



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11

"The Case for the Resurrection"

1 Corinthians

TRANSCRIPT

Good morning. This is a wonderful chapter in the Word of God. Chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, and here, Paul begins a new subject. You notice at the beginning, in verse 1, where he says, "Now I make known to you," and you go through the book, and you read statements like that. "Now concerning," or now this, or now concerning that. So, we've been in the subject from chapters 12 to 14 of spiritual gifts, the use and the abuse of them, and now Paul is speaking about another issue in the church: that of the resurrection. And he gives us a lengthy chapter which we'll spend some time on in the weeks to come. It's a good time to be in that chapter this time of the year, but he begins it with the first 11 verses which introduce the whole subject to us.

"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which 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 according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit 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 did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and

so you believed." May the Lord bless this reading of his word and our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do pray Your blessings above us. We thank You for this time together in this wonderful chapter that we will begin this morning and study through for the next few weeks. It is an encouragement. It is more than an encouragement, though. It is fundamental to our faith. It is the bedrock of our faith, the cornerstone of our faith, the resurrection of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul comes to this great subject. You could really call it the subject of the gospel. We could've titled this lesson, "The Gospel that Paul Preached," the gospel that the apostles preached, the only gospel there is, the gospel of the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of the Savior. There is salvation in that message alone, and we who have believed it have believed it by Your grace. By the grace of God, we are what we are, and by nothing else. So we give You praise and thanks Lord for the grace that snatched all of us like brands from the burning. You gave us life, really, You gave us life when we weren't seeking it. You found us when we were running away from You. You changed us, You made us Your children, and all of that really goes back to the cross where Christ purchased us, where He bought us, where He paid the price. And You demonstrated that You accepted that payment by raising Him from the dead.

So Lord, as we look at this great subject, this very important, essential subject, we pray that You'd give us eyes to see, minds to comprehend. Paul prayed for the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:18 that You would enlighten the eyes of their mind. They're Christian people. They were born again. They were men and women with a new heart, and eyes to see, but their vision needed to be even clearer, and so does ours, Lord. We need to have a clearer focus. We need to see things better. We need to understand them more clearly. And so, we look to You to bless us and give us an understanding of this text and the importance of it for us, and may we leave this place rejoicing in the resurrection of Christ, rejoicing in what it means for us. And may that have a controlling, constraining influence upon us in the way we think and the way we behave.

So bless us, Lord, spiritually. Build us up in the faith, and I pray that you'd bless us materially. We have many different needs, all of us. We are not in the same place. We are enjoying maybe pleasant times, easy times, or we're going through a

dark valley. And some of us are. We look at the prayer list and realize that life is fragile. And so, we pray that You bless those whose names are listed here. Every one of us really could be on the prayer list. We may be, as I put it in pleasant times, and having pleasant experiences where we're not experiencing any setbacks physically or financially or emotionally. And yet, all of that's from You. As Paul said, by the grace of God, I am what I am, and that's true of every one of us. And even when we go through these dark valleys, Your grace is with us. We don't understand that very often. But what we can know is what You reveal in Your word, and that is that You're always with us. You will never leave us or forsake us, and everything comes by Your wise and gracious providence, and we can rest in that. And so, help us to do that. Bless all of us in the ways we need blessing, in the ways that will make us more like Christ and more dependent upon You. Well, we're dependent upon You in this hour, Lord, to enlighten us and teach us, and we pray for that ministry. So bless us now, Lord, as we continue to worship You and as we study together. We pray that this will be a profitable time for each of us, and equip us for a week of serving You and glorifying You. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

[Message] On the banks of the Seine in Paris, underneath a great gold dome is the tomb of Napoleon. It's a quiet place, a somber place. It's a shrine. His words are engraved on marble walls, idealized portraits there represent him as a man who was larger than life. Around his sarcophagus are listed the names of his battles. Marengo, Austerlitz, the Pyramids, Lodi, Jena. His victories. What's missing are his defeats. But his greatest defeat is there for every visitor to plainly see. It's not Waterloo. It's death. Not even Napoleon, called the greatest captain of his age, could conquer the grave. No general or emperor ever has. The only person who conquered death was a carpenter who proved by his resurrection that He was far more than that, more than a man, and the only person worthy of a shrine and worthy of worship. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not only proof that He's God's Son, and that He defeated death; it is the guarantee that everyone who believes in Him will also conquer death. Everyone who believes in Him will be resurrected. That is our hope.

And Paul explains it in 1 Corinthians 15, the classic chapter on the resurrection. But Paul wrote this chapter not simply to remind us of this great truth and the hope we have, but to answer a question. There were some teachers in Corinth

who were denying the resurrection saying that we won't rise from the dead. This body will go into the grave, dissolve, become nothing. Evidently there was some Greek thought in that, that the material was evil, that the body was like the prison house of the soul. We wanted to be free of that, and they denied the resurrection of the body.

So, Paul writes to that issue. He refutes that false idea. He explains that if there's no resurrection from the dead, if you and I aren't going to be raised, then Christ Himself was not raised. And if Christ was not raised, then we are without hope in the world. But the apostle's case here for the resurrection is not simply that there must be a resurrection, otherwise life is hopeless. We have to hold onto something. You can't live life without hope. No one can do that. Even listen to materialists of today who really, if you follow out their philosophy and their whole worldview, it's a despairing thing. It comes to nothing.

And yet, they'll live hopeful lives. They can find some way to find some hope, even though it's a hope against hope. It's a hope against all their ideas of reality. Paul's not talking like that. He's not saying we've got to hold onto something, and this is what we must hold onto, otherwise we're without hope. There's ample proof for the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are sound reasons for believing in it. And in verses 1 through 11, Paul gives that proof by citing the witness of Scripture, and the testimony of men.

Two lines of argument, both of which establish that Christ was raised and that we who have believed in Him have a glorious future. This is an essential part of the gospel, and Paul begins the chapter by reminding the Corinthians of that. This is what he had preached when he had come to Corinth. This is nothing new. He's not giving them some new idea that he'd come up with. He preached this when he first came. They heard it, they believed it. That's what he says. " Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand." It's through that gospel, he says in verse 2, that you are saved.

So, the right understanding of it is very important. It is essential. It is a matter of eternal life. That's the promise for all who believe. If, Paul says, you hold fast to the word. If you continue to believe the gospel, if you persevere in faith, and those who have genuinely believed in the gospel and the very things that Paul lays out here, will certainly do that, will persevere, will continue to believe.

Paul didn't question the reality of the Corinthians' faith. He expresses that at the very beginning of this book. When he introduces the book, he calls them saints. He calls them people who have been set apart, have been saved. He believed in their salvation. It was only some in Corinth who had denied the resurrection. Not the congregation as a whole, not the body of Christ there in Corinth. The sense of this statement is: if you hold fast, as you do. So really, he's expressing his confidence in them.

He believed they were holding to the truth. He believed they were saved. Unless, he adds, you believed in vain. Now that's a little disturbing. How does a person do that? How does one believe in vain? By believing the gospel when it's not really true. By believing in the resurrection when it is not really true. If those teachers in Corinth who denied the resurrection were in fact right, if men today who are materialists, skeptics, are right, that there's nothing beyond the grave, that the grave is the place where everything dissolves and becomes nothing; if that's true, then our faith is not in the truth. Our hope is empty. Nothing will come of it and our faith is worthless. It's all in vain. That's what he's saying.

So, how can one believe in vain? Well, you can believe in a lie. One can believe in a deception. One can believe in something that's not true. So, this matter of the resurrection is of great significance. If the body of Jesus remained in the tomb, if the resurrection is not true, then the gospel is not true, and there is no salvation. Paul believed that it is true. It's what he preached. It's what all the apostles preached, and it is what the church believed, and believed with good reason.

Paul gives the proof for it in the next verses. He begins though with a simple summary of the gospel in verses 3 and 4. This is what he preached when he came to Corinth originally. This is what he preached wherever he went. This is the gospel. It has, essentially, two main features: the death and the resurrection of Christ. He introduces those facts as being of first importance, meaning Christ's sacrificial death and His resurrection are the principle things. They are the main things: the foundation of the gospel.

Now, that wasn't just Paul's opinion. This isn't his gospel. This isn't what he's arrived at. This isn't some message that he developed. The gospel was not his invention at all. He says he received it. He didn't invent it. In fact, he told the Galatians that he received it directly from Christ at his conversion. Later, he learned

more of the details of it from his discussions with other Christians, with the apostles themselves. He gives some of those details here in this chapter.

But because of that, because he had these details, because he had received this truth of the gospel, he could speak about what happened and what was true with complete confidence. He doesn't waver in his confidence. He doesn't doubt anything he has to say here, and his explanation and his proof of the gospel should give us confidence as well. That's what we should come out of this meeting, this time together with. If anything, confidence in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gospel that the apostles preached.

Now, the first fact that Paul says is of first importance is that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. What is of importance is not just that He died, but that He died for our sins. The gospel is not simply a list of events that occurred in history. It is that, and that's very important. Everything Paul talks about here is history. These are vents that actually happened. This is not a myth. This is not a legend. This is history.

But, the gospel is more than that. The gospel is the theology of those historical events. It is the events of history, rightly interpreted. It's not enough to believe that Christ died. Any people believe that. Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus died. Caiaphas knew that Jesus died, but they didn't understand the significance of His death, that it was for our sins.

Now, that's quite a statement. That's very significant. Can you imagine someone saying, as you walk into that tomb in Paris, "Napoleon died for our sins." See that chiseled in marble as you walk in to look at that sarcophagus. It'd be absurd. This is what Paul says of our Lord. He died for our sins. That's the good news. The good news of the gospel is that Christ's death was for a purpose, which was to save us from the penalty of our sins by taking the penalty in our place.

Christ's death made atonement. His death and He as our substitute turned away God's wrath from us by satisfying God's justice by being a substitute for us. That's the good news. Paul states this was done according to the Scriptures, which indicates that the cross was not an afterthought. Christ didn't die before His time. He wasn't this young rabbi who, through a tragedy of history, was swept away before we hardly knew Him. No, the whole thing was purposed and planned by God from the beginning. Christ came to die. That's the reason He came. He did wonderful things.

He said great things. His teaching is pure, and wise, and all of that, but He came principally to die, to give His life a ransom for many. Because before there can be forgiveness, there must be atonement. There must be a satisfaction made for sin.

You say, "Why is that? Why must that be?" Because God is holy. He cannot ignore sin. He cannot ignore justice. He cannot issue some kind of blanket amnesty for sinners. Sin must be dealt with justly, righteously. God must put things right. God must do right. He cannot ignore evil. He cannot ignore sin. And the cross is His way of dealing with sin and putting it away. The fact that this was done according to the Scripture shows that this was always God's plan. No one took Christ's life from Him. He laid it down of His own will. He says that in John chapter 10 verse 18. He could've stopped the arrest there in the garden.

You read on in John's gospel and you remember how He's there in the garden, and the soldiers come in, they have their torches and their swords and their clubs, and they're armed for any kind of resistance. And they say to Him, He asks who they're looking for and they say, "Jesus of Nazareth." And He says, "I am He." And what do they do? They fall flat. They fall down before those words. He could've spoken them into oblivion if He wanted to. They took hold of Him, and they marched Him off to a trial and to the cross because He gave Himself into their power. He laid down His life of His own will for us.

So, the cross was not a mistake. It was ordained from all eternity and prophesied in time. Paul doesn't quote the specific Old Testament text or texts that he's referring to here, but he would've been thinking of a number of texts. Most likely, he would've thought of Isaiah 53 verses 5 and 6 where the prophet speaks of the Messiah being pierced through for our transgressions and our iniquity falling on Him. But there are others as well: Zechariah chapter 13 and verse 7 prophesied God's shepherd being struck down and the sheep being scattered, and that's exactly what happened when our Lord was arrested, taken to the cross, the disciples fled, went into hiding. You can go back to Genesis chapter 3 where God slays the animals and clothes Adam and Even following their sin there in Eden with the skins of those animals. It was a picture of what must happen in order to clothe them in righteousness in order to protect them from the consequences of their sin. In order to take it away, there must be a death. There must be the shedding of blood. And of

course, all of the sacrifices of lambs, and bulls, and goats, all through Israel's history, pictured Christ on the cross.

The death of Christ is not a mystery. It was revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures and it is the very heart of the gospel. It's the great demonstration of God's love for us. God could've abandoned us justly to our fate. He could've left us to the terrible consequences of wrongdoing. But he didn't do that. He loves so much, loves the sinner so much, that He gave His Son, His only begotten Son to die for us.

John Stott has written, "It takes a hard and stony heart to remain unmoved by love like that," and that is certainly true. But, many, many remain unmoved by it. In fact, many have tried to have Christianity without the cross. The cross is the great offense to the natural man. Thomas Jefferson was one. He spent many nights while president next to a small lamp with a pen knife cutting out passages of the Bible that showed God doing miracles. In fact, it's called the "Jefferson Bible." I think I read this week that the Jefferson Bible is on display right now at the Smithsonian Institution. It's a real thing. He rejected Christ's deity, rejected His miraculous conception and resurrection. He considered the apostles the corruptors of Christianity. They invented this gospel message. He rejected it. He liked the sermon on the mount. He called himself a real Christian because he believed in the ethics of Jesus, even though he didn't live by them.

Paul is clear: without the cross, there is no Christianity. You can call yourself a Christian, you can say all kinds of wonderful things about Jesus. But if you don't recognize Him as the eternal Son of God who became a man that died in the place of sinners and was raised on the third day, there's no Christianity in that. No Christianity, and anyone who denies that, this is the gospel,, and apart from this, there's no Christianity. Apart from the cross, there is no salvation.

Paul made that clear back in chapter 1 when he said he preached the gospel not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. Without the cross, there's no gospel, because without it, there's no remedy for sin. So Paul says, it is of first importance. Then, in verse 4, he adds that Christ was buried, indicating the genuineness of the Lord's death, the finality of the Lord's death. That's the final indignity of our Lord suffering in our place, the final aspect of His humiliation as the sin-bearer.

But that grave shows that He truly died. He was laid in a tomb. But that was not the end of the matter, because He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Again, Paul doesn't cite a text from the Scriptures, but he was probably, most likely, most certainly thinking of Psalm 16 verse 10 where David wrote: "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." Peter quoted that verse in Acts chapter 2 and verse 31 when he was preaching on the day of Pentecost there in the temple. And he quoted that to prove from the Psalm, the resurrection, that Christ wasn't here. He had been raised. He quotes it to show that it doesn't refer to David. David died, he was buried. In fact, he says, his tomb is with us to this day. You can walk over there and see his tomb, he was saying.

David's body is there, and it turned to dust. But the promise in the psalm is that God's Holy One would not undergo decay. So, it certainly wasn't about David that David was writing. It's about someone else. He was prophesying about Christ and about His resurrection. Paul interpreted the psalm the same way. He also quotes it later in the Book of Acts in chapter 13 and verse 35 to prove the resurrection from the Scriptures.

Like the Lord's crucifixion, the resurrection as well was planned from all eternity and prophesied in time. And it too is an essential part of the gospel, because it is the proof that Christ's sacrifice for us was accepted by the Father, and that all who believe in Him are saved. We could not know that apart from the resurrection. The sacrifice of Christ was the payment for our sins, and the evidence that God accepted that payment and that all is well is the resurrection. In fact, the Lord's body, if it had remained in a tomb, would mean that His sacrifice had not been accepted, and we're still in our sins.

It's not just that we wouldn't know if the sacrifice had been accepted; the body of Christ with us today would mean He did not accept it. But it's not with us. Christ has been raised. He is alive today. We have a living Savior, and His life has a direct influence on our lives now. The importance of that cannot be overestimated. Jesus is not some martyr or national hero whose tomb we can visit and whose memory might inspire us. He's alive, and actually in us, living within us through the Holy Spirit. He promised the disciples that. "The Father and I will make our abode within you." That's through the Holy Spirit. We share in His life, and His life transforms us. It's

transforming you now as a believer in Jesus Christ. It's affecting you now. He's alive. He directs our lives. He guides us providentially. He's praying for us constantly. That's one of the great themes and lessons of the Book of Hebrews, that He's actively praying for us. It's very significant that we have a living Savior.

It's significant for us now in our lives in this present day. It's significant for us as well for the future because it means, because He's alive, we too will live forever. We'll be glorified as He's glorified. We'll be like Him. And that future is secure. We have no reason to fear death.

Now, I know we do, and I understand that. Death is a great enemy. In fact, as Paul will describe it later on in this chapter, it's the last enemy. He doesn't gloss over the reality of death and, really, the terror of the grave. It's an enemy. But the fact is: it's an enemy that's been defeated. It can touch us and if the Lord doesn't come back in our lifetime, it will touch all of us. But it can't destroy us. It can't hold us. And the proof of that is the resurrection.

But, is there any proof for the resurrection? Well, the answer is yes. There is proof. Paul's given proof already. He's given the first line of evidence, the first line of proof, and that's the Scripture, the scriptural evidence. But now, he cites historical evidence. This supports the statements of Scripture and the statements of the apostle. And in verses 5 through 8, he gives a list of eyewitnesses to the resurrection. It's not an exhaustive list. He could've given more. He doesn't mention, for example, the women to whom the Lord first appeared as the gospels record. Instead, he begins with Peter in verse 5. He calls him by his Aramaic name, "Cephas." This appearance to Peter is mentioned in only one other place, and that's in Luke 24 verse 34 where it's reported that he appeared to Peter. And it may be that the Lord made a special appearance to Peter as an act of mercy, in order to give him the assurance that after he had denied the Lord three times, the Lord had not rejected him. The Lord loved him as much as He ever had. He would never diminish in any sense in his love for Peter, and He had a plan and a purpose and a mission for Peter. So, in His mercy, He appeared specifically, I assume in isolation, with Peter, to Peter.

Next, Paul says, He appeared to the twelve. Now, this is a general term, the twelve, because it was actually the eleven. Judas wasn't among them when He appeared to them. He appeared to them in different places and times. You see that at the end of the Gospel of John. But Paul knew that. Paul knew that this was the

eleven, but the word twelve is a way of referring to the apostles. And so, he uses that expression. In verse 6, Paul states that after that, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time." He doesn't state where that occurred. It could've been in Jerusalem, but most likely, this happened in Galilee where he told the disciples to meet him, in Matthew chapter 8 and verse 7. So, there was a great meeting up there in Galilee of him, the apostles, and many, many others. Over 500 people.

Now, this meeting with so many people at one time is very significant. A person might be able to dismiss the testimony of the resurrection of one or two people as a hallucination. In fact, you are aware I'm sure that that's how some have tried to deal with the resurrection, particularly back in the 19th century when there was this quest of the historical Jesus. Well, it can't be a miraculous Jesus because miracles don't happen. They just don't happen.

So, how do you explain this idea of the resurrection? Well, there was a plot. They concocted this conspiracy to perpetuate this movement of theirs. Other say, well, he had a hallucination. That was one explanation, but it's very difficult to do that with over 500 people testifying to seeing the same thing at the same time. Hallucination doesn't explain that. Neither does a conspiracy of some kind. It would break down. You can't keep that kind of thing tight with 500 people.

Now, they were there, they witnessed it, they could all vouch for that a swear to that. Most of the people, in fact, were still alive at the time Paul wrote this. So if the Corinthians had any doubts about it, they could interview these individuals to their own satisfaction. The second name that Paul lists is James in verse 7. This was James, the Lord's half-brother, who wasn't a believer during the Lord's ministry. That's what John tells us in John 7 verse 5. His brothers weren't believing any. So, it was probably through this post-resurrection appearance to him that led James to his conversion. Then, he appeared to all the apostles. Not one of them is missing here, and this may have reference to the Lord's ascension into heaven from the Mount of Olives. It's an impressive list of evidence that he gives.

Later, when Paul is speaking to Agrippa before he's sent off to Rome at the end of the Book of Acts, in Acts 26 verse 26, he tells Agrippa after he's given this story of his life and of Christ and of His death and His resurrection, he says to Agrippa, "You know about these things. These things were not done in a corner." In other words, this is common knowledge. This isn't some little secret mystical truth

that the apostles had. Everybody knew about this. These things were done publically: the crucifixion, the resurrection. These things were known. The great Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, calls the resurrection of Jesus Christ the "best authenticated event in the history of the world." Now, that's a big statement to make. I think it's certainly true that it's the most authenticated event of the ancient world.

Gordon Clark, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, gives support for that with a couple of examples. And one of them is Hannibal's military maneuver, when he ambushed the Romans at Lake Trasimeno. And there, this famous battle took place in which he defeated the Romans. The other example that he gives is the damage Caesar's fleet suffered from a high tide when he was attempting to invade Britain. The only evidence for Hannibal's tactic is found in Livy's "History," and the only evidence for Caesar's experience is found in his own "Gallic War." The evidence for either event is small. Each one is mentioned only once, only once in ancient literature. But neither is disputed. Historians don't doubt that Hannibal carried out this maneuver and won this victory. They don't doubt the things that Caesar mentioned.

So, Clark writes: "A secular historian who accepts either of these two events, or any other in ancient history, can reject the resurrection not by the usual methods of historical research, but only by the theological presupposition that God cannot raise the dead." And then he quotes from Paul in Acts 26 verse 8. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? Why indeed? What is so incredible about the almighty God, who can speak everything into existence, can create everything out of nothing? Why would it be thought unusual, surprisingly, that He could raise the dead?

Nothing is too difficult for God. But men do think it incredible. It takes more than historical research and piles of evidence to convince people of the truth of the gospel. That's just not my opinion; that's the statement of Scripture. You remember the rich man and Lazarus? And how the rich man is ultimately in Hades and Lazarus is in the bosom of Abraham? And the rich man speaks across this great chasm and he asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to his house. You know, that house where he had sat day after day begging for bread and getting the crumbs. Go back to that house to speak to his brother so that they would not come to this place where he was in torment. And Abraham answered: "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets,

they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." Luke 16:31. Isn't that an amazing statement? Think about it. Even if someone rises from the dead, they won't believe that. That's exactly what happened with the men of Jerusalem. Those leaders, Annas, Caiaphas. All of them. They were aware of the resurrection. They didn't believe it. They knew that He'd raise Lazarus from the dead. That's what galvanized them to put him to death.

No, it takes more than just historical evidence. It takes the sovereign grace of God to cause a stone-dead heart to believe. It takes the sovereign grace of God to open the eyes of the blind. But He does that. God causes unbelievers to believe the Scriptures and the witness to the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ. He did that with the apostle Paul. He's the great example of all, the greatest example of all of God's grace toward the sinner. And Paul cites himself as last on his list of eyewitnesses to the resurrection. After a period, all the apostles, he writes, and last of all, as to an untimely born, He appeared to me also.

Now, that appearance, as you know, appeared on the Damascus road as Paul, or Saul of Tarsus, zealous young rabbi was on his way to that city to kill Christians and terrorize the church. But Jesus stopped him in his tracks with a blinding light of glory, and the simple question: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? He saw in that light the resurrected Christ. He confessed Him to be Lord. He was converted. It was sudden and unexpected. It was a complete and immediate turnaround.

Paul's description of himself as "one untimely born" is fairly innocuous to us, but it was a startling statement, a very strong statement to those Corinthians, because it usually had the meaning, that expression had the meaning of a miscarriage. That's how he described his conversion. It's a miscarriage. So, it conveys a feeling that he was not a normal member of the group of apostles. When they were called by Christ, they followed Him for three years. There was a period of development for them. Paul didn't have that three year period of spiritual gestation like the others. He was born into the apostolic band suddenly, violently when he was snatched out of his sin and rebellion by the glorified Christ. In a moment, like that, he's saved.

It was an abnormal spiritual birth, Paul is saying, and seems to have felt that it was to his shame that he had to be saved in that way, that he couldn't have seen from just the truth of the gospel, and the evidence that he knew about, that that wouldn't have brought him to the saving knowledge of Christ. But he was so willful, so strong

in his sin that this was the way of conversion. And so, it was to his shame, even though it was to God's glory. But Paul felt he was completely unworthy to be an apostle, even though all of this renowns to the glory of God. And in verse 9, he calls himself the "least of the apostles," not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

Nevertheless, God chose him. And as he explains in verse 10, it was all of grace, unmerited favor, unconditional love. But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

The understanding of that grace of his own unworthiness and God's unimaginable blessing to him, him of all people, someone who hated Christ and tried to kill His people and killed His people, knowing of this great love and what He had done for him had an effect upon Paul. It galvanized Paul. He says, "I labored even more than all of them. I'm the least of them, but I labored more than all of them, all of the apostles." Now, that wasn't a boast on his part. He's not saying "I am the least of them, but let me tell you something: I work a lot harder than they do." His point is the grace of God. God made something great out of this persecutor of the church, this most unworthy of all was made the greatest laborer and missionary for the Lord that the church has ever known. That's the grace of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am." Christ forgave him, as he can, the worst of sinners. He gave him a new life with a glorious future.

That's the hope of the gospel. The gospel preached by all of the apostles, the only gospel there is. He concludes in verse 11 whether then it was I or they. So we preach, and so you believed. What the apostles proclaimed and what the Corinthians believed, what the church has believed down through the ages is the death and resurrection of Christ. That's the gospel. There's no gospel without the cross. The cross means nothing if Christ wasn't raised from the dead. And the promise of God is that all who believe that, all who put their faith in Christ, who trust in Him as the living Savior who died for our sins will be forgiven and saved forever.

That hope is certain because Christ's resurrection happened. He defeated the enemy that no one can defeat. He conquered death. He won the battle of the grave, and that has sealed the future for everyone who believes in Him. Every one of you. Your future is certain. It is sealed. It is guaranteed. It cannot be taken from you. So many people ignore that. That means nothing to them. They don't live for eternity; they live for time. The future they live for is the future right now, and they attempt to

find happiness and meaning, and significance in this world and this alone. That effort is doomed to failure and unhappiness regardless of what they might achieve, and people achieve great things in this world. We build shrines to them. We memorialize them. But if that's all they've done and that's all they have, it all turns to dust.

I came across this quote from Napoleon in his last days as he was a prisoner on the island of Saint Helena in the Atlantic, he reflected on his life and his end. He wrote: "I die before my time. My body will be given back to the earth to become the food of worms. Such is the fate of the great Napoleon." Then he added, "What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ which is proclaimed, loved, and adored, and is extending over the whole earth." What a despairing thought. The body being given back to the earth to become the food of worms. And at that man's destiny outside of Christ, and that man's destiny for the greatest of men to the least of men, but those who believe the gospel, what the apostles preached, have a share in the eternal kingdom of Christ and in the resurrection to come, we have life now at this very moment, and we have it forever.

Can you say that you have that? If you're not sure, understand that Christ died for sinners. God accepted His sacrifice for us. Now, all one must do to be saved is believe. Receive it. You can't achieve it, but you can receive it by the grace of God. Understand that you're a sinner and thank Him for dying for you and receive all that He did. If He could save Saul of Tarsus and make Him an apostle, give Him the certain hope of the resurrection. He can, and He will do that for you. Believe in Him. Be saved and rest in that, and rejoice in that, and then live for Him. May God help all of us to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the message that Paul preached to those Corinthians. In fact, the message that he, and Peter, and James and John, and all of the apostles preached, the one gospel that there is, that Your Son died for sinners, and you raised Him up from the dead, and we have that hope. Thank You. Regardless of the trials of life which we go through, and we go through trials, this is not an easy place to be. It's a fallen world and we suffer the effects and consequences of sin. But