

THE GOSPEL -- WHAT IS IT?

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Intro: We are usually reminded when we observe the Lord's Supper that when we eat the bread and drink from the cup, we are remembering the Lord with a special emphasis upon His death. This means that when we come to the Lord's Table we are to come meditating upon His death. The hymns we sing should direct our thoughts to the death of our Lord, and the same should be true of the Scriptures we use. It seems obvious that there is something very needful in our lives which can only be met as we continuously keep coming back to the Cross.

Paul was expressing how important the Cross was in his own ministry when he wrote earlier in this epistle to the Corinthians (2:2),

For I determined not to know anything among you,
save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

It is clear that apart from the Cross of Christ Paul had nothing to say. All of his teaching, his whole message, was related in one way or another to the Cross. It is the Cross of Christ which is the distinctive feature of our Christian faith. Without the Cross there would be no substitution, and without the Cross there would never have been a resurrection. Even the teachings of our Lord, as marvelous as they are, rest upon the Cross.

Here in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul makes the Cross the very heart of the Gospel. For a long time, probably ever since this epistle was written, it has been recognized that in the first eight verses of this chapter we have a definition of the Gospel. Paul actually said that is what he was stating. It is important for us to be reminded regularly what the Gospel is because this word, like so many in the Bible, have had their meaning changed in present-day usage. The Gospel has to do with Christ--not His birth, nor His perfect life, nor His unsurpassed teaching, but with His death and His resurrection. His birth, life, and teaching are all extremely important, but His mission on earth would never have been complete without His death and His resurrection. We are not saved by following His teaching, nor by trying to live according to His example. We are saved by His death. If the Lord Jesus Christ did not die as the Scriptures say that He did, and for the reason given in Scripture, and if He were not raised from the dead, **THEN WE HAVE NO GOSPEL.** The heart of the Gospel is the death of Christ.

Now notice how Paul stated it here.

Paul tells us in verses 1 and 2 that this was the message he

preached to them. This was the message they had received, and in which they "stand." Some of the Corinthians may have been shaky on the Gospel, but the majority of them were standing on the Gospel as their only hope of salvation and acceptance with God. According to Scripture there is no salvation apart from the Gospel as the Apostle Paul defined it here. Charles Hodge, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, said that Paul used the present tense here to show that there salvation was sure, or that it was a present reality. It probably expresses both: "Ye are saved."

What had he preached to them? Four things:

- 1) "Christ died for our sins."
- 2) "He was buried."
- 3) "He rose again the third day."
- 4) And that he was seen."

Paul emphasized that of these four statements two were foundational, and he did that by adding the words "according to the scriptures." First, He "died for our sins **according to the Scriptures.**" Second, "He rose again the third day **according to the scriptures.**"

When he spoke of "the scriptures," he was not speaking of the NT scriptures because they were still in the process of being written. He was saying that the OT Scriptures prophesied that Christ would die, and also that He would be raised from the dead. And so the authority of the OT actually rested upon both of these prophecies being fulfilled. If Christ had not come, if He had not died, and if He had not been raised from the dead, then the OT would have been interesting historical literature, but not something that we would want to depend upon for our knowledge of the truth. But the fact that He did come, did die, and was raised from the dead, assures us that the OT is the Word of God. No prophet on his own would have known to predict such a thing. God led them to write what they wrote, and so we have a reliable message of the Gospel which has its roots in the OT.

Now look at the other two statements, and note the place they have in the Gospel message.

There have always been people who have denied that our Lord really died. But His burial is proof that He died. The soldiers did not break His legs because they saw that He was already dead. Pilate was sure that our Lord had died, and so he gave the Lord's body to Joseph of Arimathea and to Nicodemus, who were also sure that the Lord had died, and they buried His body in Joseph's tomb. The Jews were sure that He died because they wanted to tomb sealed so that the disciples could not come to take away His body and then

spread a false report that He had been raised from the dead.
The person who says that the Lord did not really die just has not examined the evidence.

Our Lord's resurrection has also been disputed, but we have abundant testimony that He was raised from the dead. And so just as the Lord's burial was proof that He died, so there were many witnesses who saw Him alive after His death who declared that He had been raised.

This is what Paul was stating from verse 5 down through verse 8. (Read.)

Look with me at a couple of passages in the book of Acts which also confirm our Lord's resurrection:

- 1) Acts 1:1-3, Luke's introduction to the book of Acts.
- 2) Acts 10:37-43, where Peter was preaching to Gentiles in the house of Cornelius.

The resurrection of Christ has the strongest possible evidence. Two or three witnesses will confirm any event; in this case we have hundreds of witnesses.

So we can say that the Gospel has two main points: the death of Christ, and His resurrection. The proof that He died was that He was buried; the proof that He was raised was that He was seen.

But in another way we can say that the Gospel has one point: "Christ died for our sins." The other three statements, including His resurrection, prove that He really died. You can see this if you stop to think that He could not have been raised if He had not died. So the second and third and fourth statements point back to the first as evidence that Christ really did die for our sins.

Now in the time that remains I want you to think with me about that very brief, but extremely important statement, **"Christ died for our sins."** There is nothing in Scripture which surpasses this statement in importance. It would be of immense good for all of us to meditate frequently on these five words.

This statement tells us that:

I. OUR LORD DIED AS A SUBSTITUTE.

His enemies were always trying to charge Him successfully with sin, but they never succeeded. When He was tried, they brought false witnesses, but even they did not agree with each other. And yet our Lord did not die a natural death; He

was crucified. He died as a criminal even though He was never convicted of any sin. The explanation given in the Gospel is that He died, He took the place of His people, and offered Himself for their sins. I should say, "For our sins." This is what Paul said.

He died, not only that we would not have to die, but He died so that we could have eternal life. It is by His death that we have been made acceptable to God. Our sins had separated us from God; Peter teaches us that because Christ suffered for our sins, He has been able to bring us to God--accepted, forgiven, saved eternally.

This is what Isaiah preached. Cf. Isa. 53:6.

And will you notice that our Lord is called "Christ" in our text? Christ means Messiah, the Anointed One, the One Whom God sent on a mission. And so for Paul to use "Christ" here means that this was the main purpose for which our Lord came into the world. He came to die for us.

Second, look at the price He had to pay for our salvation:

II. "CHRIST DIED."

Would any one of us dare to claim to be able to describe the meaning of those words, "Christ died." Of course we know that He really died, and that He died for us, but could we begin to understand why He sweat great drops of blood before He ever got to the Cross, or why He would say from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And what did Paul mean when he said that our Lord was "made sin for us"? Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17. Or what was involved in John the Baptist's message, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

No one ever died a more terrible death than our Lord did. We can think of the crown of thorns, the nails, and the spear, but who can understand that His soul was made an offering for our sins? Cf. Isa. 53:10.

Finally, notice specifically the reason for His death--which we have already touched on:

II. "OUR SINS."

Can we ever minimize the dreadful nature, the awfulness, of our sins, when we understand what it took for our sins to be forgiven? It wasn't some martyr's blood that is responsible for our salvation. It wasn't an angel who came to die for us. It wasn't even that our Lord completed what we were able

to do to save ourselves. There was nothing that we could do but await our judgment. No, our sins are so terrible that no one could help us and redeem us but the spotless Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the only One Who ever lived upon this earth "without sin."

You and I may never have done anything that would cause us to be put behind bars, but our sins are bad enough to send us to hell forever! If people could only see their sins as God sees them, they would go to Christ for forgiveness as fast as they could go. And that is what happens when we realize what it means that we are sinners.

Concl: How thankful we should be for those wonderful words of the love and grace of God, "Christ died for our sins." He knew that was ahead of Him when He came into this world. And yet He never turned aside. He drank of the cup which the Father gave Him so that we might drink of the cup that will be offered to us tonight as we remember what it cost Him that we might be saved.

May the Holy Spirit enable us tonight to observe the Lord's Supper in true remembrance of Him and His death for us.