

THE LOOKOUT

APRIL 2024

Unit: 1 Corinthians (Part 2) Theme: The Powerful Church

Overview: If the living church had problems (which was last month's emphasis), then the powerful church had answers. Even churches with brokenness, like the Corinthian congregation, can provide knowledge and insight. Powerful churches learn to stress the right things (i.e., the big things of the book, the Bible). Powerful churches stress God's wisdom over the foolishness of this world. Powerful churches stress spiritual gifts that edify others over pandering to the pride of the user. Powerful churches stress love over self-centeredness. Powerful churches stress the resurrection over the hopelessness of the world.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF APRIL 28, 2024

LESSON AIM: **"Give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).**

UNIT: 1 Corinthians (Part 2)

THEME: The Powerful Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 16-27, 50-58

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 15:5-15, 28-49; 1 Peter 1:3-9

RESURRECTION

BY MARK SCOTT

Mockery and ridiculing are not very becoming for a Christian. Professional football players can even be penalized and fined for taunting. But mocking, ridiculing, and taunting are totally acceptable for the Christian when it comes to the subject of death. The resurrection (both Jesus' and ours) makes a mockery of death. It is the ultimate joke on the devil.

Many of the problems in the Corinthian church can be traced back to a faulty view of the resurrection and eschatology. Some had an over-realized eschatology (i.e., believing that Christians already exist in an exalted state like heaven and therefore they can do anything they want in the here and now). Some had an under-realized eschatology (i.e., believing the resurrection is so far removed from believers that even if it did take place it wouldn't matter). This may explain why Paul devoted 58 hefty verses to the resurrection. Paul based his mockery of death because of the resurrection on the following arguments.

The Historical Argument of the Gospel*1 Corinthians 15:1-4*

Other religions spoke about resurrections (and more likely, reincarnation), but Christianity is unique in that the earliest believers claimed that a resurrection—Jesus' resurrection—had actually happened. The collaborative eyewitness accounts are overwhelming. No judge who sits on the bench could deny the multiple attestations for the resurrection of Jesus (see Judge Herbert Casteel's book *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* and consider the debate between Gary Habermas and Anthony Flew). The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of fact. He came forth from the grave. *Acceptance* of this fact is a matter of faith. Resurrection is at the heart of the gospel. The gospel that Paul preached and that the Corinthians accepted and stood upon and by which they were saved centered on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul declared this historic event and the gospel message that flows from it as *of first importance*. Additionally, the Scriptures testified to the fact. Several resurrection appearances were cited in verses 5-11. Could over 500 people be wrong about seeing Jesus? Considering the number of people who saw the resurrected Jesus, that 3,000 were baptized on the Day of Pentecost (not much later) is not surprising.

The Logical Argument of Faith*1 Corinthians 15:16-27*

Paul used impeccable logic to argue for the resurrection. First, he laid out what was at stake if there were

no resurrection. His argument had nine points. If there were no resurrection, he argued, then Christ would not be raised, preaching was vain, people were still in their sins, and those who died in the Lord before Jesus returned simply perished. James S. Stewart's famous sermon on this text was entitled, "If Christ Be Not Raised, What Then?"

Second, Paul laid out what was at stake if there was a resurrection. His argument again had nine points. If there was a resurrection, he argued, then Jesus was the first-fruits of the resurrection and he was the second Adam, God's enemies are destroyed, death is forever gone, and God would be vindicated. Here is the logic: If resurrection is possible, then Jesus could well have been raised from the dead. And if Jesus was raised from the dead, then the resurrection of believers follows.

Paul continued his logical argument in verses 28-34. If resurrection does not happen, then baptism is ridiculous (v. 29), enduring things in life would be silly (vv. 30-32a), and moral behavior does not matter at all (vv. 33b-34). But if resurrection does happen, then those very things come into clear focus.

The Eschatological Argument of Victory*1 Corinthians 15:50-58*

A seeming objection to resurrection by some in the Corinthian church had to do with the nature and state of the resurrection body. Paul argued in verses 35-49 that in the future the resurrected body would be totally different—just like Jesus' resurrected body was different following that famous first day of the week. Paul illustrated his involved argument with farming (seeds being sown and having to die in the soil to produce), animals, birds, fish, sun, moon, and stars. He argued there was an essential difference between the natural world on earth and the supernatural world in heaven.

In the ultimate future, the human body would not endure. Therefore, the body must undergo a complete change. This will happen in the eschaton. It will happen quickly when Jesus returns. The old world will be swallowed up in the new world. Death itself will be swallowed up and forever mocked. Paul used Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 to garner his biblical support (see vv. 54-55). Death is gone, and Jesus has fulfilled the law. God is to be praised for this eschatological victory. Therefore, the resurrection becomes the motivation for being happy in the service of the king (v. 58). ■

APPLICATION

OF FIRST IMPORTANCE

BY DAVID FAUST

Jesus Christ is risen indeed! Aren't you glad? The miracle of Jesus' resurrection is the turning point of history, the backbone of biblical theology, and the foundation of the Christian faith.

Resurrection Consequences

If Christ didn't rise from the dead, the New Testament wouldn't have been written, the gospel wouldn't have spread around the world, and the apostles wouldn't have given their lives as martyrs. Without the resurrection, Christians wouldn't gather and worship on the first day of the week, baptism would be an empty ritual, and the Lord's Supper wouldn't involve communing with the living Lord. If the resurrection didn't happen, we would be fools for believing and perpetuating a colossal hoax. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14).

But the reality of the resurrection changes everything. Jesus himself stressed its significance. He taught plainly "that he must be killed and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). The apostle Paul's driving passion was "to know the power of [Jesus'] resurrection and participation in his sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). What did Paul consider "of first importance"? "That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

The resurrection is "of first importance" because it validates Jesus' truth claims, fulfills his messianic mission, and gives his followers purpose in life and hope when we die.

"The resurrection is the supreme vindication of Jesus' divine identity and his inspired teaching," writes former unbeliever Lee Strobel in *The Case for Christ*. "It's the proof of his triumph over sin and death. It's the foreshadowing of

the resurrection of his followers. It's the basis of Christian hope. It's the miracle of all miracles."

Do We Give It the Attention It Deserves?

Do we make it clear that Christ's resurrection is "of first importance" in our preaching, teaching, and worship services—not just something we sing about and think about at Easter? The fact of the resurrection profoundly impacts the way we deal with death, grief, and loss. What we believe determines how we grieve.

Recently I wrote a book to encourage adults to keep serving God as we grow older. I interviewed Bill Gaither, who was in his thirties when he and his wife, Gloria, cowrote their well-known song, "Because He Lives." I asked Bill, "What do those lyrics mean to you now, in this later season of your life?" (He is in his late eighties.) Here is his response:

"A great old hymn called 'He Lives' talks about the fact of Jesus' resurrection. But we added the adverb *because*, which answers the question, 'OK, this happened, but why does it make a difference to me on Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday? How is it going to make any difference to me tomorrow when I go back to the house and 'she's gone' or 'he's gone' and they are not coming back? In our song, the lyrics say, 'Because he lives, I can face tomorrow . . . all fear is gone . . . and life is worth the living.'"

Because Jesus is "the resurrection and the life," we can live in peace and security after we die (John 11:25). What could be more important than that?

Personal Challenge: Do you know the song, "Because He Lives"? Sing it out loud and thank the Lord that you can say, "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow." **L**

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When and how did the reality of Jesus' resurrection first impact your life?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 16-27, 50-58** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the passage briefly.

2. What did Paul mean when he wrote, "By this gospel you are saved" (v. 2)?
3. In what way are the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ foundational to the Christian faith and hope?
 - What is the point of baptism if Jesus' resurrection did not occur?
4. What does it mean to have believed "in vain"?
 - Acknowledging that salvation comes to us by the grace of God, what can we do personally to make sure we do not believe in vain?
5. Paul said that Christians are to be pitied if our hope ends with this present life.
 - Why would that be so?
 - What difference does hope in Christ make as you look toward eternity?
6. In what way is Jesus "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"?
7. Application writer David Faust notes, "The reality of the resurrection changes everything." Share some of the things in your life that have been changed because of the resurrection.
8. In Scripture, the word mystery often refers to something that has been hidden but is now revealed. How does the resurrection of Christ fit this understanding?
9. How does the hope of the resurrection and Christ's return motivate you in your Christian walk, and what can you do to encourage others with this hope?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: We move on from studying Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth to a four-week study of his second letter to the Corinthians. Read and reflect on **2 Corinthians 1:12-24; 2:12-17**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖