

Easter Sunday; April 17, 2022
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
“Easter is of First Importance”

Brothers, I am going to call your attention to the gospel that I preached to you. You received it, and you took your stand on it. You are also being saved by that gospel that was expressed in the words I preached to you, if you keep your hold on it – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:

**that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,
and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.**

After that he appeared to over five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Last of all, he appeared also to me, the stillborn child, so to speak. For I am the least of the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God’s church. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not ineffective. On the contrary, I worked more than all of them (and yet it wasn’t my doing, but was the grace of God, which was with me, that did it). So whether it is I or they, that is what we preached, and that is what you believed.

Have you ever had a day, or maybe just a single moment, of first importance? The married men here today have had a moment of first importance, a day that all your hopes came down to. After the months, maybe even years of dating, you drop to your knee and pop the question. And it all comes down to that moment. If she says, “yes,” you jump for joy. That is a moment of first importance.

Students have moments of first importance. You know, as you sit down for that final exam, that it all comes down to this. Your future depends on how you answer questions that you’ve been studying for all semester. This is the moment of first importance.

We Christians also have a day, a moment, of first importance. And today is it. Everything comes down to Easter. If Easter is true, if it is a fact, if it really happened, then it certifies this entire faith that we call Christianity, it changes the entire way we live our lives, and it guarantees us eternal happiness. If, however, Easter is a fraud, if it never happened, if it’s all a big lie...well, then, everything unravels. I think that both those who believe Jesus physically rose from the dead and those who do not believe can at least agree on this much: what St. Paul wrote is true. It must be: Easter is **of first importance**.

Before he was crucified, Jesus on multiple occasions predicted that he would rise from the dead three days after he died. This is the main reason Easter is of first importance. We have a word in English for someone who says he is going to do something and then does not. We call him a liar. If Jesus promised he was going to rise, but then did not on Easter morning, he’s a liar. And, of course, if Jesus is a liar, he cannot be the holy, sinless Son of God, which he also claimed to be. That makes his whole life one big lie.

In fact, if Easter’s a lie, it’s not really even possible to think of Jesus as a “good teacher” or a “moral man.” Good teachers don’t lie about who they are. Moral men don’t promise to do something and then not follow through.

Easter is definitely of first importance. Because if it's not true, the carnage doesn't stop there. Your faith, if Easter is not truth, is a big nothing. The entire Christian faith is a big nothing, actually. What good would it do you to trust in a liar who died two thousand years ago? He can't help you. He can't save you. He can't forgive your sins. He certainly can't deliver you to any heaven when you die. If Christ hasn't been raised, sin and death still rule. Death still has you in his sights, and when death takes you down you won't be getting back up again. Without Easter, you have no hope of anything after this life.

Without Easter, we may as well join in the chant of the unbelieving world: **Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.** If there's no Easter, if this life is all we have, then why would we ever bother to live for anything but pleasure in the moment? We might as well live just to squeeze every drop of pleasure out of life. Of course, even if we do that, someday we're still going down with no hope of getting back up. Without Easter, life is empty.

Oh, and one last thing: if Easter's a lie, everything we do as a church is worse than a giant waste of time. Sunday school? All we do there is brainwash innocent kids into believing silly fairy tales – if Christ has not been raised. This church here? All we do is waste people's hard-earned money by spreading a lie. You'd be better off flushing your offering envelope down the toilet, if Easter is not true. At least then your money wouldn't be going to spread a lie.

Easter is of first importance. Without it, we have no future, no life, no purpose, no mission.

Which is exactly why God has left us with absolutely no doubt whatsoever that Easter really happened. St. Paul tells us that after Jesus rose, **...he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to over five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. Last of all, he appeared also to me...**

After they saw the risen Christ, those men went out and preached Christ crucified and risen. They were so convinced that Jesus bodily rose from the dead that they gave up their own bodies for him. They traveled to the ends of the known world for him. They got locked up for him. And, finally, most of them were put to death for him.

Now, people who do not believe in Easter will argue that people just do crazy things sometimes. That's true enough. Sometimes people who believe very strongly in something will go all-out for it, even if it isn't true. Sometimes people do that. People will devote their lives to some really crazy causes. People will sometimes even die for a lie. But people will not die for something that they *know for a fact* is a lie. If Jesus didn't rise, if he did not appear to his disciples, they would have known for a fact that his whole life was a lie. And they would not have died for him. The only way to explain what Jesus' followers did after Easter Sunday is that they actually saw the risen Jesus with their own two eyes, and that all of them were absolutely certain of his physical resurrection from the dead.

As if eyewitnesses so convinced that they will die for him is not enough, Paul also writes: **...he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.** It is not just the testimony of Christ's followers that we have to lean on, it is the entire revelation of Scripture, going back hundreds of years before Christ was born. The Old Testament predicts his resurrection. Psalm 16:10 promises about the Messiah: **You will not let your Holy One see decay.** And Isaiah 53:11 makes the same promise: **After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life.** It is not only the testimony of men that proclaims Christ is risen, it is the testimony of God himself. He inspired the writers of the Old Testament, which carries these promises of

the resurrection. He inspired the New Testament, which tells us the story of the resurrection. In the end, we know Easter is real because God testifies to that fact throughout his own Word.

Easter is of first importance. And it is very real. It is a historical fact. About 1,990 years ago a group of women walked to a tomb expecting to find their dear Lord still inside, wrapped up in linen. Instead, they found an empty tomb. And they heard the most important news ever. News that impacts everything.

Since Easter is real, Christ is no liar. He is the sinless Son of God, who lived a perfect life for us. We know it, because he proved it by rising from the dead. He is nothing less than the holy, sinless Lamb of God, sent to bear our sins on his cross in order to win forgiveness for us. You see, before Christ rose according to the Scriptures, God's Word says he also **...died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures**. He died for you and me, to bring us back to God. And we know it worked, because God raised him again. Easter is of first importance. It proves our sins forgiven.

And since Christ made that effective sacrifice – and Easter proves that it worked – as a Christian you have everything to look forward to. The end of your life will only mark the beginning of another life, which will not end. Paul writes in verse 2: **You are also being saved by that gospel...** And we are. In the reality of Easter we have a certain hope of everlasting life. We don't have to be afraid of death anymore ever, today or on our deathbeds. Not ever. Because Christ beat death for us. So we will rise too, on the Last Day.

Easter is of first importance. It means your own resurrection and eternal life. And not only for you, but for everyone you love who has died with Christian faith in their hearts. Easter means you can smile through your tears when you think of a loved one who's passed away in Christ. Because they're not really dead. They're still alive with the one who conquered death.

And because Christ is risen indeed, we Christians also live an entirely new life while we are still on this earth. Did you hear the effect that Easter had on St. Paul? Before he learned about Easter, Paul made his living brutally persecuting Christians. He killed people like you and me for a living. But listen to what happened after Christ convinced Paul that Easter was real: **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not ineffective. On the contrary, I worked more than all them...**

What is it about your life that says, "Christ is still dead"? Does the way your worship, or the frequency of your worship, say, "Christ may be dead"? Is it the way you give, as though Christ were not alive to provide for you? The way you treat other people, as though Jesus did not die and rise for them all? The way you worry, as though Christ were not alive and in control? What is it about your life that says, "Jesus never rose"?

Whatever it is, Easter will change it. Because with Easter – with the knowledge that Christ is alive, that this life is not everything, and that we do have hope – we will worship him like he's alive, work for him like he's alive, open our mouth to tell others that our Savior lives and conquers sin and death. In short, Easter will give our lives Godly purpose, just as it did for St. Paul. It will change us into what God wants us to be. Easter is of first importance. Christ's resurrection means a new life for his people right now. It turns us into people who live like our Savior is alive – because he is!

And the truth of Easter makes the work of this church and others like it the most important work in the world. It makes this a place where children grab on and take hold of the precious truths of sins forgiven

and everlasting life. It makes this house of worship a place where we proclaim good news that transcends eternity. Easter means that we, as a church, have the most important mission in the world.

Easter is of first importance. And we know it is reality. St. Paul concludes: **That is what we preach and that is what you believed.** We believe the testimony of the men who saw him. We believe the testimony of the Holy Spirit, who proclaims it through the Bible's writers. Christ is risen indeed. Our sins are paid for; we have certain hope for our own resurrection and eternal life; our lives take the singular aim to worship God and please him in every way we can.

Easter is of first importance. Thank God it is reality.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.