are being baptized. They are in effect dead bodies when they are baptized. If the completely dead are not raised, then why are they baptized for themselves as corpses?

Do you see how taking away the resurrection and life after death has major implications on how you live your life today?

But because of the resurrection, we who trust in Jesus will be raised to eternal life, and death will be destroyed. Jesus is the firstfruits of the harvest. Just as the first crops are a sign of the greater harvest to come, Jesus' resurrection is a sign of the greater resurrection to come when we are all raised to life.

And death will be destroyed.

Stop listening to false teaching, and stop sinning.

He continues to address the question of how a physical body can inhabit a spiritual, heavenly space:

³⁵ *But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"* ³⁶ *How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.* ³⁷ *When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.* ³⁸ *But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.* ³⁹ *All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.* ⁴⁰ *There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.* ⁴¹ *The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.* ⁴² *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;* ⁴³ *it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;* ⁴⁴ *it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.* ⁴⁵ *So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.* ⁴⁶ *The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.* ⁴⁷ *The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.* ⁴⁸ *As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.* ⁴⁹ *And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.* ⁵⁰ *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* ⁵¹ *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--* ⁵² *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.* ⁵³ *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.* ⁵⁴ *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

In this section, he addresses those who could not understand how an earthly body could be fit for a heavenly, spiritual realm. Paul uses metaphors from farming and the celestial bodies to show that our bodies will be changed. Just as the seed is different than the plant it becomes after it is buried, we will be changed.

Look at Jesus – eating fish, walking through walls. Unrecognizable on the road to Emmaus. We will be changed. We will not inhabit the same bodies. We will be in heaven, and then resurrected on the renewed heaven and earth to live with God forever. We will not grow old, decay, or die.

Let's read the final section:

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

He ends with a bold, yet completely logical, conclusion: If the gospel is true, and the God of the universe loves you so much that He saved you from eternal death by dying a horrendous death in your place, and if the resurrection is true, that death is not the end, and if the life of the believer ends not with nothingness but with eternal joy in the presence of God, then how should that change the way we live? We should give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because we owe our lives to Him, because we know that He loves us and wants good for us, and because it is never in vain. In other words, it all matters. It is all significant.

The flip side is also true: if there is no resurrection, no life after death, then life is essentially meaningless. If you are just here as an accident, a product of a godless evolution, and if there is no life after death, but you simply cease to exist, and if in the end the sun will burn up and the planet will be destroyed, then life is objectively meaningless. You have no purpose, in that no one put you here, and your life has no significance, in that your life will ultimately make no difference.

Apart from the resurrection, your life is in vain!

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3 - The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: ² "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." ³ What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

Bertrand Russell: "The whole temple of man's achievements must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins."

Maybe you object. Maybe you feel like your life has meaning, even though you don't believe in God. Here's the thing: you can certainly create your own subjective meaning. You can pretend that there is some meaning to your life. But that does not change the fact that there is no actual, objective meaning. You are a cosmic accident, here without purpose or significance. And when you die, in 100 years even your family will have forgotten you. What is the best you can hope for? Your name on a building? To invent something that outlasts you? A YouTube video that people are watching, probably on the back of their eyelids, in 100 years?

This is why, when Paul considers what it would mean if there was no resurrection, he says in v. 32: *If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."* In other words, maximize your pleasure in this life if death is the end.

If you do not believe in the resurrection, then here is my advice: shut your brain off. Don't think too hard about the meaninglessness of it all. Just eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you will die and cease to exist, along with everyone else that you love and everything you have worked for. If there is no life after death, then maximize your pleasure here on earth, grab all you can before you expire and cease to exist.

But what if there is life after death? What if the resurrection is true? What if your destiny is not that you will cease to exist, but that you will live forever on this renewed heaven and earth with God?

⁵⁸ *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Maximize your eternal pleasure

If you can expect about 80 years on earth and then a never-ending life after death, then the most sensible thing you can do is to maximize your pleasure for all eternity. And your pleasure will be highest if you have found your joy in Christ instead of the things of this world. Store up treasure in heaven by giving yourself fully to the work of the Lord.

CT Studd – One life

Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;

Bringing conviction to my heart,
 And from my mind would not depart;
 Only one life, twill soon be past,
 Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
 Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
 Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,
 And stand before His Judgement seat;
 Only one life,'twill soon be past,
 Only what's done for Christ will last.

Everything that is done for Christ will matter eternally. As Jesus put it:

Matthew 10:42 - *And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."*

Do not waste your life on things that in the end are insignificant. Walk by faith, believing that everything you do for the Lord matters eternally.

What is the work of the Lord?

John 6:29 - *Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*

Believe and follow Jesus. Get to know what He calls you to. Walk by the Spirit. In particular:

Matthew 28:19-20 - *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Is he calling you to missions? Or to make disciples at home? To live to love others and lead them to Jesus and disciple them.

1 Corinthians 10:31 - *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

But it's also honoring the Lord at your work by doing work that benefits others and that honors God.

What does it mean to give yourself fully?

Think of how we are living in these days. All that we are willing to **sacrifice** in order to save some from death. Willing to wear a mask, work from home, give up income, not see friends, not gather together.

What would we sacrifice to save others from eternal death? Money? Time? No sacrifice is too great. Paul was willing to face death every day because he knew death is not the end.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Do not fear death

Philippians 1:20-26 - I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Listen to Paul. To live is Christ and to die is gain. Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, no matter the cost, because eternal life will be so much better than even the best earthly life.

You don't have to start by giving yourself fully. Give a minute to the Lord. Give five minutes. Give an hour. Give a morning. Give a day. But continually try to give yourself fully to the Lord.