



The Most Important Truth in the Universe

Resurrection Sunday 2015

1 Corinthians 15:1-28

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

Let me ask you a question this morning. What is the most important thing, the most important truth, the most important principle in the universe? What matters most? I checked the internet, because we all know that everything on the internet is true, right? Here's a sample of what people believe is of most importance in life -- Taking care of your health, investing in your relationships, having a supremely positive view of yourself, living your purpose, values and dreams, fitness and weight management, looking good in a bikini, self-development, knowing yourself, living life to the max, accomplishing your bucket list, and, of course, what list would be complete without the mention of sex and money. Now some of those things are important, but are they are of first importance? Are any of them the most important thing in life?

The Bible tells us something else. The Bible tell us that the most important thing, the most important truth in the universe, is that God has sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the sacrifice for our sins, crushing Him on the cross in our place, making Him who know no sin to be sin for us so that we could be forgiven and made at peace with God, by faith in Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross -- and that God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead three days later declaring Him to the Son of God with power. That is what matters most. Paul tells us that this morning in this text from 1 Corinthians 15. Let me set the context for this.

Paul is coming to the close of his letter to the Corinthians, a letter that began with the declaration: **“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”** (1 Corinthians 1:18, ESV) From that initial declaration, Paul had branched off to talk about a variety of things: division and unity in the church, true spiritual wisdom, union with Christ, church discipline, the nature of purity, principles for marriage, warnings about idolatry, the abuse and use of spiritual gifts, orderly worship and more. But as he closes this letter, he returns to the gospel. He brings them back to what is

of first importance, highest priority, the most important truth, the most important message in the universe. In this text that we are looking at,

Paul Reminds The Corinthians of the Gospel's Power and Purpose (1-2) Look what he writes in verse 1-2: ***“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:1–2, ESV) These words that he is going to speak to them, he has spoken to them before. Paul's desire is to set their minds anew and afresh on the gospel that they had heard and received from him– the gospel that called them out of spiritual darkness and into light, the gospel that broke down the wall of hostility between them and the holy God, the gospel that announced the saving work of Christ, the gospel that should hold the supreme place in their hearts and minds, the gospel that had captured their souls and their affection for Jesus, their Savior. This is the gospel that they had received and believed.

It is this gospel, Paul says, “in which you stand.” What does he mean by that? The word “stand” means to be firmly and well-established in something. The gospel was the foundation of their standing before God as forgiven sinners, as saints saved by grace, a standing before God that is unalterable, unchanging and eternally stable, an immovable foundation for their lives because of the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ alone.

And it is this gospel, he says, ***by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*** The gospel saves and keeps only those who receive it and hold fast to it by faith. It is the gospel of Christ that saves your soul, Paul says, unless you don't believe it or if you believe the facts in your head and not your heart. That is what it means to believe in vain. It is a warning against non-saving faith, against believing the facts of the gospel with no effect in your soul. It is possible to believe in vain. Your faith in Christ can be of such a superficial nature that it is really nothing more than a nice religious acknowledgement of a higher power, a nice insurance policy against hell, but it never changes anything in you. That is “believing in vain.” That's why Paul reminds the Corinthians and us

What is of First Importance (3-11) Read verse 3 and 4 with me: ***“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”*** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, ESV) Paul says “I delivered to you... what I also received.” That is to say “I presented to you what was given to me by God.” Paul was simply the steward of this good news. This is God’s good news, from Him through Paul to you. Paul was simply delivering to them what God had given to him. He gave to them the most important message ever delivered, the most essential truth that they could hear, that which was of supreme worth:

Christ died for our sins;

He was dead and buried;

He was raised from the dead;

He appeared to many witnesses.

Christ died for our sins – for our sins, not his own; for the sake of our sins, on our behalf, and in our place. There is no avoiding this truth in the Bible. Our problem is sin and rebellion against the law of God – our pride, our lust, our deceit, our hatred, our idolatry, our envy, our gossip – the list goes on and on – that makes us worthy only of God’s judgment. That is why Jesus came into this world. It’s why He lived a perfect life and then surrendered Himself to die on the cross. He died so that we could live – the just for the unjust, the perfect for the ruined, the holy for the wicked and defiled by sin. ***“He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”*** (Isaiah 53:5, ESV) ***“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”*** (1 Peter 3:18, ESV) Jesus died to pay for our rebellion, to suffer the penalty for us of our sinful, guilty lives, to vindicate the holiness and righteousness of God, and to satisfy God’s justice against our sins so that we could be set free from the power and guilt of sin. The death that Jesus died was not a symbolic death. It was not just some inspiring death that showed Christ’s selfless love, nor was it an example of self-sacrifice that we should all go out and imitate, nor was His death some motivational tool for using your gifts and life to make the world a better place and live a better life. That is not the gospel. The gospel is that Christ died for our sins.

He was dead and buried – He really died. He did not faint or swoon on the cross but He died and His lifeless body was entombed. He was buried just like everyone else with no human expectation of anything else, but He was

Raised on the third day – the grave had no power over the perfect King of Glory. God the Father raised Him from the dead: **God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:24, ESV)**

And all of this according to the Scriptures – according to the prophecies of the Word of God, according to Jesus' own words, according to God's sovereign plan to accomplish the purpose of redeeming lost sinners from hell for God's glory and for our eternal good. The events of Christ's passion and resurrection were the fulfillment of the divine plan as revealed in the Scriptures. These events did not "overtake" the Lord Jesus, so to speak. They were the purpose of his coming into the world and had been predicted long before.

And, then, after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to many witnesses so there would be undeniable proof of all who He is. **“And that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” (1 Corinthians 15:5–9, ESV)** Paul gives a roll call of all who had seen the risen Christ. This was no hallucination, no made up fairytale, the resurrection, the evidence of God's power to save sinners through the cross of His Son, is proven by the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. He speaks of Cephas – that's Peter, of the twelve, of five hundred brothers –some dead, others still alive, of James and of all the apostles, and then last of himself as the least likely to see Christ because he was a blasphemer and persecutor of the church. But Christ did appear to him and save him and transform his life. Paul was living proof of the power of the gospel.

What was the point? The risen Christ had appeared to them. The word for appeared is a word that means to perceive with the eye, to pay attention to, and to understand. They all saw Him and understood the significance of the resurrection. The obvious point of mentioning the fact that many of the eyewitnesses of the Lord's resurrection were still alive

is that there were plenty of people at that time who could confirm the truth of what Paul was saying and what Christians believe. The amazing events that make up the message of the gospel was backed-up by many eyewitnesses. The gospel message rests on verifiable history. This is no fairytale. Why does the gospel matter so much? Let me tell you...

Why the Gospel is of First Importance It is only the gospel that deals with our greatest need as sinners – forgiveness with God. This is what is most needful – not good health, income equality, equal rights, and good self-esteem. Our need is for forgiveness. The gospel tells us how God forgives sinners and makes us to be at peace with Him. John writes in I John 4:9-10, ***“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*** (1 John 4:9–10, **ESV**) Out of His great love for sinners, God provided the way to deal with the punishment that our sins deserved by punishing Jesus in our place on the cross. Our sins deserve God’s holy wrath, deserve death, deserve suffering and hell and the gospel tells us that Christ stood in our place on the cross and died the death that we deserve, taking our place, suffering the punishment and penalty demanded by God’s law, fully enduring God’s wrath on account of our sins so that we could receive from God’s hands only mercy and grace. That is the power of the gospel.

It is by believing in Christ that God declares us absolutely righteous and forgiven of all sin – that is the meaning of the biblical word, “justified.” Scripture says that we are ***“justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”*** (Romans 3:24, **ESV**) Redemption means “to pay a ransom in order to release a person from bondage, in particular that of slavery.” It means to permanently set someone free. It is a once and for all transaction in which a person pays the price of a slave in order to liberate them from the bondage that the slave is in. And that is exactly what we were, slaves and our master was sin. And as a result of that master we were dead in trespasses and sins, we fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind thinking that it was life when it was really death. We were far off from God, living in complete futility, running the hell-bound race from which we could never free ourselves no matter what resolutions to live a better life or what self-improvements we might make. Someone had to free us from our slavery to sin. And thank God, the Lord Jesus Christ came to ransom us.

The gospel changes everything – that’s why it’s so important, of first importance; we must only believe its truth. Scripture says, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1, ESV)** We, who by nature were enemies with God, He has made into His friends. By justifying us, and propitiating His wrath, by redeeming us, and joining us by faith to Christ so that we become new creatures in Christ, God makes us His friends, at peace with Him. From hostility to love, acceptance, and friendship. But not only friends – family. **“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4–5, ESV)** God makes us His own children. Our adoption was purchased at the price of the blood of His own Son. Here is the wonder of God's love in adopting us, that He should go to such expense to accomplish it. That God would adopt us when we were not only strangers, but enemies, is incredible love.

The gospel gives us new life. By faith in this gospel, our lives are made brand new. **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV)** Those who are Christians are no longer defined by the former life, no longer defined by their sin, but are new creations in Christ. By virtue of being united with Christ, of being redeemed by Christ, Christians are the new creation – new in quality, transformed by the grace and forgiveness of God. Old things – old desires, plans, loves, values, beliefs – no longer hold sway in our hearts. They have been replaced by new desires, loves, inclinations, and by the truth. That is gospel truth of first importance.

The Gospel is the promise of eternal life for us, the victory over death. Jesus Christ said: **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”** (John 11:25–26, ESV) Eternal life is at stake with the gospel.

And this gospel is not just some facts to know, it is truth to be believed and confessed. You have to believe it, stake your life on it. Our very lives –physical and spiritual depend on it. Paul writes in Romans 10 and starting in verse 9: **If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on**

all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.””
(Romans 10:9–13, ESV)

This is not just “religious” truth that is important to know. Lots of times, people will complain that “religion” isn’t practical, but Paul shows us that the death and resurrection of Christ is as practical as it gets. In fact, he proves that it is

Of First Importance Now and Forever (12-28) The gospel message is of first importance now and forever. That is why Paul would go on to say in this chapter -- ***“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.*** Not that the Corinthian church as a whole was actually saying that but there were some that were saying that it didn’t really matter if Jesus rose from the dead or not. It was the message of his life that mattered. Nothing was really lost if Jesus didn’t actually rise from the dead. They were dead wrong. The evidence of Christ’s resurrection was proof that the resurrection is beyond dispute and there should be no doubting, no questioning the truth of it because it is absolutely important. The resurrection is so important to the gospel, that without it, Paul says next:

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. Paul is saying first, if the cross happened but the resurrection didn’t, then we have no gospel to preach, our preaching is worthless. Not only was the death of Christ for sins not good news, it was a lie and we are the biggest liar ever! And even more than that, the Christian faith is worthless – your faith in Christ is worthless if He didn’t rise from the dead. We are all still dead in our sins – outwardly alive but spiritually dead and everyone who has died believing in Christ are lost forever. But, praise God, that’s not the case.

Christ has been raised from death and so our preaching is true. I am not a false witness about Christ and neither are you. Our preaching is not in vain—it is full, meaningful, valid,

valuable, and significant. And because He has been raised from the dead, you too – who are joined to Him by faith – have been raised now from spiritual death and will be raised from physical death as well. We are not dead in our sins, the Christians who have died before us are not dead in their sins, but forgiven and alive in Christ.

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:12–22, ESV) If Jesus lived and died merely to show us a better way of living without really dealing with our sins – sins’ penalty and power – then we are pitiable. If Christ is not raised, then living for Him, loving Him, following His will is a great delusion. We should be pitied like insane people. But since He has been raised and is alive and reigns as king forever and we have been reconciled to Him we should be, of all people, most envied.

Look, Paul makes clear that Adam was the physical father of every human being, and sin and death entered the human race through his sin in the garden of Eden. Because of Adam's sin every one of his descendants comes into the world spiritually dead and will suffer the consequence of eternal death. But for those who are in Christ, that is, trusting in Christ for one's salvation, because of His substitutionary death on our behalf, will be given spiritual life, and even if he dies physically he will be resurrected bodily to enjoy eternal life with God.

Paul is telling us once more, reminding us, that the most important, most essential truth, is that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried and that He rose again on the third day to secure for us an eternal forgiveness. You do not have to perish in your sins, but you can have eternal life. You do not have to suffer the torment and pain of hell; you can have the glory and joy of heaven. You don't have to live in slavery to sin for the rest of your life; the Son of God can set you free. You do not have to grope in the darkness, but can live in the light of life. This is the gospel preached to us, entrusted to us, to be proclaimed by us, to be savored by us, by which our lives are to be lived. And this gospel impacts all of eternity.

Paul writes later in this chapter of the connection between Christ's resurrection, our own resurrection from the dead and the future summation of all things in God, when Christ reigns

over all and presents His Kingdom to His Father in heaven. He writes: ***“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:24–28, ESV)*** We need to understand that the resurrection was not some isolated, dispensable event. Rather, it is an integral and culminating stage in God's sovereign rule over history. Redemption will not be complete "until he has put all his enemies under his feet." The climax of all that Christ has done is His total conquest over his enemies, "so that God may be all in all." Jesus, by virtue of His death and resurrection from the dead for our sins, will present a new humanity, a redeemed, forgiven, washed, sinless, resurrected, glorified humanity to God to worship and serve Him forever. Everything wrong with creation will be made right, sin will be removed, and God will reign over all things, with no rebellion of any sort, as it was before the Fall of man and will be forever. That is gospel truth of first importance. This is the glorious goal of the gospel.

The gospel of what God has done in Christ to save sinners from hell is the most powerful, most explosive, only truly life-changing, only soul saving message in the world – Christ and Him crucified and raised from the dead on the third day. It is the only message that saves people for eternity; it completely changes someone into a new creation; it gives forgiveness of sin and cleanses us thoroughly from our guilt before God; brings us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light; gives us eternal life; secures heaven as our home forever; overcomes death; gives us the power to live holy lives and brings us into intimacy and peace with God forever. It is the supreme expression of God's grace and mercy without which we would all be forever lost with no hope. It is the preaching of the gospel that magnifies Christ and that draws lost men and women to life. No wonder Paul cried out: ***“For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16, ESV)*** We have the message of first importance that demands a response.

The Gospel Demands a Response Charles Spurgeon said: ***"The hearing of the gospel involves the hearer in responsibility. It is a great privilege to hear the gospel. You may smile and think there is nothing very great in it. The damned in hell know. Oh, what would they give if they could hear the gospel now? If they could come back and entertain but the***

shadow of a hope that they might escape from the wrath to come? The saved in heaven estimate this privilege at a high rate, for, having obtained salvation through the preaching of this gospel, they can never cease to bless their God for calling them by his word of truth. O that you knew it! On your dying beds the listening to a gospel sermon will seem another thing than it seems now."

Receive it or reject it, all must do something with this truth because the gospel of Christ's death, His resurrection, and His return to judge the living and the dead and to consummate all things – this gospel cannot be ignored.

Closing exhortation and call to faith...

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