

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 May 2020

Preacher: Iver Martin

[0 : 00] In some senses, I'm going to break all the rules of preaching this morning. The rules say that you should give an introduction, that you should give a background. And in a passage like this, the one that we've just read, I should tell you a little bit about Paul and Corinth and the church in Corinth and what its background was and how they came to be and so on, why he was writing and so on and so forth.

But I'm not going to do that this morning. I'm going to go straight into the substance of these first few verses because it seems to me that this chapter stands alone. Of course, it's to be understood in the light of the rest of the letter.

But it also stands alone because it is a reminder of the gospel. If I was to say to you, I'm going to spend the next 15 minutes reminding us of the gospel, what is your reaction to that?

Is it, well, we've heard all this before. I don't know why you're going to do that. Then there's something wrong. And I'm challenging you this morning that if that is your reaction, that you need to repent from that.

You need to go to God and ask that he will fill you once again with the thrill of what the gospel is. Because the gospel ought to be new every morning.

[1 : 23] Even if we've heard it a thousand times before, as many of you have. The gospel is new every morning.

And even in our familiarity with what the gospel is all about, there should be that sense of joy and that satisfaction in us as believers that takes refuge in this great message.

Now, there was a particular reason why Paul was writing this. There was a question that had arisen amongst the Corinthian believers as to the truth of the resurrection, the credibility of resurrection.

But so that's why Paul is having to remind his readers of the very basics of what the Christian faith is all about.

And he says three things. He says, first of all, how the gospel works. How the gospel works.

[2 : 27] And then secondly, he tells them what the gospel is. And then thirdly, by verse seven, he becomes personal with them. And he gives them his own personal testimony of how the gospel has affected him.

The apostle Paul, the Pharisee that was once known as Saul of Tarsus, until he came to meet with the living Jesus on the road to Damascus and what his life now is as a consequence of this great message.

So number one is how the gospel works. Number two is what the gospel is. And number three is how the gospel has taken hold of Paul and what he now is because of it.

How does it work? Well, first of all, he tells us that the gospel works by word of mouth. That's how it's transmitted.

I want to remind you of the gospel that I preached to you. It's a message. It's a message that Jesus gave to his disciples and commanded them to pass on, go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

[3 : 45] And ever since that moment, the gospel of Jesus Christ has become the singular greatest influence and movement in the world.

And the way it's transmitted is very simple. By persuasion, by argument, by reasonable dialogue, by announcement, by word of mouth.

God is all about the word. That's why the Bible is so crucial to us, because it is the word of God. It's God's message to us to be transmitted, to be shared, to be announced, to be written about and to be received.

The gospel is the word. And that word has taken hold. There's a particular power in the message of the gospel.

What is it? Paul says in Romans, There is something.

[4 : 56] And you know what I mean by this. If you've come to believe and to receive Jesus as your Lord, you know what I'm talking about. That there's just something.

There's just a reality. There is a compulsion. There is a divine power and authority in the message of the gospel.

And that authority is transmitted by believers and by the church. Remember that the church consists of believers whose work it is to go and tell others about what Jesus has done for them.

And so it is preached. Second thing Paul tells us is that the gospel is received. He says, I want to remind you of the gospel.

I preach to you which you received. That's crucial in our understanding of what. Remember that the gospel, by the way, is the message of good news.

[5 : 58] That's what the word means. Gospel. It means good news. And not only was the good news transmitted by word of mouth, but in Corinth it was received by those who came to faith in Jesus.

Same as it has been received for 2000 years by all those who have come to faith in him. In all kinds of cultures all over the world. Even today people are receiving this message of good news.

Now, what does that tell us? It tells us that in order to be right with God, it's not what we do for him. You know, there are so many religions in the world.

And it's in order, if you listen to them, what they'll tell you is their message is, this is what you've got to do. This is how you've got to be faithful. This is what you've got to obey.

And these are the ceremonies and the procedures you've got to go through. And even after doing all of these things, well, we still don't quite know whether you're going to be right with God because it's such a mystery.

[7 : 06] But the gospel says that to be right with God, it's a gift from him. It's not what we've done for God because we can't do anything for him.

We're incapable of doing anything to deserve God's favour. But the gospel is God's gift to us.

It's what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ. And today God asks us to take it, to receive it.

And that's what the Corinthian believers did. The gospel that you received. But then he goes on to say, that the gospel is something that they have taken their stand.

In other words, the gospel is the greatest influence and identity in their lives.

[8 : 08] It has shaped them and moulded them and changed them and transformed them. It's not something that they have just signed up for. It's not just something that they've believed along with a whole bunch of other things.

The gospel has taken over them. It has possessed them. It has changed their whole way of living.

And each one of these Corinthian people could look back to a time in their lives where the direction of their lives was entirely different to what it is today.

The gospel is life transforming. And we can say the same thing if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can say with Paul that we are what we are today because of what God has done for us. But then Paul goes on even further and he says, By this gospel you are saved.

[9 : 13] Verse 2. And another translation says this. It says, By this gospel you are being saved. In other words, The gospel is not just something that we have come to believe in, but it is God's power that continues to work within each one of us by the person of the Holy Spirit.

Something really spectacular takes place when a person comes to faith in Jesus. God literally comes into that person, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

God is there to stay. And he's there to produce within us the character of Jesus. He's there to change us.

He's there to teach us. He's there to enlighten us. He's there to progress and prepare each one of us because of what God is going to do one day in the future.

Each one of us is being prepared for future glory. And that ought to be a magnificently comforting word right now where we're all feeling so vulnerable and where we've been reminded that this world is not our home.

[10 : 39] This world is changing all the time. I guess that for many years everything was the same, wasn't it? Perhaps even since the Second World War. We've never seen anything like this because life has gone on as normal and there has been progression and success and prosperity and so on and so forth until now.

And all of a sudden we've been brought to sea we can't rely on this world. This world is unstable and in a moment of time our whole lives have been turned upside down.

But God promises that for those who believe and trust in Jesus we are being prepared for his eternal, perfect, unchanging kingdom that extends beyond death itself and into glory.

That's what Paul means when he says in verse 2 by this gospel you are being saved. God is working in us that sense of anticipation for the future because there is a future a promised future an eternal future.

That's what this whole chapter is all about. It's about how God one day promises to raise his people from the dead in perfect bodies, glorified bodies and he promises that in these perfect glorified bodies we will go forever to be with Jesus in heaven.

[12 : 18] That's the promise that we have and it's all we've got but I'm glad we have it this morning. But then lastly when he's talking about how the gospel works he says this if you hold firmly to the word that I preached to you and he's saying that because he knows that there are many of the Christians in Corinth perhaps most perhaps even all of them who from time to time struggle in living the Christian life.

they struggle with all kinds of conflicting influences and elements and doubts and temptations each one of them calls into question the stability of their faith.

Does that sound familiar? That's where the Bible speaks to us as well because Paul in speaking to the weak Christians in Corinth is also speaking to us because even the strongest can be made very weak from time to time can't we?

We struggle with doubts particularly in a secular world where we're marginalized and there are not very many of us and we're made to feel as if we belonged to two centuries ago because we believe what we believe.

And sometimes we reach that point where we think well is it all true? Have I believed in vain? How do I know that this gospel is the truth?

[14 : 02] If you're struggling with these thoughts you're not alone. You're not alone. There were men and women in Paul's day and in Jesus' day and ever since who have struggled.

Remember the man who came to Jesus and he asked for Jesus' help and Jesus said if you believe this can be done and he said Lord I believe help my unbelief.

That man's faith even although it rested in the right place was imperfect and so is ours. Our faith is often shaken and it's imperfect and it's sometimes subject to all kinds of voices and temptations and doubts.

That's why today you're in the right place you're listening to the right message. This is how we hold on. We hold on by encouraging one another and praying for one another.

We hold on as a body as a church we hold on to one another and we make sure that we take care of one another and like remember what we saw last week Barnabas remember he was the son of encouragement that we need to look out people who are really struggling with our faith and we need to say to them look keep on keep on keeping on because one day God's word will become visible for all of us.

[15 : 35] we will see him as he is so you're in the right place. So that's how the gospel works.

Paul then goes on to talk about what the gospel is. Verse 3 I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died. Now I want you to listen to this because this is one of the most magnificently intricate statements in the Bible.

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Now I know he goes on to say other things we'll come on to that in a minute but let's just take that sentence Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

That's the gospel in miniature. That's a shortened form of what the good news is, what the message is. It's all about the person of Jesus.

That's who Christ is. The person of Jesus. It centres around, it revolves around a person. A unique person.

[16 : 52] The most uniquely perfect extraordinary person that ever walked the face of the earth. Some people think that Jesus was the best man that ever lived.

No, he was the only perfect man that ever lived. He was the only truly perfect man that ever lived. Which begs the question what made him so special?

Anyone who examines his life as it's recorded in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, has to come to the conclusion this is an extraordinary, the most uniquely extraordinary figure in history.

So it's no wonder that the Christian movement is the single greatest, most influential movement in all the world. So the good news centres around Christ and it centres around a particular aspect of Christ.

Christ died. Now isn't that extraordinary? That is extraordinary isn't it? Because usually the death of a person is seen as well the end of their life on earth, which it is.

[18 : 14] But what Paul means when he says Christ died is that it is the death of Jesus which is the good news.

Now that kind of goes against everything known to us, doesn't it? Because usually when we come to celebrate a person, a famous person, for whatever they've done, it's their life that we celebrate.

But here Paul is celebrating the death of Jesus and that's what makes the good news so unique.

the truth is that Jesus is the only person who ever lived in this world who was born in order to die.

That was the purpose for which he was born. Now that can't be said about anyone else who ever lived because all of us we were born to live and sadly one day we will all die because death is a fact of human existence.

[19 : 24] But Jesus was born in order to die. Not only so, as we come to discover who Jesus was we discover that he was not an ordinary human being.

He was God as well as human. That's what makes the incarnation so extraordinary.

That's what makes Christmas time so special. Because the birth of this child in Bethlehem was not just an ordinary birth, joyful as that would be, but this was the birth of God who came into the world as a real human being, which makes his death all the more inexplicable.

Because it begs the question, well if this is God, if Jesus is God, how can he die? I mean God is the author of life, God is life in himself, he's the one who gives life, how in the world can this Jesus who is God, how can he die?

You see how this one statement, it raises so many issues, doesn't it? Christ died. Christ, the Son of God, Christ, the God man, Christ, the only man who was God as well as man, died.

[21 : 14] Christ, that's the last thing you would expect. It's actually the last thing that the disciples expected as they watched him being arrested and taken away to the cross and as they watched him being tortured and hung and suffering and dying.

But that's the good news that Paul wanted everyone to know. Christ died but he goes on. He doesn't just leave it there because to leave it there would be meaningless.

He says this is why he died. He died for our sins. And he goes even further.

He says Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. If he had just left it at Christ died for our sins that would be meaningless.

We would be none the wiser. But because he completes it by saying he died for our sins according to the scriptures all the pieces fall into place. This verse is like a jigsaw.

[22 : 17] Each word is like a piece in the jigsaw. And as all the pieces are put in the right places the picture comes to view. And what it tells us is that we need to know the scriptures in order to understand why Jesus died.

Now when he talks about the scriptures he's talking about what we call the Old Testament because that was their Bible at that time. We now have two parts of the Bible the Old and the New Testament but it was 200 AD before all of that was complete.

In Paul's day their Bible was the Old Testament and so what he's saying is if you really want to understand why Jesus died you have to go back into the Old Testament because that's where you get light you get an explanation.

sacrifice. And the key word in the Old Testament that explains to us why Jesus died is the word sacrifice.

If you were an Old Testament believer if you were an Old Testament Israelite and if you wanted to worship you could only worship one way and that was by sacrifice.

[23 : 33] What you did was you took an animal and you led your animal would be a lamb or a goat and you would lead the animal to the door of the temple and at the door of the temple you would place your hand on the animal's head and your sin your guilt would be symbolically transferred to the animal.

The animal was then led off and it was slaughtered and its body was burned as an offering to God by which God would accept the offering of the sacrifice and as a substitute for your sin and he would declare you to be forgiven.

That's what sacrifice was all about. Sacrifice was God's way of accepting a substitute that died instead of you.

The substitute would take the penalty for your sin and your shortcoming and your guilt. Your guilt would be transferred onto the sacrifice and God would accept the death of that animal instead of you.

That's the whole idea of sacrifice. It's like a substitute. Now, no animal was able to pay the price of our sin, but in the Old Testament this was God's way of showing his people that it was possible for someone else to suffer the consequences of your sin and that someone else ultimately was none other than Jesus Christ in his death on the cross because as Jesus hung and as he suffered the cruelty of humankind, the Roman soldiers who had nailed him to the cross, he suffered also the wrath of God as he became guilty for our sin.

[25 : 54] God that's what Paul means when he says Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

he died as our sacrifice, the substitute that took the wrath of God, that suffered the wrath of God instead of us and because he suffered, because he died, because he gave himself on the cross willingly and lovingly for us, our sin is paid for in full.

it's done, it's complete. Jesus, when he was on the cross just before he died, he said this, it is finished, which meant that his death truly was accepted by God as the perfect sacrifice for our sin.

And as a consequence of that, when his body, when his dead body was removed from the cross, wrapped in linen and placed in the tomb, three days later, God brought him to life once again.

Really, actually, historically, he raised him to life once again. As the final mark, the final validation, confirmation, the final confirmation that proved once and for all that Jesus' death was the payment of our sin.

[27 : 48] That's why the resurrection is so important, because it completes the work, it's God's amen to everything that Jesus did.

And that's why it was so important for Paul to stress the reality and the truth of Jesus' resurrection. That's why it has been the very centre of the gospel for 2,000 years.

And that's why every Christian today believes in the bodily, actual, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that's why we can rejoice this morning, because Jesus is alive.

The grave could not hold him. He rose triumphant over the grave. And we can know that as we come to him this morning, confessing once again our own shame and our own sinfulness, that God forgives us, washes all our sins.

So, we have how the gospel works. What the gospel is. And then lastly, the effect that it had on the apostle Paul. This is where it becomes personal.

[29 : 06] And the gospel is personal. He relates himself, he shares himself, the effect that the gospel has had, and he summarises it all like this.

If you want to know the background to what Paul was before he was a Christian, the zeal that he had, as a Pharisee, most religious man that ever lived, I think.

And then Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. You want to know all that, you have to read the Acts of the Apostles. But here's how he summarises it. He's saying this, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

By the grace of God, I am what I am. And it takes us back to what I've said already, that the good news of Jesus Christ is the single greatest influence on our lives.

It has shaped us, it's changed our priorities, it's changed us. I think of my own life, and I often wonder, what would I have been like? Where would I live?

[30 : 18] What would I be doing? Who would I be married to? What would my priorities be if I wasn't a Christian this morning? I know that, I have no idea, I don't know, I don't know, I couldn't even begin to answer any of these questions, but I do know this, that God has totally changed me in every single way, just like he did the Apostle Paul, and just like you, if you're a follower of Jesus, then following Jesus means that your priorities will be his priorities, your values will be his values, it means that God comes first in your choices, in your thoughts, now I'm not saying that any of us are perfect, we fall short in every way, don't we?

And yet, we're able to say, by God's grace, we are what we are, because of what God has made us, and we can rejoice at that this morning, yes, we have so much to confess, and we will have up until that moment when God takes us from this world, God.

Nonetheless, God has done something marvellous in us, hasn't he? And he can do something marvellous in you if you're not Christian this morning, if you ask him.

Jesus said, ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. So I would invite you this morning, don't try and deserve God's favour, you'll never do it.

Don't try and work your way to being right with God, ask and you will receive. Isn't the gospel something to truly rejoice in this morning?

[32 : 16] Our sins are forgiven, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we have been given a certainty that God himself will receive us one day to be with him.

we have everything that we need in this world and for the next. So may we rejoice this day in all that God has done for us.

Our Father in heaven, we pray now that you will take your word and implant it in our hearts. We pray that it will dwell within us richly. We pray that we will reflect much today on what you have done for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And we pray that that influence, that force, that loving force of God will continue to change us and make us more like Jesus for we ask in his name.

Amen.