

“Back to Basics: The Resurrection of Jesus”

31 October 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: Once Again

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Sermon:

At a recent NPHET briefing, in response to the rising Covid infections, the Chief Medical Officer told us to go back to basics, by that he meant, make sure you have been vaccinated, keep your distance, don't forget to wash your hands and wear your masks. Why is that advice important, well as of this weekend nearly 5 million people have died from Coronavirus worldwide and 5436 people have died in Ireland? Going back to basics of good practice regarding virus protection is our best way of protecting ourselves from the Covid virus and the consequences of a severe illness. To deny its seriousness, to treat it too lightly and to pretend it doesn't exist would be a mistake. Hence by and large there has been good compliance with the NEPHET advice. A strong fear of death has prompted our scramble for ways to avoid getting the infection and possible death. Fear of death is prevalent.

When the Apostle Paul says in v2 that *“By this gospel you are saved.”* He means saved from death, but not physical death, but spiritual death and everlasting punishment. That is why JB Philips (the bible translator) describes this as the most important chapter in the bible, and why Paul wants to take us back to basics, to remind the Corinthian Church (and us) of the gospel, (v1) remind them of its content (v3-4) and that it can save us from our sins. (v1-2). Sadly, Halloween has trivialised death and the afterlife. The bible reminds us that death is not a joke, or lets pretend, it is real, it is a matter of eternal life or eternal death and punishment and the gospel is the only solution available for death.

I. The Gospel's central importance (v1-3a)

I am told that 90% of adults do not try to remember stuff, probably because we have Google search engines to recall all the information, we need in fractions of a second. Even in a culture that would have learned much more by heart Paul recognises the need for the church in Corinth to be reminded of the gospel he preached to them. (v1) They received the gospel, they heard it, believed it and have taken a stand on it. That means they were convinced of its truth, its relevance and they accepted it and by it they were saved. *“By this gospel you are saved”* (v2) the Greek word used is present tense, the ESV picks this up *“By this (gospel) you are being saved.”* Salvation is an active state, a reality that is based on a past event (Jesus' death and resurrection) but constantly applied in the present and cannot or should not be forgotten. As a colleague reminded us when he preached this at our Easter services, it is vital that the Corinthian Church did not forget, nor be vague, or drift from what they first received from Paul. (v2) *“By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word of God. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”*

This is both reassuring and worrying. If you are sincerely holding firmly to the gospel, the word of God which you heard in the past, believing its truth then you are assured of salvation

but if you are not doing so then you cannot have assurance. This means that you continue to believe and that you live it out in obedience to the saviour Jesus Christ. Earlier in the letter Paul has addressed the Church over their behaviour (s) some very serious and others less troubling but all sinful and he said this, *“Do you not know that the wicked, will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.”* (6:9) Sin of all types matters. It is *“the perseverance of the saints”* that is a sign of the true believer. Paul makes this clear in many of his letters and the one I remember is Colossians Ch 2:6 *“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”* Reminding us of the gospel means continuing to hold to it in understanding and action.

Paul also reminds them of his solidarity with them (v3a) because he too received the gospel, and he did so with the clear call from God to pass it on. No doubt he is recalling that day when he travelled from Jerusalem to Damascus where he met Jesus (1st Cor 9:1) and when he was taught the fundamentals of the faith by Ananias. He received the truth of the gospel, believed it and stood firmly on that truth and he passed it on as he was commended to do by his Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. (Acts 9:15 *“Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their Kings and before the people of Israel.”*)

So, what can we do to remind ourselves of the gospel?

- Recall your initial encounter with Jesus (share it with others)
- Read the scriptures daily, to keep reminding yourself of the gospel
- Put sin to death through the gospel
- Attend church weekly as you collectively encourage each other in the gospel
- Regularly take communion
- Share the gospel with others

Paul describes this as of first importance.

II. The Gospel's content (v3b-4)

I am conscious that some of you are possibly asking what is the gospel? What is this thing of such importance that we must never forget? Well, we have its outline in v3-4, and that may be in the form of an early Christian creed, that Ananias may have used with Paul)

1. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures
 - 1b. Christ was buried
2. Christ was raised on the third day according to the scriptures
 - 2b. Christ appeared to Peter (Cephas) and then to the twelve

What are we saved from? The answer is our sins or the consequence of our sins. The reason we die is because we have disobeyed the God who has made us, and the punishment for such terrible disobedience is death. As Paul succinctly says in his letter to the church in Rome, *“the wages of sin is death”*. (Romans 6:23) Christ Jesus, the Messiah died, he is the one who died for our sins. His death has a purpose, Jesus was punished in our place for our sins as our substitute.

Jesus died, he suffered the consequence of our sin (he himself was sinless) and to prove he died he was placed in a tomb, he was buried, and he remained there for three days. He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

The resurrection was by the power of God, he was raised, not by himself. Paul has told us this already in 6:14 *"By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also."* There is no power on earth that can do what God the father did. Acts 4:12 *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."*

'According to the scriptures' tells us that the death and resurrection of Jesus was planned, God always had this in mind. You can verify this plan in the scriptures. You may be asking which scriptures tell of:

his death: *Gen 3:15; Isaiah 53*

the three days: *Hosea 6:2; Jonah 1:17; 2nd Kings 20:5; Ex 19:10-11; Leviticus 23:10,11,15*

the resurrection: *Psalm 16:10; 110:1; Isaiah 53:11-12*

When someone reads the bible (the scriptures), they can see Jesus through the words and truth there when the Holy Spirit reveals him to them. That is why Paul came to Corinth and why he preached about the cross of Jesus (Ch 2), this is God's means of salvation, the word of salvation and the content of the gospel is Jesus' death and resurrection.

Let me illustrate that with a testimony of someone in church today. They told me that they were first introduced to Jesus by a friend who was involved in a charismatic church and who spoke a lot about supernatural gifts, but they didn't understand. So, they started to read the bible beginning at Genesis. It was only when reaching Isaiah Ch 53 that in their words "I saw Jesus" and they believed that his death on the cross was for their sin, that he rose from the dead for them and now lives forever with them by the Holy Spirit. God has made that life available to all who believe and hold firmly to that word.

III. Eyewitnesses of the resurrection (v5-9)

I will not tell you when I went to university, but it was then I read a lot about evidence for the resurrection. I had believed since I was 8 years old but doing the reading and understanding the breath of the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus was reassuring. The resurrection is a big deal! A well-known book at that time was written by a lawyer called Frank Morrison who started out with the premise that the resurrection was a myth, and he was going to prove it as a lawyer. His book was called, *"Who moved the stone?"* and his conclusion was that Jesus did rise from the dead, and he became a Christian.

Evidence for the resurrection falls into two categories, the empty tomb and eyewitnesses who testify they saw Jesus. Paul here majors on the eyewitnesses with a list. Peter (Cephas) who was known to the church in Corinth (1:12; 9:5), the twelve, the twelve disciples minus Judas, the more than 500 at the same time, (v6) is new information, and has been linked to the appearance to the church in Galilee (but it may not be known to us in the gospels) and some of whom are alive is an invitation to check if needs be, James the Lord's brother who became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and was a sceptical unbeliever as recorded in John 7:5 *"for even his own brothers did not believe in him."* Was it the fact of Jesus'

appearance after his death that convinced him? Then all the apostles probably refers to the time of Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 1:14).

Lastly, he speaks of himself with the unusual phrase as to one “abnormally” born. The word in Greek, “ectroma” is translated by the ESV as “untimely” and normally is used of a miscarriage or stillbirth. The word also has an abusive, derogatory idea behind it. Some think Paul may be referring to his physical birth, (2nd Corinthians 10:10) some that he is referring to his spiritual rebirth. The latter is more likely in view of v10. He was persecuting the church and the way and speed with which his salvation occurred, surprised him, even to this day. Paul is shocked that someone so implacably opposed to the gospel should be considered worthy of being saved.

The evidence for the historical death of Jesus, and resurrection of Jesus was convincing then and remains so today. There is no excuse for not believing. The inclusion of James and Paul on the list of believers should give us hope that even the most sceptical, hardened opponent of Jesus and Christianity can come to faith when they hear the gospel preached, Jesus died for our sins, and Jesus rose from the dead according to the scriptures.

IV. The effect of the gospel (v.9-11)

Paul is amazed at the grace of God towards him, in salvation, and particularly in the call to be an apostle, he believed he should have been disqualified, but he attributes his salvation and calling to the grace of God. He was dead in his sins, he became alive to Jesus; he was destined for Hell, he is now heaven bound; he hated the church, he became one of its foundational leaders. He was an angry, self-righteous religious fanatic and he became a founding pastor of churches and a spiritual father to many. Saul had become Paul! He had changed, that process was planned by grace, began with grace, accomplished by grace, and it continues by grace.

Paul suffered more than anyone else, he planted more churches than anyone else, he wrote more letters, he worked harder but by God's grace. He speaks of this many times and succinctly in Colossians Ch 1:28-29 *“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”*

The grace of God saved him, and it empowered him. There was an effect, the presence of Jesus with him effecting change and empowering him to live the life he has been called to. This is what I believe and preach says Paul, it is what the other apostles believe and preach, (*I or they*) and it is what you have heard and believe. The gospel saves us, changes us, unites us and sustains us all by the sheer grace of God in Jesus Christ who died and rose according to the scriptures.

I remind you of the gospel; it is your only hope of salvation, let us take our stand on it and persevere in it by the grace of God.

Praise: For God So Loved The World

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: And Can It Be?

Discussion Questions:

Are you convinced of the truth of the resurrection? If so, what aspect of Paul's approach do you find helpful? How might this passage shape the way you communicate the gospel?

Take time to remember your story of salvation - past, present and future hope. How do you see these 'gospel basics' at work in your life? Pray for an opportunity to share about how the gospel is at work in your life with someone this week.

What tries to loosen your hold on the hope of the gospel today? What practical means of grace (spiritual discipline) might you need to practice more frequently to help you hold to the gospel? What would that change look like in your life this week?