

# Of First Importance

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Date: 29 March 2024

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well good morning friends, let me add my welcome to you, to being at church. If you don't know me my name is Roy, I'm one of the pastors here as well, lots of us, there you go. Open up your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and I'm going to spend a bit of time looking at that because the Bible is the best way to understand the Bible.

And so 1 Corinthians chapter 15 actually explains the things of what we've been reading about in the Bible so far this morning. So 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and I'll just read out the first 11 verses and then on Sunday morning we'll read out some more of 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

It's so good to have the morning church crew and the uni church crew here today and others as well. Welcome to family and friends, it's great to have you here. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, picking up at verse 1.

This is what God says about these things we've been reading about as well. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, 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. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, 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, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, and he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

[ 1 : 4 3 ] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to an untimely born, he appeared also to me, for I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is in with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Let me lead us in prayer. Our Father in heaven, as we come to spend some time now, considering closely some more, are the things of Good Friday, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to obey. For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, I wonder what you would say is a thing of most importance. According to the rich and famous, if you read news.com, it's things like health, and family, and hope, and love, and purpose, and time.

[ 3 : 0 4 ] And they are all good things, don't get me wrong. I think those things are important. But if you push it a bit further, what do you think is the most important truth to hang on to?

What's the most important truth, the most important news you could ever hear? That refines our response a little bit, doesn't it? I mean, the geographer might say that, well, you've got to know that the Earth is round, not flat.

The astrophysicist might say that, well, the Earth is not the centre of the solar system, the sun is. Or the scientist might say that, well,  $E = MC^2$  might be the most important truth you could know.

The environmentalist might say, well, you've got to get a hold of the truth that the Earth is getting warmer. Or the nutritionist might say that you need to eat your vegetables.

And you do, just so you know. But what would you say? What would the Christian say is the most important thing, the thing of first importance?

[ 4 : 15 ] Well, C.S. Lewis said, Christianity, if false, is of no importance. If it's true, it's of infinite importance. The only thing it can't be is of moderate importance.

Now, what God, through the Apostle Paul, thinks is the most important news the world could ever hear, is this. We read about it in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 3.

This Easter, we're going to be considering this message, this truth, which is of first importance.

Why is this message, do you think, this truth, this message, which we call is good news, which we call the Gospel, why is it the most important news that anyone could ever hear?

Well, let me tell you why. Why, as we've all been saying this morning so far up the front here, is because by it, we are saved. 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 1, it says this, Now I would remind you, brothers, of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.

[ 5 : 43 ] It's by this message, by this truth, we are saved. So, come with me, and we'll just consider these things for a minute, the first importance things.

Of first importance, Christ died. There you go, we're going to look at three things. Firstly, Christ died. Paul is reminding the Corinthian believers of what he preached to them, and he preached the Gospel to them, that Christ died.

That is the good news he preached to them, for that is what the Gospel is, good news. It wasn't just any news, it is the good news.

And there's no better news to hear than this, this message which saves. It's a message that the Corinthians received from Paul, you see, they received it from him. And it's a message that Paul himself received from God.

He didn't make it up, didn't cook it up, didn't dream it up, he wasn't taught it by man, God gave it to him. As he came face to face with the risen Lord Jesus, he received it as true.

[ 6 : 51 ] At the beginning of his letter, in 1 Corinthians at the beginning, he told them that when he came to them, the people in Corinth, he came to them not in lofty speech of wisdom, no, he decided to do nothing amongst them except Christ and him crucified.

And he goes on to say that Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but he preached Christ crucified. A stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, to the Greeks.

But to those who are being saved, those who have been called to believe, Christ crucified is the wisdom of God and both the power of God as well.

And it's this message which changes the world. Because it changes the hearts of people from every strata of society, from pauper to prince, from urchin to emperor, from servant to sovereign.

It changes hearts. When we see people behaving badly and nations treating other nations poorly, we shouldn't be surprised.

[ 8 : 01 ] Because that is normal, sinful humanity. No historian will refute or deny that Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross around 2,000 years ago.

The crucifixion of Jesus though is devoid of any power, right, or significance, unless it's accompanied by the resurrection and more of that on Sunday.

The way that we want people to live, the hopes that we have for our society, for people to get along, for our world to get along, can only be achieved by the death of Jesus.

And so today we're just majoring on one verse. Verse 3, For I deliver to you of first importance what I also receive, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

Christ died, we heard, we read in Mark chapter 15, by crucifixion. Christ died. And when we say Christ, it's title, right?

[ 9 : 12 ] It's like Prime Minister of Australia. It's not Jesus' surname. It's the position of God's anointed king. And Jesus of Nazareth is God's anointed king.

Now lots of kings have died through history. Some by assassination, like King Eglon of Moab, and many others through history. Some by decapitation, King Charles I.

Some as they led their soldiers into battle, killed in battle. Some by old age, which is great. But there's only one that I know of who's died by crucifixion.

That is Jesus, God's anointed king of the Jews. And that the anointed king of Israel, the Christ of God died, rattles people, just like it rattled our glory here.

Because Christ's kings aren't supposed to die. But he's supposed to rule over a glorious kingdom of God.

[ 10 : 24 ] And the desire would be that that would be forever. I mean, that's the common refrain given to kings, isn't it? And emperors and despots.

They like to hear it. May you rule forever. May you live forever. But Christ died. He truly was dead, flogged, nailed to the cross, spear in the side, blood and water flowing out.

He didn't faint into a flop and then into unconsciousness and then somehow or other revive. He was dead, dead, dead.

And his death was for a reason. You see there in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 why he died. That he died, what did he die?

For our sins. That is the purpose. He did die because he loves us but his death is not merely a declaration of love.

[ 11 : 28 ] It wouldn't achieve much if I told Karen, I love you and then jumped over a cliff and got smashed on the bottom of the rocks, would it? And scream as I go down, I love you all the way down at the bottom.

It would just leave her without a husband and Jessica without a dad and it wouldn't achieve much. What was the purpose of it? Jesus died for our sins.

Now it's this little phrase that summarises the purposes of God, purposes which God had planned from the beginning of time, before the beginning of time even, he dies for our sins. Which means, just quietly, that we must be sinners.

Otherwise, it was pointless, him dying. I think the fact that we are people who sin is the easiest thing to prove really. It's the easiest thing to demonstrate.

But at the same time, one of the hardest things for us to acknowledge. Easy to demonstrate, hard for us to acknowledge.

[ 12 : 41 ] Most of our society wants to say that people are basically good at heart, but the scriptures say that we aren't. You turn on the radio, watch the news, read the newspaper, and all we hear and see is the sinfulness of mankind played out for all to see and hear.

Other people out there. But the truth is, we all sin and we continue to sin. I can't do the things I know I should do, wish I could.

And I continue to do the things I know I shouldn't do, I wish I didn't. And if you were honest, you'd say the same thing. Sin is deeply ingrained in us all.

It's the very DNA of what we're made of. And to be rebels who continually seek to overturn his good and righteous rule over us must have some consequences.

We think we know better. But the bias is always towards rebellion. Like the bowling ball down on the weighted bowls.

[ 14 : 00 ] Never go straight to the jack, does it? It always veers off to the right or to the left. Some sins are obvious. Some sins are not.

But as we do the sins, they're all destructive and they damage ourselves, they damage our society, they damage our world.

I mean, why are there kidnappings in Nigeria and civil unrest and a place on the brink of war? Why is Haiti a lawless disaster area that people are describing as close to hell?

Why is there youth violence all around Australia? Why is there dysfunction in your family? Why is there dysfunction in my family, my life, my workplace?

It's because of sin. I say the things I shouldn't say, I do the things I shouldn't do, I think the things I shouldn't think, I don't love God my whole heart and I don't love my neighbour as myself.

[ 15 : 16 ] But it's a saving power of Christ crucified which is the only hope of undoing any of this. Here is the only thing that completely undo the problem of our sin.

Christ dies for our sins. His death is for our sins, your sins, my sins and the sins of the whole world.

Sin is destructive to self, society and God's good creation but Jesus dies to bring a change for our sins.

We deserve death for our sins, that's what we deserve. That is the constant message of the scriptures, the wages, the rewards that we deserve for our sin is death, Romans chapter 3.

That is what those guilty of high treason deserve. That is what those who sin against the true and living God deserve, the holy, just, loving God God.

[ 16 : 28 ] Which is what by rights I deserve. And yet through Jesus' death in my place, I am saved from the righteous, just wrath of God.

And we are saved from being shut out from the kingdom of God forever. forever. We are saved from being locked out of glory and being forever in the place of torment where there is nothing good, no friendships, no joy, no happiness, no love, no care.

It's worse than being in the worst place on earth with no hope of escape. Far, far worse than somewhere like Haiti today.

But the good news is this, Christ died for our sins. He's the one who steps in and dies for me in my place, for my sins and your sins and the sins of the whole world.

He is the one who bears the punishment that I deserve, that we deserve from God for our sins. He dies for our sins. That's what we're remembering today.

[ 17 : 50 ] It's my sin that required his death. It is your sin that required his death. And God's plan was that he would be a substitute in our place from before the beginning of time.

Christ dies once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God. But notice also this is according to the scriptures.

This death of Christ for our sins was according to the scriptures. Now where would you go in the Bible to hear this kind of thing? Notice it's according to the scriptures that we know that Christ died for our sins.

It's not something we'd make up or deduce without God telling us. It's not something that we could work out by philosophy because we're not smart enough to work it out. It's stupidity to the world we're told.

It can only be known by revelation from God that we can know this. And the whole direction of the Old Testament scriptures was to the death of the Messiah on the cross.

[ 18 : 57 ] Christ. And the testimony of the New Testament is that Christ died for our sins. The promise of one who would die for our sins begins in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 and it continues with the Passover Lamb of Exodus where the Lamb dies in the place of the first born son and the angel of death passes over Egypt and those who trust in the blood of the Lamb are rescued from the wrath of God.

And on that night there was salvation for those who believed and devastation and destruction for the families who didn't. It continues as we hear about the Day of Atonement in Leviticus chapter 16 when the sins of the people are laid on the goat and the goat takes the sins away.

And we hear the suffering one in Psalm 22 prescient of Jesus who dies on the cross. And we hear the suffering of the suffering one for sin again and we read about it in Isaiah chapter 53 where the servant of the Lord is crushed and by his wounds we are healed and the Lord lays on him the iniquity of us all, the sin on him of us all.

The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament is about the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world by dying in our place, bearing the curse of God for our sins.

Jeremy chapter 21 verse 23 says that he who dies on the cross is cursed by God. And it's clearly explained in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 24, he himself bore our sin in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

[ 20 : 43 ] By his wounds you have been healed. Jesus' death wasn't a mistake. His death was all in accordance with the sovereign purposes and plans of God, the will of God from before the beginning of time.

Nothing happened by chance, nothing was a mistake and the result of Christ's death was salvation for all who will believe. It is this that we are to remember constantly, reminding ourselves, focusing ourselves on this, for this is the way we are saved, this is of first importance.

is there nothing we've done? Nothing I could ever do. It's something that's been done for us, done in us. God does the saving.

He is the one who sent his son to die for us. He is the one who brings us to trust in him and all that Christ has done for us. Good Friday is the day in the Christian calendar to remind it again that Christ died for sins in accordance with the scriptures.

And it's this which saves us from the righteous wrath of God which is coming. And that's what makes Good Friday Great Friday. That's what makes the death of Christ really good news for the whole world.

[ 22 : 07 ] This is the most important truth that anyone in the world can ever hear and believe. Now, many of you have heard it before, but can I encourage you to feel the weight of this news.

It's not of some importance. It's not of no importance. It's of first importance. Knowing and believing this is the most important thing that anyone can ever know and ever believe.

It may be and we're glad if you're here that some today this is challenging everything you ever thought about Jesus. Challenging everything you thought was important in the world.

And today might be the day you begin believing that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and in doing so are saved.

Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we thank you for your mercy and your kindness and your love and your wisdom. And we thank you Father for this great truth that the saving events of Jesus at the cross were no mere accident but they were according to your plans and purposes.

[ 23 : 30 ] And we thank you that by his death you bring about the forgiveness of our sins. We do pray you'd help us to keep this of first importance every day in our lives as we navigate this world.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.