



# 1 Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 15A

## Chapter 15:1-4

P.O. Box 702107  
San Antonio, Texas, 78270  
210.319.5055

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- There are probably as many ways to conduct a church service as there are churches

**An employee of a company was working at his desk one morning when the boss stopped by to ask him a question. Out of the blue the boss asked, “Do you believe in resurrection?”**

**The question stunned the young man. His boss had never shown any interest in his Christian faith in the past, so it was quite unexpected to hear him asking about religious matters, especially in the workplace. Finally, he hoped he would have an opportunity to witness to his faith. The young man answered enthusiastically, “Why yes, I do believe in resurrection.”**

**The boss got a smile on his face and said, “Oh wonderful, then that explains everything.”**

**Now the young man was puzzled. He asks his boss, “What do you mean it explains everything?”**

**His boss answered, “Well, when you were away from the office last Friday to attend your grandmother’s funeral, she stopped by the office to see you.”**

- It’s not an exaggeration to say that the entire Christian faith – and all the Bible teaches concerning Christ – depends on the resurrection
  - If the resurrection of Jesus is not true...if it never really happened, then the entire Christian faith is meaningless and a fraud
    - It would mean Jesus is still in the grave like every man
    - It would mean that His claims to being God and to having the power to overcome death were lies
    - It would mean that we have no reason to trust in Him for our own salvation from death
  - But if the resurrection is true...if it happened as the New Testament authors testify, then it changes everything
    - It means that Jesus’ claims to being the Truth and the Life are trustworthy
    - It means that He and He alone has the power to conquer death
    - It means we can place our trust in Him to raise us from the dead, and we will not be disappointed
- We’ve reached the final topic Paul addresses in this letter to Corinth
  - Each topic Paul’s raised so far has been the result of something he heard was going wrong in the church
    - We’ve heard him preaching on idols, marriage, spiritual gifts and the Lord’s Supper
    - With each topic, Paul begins with teaching and eventually ends in correction
    - Once again, this will be Paul’s approach to his final topic of resurrection
  - So Paul begins with a teaching on the resurrection of Jesus Christ

**1Cor. 15:1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,**

**1Cor. 15:2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**

- Paul begins his teaching in a curious manner
  - He says I make known to you the gospel which I preached to you, which you received
    - Paul calls his audience brethren, which is a term reserved for fellow believers
    - So Paul is implying they have heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message that brings salvation and makes one a Christian
    - So we might ask why does Paul feel the need to preach the gospel once again to believers in Corinth?
  - The answer is because Christians need to be reminded of the gospel daily
    - It's one reason why we honor the day of Jesus' resurrection every year at Easter
    - It's why pastors repeat the Gospel from the pulpit on many Sundays
    - It's not merely because we hope to persuade a new heart to believe
    - It's also because even those who have believed need a constant reminder of what the gospel is and what it teaches
- If you pay attention to religious news articles on website or in blogs, then very quickly you'll realize many people have no idea what the gospel is
  - In fact, many Christians don't know what the words means
    - If you want to entertain yourself sometime, conduct a random "man on the street" experiment
    - Ask people, what is the gospel?
      - You'll be surprised by the answers
  - I've encountered Christians who think the word "gospel" simply means the New Testament
    - Others think it's a synonym for Jesus Himself
    - Some think the gospel means treating other people nicely
    - Some say it's a call to equality and opportunity
    - Some teach the gospel is about achieving happiness or wealth
    - Some think it's about social equality
    - I've read religious articles written by so-called Christians who treat the term "gospel" as if the word has no definition at all
      - They view the gospel as a mysterious, ambiguous concept without specific form
      - Something we acknowledge yet can't relate to
  - All this confusion is exactly why we return to the Bible repeatedly to find and preach the gospel on a regular basis, both to others and to ourselves
    - Otherwise, even a believer may become confused about how they are saved

- We may lose all understanding of what it means to be a Christian
  - Then we'll have no hope to understand the theology or our faith, much less to avoid the deceptions and schemes of the enemy
- So in effect, Paul is saying to the church I need to reteach you the gospel that you received from me before, the one you received in faith, the one in which you stand
  - When Paul says stand he means to withstand the judgment of God
    - All men are going to stand for judgment by a holy and righteous judge
    - Either we enter that moment prepared and ready to stand
    - Or we enter with no prospect to survive the wrath of God
  - That's why in v.2 Paul says the message he delivered is the one that saves them... saves them from the penalty of sin
    - The world is filled with men preaching false gospels, false messages of salvation
    - Religions that claim you can earn your way out of hell or that there is no eternal punishment in the first place
    - There are even distorted versions of Christianity that have changed the gospel to suit their deceived hearts
    - But only one gospel has the power to save men on the day of their judgment
  - Notice at the end of v.2 Paul adds a provocative statement
    - He says you are saved if you are holding fast to the message I have preached to you, unless you believed in vain
    - Now we see clearly why Paul feels the need to repeat the Gospel to this church
    - Chloe's report to Paul must have included a disturbing case of some in the church professing belief in a different gospel
      - Rather than holding to the truth Paul delivered, these people were now claiming to be saved by a different message
      - A message the enemy had introduced into the church through false teachers
  - So naturally, Paul is concerned that these people were never believers in the first place
    - They heard Paul deliver the true gospel and they professed an acceptance
    - But when a more appealing alternative showed up, these people ran after the new message with equal gusto
    - By not holding fast to the truth, they gave evidence that they had never accepted it in the first place
    - They had "believed in vain" which means to have never believed at all
      - The word "vain" in Greek means to fail or to be empty
      - There had been a false or empty acceptance
- This is precisely the danger with any group of Christians setting the gospel aside assuming that once is enough
  - The gospel is never a message that gets old

- It never loses its importance or relevance
- Repeating the true gospel is just as important for the person who has been saved as it is for the one who has believed in vain
- We all need to be rock solid on the message that brings God's forgiveness
- Salvation isn't like a game of horseshoes
  - You don't get points for getting close to the gospel
  - You don't get into heaven because you went to church
  - Or because you were married to a Christian or because your parents were Christians
  - You don't get a pass because you were mostly a good person
  - There is too much at stake for anyone, whether Christian or not, to misunderstand the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- So do you want to know what the true Gospel is? Do you want to be sure you've believed in the right thing? I hope so, and so does Paul
  - Because now he presents the church the one and only message that saves men from Hell and assures us entrance into Heaven

**1Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,**  
**1Cor. 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**

- There it is...the true gospel
  - This isn't the only place you can find it in the Bible
    - In fact, it's written in one form or another on virtually every page of the Bible
    - But in these two verses, Paul succinctly captures the one and only message that saves our souls
  - In v.3 Paul says this is the message he delivered in the past as well
    - And this is the message of first importance
    - There is no other topic or discussion that matters unless and until the gospel is settled in a person's heart
    - If someone wants to entertain themselves with religious conversation, there are an infinite number of things we can talk about
      - We can talk about myths, controversies, denominational differences, traditions and mysteries all day long
  - But the gospel is the topic of first importance Paul says
    - He doesn't say highest importance
    - He says first importance
    - What he means is that we have nothing else to talk about until we agree on the Gospel

- Unbelievers with an interest in religion love to engage a Christian on many useless topics...except on the gospel itself
- I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with unbelievers unwilling to discuss the Gospel
  - They want to talk about Evolution
  - Or the accuracy of the Bible
  - Or the errors of Catholic popes or whatever church scandal is in the news
  - But ask them to consider the truth of Jesus' claims, and the conversation ends
- We need to take note of Paul's example here
  - As soon as he becomes aware that some may not have understood the Gospel, he returns to the message of first importance
  - And so should we
  - Preach the Gospel and nothing more until it's received
  - As Paul said earlier in this letter, when he first entered Corinth he was determined to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified
  - So should we
- And then Paul proceeds to explain the fundamental elements of the gospel message
  - Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures
    - The gospel story begins with our sin
    - Men have sin, lots of it
    - Years ago when I was a new believer, I had a friend who was an unbeliever
    - In those early days of walking with Christ, I wanted to share my faith with this friend
    - One day I began to testify to him that belief in Jesus Christ was the only way to avoid the penalty for our sin
    - And then he said something I didn't expect
    - He said he didn't believe in sin
  - His comment stopped me in my tracks
    - If he didn't understand his own sin before God, then there was nowhere for our conversation to go forward
    - The gospel message is fundamentally a message of how God forgives us for our sin
    - But if we don't appreciate our sin, then we have no reason to consider a message that promises to save us from the penalty of sin
- The gospel begins with the sobering reminder that sin brings judgment

**Rom. 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;**

**Rom. 3:10 as it is written,**

**“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;**

**Rom. 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;**

**Rom. 3:12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”**

**Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

- Why do we have so many false gospels, so many ways to define the word, so many alternatives being preached in pulpits?
  - I think it's because the last thing a hard, unbelieving heart wants to hear about is sin
  - The true gospel begins with an accusation
  - We are in trouble with God
  - The choices we've made, the lifestyle we've lived, the words we've spoken, even the thoughts that run through our head
  - They offend a holy God
  - They are wrong, they are sin, and they put us in God's debt
  - A debt that only death can pay
  - That's not a message the unbelieving heart wants to hear, but even the believer's heart rebels at the thought if we aren't reminded of it continually
    - Many a Christian has become self-righteous or even self-indulgent and licentious because we forget why Christ died
    - Our sin is the problem Christ came to solve
    - He didn't die to teach us a lesson or show us a way
    - He came to solve the problem of our sin
  - And what He did is the only thing that could be done
    - There was no alternative
    - Don't let someone fool you that there are many ways to heaven
    - There aren't "ways" to heaven
    - There is only Christ's death
- Then Paul says, this death was the one scripture said would happen
  - Many men have died, but only one death was capable of solving the problem of our sin
    - It was the death that came in accordance with God's promises found in His word
    - It's the only death the Father will accept as payment for our sin, as He foretold through the prophets
  - Like Isaiah who said

**Is. 53:1** Who has believed our message?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

**Is. 53:2** For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,  
And like a root out of parched ground;  
He has no stately form or majesty  
That we should look upon Him,  
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

**Is. 53:3** He was despised and forsaken of men,  
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
And like one from whom men hide their face  
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

**Is. 53:4** Surely our griefs He Himself bore,  
And our sorrows He carried;  
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

**Is. 53:5** But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,  
And by His scourging we are healed.

**Is. 53:6** All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him.

- There was a death of a certain Man that the scriptures said would come for our sake
  - This Man would have a common, unremarkable appearance
  - And He would be despised by men and forsaken
  - Isaiah says this Man would be One chosen by God to bear our griefs and sorrows
    - He was assigned by God to be afflicted in our place
    - Pierced through for our transgressions, referring to the crucifixion, and crushed for our sins
    - By His affliction we are healed, forgiven of our sins and reconciled with God
  - You see not just anyone can address our sin before God
    - No self-appointed savior can save us from the wrath of God
    - Not Buddha, not Muhammed, not Confucius, not the Dalai Lama, not David Koresh, not Joseph Smith, not Charles Russell
    - Nor any other crackpot, conman, false prophet or cult leader with a messiah complex
    - Whether by their life or by their death, none of these can solve the problem of our sin, because God has not appointed them to serve that purpose
  - God alone determines the propitiation, the remedy for our sin
    - And Paul says the Father determined that His Only Son Jesus would be the One to address the problem of our sin



- He would be assigned to bear the penalty for our sin
  - He died for our sins, so that we might escape that penalty
- Our sin is the beginning of the Gospel message, but it doesn't end there
  - If the Gospel message begins with our sin, it moves to the penalty of sin
    - Paul says that Jesus was buried and then raised three days later
    - There's certainly nothing remarkable about a dead man being buried
    - That's what happens to every person who dies
    - The body returns to dust, one way or another
  - But Paul repeats this part of the story because it's essential to our understanding of what sin requires
    - Paul says in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death
    - Paul means that because we sin, we have earned the penalty that sin requires, which is a spiritual death
    - Yet Christ took that wage on our behalf, standing in our place, lying in our grave
    - So the true Gospel recognizes that Jesus died a true death
  - In the early church, false teachers began to report that Jesus had not actually died
    - He had swooned on the cross, experiencing punishment for our sake but not actually dying
    - For some held that it wasn't right that God could die like a man
    - So they concocted a story that Jesus faked death and then escaped from the tomb
  - But this is not the Gospel
    - The Gospel says that Jesus truly died, for that is what's required because of our sin
    - If Jesus never died then the payment for our sin has not been paid
    - What's more, if Jesus never died, then the next part of the Gospel message is rendered false as well
- This brings us to the final element of the true gospel: Paul says Jesus rose from the dead
  - In a word, He resurrected
    - Jesus' dead body became living again, stood up and walked out of the grave
    - Just as surely as He was dead, He also came to life again
  - The true gospel is the good news that our death doesn't have to be the end of us
    - We can live again just as Jesus did
    - The promise of the gospel is that everyone who places their trust for salvation in Christ can be assured they will not be disappointed
    - For when it comes to choosing a savior who promises to rescue you from death, shouldn't we choose the One Who rescued Himself from death?

- If a person cannot even raise himself from his own death, then certainly there is no reason to place your own life in his hands?
  - Buddha never returned to life
  - Muhammed is still in his tomb
  - Not Confucius, nor the Dalai Lama, nor David Koresh, nor Joseph Smith, nor Charles Russell nor any other man has ever returned from the grave
- Except Jesus Christ
  - When He rose from the dead, He proved beyond any doubt that He has the power of life over death
  - He validated all that He claimed concerning Himself
  - Talk is cheap...anyone can make claims about their power and authority while they walk the earth
  - But before you accept their claims, first let them die and come back to life
  - The One Who can bring himself back to life has proven Himself to be God, the one with power over life
- The true Gospel, the true good news is the story of the Son of God dying and resurrecting for our sake
  - The gospel Christ delivered to Paul is the same gospel Paul taught in his letters
    - It's the same message Paul delivered in Corinth
    - And it's the message of first importance that I preach to you this Easter morning
  - Our sin made necessary a death
    - But the Father, in His mercy and love for us, appointed His only Son to stand in our place to satisfy the wrath of God
    - And on a cross, Jesus died in our place
    - His dead body was buried in a tomb for three days
    - But after three days and three nights in the grave, Jesus' dead body returned to life, resurrected never to die again
  - This is the one and only gospel, the good news that saves
    - Paul says in Romans 10

**Rom. 10:9** that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

**Rom. 10:10** for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

- ◦ Accept the truth of this testimony, believe it and rely upon it for your salvation from the judgment that is to come, and you will be saved
  - Jesus' resurrection means He has the power to give life to your dead body
  - And His word says if you trust in Him, you will not be disappointed

- This is the gospel