

* These notes are provided for personal devotional and study purposes only. They may not be published, distributed, or disseminated to others without the permission of the author.

Resurrection Certainty

1 Corinthians 15.1-8

Series: Holy Week 2023

The Village Church

April 9, 2023

- I. Text – 1 Corinthians 15.1-8
 - A. **1 Corinthians 15:1-2** (NKJV) —
 - 1. 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,
 - 2. 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—
 - 3. unless you believed in vain.
 - B. This text raises the possibility that you are all wasting your time
 - 1. Because it implies that it may be possible to believe in vain
 - C. Vanity is an interesting word
 - 1. There are two basic meanings in the English language
 - a. Neither one is positive
 - 2. Excessive pride, especially in one's personal appearance
 - a. That's why traditionally a dressing table in one's boudoir is called a vanity
 - b. Don't misunderstand me – I very much appreciate beauty, and understand the desire to make oneself as presentable as possible to the public
 - c. There are, of course, reasonable limits regarding the amount of time, effort and money one should put into such enterprises in comparison with other things which ought to occupy our personal resources
 - d. I'm sure you all balance all of that perfectly!
 - e. But I'm all for beauty
 - f. It's the excessive preoccupation to the process that would evoke the designation of vanity in this sense of the word
 - g. And then, of course, some of us have less to work with than others
 - h. Which brings to mind the other meaning of the word "vanity"
 - 3. The other sense of the word "vanity" is meaningless, or worthless, or useless, or foolish, or futile
 - a. For me, the beautification process very quickly becomes futile
 - b. This is the meaning the author of Ecclesiastes has in mind when he defines life apart from God and says
 - c. **Ecclesiastes 1:2** (NKJV) — 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

4. And that's the meaning Paul has in mind in the beginning of this great chapter on the resurrection
 - a. "... unless you believed in vain."
 - b. Unless your faith is useless... unless your trust in Christ is worthless... unless your belief in Christ is futile

II. The Gospel or Vanity

- A. This text sets in opposition to each other two main issues
 1. It is either the gospel or vanity
 2. Paul says at the beginning of this sentence, "... I declare to you the gospel..."
 - a. And then ends the sentence with "... unless you believed in vain."
 3. "... I declare to you the gospel... unless you believed in vain."
 4. Either the gospel is true
 - a. Or our so-called faith is futile... is useless... is meaningless... is vain
- B. So what is the gospel?
 1. Gospel = euangelion (Gk) – good message, good news
 2. Good news that in Christ Jesus God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them (2 Corinthians 5.19)
 3. It the gospel that we are beginning to unpack in our study of Romans
 - a. And is it not good news?
 - b. And is not "good news" the mother of all understatement?
 4. As God looks down on a humanity that by nature is in cosmic rebellion
 - a. In abject disobedience to the commands of God
 - b. Commands, by the way, which are designed for the welfare of human beings, of all human beings who are made in the image of God
 5. And yet God, in His mercy, sends His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (Romans 8.3)
 - a. Providing for the forgiveness of the sins of all those who would ever believe in Him
 6. Is that not – not just good news – but the best conceivable news ever imagined in this sin-sick, dysfunctional, deteriorating world?
- C. But is it true?
 1. Or is it merely a fantasy of wish-fulfillment on the part of gullible, superstitious, fools?
 2. The gospel is only true if, in fact, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead
 3. Listen to how powerfully Paul lays out the implications of this gospel
 - a. As he provides layer upon layer of experiences which are not valid, which are vain, futile, useless – unless the gospel is true
 - b. And unless the resurrection of Christ actually occurred in space-time history
- D. Preached
 1. 1 Corinthians 15:1 (NKJV) —

- a. 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you...
2. Paul was converted on the road to Damascus while he was in the midst of persecuting the fledgling church of Jesus Christ
 - a. Arresting and putting in prison the followers of the way
3. But Christ met him – and Paul himself became a witness of the resurrected Christ
4. And he immediately began to preach the very person he had been persecuting
5. He spent time in Jerusalem with Peter and James, from whom he heard first hand, eye-witness stories of the ministry of Jesus
 - a. And learned of the gospel he would be preaching
6. Then he spent more than a decade personal reflection and study – in the presence of Christ by the Spirit
7. Returning eventually to Jerusalem to make sure that the gospel he was preaching was consistent with the gospel of the first apostles
8. And so Paul made the gospel – the revelation of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, rooted in the prophetic OT scriptures, confirmed by eye-witness testimony
 - a. He made this gospel the central message of his missionary journeys all over Asia-minor, into Europe
 - b. As he went planting churches
9. All of which is vanity, useless, futile, empty – if the gospel is not true, and Christ has not been raised
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:14** (NKJV) — 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. [vain]

E. **Received**

1. **1 Corinthians 15:1** (NKJV) — 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received...
2. You took the time, Paul says, to hear the gospel preached to you
 - a. And more than that, you received it – you believed it
 - b. You swallowed it! Every last bite
 - c. You devoured it
3. And in receiving it, you received it the way good news ought to be received
 - a. You delighted in the gospel!
 - b. You were thrilled in your souls with the gospel
 - c. You were overwhelmed with a sense of relief, as the burden of guilt, of shame, of self-destruction was lifted from you
4. But if the gospel is not true, if Christ has not been raised, then your receiving of it is futile, useless, vain, empty
 - a. All your delight, all your enthusiasm – it was all just a fantasy
 - b. If the gospel is not true... if Christ was not raised from the dead
5. **1 Corinthians 15:14** (NKJV) —

- a. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. [vain]

F. **Stand**

- 1. **1 Corinthians 15:1** (NKJV) —
 - a. 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand...
- 2. You have made this faith in the gospel the foundation of your lives
 - a. You have staked your claim on the gospel
 - b. You have committed yourself to the gospel
 - c. The gospel is the foundation of your very existence
 - d. It is the gospel in which you stand
- 3. And yet, if the gospel is not true, if Christ has not been raised from the dead
 - a. You are standing on quicksand
 - b. What you thought was a rock was a swamp
- 4. And your standing is useless, vain, empty – a chasing after the wind
 - a. If the gospel is not true

G. **Saved**

- 1. **1 Corinthians 15:1–2** (NKJV) —
 - a. 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,
 - b. 2 by which also you are saved...
- 2. Your eternal salvation is rooted in this gospel
 - a. Whatever hope you had of eternal life, of life in the presence of God
 - b. Of a life of unending joy, and love, and favor
 - c. Of a life with fully sanctified, fully loving brothers and sisters in Christ
 - d. Of a life with Christ Himself, who is the author of love
 - e. Of a life with the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit – who is the Spirit of love
- 3. All of that great hope – the hope of every believer in Jesus – is useless, vain, empty, futile
 - a. If the gospel is not true, if Christ has not been raised from the dead

H. **Hold Fast**

- 1. **1 Corinthians 15:1–2** (NKJV) —
 - a. 1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,
 - b. 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.
- 2. You not only have faith – you cling to this faith
 - a. You hold fast to this gospel
 - b. You persevere in this gospel
 - c. It is your only hope in life and death

I. So what's at stake in the gospel?

1. Paul's preaching
 2. Your receiving and believing
 3. Your standing
 4. Your eternal salvation
 5. Your perseverance
- J. So how do we know if it's true?
1. How do we know if the gospel is really good news, and not just our fantasy?
 2. How do we know if Christ Jesus was really raised from the dead?
 3. How can we be sure?

III. Text

- A. **1 Corinthians 15:3–8** (NKJV) —
1. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:
 2. that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
 3. 4 and that He was buried,
 4. and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,
 5. 5 and that He was seen by Cephas,
 6. then by the twelve.
 7. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.
 8. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles.
 9. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

IV. **Compelling Evidence**

- A. Paul then begins to marshal the evidence for the resurrection of Christ
1. The lynch-pin in the argument for the truth of the gospel
- B. **The Death of Christ**
1. **1 Corinthians 15:3** (NKJV) —
 - a. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...
 2. The death of Christ is the universal testimony, not just of the gospel writers, or of the 1st Century Christian community
 - a. But even of secular historians and enemies of the Christian faith
 3. And that, in itself, is significant
 - a. For such testimonies affirm that Jesus of Nazareth actually did exist, did live as a Jewish rabbi in Palestine during the 1st Century
 - b. That the accounts of this Jesus of Nazareth is verified by extra-biblical sources as well as the Bible itself
 4. And His death by crucifixion is nearly unanimously acclaimed by both friends and enemies of the gospel
 5. Christian testimonies
 - a. All four gospels
 - b. Acts
 - c. Paul's letters

- d. Hebrews
- e. 1 Peter
- f. The Revelation
- 6. Non-Christians
 - a. Jewish historian Josephus
 - b. Roman historian Tacitus
- 7. Quasi-Christian literature of 2nd and 3rd Centuries
 - a. Apocryphal gospels – Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Truth
- 8. Early Church writings
 - a. 1 Clement
 - b. Epistles of Barnabus
 - c. Polycarp
- 9. That, in and of itself, is remarkable
 - a. Why would a nascent religion invent a story detailing the disgraceful execution of its own founder as a common criminal?
- 10. Bart Ehrman – no friend of Christianity: It is hard today to understand just how offensive the idea of a crucified messiah would have been to most first-century Jews.... Since no one would have made up the idea of a crucified messiah, Jesus must really have existed, must really have raised messianic expectations, and must really have been crucified.
 - a. That from an unbelieving scholar
- 11. Paul adds that the death of Jesus was “according to the Scriptures”
 - a. Specifically he has in mind both Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53
 - b. Psalm 22 details much of the details of death by crucifixion
 - c. Isaiah 53 describes the death of the Messiah, and that He specifically died for our sins – the substitutionary sacrifice, the purpose of the death of Christ
- 12. Gerd Ludemann: The fact of the death of Jesus as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable

C. **The Burial of Christ**

- 1. **1 Corinthians 15:3–4** (NKJV) —
 - a. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:
 - b. that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
 - c. 4 and that He was buried...
- 2. The burial of Jesus is recorded in all four gospels
- 3. Paul, clearly, includes it in this letter to the Corinthians, written around AD 55, without 30 years after Jesus’ death
 - a. Probably through a creed that had been a part of Christian worship from the very earliest days of the church
- 4. So multiple witnesses attest to the burial of Jesus
- 5. And with specificity – that Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Sanhedrin – the very court that condemned Jesus to death
 - a. Unthinkable that the church would make up that detail about a member of the very group that condemned Jesus participated in his burial

D. **The Resurrection of Christ**

1. **1 Corinthians 15:3–4** (NKJV) —
 - a. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received:
 - b. that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
 - c. 4 and that He was buried,
 - d. and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...
2. The NT gospels all affirm that the tomb of Jesus was empty on the third day following His crucifixion
 - a. Strength of this testimony is that it was discovered by women
 - b. That in and of itself may not strike us as odd
 - c. But in those days, it was significant
 - d. Women were low on the totem pole regarding their credibility
 - e. Their testimony in court required corroboration
 - f. Josephus' understanding of Jewish law: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex."
 - g. Don't like blatant sexist attitude, take it up with Josephus!
 - h. Point – if the early Christians wanted to invent some notion about a resurrection and an empty tomb, why would they use women as their primary witnesses?
 - i. And why would the women, setting out to minister to the body of Jesus, to their shock and consternation, and discovering an empty tomb, then become the purveyors of some manufactured fiction?
3. Just seven weeks after Jesus' death, the apostles were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem – the very city where Jesus had been crucified and buried
 - a. Had he still been in the tomb, He could easily been identified by his features – his wounds still visible from the crucifixion
 - b. How could the Christian movement have continued, in Jerusalem, in public, when all anyone had to do is say, "No! Look here! Here's where He's buried!"
 - c. The empty tomb was easily falsifiable – and yet it never was falsified!
4. And then there was the story – alluded to by Matthew in his gospel – that the Jewish leaders claimed the body had been stolen by the disciples
 - a. A story that was still circulating even into the 2nd Century
 - b. Why was that even a story if the tomb wasn't empty?
 - c. Even the Jewish leaders believed the tomb was empty
5. The skeptics of the empty tomb – and hence of the resurrection – develop arguments that simply dissolve upon a cursory inspection
6. Once again, Paul includes this statement in relation to the resurrection: "...and the He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..."
7. How do the OT scriptures attest to the resurrection of Messiah?
8. There is not a specific OT text to refer to; but the OT as a whole alludes to the resurrection of Messiah

- a. **Hosea 6:2** (NKJV) — 2 After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight.
 - b. Recall that in the Servant of the Lord hymns in Isaiah it is the Messiah who represents Israel in its redemption
 - c. Jonah – inside the fish for three days and three nights – a text Jesus Himself refers to in prophesying His resurrection (**Jonah 1.17, Matthew 12.40**)
 - d. Isaiah prophesies the resurrection in **Isaiah 53.10-12**
 - e. **Psalms 16 and 110** also refer to the Messiah's resurrection
 - f. And recall how Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, opened the OT scriptures to the two disciples, and showed them how all of it pointed to Himself
9. So as a whole, the OT scriptures attest to the resurrection of the Messiah Jesus

E. **He was Seen**

- 1. **1 Corinthians 15:5-8** (NKJV) —
 - a. 5 and that He **was seen** by Cephas, then by the twelve.
 - b. 6 After that He **was seen** by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.
 - c. 7 After that He **was seen** by James, then by all the apostles.
 - d. 8 Then last of all He **was seen** by me also, as by one born out of due time.
- 2. “Was seen” – repeated four times in these verses
 - a. Applied six times
 - b. Cephas (Peter)
 - c. The twelve – in the upper room in Jerusalem on that resurrection day evening, and on Sunday the following week
 - d. Then 500 at once
 - e. Then James
 - f. Then again by the apostles
 - g. Then by Paul
- 3. These are eye-witness accounts
 - a. Multiple eye-witness accounts!
 - b. On multiple occasions
 - c. Verifiable – many of those who saw Him were still alive; you could interview them and find out for sure!
- 4. Even scholars who deny the resurrection – usually for importing naturalistic assumptions in their epistemologies – acknowledge that the disciples believed wholeheartedly that they saw the resurrected Jesus
- 5. And consider what happened to these disciples, these apostles?
 - a. They were all, with perhaps one exception, martyred for their testimony of the resurrection of Jesus
 - b. And the one who wasn't – the apostle John – was exiled and imprisoned

6. And they all maintained their testimony, even unto death
 - a. Would they have done so if they knew the resurrection to be a fabrication?
 - b. Would not one of them say, “Hey, you know, it really didn’t happen?” – even to save his skin?
7. No – the testimony of the apostles, even through persecution and death, removes all doubt about the historical certainty of the resurrected Christ
- F. So Paul removes, beyond any reasonable doubt, the historical certainty of the resurrection of Jesus Christ
 1. His death is certain
 2. His burial is certain
 3. His resurrection is certain
 4. And His appearances are certain
 5. All consistent with the scriptures
 6. All in accord with the testimony of eye-witnesses

V. **Faith or Futility**

- A. So – the gospel or vanity
 1. Faith or futility
 - a. That is the choice
- B. The certainty of the resurrection is why I preach
 1. And why countless others have preached the same message for more than two millennia
- C. The certainty of the resurrection is why there are believers on every continent
 1. And why there will be believers from every people group when Jesus returns
 2. Why we seek to fulfill the Great Commission, and preach to every people, nation, tribe and tongue
- D. The certainty of the resurrection is why we stand firm in our convictions in Jesus Christ
 1. No matter what the society or the culture says about us
 2. Or what they do to us
- E. The certainty of the resurrection is why we are assured of our salvation, of the eternal life Christ Himself promised
- F. The certainty of the resurrection is why we persevere in the faith
 1. It is the gospel – or vanity
 - a. It is faith or futility