

Three Appeals for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11 • RESURRECTION (PART 1)

Baxter T. Exum (#1594) • Four Lakes Church of Christ • Madison, Wisconsin

May 16, 2021



****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE****

It is good to be together this morning! I hope all of us have the elements for the Lord's Supper (either from home or from the table in the entryway), as John/Aaron will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper right after our study today. And then, Noah/Caleb will be leading us in three songs before we head outside to do our visiting outdoors on this beautiful day.

Since it is extremely important that all of us understand God's plan for saving us, we want to make sure to give at least a brief summary here at the beginning. We've sinned, but God made a way for us to come back. He sent his only Son to this earth to live a perfect life. He offered himself up on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. He died, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. This is the good news. And in response, we obey this good news. In a sense, we reenact what he did in our own lives. We believe the message, we turn away from sin, we publicly confess our faith in Jesus as the Son of God (as the Messiah), and then we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and the Christian life begins. If you have any questions about this, if you would like to study together, we would invite you to get in touch. If you are joining us online, our contact information is there on your screen. If you are joining us on the phone, our number is 608-224-0274. And if you are here with us today, please pull me aside on your way out today, or talk to John or Aaron, and we would love to set up a time to get together to study the word of God together.

As our tradition has been, we are passing along some good news today, pictures of those who have obeyed the gospel over the past few days. The first one comes to us from the Wytheville congregation, over in West Virginia. Last Sunday, Ralph Corvin obeyed the gospel. It looks like he's on oxygen, they had him squat down in the water and actually tipped him forward instead of backwards as we might be accustomed to seeing, but they got it done, and so we rejoice with Ralph this week.

This next one comes to us from the Piedmont Road congregation down in Marietta, Georgia, where Jake Sutton preaches. Last Sunday, Preston Markwell was baptized, and so we rejoice with Preston today.

And the last example today comes to us from the church in Newark, New Jersey. Eugene Lawton has been at that congregation for many years, and he reports that they welcomed Earl Mills last Sunday. In the Facebook post, brother Lawton also says, "We commend brother Shakree Quinn for reaching out to his friend." Amen to that! We are looking forward to meeting both Earl and Shakree at some point, if not in this life, then the next. And we share all of this by way of encouragement. What Ralph, and Preston, and Earl have done this week, you can do today. We have a baptistery downstairs. It takes about 20 minutes to fill it with warm, clean water. If there's anything we can do to help or encourage, we hope you will get in touch.

Before we get to our study today, I'd like to give another brief update on the tech-outreach side of things. We've given a few updates on the website, and YouTube, and the captions over the past several weeks, and I thought we should give just a brief update concerning our page on Google Maps. Years ago, we claimed this location as the "Four Lakes Church of Christ" on Google Maps. And this basically allows people to find us online. It also allows people to call, get directions, or make their way to our website. Years ago, we had a decent ad in the Yellow Pages. We were paying up to around \$250 per month for that. And on our visitor cards, we had a blank for "How did you find us?" One of our seniors, when she first found us, she filled out that blank and said, "Very friendly." She found us to be "very friendly." That's not really what we were asking, but that's awesome! Fifteen years ago, probably 80% of those who found us as they were passing through Madison found us through the Yellow Pages. Now, that figure is probably 90% through Google and Google Maps, with the rest through Facebook. Google sends us some stats every month, and as you can see, people found us just over 7,300 times in April because of Google. They searched for things like "churches" or "churches near me," and those search terms led them to us.

This is what people would first see when looking for us on Google Maps – either a map or something of a satellite image, and then we also have reviews. Most of us check reviews before going somewhere, and this is also true of churches. So, we appreciate those of you who have left reviews through the years. If you haven't, go for it! But I just wanted to give a brief update concerning one of the main ways people are finding us online, through our page on Google Maps.

This morning, I would invite you to be turning with me to 1 Corinthians 15. Several months ago, one of members asked for a lesson on a rather difficult verse in this chapter, but as we make our way to that passage, I'd like for us to spend several weeks in 1 Corinthians 15, which includes what is perhaps one of the first written records of the Lord's resurrection. And I say this, because when Paul writes the letter we know as 1 Corinthians, the four gospel accounts most likely had not yet been written (with the possible exception of Mark). Matthew was probably written shortly before 70 AD, Mark was probably written at some point in the mid 50's, Luke was likely written around 60 AD, and John was most likely written much later, perhaps around 85 AD or even later. On the other hand, 1 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul, in roughly 55 AD, only about 25 years after the Lord's resurrection. So again, this is perhaps one of the first written accounts of the resurrection.

Just a bit of background on Corinth. Paul traveled to Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey, and as most of us probably know, Corinth was built on an isthmus. Here in Madison, we know what that means! Corinth's isthmus was a bit wider than ours (about 4 miles across, instead of less than a mile across our isthmus here in Madison). Now, they have cut a canal through the isthmus in Corinth (in the late 1800's). This is obviously not the Yahara River. But even back then, before the canal, it was something of a shortcut, where ships would unload on one side and transfer their cargo over land, to the other side. This made Corinth something of a gathering place for sailors. It was the sailor truck-stop of the ancient world, and had a well-deserved reputation for being quite immoral. But the location along several trading routes also made it an important city for the gospel. Paul,

then, spends 18 months here and has some success. After he leaves, he writes a series of letters back to the congregation (four that we know of, but we only have two of those), known as 1-2 Corinthians. And in 1 Corinthians, he seems to be answering a series of questions. Throughout the book, he will say, **“Now concerning”** this, or **“Now concerning”** that. And so, it seems that they have written Paul with some concerns, and Paul is answering those concerns. He’s going down the list, and one of those concerns seems to be about the resurrection. Some were perhaps doubting or even denying the resurrection of the dead. This doubt comes from perhaps two places. On the Jewish side, we know that the Sadducees denied the resurrection altogether (and they were a major sect of the Jews). And then, on the Gentile side, the Greeks thought the idea of resurrection was ridiculous. Just up the road in Athens is where the philosophers hear Paul preaching about the resurrection; they begin to sneer and refer to him as an **“idle babbler.”** This skepticism was perhaps making its way into the congregation. Paul, then, writes to Corinth and he answers this concern in Chapter 15.

And today we start where Paul starts, with the resurrection of Jesus. I should tell you that I had quite a hard time finding an image of an “empty tomb” that we are allowed to share on the livestream (due to copyright issues). In fact, on one of the sites we regularly use for images, I ran into an ominous-looking warning that I had never seen before. When I searched for “empty tomb,” a little box popped up that said, “Keyword blocked: The keyword you entered is blocked due to security reasons.” In years of searching for images, I have never seen this before! I still have no idea what that is about. So, I thought: What I need is perhaps a picture of a cave taken from the inside looking out. I thought back to some of my fairly recent hiking adventures, and the first that came to mind was a trip out to Governor Dodge State Park with Hans back in 2019. However, I pulled up those pics, and the only pictures I had from inside the cave looking out had Hans standing there in the opening! This is obviously not what I was going for. So then I came back to this one. This one was taken back in February, on a trip up to Minnesota. I went up there since the Freed-Hardeman Lectures were cancelled, and I did some hiking and snowshoeing along the Superior Hiking Trail that stretches from Duluth more than 300 miles northeast to the Canadian border. This is a picture taken along the Superior Hiking Trail, inside Ely’s Tunnel looking out. And just to give some context, this is a picture from the outside looking in. The abandoned railroad tunnel is just west of Duluth, Minnesota, and I can tell you it is cold up there in February! It was a good hike, though. Anyway, as we find ourselves on the inside looking out, I hope we can imagine this as being an “empty tomb.” They put Jesus into a tomb on Friday, but he came out alive on the third day, on the first day of the week.

Let’s start this morning by looking at the resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, and as we look at this passage, let’s keep an eye out for three appeals, three arguments supporting the resurrection of Jesus as an event that actually happened. And this will become the basis for everything else in this chapter. Before we believe that we will be raised from the dead, we need to believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead. We start today with verses 1-11 – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, the words of Paul,

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His

grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Again, as we work our way through what Paul says here, let's notice these three appeals, as Paul tries to convince these people that Jesus really did come back from the dead.

I. And we start with the first two verses, where Paul starts, as he appeals to those who are reading this letter for the first time: He appeals to the SAVED, he appeals to the CHURCH.

And his message to those who are reading this letter is: If you are a Christian, you know there's a resurrection, because without the resurrection, there is no Christian faith. The resurrection is what the Christian faith is all about! In verse 1, Paul appeals to the gospel he preached to them. They know this, they've heard this, they believe this, they have received this, they stand in this, they are saved by this gospel message. This would be a good time to point out that the word "***gospel***" simply means "good news." "***Gospel***" comes across as a church-type word, but the word itself simply refers to a good message or a good proclamation or a good announcement. I think of "proclamation," and I think of my work as an election official. Wisconsin state law says that at 7 a.m., to open the polls, we have to make a proclamation at the entrance to the polling place, and it needs to be proclaimed with a loud voice. I usually assign this to one of our brand-new election officials. Sometimes they think I'm joking. Nope, it's state law, "Hear ye! Hear ye! The polls of this election are now open and will remain open until 8 o'clock this evening!" And with that, the polls are open. It is a proclamation. Well, the gospel is also a proclamation. We proclaim the good news. We don't make up the message, we don't have a right to change it, but we make the announcement on God's behalf. We'll define it in just a moment (as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus), but for now, Paul's point is that if you are a Christian, you already believe in the resurrection; otherwise, you have believed in vain. If you think you're a Christian but don't believe the resurrection, you have completely missed the point. The resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith. So, he starts by making an appeal to the saved: You know this, he's saying. If you are saved, then you know that Jesus has been raised from the dead. And you will continue being saved, as long as you continue holding on to the word which I preached to you. Your salvation is conditional on continuing to hold on to the gospel message.

As God's people, then, we are living proof of the resurrection of Jesus. Without his resurrection, there would be no church. Without his resurrection, the death of Jesus would have ended it. The disciples would have scattered, and we wouldn't be here today. But as it is, we have received the gospel, we do stand in it, we are saved by it, and we are holding on to it. And this is Paul's first appeal. As God's people, we are living proof of the resurrection.

II. The second appeal is an appeal to SCRIPTURE.

Paul reasons from the word of God, and he defines the gospel as being the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus on the third day. The first part of this is that "***Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.***" He died, but his death wasn't just a tragedy or an accident, but he died "***for our sins according to the scriptures.***" His death was prophesied, and it was for a reason. His death was a sacrifice. He died in our place. His death allowed him to take on the punishment we deserved. We think of those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, starting with God apparently taking the life of an animal to provide a skin to cover up the nakedness of Adam and Eve. One life was given for another. This continues with Abel's sacrifice from his flocks. It's pictured in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (and the last minute substitution that was made). It continues into the time of Moses with the Passover lamb that was sacrificed so the people could live. As Paul says earlier in this book (in 1 Corinthians 5), Christ is "***our Passover.***" He is the lamb that was offered in our place. He is "***the***

Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (as John proclaims in John 1:29). All of this is ***"according to the Scriptures."*** All of this was predicted. All of this was prophesied beforehand.

Then, Jesus' burial confirms his death. It's easy to overlook the burial, but the burial proves that Jesus really died. Imagine Jesus being declared dead on the cross and then coming back to life five minutes later. Everybody would doubt whether he really died. As it is, though, he died, and he was buried. His burial confirms the death. And even his death was prophesied. Going back to Isaiah 53:9, Isaiah said, ***"His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death."*** As I understand this, as a criminal, Jesus should have been buried with the wicked (in a potter's field of some kind). But as we know, he wasn't, was he? No, although Jesus died like a criminal, he was buried like a king. I love what Charles Hodge said about this, "To save us, God could not cancel the cross, but he could be lavish in the burial." And that is what happened. Jesus had to be crucified, but once that was over, the Lord's body was treated with the utmost of respect – taken down from the cross, carefully wrapped in fine linen, along with about a hundred pounds of myrrh, and aloe, and various spices, before being buried in a rich man's tomb, chiseled out of solid rock. As Isaiah prophesied, ***"He was with a rich man in his death."***

And finally, ***"he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."*** As with his death for our sins, so also his resurrection was prophesied. We think of the prophecy made by King David in Psalm 16 (and quoted by Peter in Acts 2), where he said, ***"For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay."*** For Jesus, the grave was temporary. He died, he was buried, and he was raised up, ***"according to the Scriptures."***

All of this is good news, the gospel. Because Jesus died for us, because he was buried, and because he was raised up, our sins can be forgiven! Paul, then, appeals to the word of God for proof of the resurrection.

III. The third appeal Paul makes for the resurrection of Jesus is an appeal to EYEWITNESSES.

One thing we notice here is that the only two witnesses mentioned by name are perhaps the most unlikely of witnesses. Cephas (in verse 5) is a reference to Peter. Remember: Peter had just denied knowing the Lord. Peter is a broken man at this point. And yet, Peter is one of the first to see the Lord after his resurrection. The other witness mentioned by name is James. Most believe this to be James, the Lord's younger half-brother. According to John 7:5, the Lord's own brothers were not believing him. In fact, in Mark 3:21, we find that Jesus' brothers tried to take Jesus into custody, for they were saying, ***"He has lost His senses."*** Our brother has lost his mind; he thinks he is God! But, a short time later, we have James writing a book of the New Testament, describing himself as ***"a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."*** In James 2:1 he refers to Jesus as ***"the Lord of glory."*** So, he goes from an unbeliever, to somebody who tries to take his brother away because he thinks he's lost his mind, to referring to himself as a ***"bond-servant"*** of Jesus and referring to his own brother as the ***"Lord of glory."*** How do we explain that? The resurrection. Jesus ***"appeared to James,"*** Paul says. With his own eyes, James sees his own brother come back from the dead. James is an eyewitness. He appears to the apostles as a group several times, and then he also appears to ***"more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now."*** Why does Paul say this? Remember: This is perhaps the first written account of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. So, Paul makes the claim, and then he invites people to investigate. If you don't believe me, check it out! Do the research! And let's also remember: If 1 Corinthians is written around 55 AD, this means the resurrection is only 25 years back in the past. If I want to know about something that happened 25 years ago, I can ask somebody.

I looked back in Madison history, and 25 years ago the Hotel Washington burned down in February 1996. I wasn't here. We were living down in Janesville at the time. And so, if I doubt that this actually happened, I could interview some people. We could talk to some old firefighters. We could look up some property records. We might be able to find some neighbors who saw it happen. We could ask around. This morning at the Cottage Café, I was talking to the woman sitting beside me, and I asked her, "Do you remember the Hotel Washington burning down?" Yes, she did, and we talked about that for a bit. The point is: Twenty-five years is not a long time ago. And so, when Paul says that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at one time, most of whom are still alive, I'm not too good at math, but I'm pretty sure that leaves at least 251 eyewitnesses that I can track down and talk to. Paul, then, seems to be giving a challenge: There is evidence for the resurrection, and if you doubt, start digging into it. Go talk to these people.

And thankfully for us, some of these eyewitnesses wrote down what they saw – men like Matthew, and Mark, and John, and James, and Peter. They wrote books about the Lord and his resurrection. We have Luke who is not an eyewitness himself, but he does the research and interviews those who are, and he also writes two books of the New Testament. And these men are all willing to die for their faith.

And then, as if all of these are not convincing enough, we also have Paul in this list (in verse 8), ***"and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."*** Paul sees himself as having been born at the wrong time. He uses a word here that was sometimes used in the ancient world to refer to a miscarriage or an abortion. Paul was out of place as an apostle. He was born at the wrong time. He starts out as an enemy of the Christian faith. So, we have Peter (the denier), we have James (the guy who thinks his brother has lost his mind), and we have Paul (a persecutor of the church). All of these are eyewitnesses to the resurrection. These are the last people we would ever accuse of making this up.

Paul, then, in this first written reference to the resurrection, he appeals to the faith of those who are saved, he appeals to the Scriptures, and he appeals to eyewitnesses.

IV. Here at the end (in verses 9-11), we come to the "SO WHAT?" question: What does all of this evidence really mean?

For Paul, this is personal. He is ***"not fit to be called an apostle."*** He ***"persecuted the church of God."*** And yet, the grace of God changed his life. Many years back, Paul heard the gospel himself, and then he obeyed it – turning away from the old life of sin, and allowing himself to be buried with Christ in the act of baptism, a burial in water for the forgiveness of sins, rising up out of the water to live a new life. And then, the grace of God allowed him to preach this good news to others.

And isn't this where Paul started in verse 1? ***"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel."*** For this reason, he says, ***"I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."*** The resurrection changes everything. And if the resurrection of Jesus has the power to change Paul, then the resurrection certainly has the power to change us as well.

Conclusion:

What makes the good news good is that it saves us. And it saves us when we obey it. There are two passages, in fact, promising God's judgment on those who ***"do not obey the gospel"*** (1 Peter 4:17 and 1 Thessalonians

1:8). The gospel is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. How do we obey the good news? Paul answers this in another passage, in Romans 6:3-7. How do we “**obey**” a death, burial and resurrection? As we close, think with me, please, about the words of Paul from Romans 6:3-7,

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.

We obey the gospel by reenacting the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in our own lives in the act of baptism. We die to sin, we are briefly buried under the water, our sins are forgiven, and we are brought up out of the water to live the Christian life. As I said earlier, if you have any questions about this, if you would like to study further, please get in touch, and we would be glad to study the word of God together.

Before we partake of the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the God of life, the only true God, the one with the power to raise your Son up from the dead. We are thankful for your grace and your mercy toward us. We are thankful today for the good news. We are thankful for the changes we’ve seen in our own lives, we are thankful for the testimony of scripture, and we are thankful for the eyewitness accounts. Thank you for saving us and for washing our sins away. Bless us with courage as we share the good news with the people we know and love. Forgive us when we fall short.

We are thankful for our guests today. We pray that you will comfort Ruth in the loss of her son.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. In Jesus we pray, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com