

April 1, 2018

“Facts of First Importance”
1 Corinthians 15:1-11

FCF: Confusion as to the point of Easter

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The facts surrounding the resurrection are of first importance.
(magnet) We need to let them settle in.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

As with any holiday, Easter comes with traditions. We have the Easter Bunny. Australia has the Easter Bibby and France the Easter Bell. Italy has the explosion of the cart and Poland the blessing basket. Brazil has the burning of Judas and Spain the Dance of Death. The U. K. has the Morris Dance and Greece pot throwing. Each is symbolic in its own way and involves the gathering of friends and family which makes for regular times of bonding and grounding.

But anyone in any of these cultures (including ours) would have the right to ask, “What’s the point of it?” And the answer is this. The resurrection is true. And it has power to change.

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION

Some background to the text would be helpful. Paul was an apostle of Jesus, chosen by Him as an authorized agent. He was writing to the church in Corinth. Corinth was a Roman colony, a wealthy port city known for philosophy, pagan idolatry, and immorality. The church had been planted around 51 A.D. Paul is writing this letter just a few years after that, addressing local concerns and answering particular questions. One of those had to do with the resurrection.

Of that, Paul says something worth noting (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:3a**). There are a lot of things of importance in life - meaning, purpose, identity, ethics. But the resurrection of Jesus (and everything surrounding it) is something of first importance. Meaning that it is not just a matter of interest or something peripheral. It is central and essential to the Christian faith.

The resurrection of Jesus is central and essential to the Christian faith. Easter Sunday is sometimes referred to as Resurrection Sunday, followers of Jesus as Resurrection People. And that is absolutely appropriate. Why? Because of what Paul says in our text. That is, that the facts surrounding the resurrection are of first importance. And we need to let them settle in.

These facts surrounding the resurrection burst forth here in two ways - first, its historicity and then second, flowing from that, its significance. Which gives us a message to consider and to embrace, something for both the mind and the heart. Let’s look at each of these in turn.

I. THE HISTORICITY OF THE RESURRECTION

First, the historicity of the resurrection. Paul means for us to see that these are real events in space and time. That is, this was as verifiable as anything else in history. And more so.

A) As Prophesied

For starters, it all came about as prophesied (**READ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4**).

1. Meaning

Twice, Paul tells us this came about “in accordance with the Scriptures” - meaning as recorded in the OT centuries before. Not just generally but also specifically with certain texts predicting the substitutionary death of the Christ and His rising again three days later. A stunning thing.

2. Implications

Think of the implications. This was no afterthought, something haphazardly thrown together. These events that had taken place in recent times were planned before the beginning of time.

B) As Testified

All happening as prophesied. And also as testified ([READ 1 Corinthians 15:5-8](#)).

1. Multiple witnesses

There were multiple witnesses. Four times, Paul says “He appeared” - to Peter and the twelve, to 500 at once, to James (Jesus’ brother) and the apostles, and then to Paul. The 500 is especially worth noting. What is Paul doing? He’s throwing down the gauntlet, challenging and inviting his readers to check the facts. There were hundreds still alive at that time who could verify this.

2. Problematic witnesses

So there were multiple witnesses. And problematic ones too. By that, I mean Peter - who had turned from Jesus in His hour of need. Or James - this pillar of the church who had grown up with Jesus but not understood until the end. If you’re making this up, you don’t do it like this. In listing these men, Paul is showing he has no desire to clean things up but to just pass them on.

There’s more we could say but you see just with this the historicity of the resurrection.

Application:

So we ask, “Is this real?” And the answer is, “Yes, as real as it gets.” This is no ancient myth or fanciful tale. So we have a solid foundation on which we can and must base our lives.

Illustration:

Perhaps you’ve heard recent news of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where the crucifixion and resurrection likely occurred. Major parts sit on an unstable foundation of earlier structures and numerous tunnels. And without serious work, it is sure to collapse.

You see the irony. The events which that site marks are the most solid of any foundation. It will never give way. And the evidence is sure. You can press on it all you like and it will hold.

The facts around the resurrection are of first importance. We need to let them settle in.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

Which takes us to the significance of the resurrection, its meaning and implications.

A) Transformation of Death

Part of that is the transformation of death ([READ 1 Corinthians 15:6](#)). Think of this.

1. The terror of death

What is death? A cessation of life, alienation and separation, the terror of nothing lasting forever. What does it bring? Lives spent in denial, a stubborn determination to seek out every distraction.

2. The death of death

With the resurrection we have the death of death. Paul likens it to sleep - resting, awaiting to be awakened by the Lord. So the permanence of death is gone. The goodbye is no longer forever.

B) Transformation of Life

So we see the transformation of death. And of life (READ 1 Corinthians 15:8-10).

1. Saul the Pharisee

Paul is so beautifully transparent here. Once Saul the Pharisee, the persecutor of the church.

2. Paul the Apostle

But now, because Jesus had interrupted and redirected all that, he was now Paul the Apostle. Such was the grace of God at work in his life, a grace that had deeply changed him. Repentance in turning. Honesty of candor. And humility in how he thinks of himself and his many labors.

All of which points to the significance of the resurrection and its transformative power.

Illustration:

Consider the fact many African American slaves came to faith in Christ. For most of them, Jesus was the “White Man’s Savior.” Yet many became Christians. The question is why. Scholars have researched this. Why did enslaved Africans embrace the religion of their captors?

The answer? They fell in love with the God of Scripture. They found Jesus, a suffering Savior with a life and struggles like their own, a community of faith, and forgiveness of sin. As they came in contact with this God, they found a different reality - the reality of the resurrection.

Application:

So, is it real? Yes. Is there hope? Yes. The resurrection opens the door to a new start in life. Does that sound like good news to you? We have a living Savior who is with us and for us. So for anyone whose life is littered with failure, scarred by abuse, broken by suffering, darkened by depression, or ruined by addiction there is the possibility of being made a new creation. Now.

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CONCLUSION:

How could it be otherwise? Think of what the Easter message is. Into this world of disease, emptiness, broken relationships, poverty, injustice, and racism - all these things we are so used to and assume are permanent - into that very world comes this message “Christ is risen!” That message punches into this world and sends such a shockwave that nothing can be the same.

Some of you may know of the New Madrid Earthquakes. In the central MS Valley, from December 1811 through March 1812, there were a series of tremors felt as far away as New York City, Boston, Montreal, and Washington, D.C. Thousands of forest acres were devastated. Five mile long fissures were opened. Boatmen reported waterfalls on the Mississippi River and that there were waves running backwards for several hours. Cartographers had to change the maps.

My friends, the resurrection of Jesus has changed the maps. The message “Christ is risen” has punched into this world and sent just such a shockwave. The facts surrounding this - its historicity and its significance - are of first importance. We need to let them settle in.

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