



Date: April 12, 2009

Title: "Of First Importance" (Easter Sunday)

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

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Intro:

For many Easter Sunday is nothing more than a cultural rite of spring. Egg hunts, golf, new outfits, and lunch with the family. But, for Christians, it is the day we celebrate the glorious news that Jesus came, Jesus died, and Jesus raised from the dead. In a very religious but still mostly lost culture that presses us to neutralize and minimize the reality of the resurrection, we take some time to look at one of the most significant passages in the Bible on the resurrection. The bottom line: if the bodily resurrection of Christ *did not* really happen, then Christianity is foolish and a cruel lie. But if Jesus really *did* die and rose again, then it changes *everything*, for the believer and the unbeliever.

I. CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS

1.1. Isaiah 53:1-12

This incredible Old Testament passage prophetically speaks of the death of Christ. The prophet Isaiah makes some stunning statements such as "he was crushed for our iniquities" and "all we like sheep have gone astray." In addition, he says "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush." In other words, the rebellion of mankind and the death of Christ was part of God's providential and sovereign plan of redemption.

1.2. Question: *Why did Jesus have to die?*

1.2.1 For there to be real forgiveness, there must be costly suffering

- If there is a debt or transgression, someone has to absorb the cost.
- Illustration: The broken fence that needs repair.
- The Reason for God, by Tim Keller has some excellent thoughts on the necessity of Christ's death and why true forgiveness involves great cost. Specifically chapter 13.

II. HE WAS RAISED ON THE THIRD DAY

Strong evidence for the reality of the resurrection (See Keller's The Reason for God, chapter 14)

2.1. Empty tomb and many witnesses (the first of which are women)

Paul is very specific in speaking of how Jesus appeared to the Apostles, and to over 500 people at one time. He even gives the detail that some of those 500 have since died, just in case anyone wanted to validate his story. Such specificity in the account gives great credence to the historical reliability of the resurrection. Additionally, in each of the Gospel accounts, two women were the first to see the resurrected Jesus. In a culture where the testimony of women was not valid in a court of law, this would have been a foolish way to perpetuate a story about Jesus, unless that's the way it happened!

2.2. Resurrection in the 1st century – completely foreign concept

The idea of a bodily resurrection from the dead was a relatively foreign and unheard of concept in the culture of the time. Most hoaxes are reruns of previous ones. The completely foreign idea that Christ came back from the dead lends credence to the resurrection.

2.3. Explosion of a new worldview

Literally overnight, not over a few decades, a new worldview sprung up and Jesus' followers had a body of teaching that they instantly began to spread around the Roman empire. Nothing like this has ever happened when it comes the formation of a new faith or worldview. The stunning pace at which the church formed increases the high likelihood of a stunning event as its commencement.

2.4 Martyr's death of the Apostles

An ancient philosopher once said, "I believe the witnesses that get their throat's cut." All of the twelve Apostles died a martyr's death. It is highly unlikely that men (all of them in a group), will die for a hoax or even a strong desire to see their movement continue.

THE MAIN POINT:

You must do something with the resurrection. You cannot simply be indifferent to it.

- 1-if it is a lie, a hoax, or an embellishment, then we are fools, still in our sins.
- 2-If it is true, then it changes everything

Jesus (and the Bible writers) said some shocking things:

- 1-John 3: 3; John 14:6
- 2-Matthew 7:13
- 3-Matthew 22:37-39
- 4-1 Corinthians 10:31
- 5-Galatians 2:20

III. HIS GRACE WAS ... NOT IN VAIN

Question: Is that true of your life?

3.1 To the Christian (Romans 8:31-39)

If the resurrection really happened, then this should inspire us to live life with a great and abiding confidence that if God is for us, who can be against us?

3.2 To those undecided (Mark 1:15)

If the resurrection really did happen, then you are accountable to a holy, righteous and just God who has in His great mercy made forgiveness and redemption available to you through Jesus' work on the Cross. In response to this, you must **repent** (which is to turn from sin and self-reliance) and **believe** (which is not just to agree with the facts of Christianity but to trust in and to offer your whole life, mind, and body to God as a response).