

## A Sure and Steady Hope

1 Corinthians 15:1-19

April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018

Big idea: The death and resurrection of Christ provide a sure and steady hope.

Intro -

There are some truths that are of primary importance to the Christian faith. We need to circle back to these often so we aren't distracted by good but peripheral concerns.

Life becomes foggy, uncertain, unclear. We need truth to burn through the fog like the rising sun when the fog sits heavy on our valley. We need truth to do that so we can regain our bearings.

As we drill down to the core beliefs of the Christian faith, we see the cross and resurrection.

Easter provides a yearly opportunity to open wide the curtains and gaze at the fundamentals.

For those who aren't Christians but are here with us today, it gives you a chance to hear about the core convictions of Christianity. It's not a political platform. It's not about moral reformation. It's not about a style of music or clothing or speech. So what is it about?

### 1. The gospel is always of first importance. (15:1-4)

#### a. "Now" –

- i. Throughout the book he has addressed prideful divisions and alliances that chop up the church; marriage, singleness, and divorce; and the misuse of spiritual gifts rather than the preeminence of love.
- ii. Now he turns. He turns to the foundation of the building. He turns to that which is of "first importance."

#### b. He makes known to them what they already know!

- i. It's already been preached to them. They have already received it. They already stand in it. They are already saved by it. Surely true of the majority of you as well.
- ii. Why go over it again?
- iii. The gospel has continued relevance for Christians.

1. Not the "two door" approach followed by many – from *Resolving Everyday Conflicts*.

2. Two door – when saved you walk through a door. At the end of your life, you'll walk through another door and you'll be grateful for the gospel again, but it's basically irrelevant for living between the two doors.

3. Not so, says Paul! You stand in this gospel NOW! It's worth being reminded of. It's of first importance!

#### c. The gospel is something that he delivered to them – he handed over and entrusted it to them. It was something he had received as well.

- i. Always receiving, always passing on.

#### d. The gospel is of first importance – the most prominent, most important, central, core.

e. So what is the gospel? Explained through a series of clauses beginning with “that”

i. **Christ died for our sins.**

1. Each of those five words could be the key word.
2. I want to put emphasis on the small preposition “for.”
3. He died because of our sins.
4. Substitutionary death. Vicarious death.
5. The essence of the gospel is Jesus putting Himself where we deserve to be. The essence of sin is us putting ourselves where only God deserves to be. (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*)
6. Jesus spoke seven phrases from the cross. Two are directly related to his death for our sins.
  - a. It lead to the cry, “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?” Mt 27:46– He became sin
    - i. **Galatians 3:13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE "—
    - ii. He became a curse for us
  - b. “It is finished” John 19:30
    - i. His flawless, holy life culminated in complete obedience all the way to the end.
    - ii. Eric Davis - At the cross, God exhausted the punishment sinners earned upon his Son. Jesus suffered for every lack of perfection-in thought, word, nature, & deed of the forgiven. God declares all who trust in Christ as forever forgiven, on the basis of Jesus, their substitute.
7. The twin goals of our criminal justice system are retribution and rehabilitation.
  - a. Retribution – they must pay for their crimes
  - b. Rehabilitation – they must be changed so they are no longer a danger to society
    - i. Those on the political right tend to lean on retribution, those on the political left tend to lean on rehabilitation.
  - c. The gospel accomplishes both for us, the criminals.
    - i. **Colossians 2:14** having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
    - ii. The crime is paid for and, by the power of the new life granted to us and the stranglehold of sin broken for us, we can change.
8. He died according to the Scriptures – not a chaotic, out of control incident but planned and executed as intended by God.

- a. **Isaiah 53:5a** But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities;
- b. Patrick Schreiner - A Bible without a cross is a Bible without a climax, a Bible without an ending, a Bible without a solution. The spiral of sin that began in Genesis 3 must be stopped; the death of Jesus terminates the downward spiral.

## ii. He was buried

1. The fact that he was buried verified His death and the fact that He appeared to others verified His resurrection.
2. No need to provide evidence here. It was undenied by skeptics and Christians alike that He actually died.

## iii. He was raised

1. Verified by OT scriptures and countless appearances
2. The preaching in the book of Acts emphasizes the resurrection. Why? Our next two sections help us to see, but I want you first to see the emphasis by the first generation of Christians in the book of Acts.
3. **Acts 2:32** "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.
4. **Acts 3:15** [you] put to death the Prince of life, *the one* whom God raised from the dead, *a fact* to which we are witnesses.
5. **Acts 4:10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health.
6. **Acts 5:30** "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.
7. **Acts 17:31** because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
8. **See also: Acts 10:39-41; 13:30-31**
9. (next section)

## 2. The resurrection was confirmed as historical fact by many appearances. (15:5-11)

- a. 6 appearances listed here; half were to individuals, half were to groups.
- b. All were surprised, although some should not have been because Jesus told them this would happen.
- c. Some would have seen with willing eyes – they would have wanted this to be true!
  - i. Cephas (Peter), the 12 (still called that although down to 11 after the betrayal by Judas)
  - ii. Peter
    1. **Luke 24:33-34** And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, <sup>34</sup> saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon."
    - a. Cephas = Peter = Simon; like reading a Russian novel, so many names for one person!

iii. The 12

1. **Mark 16:14** Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining *at the table*; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.
2. Including Thomas who needed to touch the scars to believe.

d. Others would not have wanted this to be true.

- i. James was Jesus' half brother. John 7:5 tells us that his brothers were not believing in him. They thought he was crazy. Thought he was embarrassing the family. Tried to stop him at several points. After seeing the risen Christ, his own half-brother through a common mother, he believed.
- ii. Paul himself was trying to squash the early church.
- iii. Can't make the claim that these people were only seeing what they wanted to see.

e. Can't claim it was a hallucination – that doesn't happen to 500 people at once.

f. Can't claim it was just a story or a legend made up decades later – He tells the Corinthians that many of them are still alive – go ask them!

g. If people hear news that seems too good to be true they get skeptical.

- i. Example – if you receive a letter in the mail that seems to be from a legitimate law firm telling you that a distant unknown relative has died and you're the closest living relative so you've inherited millions . . . you would be skeptical. But you know, you'd probably at least call and check it out. Why? The news is so good you want it to be true!
- ii. Why list all these appearances? The news is good but people would be skeptical. We tend to look down on people from the past thinking, "of course they bought into this resurrection thing. They were gullible!" No so. They were skeptical of resurrection claims. Many Jews didn't believe in any type of a resurrection. Those that did believe the resurrection would be a group event at the end of time, not right then in the middle of history by an individual.

3. Because Jesus really did rise from the dead. . . (15:12-19)

They are worded as negatives – if Christ has NOT been raised, then here are the ripple effects. But, since the opposite is true, we can consider the opposite of the statements as well.

a. There is **rational** cause to believe in Christ. (v. 14)

- i. It is not in vain – not without cause
- ii. There are good, logical, evidence based reasons to be a Christian.
- iii. The historical evidence that Jesus really died and really rose is really strong.

b. We are telling the **truth** about God. (vv. 15-16)

- i. Worded in the negative in the passage – "if we are saying that the God of our forefathers raised Jesus, but He didn't, then we are not telling the truth about God. We are in error."
- ii. But if this is true, then Jesus is THE truth, not a truth but the very essence or foundation of truth.

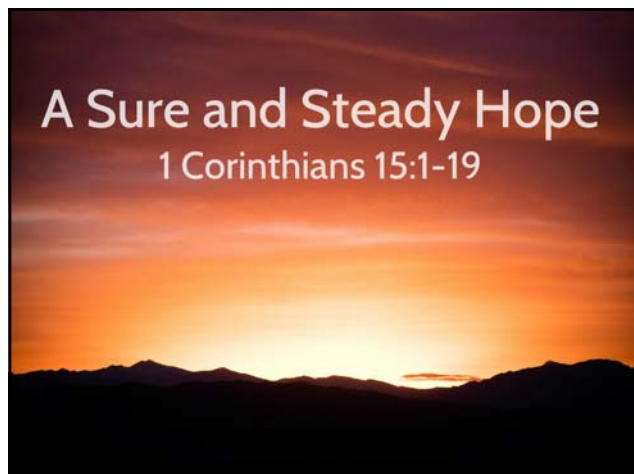
- c. We are no longer in our sins. (v. 17)
    - i. The heart of the gospel is that He died for our sins and was raised showing that the payment was made in full, accepted by the Father, and fully sufficient.
    - ii. If it was just a guy dying an unjust death as an act of love, but it didn't really do anything for us, then the full weight of our disobedience to the Father still rests on us. Our guilty conscience must be handled another way.
  - d. Those who have died in Christ now live with Him. (v. 18)
    - i. "Fallen asleep" is a way of describing death.
    - ii. **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14** But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.
    - iii. Because He conquered death for us, we know that we will conquer death in Him.
  - e. Any sacrifices made for Him in this life are worth it. (v. 19)
    - i. **1 Corinthians 4:11-13** To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; <sup>12</sup> and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.
    - ii. Are you living in such a way that you are to be pitied if Christianity is not true?
      - 1. Are your finances effected in such a way that people should feel bad for you?
      - 2. Do you deny yourself certain pleasure that the world runs after that if there are no moral bounds people could say that you failed to seize all the pleasure you could in this short life?
      - 3. Do you roll out of bed early on your one day you could sleep in so you can gather with other believers to worship?
    - iii. Or are you virtually indistinguishable from the world? Is your life practically identical with no sacrifices, no self-denials?
    - iv. Because Christ rose, we can live not for today but for the long tomorrow.
4. Big idea: The death and resurrection of Christ provide a sure and steady hope.
- a. Your failures are not final.
    - i. Did you notice that Paul slows down for a minute, pauses the discussion of the resurrection that he will pick back up in a moment, and focuses on God's grace that transformed him.
      - 1. Paul combined academic hubris and success with a self-righteous zeal that mowed over the church as he had them arrested and put to death.
      - 2. What would that look like today? Who would be the closest parallel to Paul?
        - a. Perhaps the ISIS zealot putting a gun to the head of an Egyptian Christian?

- b. His past was a backdrop to display God's grace.
  - 3. Like a performer on a stage bathed in light while the background is black makes the performer stand out, so God's grace is on center stage.
- ii. Do you think your failures are too big to be forgiven? Too significant? Too many?
  - 1. Do you realize that that is not an act of humility but rather a challenge to the sufficiency of the death of God's Son?
- b. **Death** is not the end.
  - i. **1 Corinthians 15:53-57** For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. <sup>55</sup> "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; <sup>57</sup> but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
    - 1. Death for a Christian is a doorway not a destination. It is shedding the perishable to put on the imperishable. It is replacing a tent with a home (2 Cor. 5:1)
- c. **Costly** faith in Christ is worth it.
  - i. But you have to receive it. Paul said he delivered this message of first importance and they received it and stand in it.
  - ii. It's not unreasoned faith – the passage gives evidence and makes logical arguments.

## Communion

Luke 22:14-20

Jesus knew that what awaited him was the horror of the cross. He linked this meal with His death and the new covenant that his death would bring in. How appropriate that we take communion on this day.



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