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1 Cor. 15:1-8

What is the Gospel of Christ?

Today is Easter Sunday, a truly joyful celebration every year. Though we may be tempted to think that Easter is about hunting eggs and eating chocolate bunnies, Easter is all about the *death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ* - the heart of the Gospel. This is what we're all about! This is what we celebrate every Sunday - every Sunday is Easter Sunday! This is why we gather, sing, pray, attend, give, and live our lives as Christians: ***Because we believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ!*** It's the fuel that motivates all we do!

Therefore, it's very appropriate that we specially celebrate it at Easter - but it's also *absolutely necessary* that we remember, believe, and celebrate the gospel of Christ *every week - every Sunday, every day!* After all, the gospel is our only hope! ***Believing in the gospel*** is the *only thing* that will save you from your sins and allow you *to receive eternal life with God.*

If you're not a Christian this morning, if you're not really sure if you are or not, if you're not even completely sure *what makes someone a Christian*, or what this word "gospel" means - then this gospel is exactly what you need to hear about today!

But what about those of us *who are believers?* Those of us who *are* Christians today? Why do we need to keep hearing the gospel over and over again? Perhaps you're thinking that the "message of the gospel" of Jesus Christ is just for non-believers - it's only what we need to hear in order to become Christians - but then we move on to other stuff after that. If that's what you think this morning, and are tempted to "tune out" the gospel message, then listen closely - ***the gospel of Christ is exactly what you need to hear today!*** In fact, it is what *all of us* need to hear, week after week, day after day! We *never* graduate from the gospel. We never move on. The key to becoming a Christian is by truly believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ; ***and the key to remaining and growing as Christ is believing the gospel more deeply;*** by letting the truth of God's grace sink more deeply into our hearts, to change our lives completely, to renew our minds and motivate us to be like Jesus as our hearts are *captured and transformed* by the glorious grace and truth of the gospel! The gospel of Christ is our daily bread - it is the "meat and potatoes" of every true Christian. Every page of the Bible, every sermon, every prayer, every sin we struggle with, every difficulty and suffering in our life, every reason for hope and joy - *the meaning and*

purpose is all found in the gospel of Christ! This is our hope! This is our reason to live, worship, and celebrate! The gospel is what makes us Christians, and it is how we grow and remain as Christians! Whether you're not a believer, a new believer, or have believed for 60 years - *the gospel is good news of great hope and joy for you today!*

So then, we're left with the obvious question: **What exactly is the gospel?** The word "gospel" simply means **good news**. It is the good news of *salvation* for sinners - that there is hope for salvation for even sinful, broken people like you and me. The *gospel* is the good news that the righteous God-Man, Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to save us from His wrath against our sin - even to raise up from death into eternal life! - *if we repent and believe, trusting in what Jesus Christ has done in his life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead.*

This is the heart of the gospel - and the heart of **1 Cor. 15:1-8**. In this passage Paul is writing to believers, that he himself brought the gospel message to them, which they "received" in faith. So why, then, is he reminded them of the gospel that he already preached to them and that they already believed in? *Because the gospel is not just something we "believed in" in the past* - as Paul says here in verse 1, it is something we must **"stand in."** It's not just something we believe once, but something we actively believe in. This is a reminder that the *gospel truly is the power of God to save - the only hope we have for salvation!* But only if we "hold fast" to the *gospel*. We must cling to the good news of Christ by faith to become Christians; and we must cling to the gospel *to remain Christians*. No matter who we are today, *we need the gospel*, just like Paul and the church of Corinth! And so, Paul clearly lays out the fundamentals of the gospel, which are "of first importance" for us in these next few verses.

The first essential piece of the gospel is that...

I. Jesus Christ Died to Save Us from our Sins

In verse 3-4, Paul begins proclaiming the *basic fundamentals of the gospel*: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (vv. 3-4). He speaks of the *death, burial, and resurrection* of Jesus Christ. But before we get there, we need to notice *what else* Paul says: that these things happened *in accordance with the scriptures*.

In other words, that the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ *was God's plan all along*. It was not an accident; it was not plan B. *It was God's plan from the beginning*; God's plan to *save sinners from sin, Satan, and even death*, specifically *through* the perfect life and sacrificial death of Christ on the cross!

And God unfolded this plan through *the whole Bible*. From beginning to end, the Bible is painting the picture of the Gospel - pointing to **the grace of Jesus Christ** at the center, all along. So if we're going to truly understand the gospel that Paul preaches here in **1 Cor. 15**, we need to understand *the context* of this gospel message that has been unfolding throughout the Scriptures, that is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. We can summarize the **gospel message** of the Bible in **four words: God, Man, Christ, Response.**¹

The first word is **God** - we have to know who God is. From the beginning, the Bible teaches us this: *There is only one God; He is the True God, the Creator of all things, and He is eternally good, loving, just, righteous, holy, and all-powerful*. God created all things, meaning he created *us - mankind*.

Which brings us to the second word - **Man**; we have to know *who we are*. Mankind was created in the image of God to be good - to know God, to enjoy, love, worship, obey and glorify Him forever! But it didn't end there; in order for there to be *good news*, there has to be bad news, and the bad news is: in the very good beginning, we missed it up - we *sinned*. The first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned by rebelling against God, not trusting him, but wanting to be in control of their own lives and do what *they* thought was right - not what God said was right and wrong. And this is exactly what you and I do all the time, isn't it? Every single person born in this world since this then has been *born a sinner*. Every single one of us has turned against God! No one is "really just a good and decent person deep down." We're all sinners; we're all *born sinners*. If you doubt this, just look at a two-year-old, who can ingeniously and creatively come up with ways to sin, all on his own! Better yet, just think about your own life, even just this past week: We have all acted selfishly, not caring about others, only ourselves; we have all lied and twisted the truth to make us look better or get what we want; we have all been led astray by pride, selfish ambition, greed, lust, and anger; we have all loved *ourselves* more than other people, and have sought to make *ourselves happy* at the expense of other people - even those we claim to love. But

¹ I did not come up with this outline and summary of the gospel; see *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert.

worst of all, ***we have all rebelled against God - the true King of all and righteous judge!*** We have all robbed him of His glory, disobeyed Him, and *rebelled against Him* as His enemies.

We are all evil. We are all broken - beyond any hope of repairing ourselves! The *gospel of Christ* only makes sense when we first realize that there is nothing we can do to “clean ourselves up” and make ourselves good enough; God demands moral perfection, and one day, *we will all stand before the judgment seat of God*. And because God is perfectly good and just, ***we will not stand on the basis of our own good works.***

Once that reality sets in - *then we are ready to hear the good news!* I said **four words** earlier: **God, Man, Christ, Response**. First, we see who **God** is; then, who **we** are - broken, guilty sinners, with no hope of saving ourselves. But the *good news* is *who Jesus Christ is*, and what he has done to save his people from our sins!

As Paul reminds us in **v. 3**: this is what Christ has done: “that Christ **died** for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.” Jesus Christ, the God-Man, came to earth and lived a *perfect, sinless, righteous life*; he is the only person who has ever lived that was *truly good*, who truly lived a blameless, sinless life! He fulfilled the holy demands of God’s Law and perfectly displayed the righteousness of God in His life. He lived the life we were supposed to live but have utterly failed at - a life lived *in complete devotion to God*, truly obeying and glorifying the Lord in all things. He did this as a Man; and yet He was able to do this *because He is God*. Therefore, he is the *only one of us* who didn’t deserve death! We deserve death because of our sin - a reminder that we deserve the *eternal wrath of God* in Hell because of our sin! Yet Jesus, who was perfect, *willingly gave himself up as a sacrifice - to die in our place!* He took **the guilt, shame, and penalty of our sin upon himself** on the cross - he died in the place of guilty sinners!

This is what we celebrate on “Good Friday,” as we did just two days ago: what we call “Good Friday” was the most tragic crime in history - the one and only perfectly good, innocent, and sinless man - Jesus Christ - **suffered, bled, and died in the place of those who deserved it!** There’s not greater picture of injustice than that! And yet, when we see the full picture, it becomes at the same time *the most glorious, wonderful day in all of history!* Because Christ died ***as a willing sacrifice to save us from our sins!***

He took my sin, my shame, and my guilt on Himself! He bore the wrath of God that I should’ve borne! He entered into the penalty that **we deserve!** And he did this *so that we don’t*

have to! So that we can be *forgiven and justified* - to be declared *not guilty*, to be declared *righteous* before God, our righteous judge! Christ died in the place of His people, so that ***our sins*** really were placed on Him on the cross; so that ***His blood truly has washed away all of our sin, guilt, and shame!*** There is no condemnation left for those of us in Christ Jesus *because the penalty has already been dealt out on Christ on the cross* for those of us who believe in Him!

As the beautiful hymn we sing, "In Christ Alone," puts it: "Till on that cross as Jesus died,/ the wrath of God was satisfied!/ For every sin on him was laid here in the death of Christ I live."

That's the Good News of Good Friday - that Jesus Christ died in the place of guilty sinners, so that the wrath of God against our sin can be satisfied! And it is good news because *Jesus didn't stay dead*; we know God accepted the sacrifice in our place *because Jesus rose from the dead!*

II. Jesus Christ Was Raised from the Dead that We may Live

When I was a sophomore in college, I applied to be a leader of a "LifeGroup" - which was just a small group discipleship ministry for college freshmen. During our interviews, that asked each of us, privately, to explain the gospel. Afterwards, we were told that *the majority* of people who were asked this question said, "The Jesus Christ died for our sins so that we can be forgiven and have eternal life." This statement is completely true - but it leaves out *one of the most important details!* Many Christians, when stating the gospel, *forget to mention the resurrection!* And this isn't just a matter of splitting hairs - *there is no gospel, no salvation from our sins, without the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ!*

The gospel message does not stop with the death of Christ - it culminates in His *resurrection* - the glorious reality of Easter Sunday! "Good Friday" is only good because Jesus's death was not final - though he truly died and was truly buried in the grave, he *rose again* on the third day, never to die again!

Here again the *content of the gospel* in **vv.3-4**: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures." Jesus Christ lived, died, was buried, and *was raised on the third day* to save us from our sins - *this is the heart of the glorious gospel!* This is the good news we trust, hope, and rejoice in!

And this is a *sure hope, a certain truth*, not a wishful fancy. We're reminded that we have this on the highest authority: *the word of God*. These things happened "*in accordance with Scripture*" - just as God said it would happen, and just as this scripture here tells us that it *did* happen. And what the Bible says is backed up as an *undeniable, historical fact*. We see this mentioned here in the text, in **vv.5-8**, as Paul lists the many *eyewitnesses* who encountered the risen Lord Jesus firsthand, for themselves - Peter, the rest of the Twelve disciples, over 500 more disciples, and *even Paul himself, in a miraculous way!*

The truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is *absolutely certain* because it is the *miraculous work of God*. Just as Christ bore our sins upon himself on the cross, so he *fulfilled the penalty of our sins* in the resurrection - when God was raised Christ from the dead, he declared that he *accepted Christ's sacrifice* as payment in full for the penalty of our sins! Just entered into the *consequences of our sin* when he entered death in our place - and when He was raised, he *defeated and crushed* the power of Sin, Satan, and even death! The resurrection overthrows the grace, and every consequence of sin and evil! Paul makes this point again at the end of chapter 15, **vv.54-57**: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

You see, the glorious power of the resurrection means that *it is sufficient to raise us from the dead as well - to crush the power of your sin and overthrow your grave!* All those who believe in this gospel *died on the cross with Christ* and are *raised with Him on Easter Sunday!* Because Christ died and was raised for us, *we will be raised to eternal life* - instead of our death ushering in the eternal wrath of God that we deserve, death has no sting for us anymore; we will be raised from the grave into *salvation, eternal life with God!* There is no fear in death because **Jesus Christ lives** - and because he lives, we who believe will live with him forever! We will be perfectly freed from sin and all of its consequences! We will be sinless and righteous; we will live in *God's place forever*, where there is no evil thing, no injustice, sorrow, pain, or sadness - but endless life, joy, and peace, forevermore! *That* is the glorious good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ - the gospel! But it is only good news for *those who truly believe in it.*

III. Everyone Who Truly Believes and Holds Fast to this Good News will be Saved

I said earlier that we can summarize the **gospel** with four words; *God, Man, Christ, Response*. We've seen who God is, who we are and why we need a savior, and how *Jesus Christ* has done everything necessary to save us from our sins. But this good news requires a **response**. We must respond to the gospel of Christ with *true faith*.

Let's look back at the beginning of the passage, in **vv.1-2**; *before* Paul summarizes what the gospel *is*, he tells us *how it works* - *how we personally receive the power of the gospel in our own lives*. First, we see that this message was "preached" - but in this context, that word simply means *proclaimed*, stated, declared. Paul told these Corinthians the gospel before they were Christians. And then, wondrously, by the grace of God - *they believed!* They "received" the gospel message *by faith*. They heard it, believed it was true - and then *trusted* in it.

But notice what Paul says next: he moves from the past to their *present, ongoing* faith: "in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, *if* you hold fast to the word I preached to you - unless you believed in vain."

He doesn't just point to something they did in the past; he tells us that if we're truly believers, if we have saving faith, then it means we are *currently* holding fast to the gospel; it means we stand firm in Christ by *clinging to Him in faith*, today! If we ask ourselves, "How do I know I'm a Christian?" we can't just point back to some time in our past and how "sincere" we felt, or what we said, did, or prayed; after all, if we do that, then we're trusting in our own works, and not grace, aren't we? No, our only hope and assurance is found in *currently resting in, trusting, believing in the grace of God in Christ Jesus!* True faith *perseveres*.

True, saving faith is also a *transforming faith* - to trust in God's grace means we are also *changed* by God's grace! This is why Paul says we must "*stand*" in the gospel, that we "*are being saved,*" only "*if we hold fast.*" - "*unless you believed in vain.*" It is possible to "believe" in who Jesus is and what he did - and yet not truly trust in Him for salvation; it is possible to *believe in vain*, to "profess" faith in Christ and claim to be a Christian, and yet not truly know Him. We're going to see this in more detail next week, as we look at the parable of the sower in Matt. 13. But for now, let me say this: this is the difference between simply *acknowledging* with our lips or thinking in our heads, "Sure, I accept that this is true." The book of James tells us that this is not enough; even *demons* believe God exists and affirm the truth of what Christ did! Saving faith is much deeper than this; it is to *trust* in who Christ is and what He has done! The way we truly "receive" the good news of Christ, the gospel, so that we are saved, is not just

casually believing it's true in our minds; it's not just acknowledging that it's true with our minds and lips; it is to *actually trust, in the depths of our souls, that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection was sufficient to save us completely from our sins, once and for all!* And this is not a one-time thing; to truly believe is something we must *continue* to do, every day, for the rest of our lives! And as we do, the grace of God we trust in *produces a change* in our lives! True faith is a *repentant faith* - we first believe by *turning away* from sin, the hope of this world, and anything we trust in or worship other than Christ, and *trusting in Him alone!* True faith desires to *love, follow, believe, worship, and obey the Lord!* No, we don't this perfectly; nor is our salvation based on the things we do! We're saved simply by trusting in Christ! But to truly trust and believe *changes us*; it means we *hold fast* to the word of truth, by God's grace.

We must truly *believe in our hearts* that we are saved *not by our works or anything we could!* It means truly believing that *the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ* really is sufficient to take away all of your sin! To pay your penalty, to take your place, to take away your sin, guilt, shame, and even death! The death of Christ was sufficient for you to be *completely forgiven!* That His resurrection is sufficient for you *to be raised to new life, even today, and that God **will** raise you to eternal life and salvation!* Simply cry out to the Lord, confess your sin, that there's nothing you can do to be perfectly righteous, and that you deserve God's wrath - and then *believe* in your heart and profess with your mouth that the grace of God in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ is your only hope - and it is more than enough! And this isn't *just* what non-believers need to do; this is what *each* of us need to do, every day! As the weight of your sin from this past week weighs you down - don't fall back on your good intentions, on your past sincerity, on the fact that you came to church, prayed, or read your Bible - *simply believe the gospel and trust that Christ's grace is sufficient! By His wounds we are healed, cleansed, forgiven, and justified!* Let us trust and believe that *we are saved by **grace** in Christ alone!*

As believers, we publicly and visibly proclaim that we believe this everytime we partake of the Lord's Supper. We respond to this gospel message by faith, once again, by visibly picturing the gospel and our response of faith through drinking the cup and eating the bread: remembering the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross by which we are saved! If you're a believer this morning, who has professed faith in baptism and belong to a gospel preaching church in good standing, we invite you to come to the table with us this morning.

But if you're not a believer this morning, then the Lord's Supper isn't for you - we ask that you simply remain seated during this time. But the way for you to respond this morning is *by responding to the gospel message we just heard by turning from sin and turning to Christ in faith!* Then make this public by professing your faith through baptism and joining a gospel-preaching church to begin your walk as a Christian. If you have any questions about this, I would love to speak with you. Let us pray.