

“That Which You Received and Are Being Saved By”

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Palm Sunday Sermon April 10, 2022

Text: 1 Cor. 15:1-28

**Whether then it was I or they, so we preached and so you believed.**

It is coming up on fifty years now, I had begun searching for where I could go and attend seminary—and this is what drove my search: where I should go and actually be taught the Scriptures. The church may be in the state it is in partly because when I surveyed the major Ivy League seminaries I found that none required knowledge of New Testament Greek, or original language studies. Greek and original languages were available on an elective basis but, perhaps due to the inherent linguistic challenges (which were very real to me—I struggled with Spanish and German!), one could complete a degree without being trained to deal with the Bible in its original languages. So, I chose Mansfield College, at that time the Free Church training college, where three papers, including New Testament Greek (Hebrew was optional), New Testament and Old Testament were required! *Having been taught that the Bible was untrustworthy, unreliable and, frankly, untrue, and having decided to embrace the Bible as true unless I could be shown from Scripture that it wasn't true, my choice of Mansfield College made perfect sense!*

With that as background, let's look into 1 Cor. 15:1-28 further. **Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached, 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.** So, Paul unabashedly begins this section by **reminding the brothers “of the gospel I preached.”** (v.1) Here is an assertion of the reality that Paul had **a gospel he preached.** It is not a matter of boasting, nor particularly of pride—but it was “his.” God so orchestrated his life that his life provided a filter, so to speak, but this gospel was not “his peculiar possession.” It was common ground with the preaching of the other apostles. Paul launches into a lengthy discussion of “first things” related to that gospel and its conformity to the Scriptures! This compound complex sentence can be broken down into 1. what Paul preached; 2. what they received; 3. what they stand on, or in; and 4. *by which they are **being saved** if they hold fast.* From which we gather that the gospel (which Paul received from those who received it from the Lord Himself!) is something transmitted, rather than generated. It is word of life from heaven shared on earth by all who believe. The gospel is the active agent, working even as yeast works to leaven the whole loaf.

And faith, which is also a gifted capability (distributed by God to all who are being saved according to His purpose—which we describe as election, a choice directed by the sovereign free will of God! God loves those whom He chooses to love. The love wherewith God loves the world differs from his electing love both in intensity and in purpose. God's love of the world establishes his general benevolence but the second love points to his redemptive resolve. God made us, provides for us, protects us and some of us he has purposed to purchase for his Son, so that those so purchased may inherit eternal life as co-heirs with Christ. Those who wonder why all are not saved might better marvel that any are saved—and those who protest that God should have provided many

paths to salvation would do better to praise him for any way to salvation for none was necessitated. Certainly, none was either earned, or deserved. Salvation is ever a gift. Our next consideration is the gospel Paul preached (as did the other apostles: **Whether it was I or they, so we preached, and so you believed.** (v. 11)

**I delivered to you as of the first importance what I also received.** So we must pause and recall that Paul has already spoken to what the brothers had received: **what I received *is paired with which you received.*** There is the preaching of the word, then the hearing of the word and, finally, the receiving of the word. That is the necessary progression. Now for the content.

And at the head of the queue we have, as of first importance: **Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.** (v.3) In accordance with Scripture is a statement of validation. What was prophesied in the Scriptures has been completed, or fulfilled in **Christ died for our sins.** Christ came to save us from our sins by dying for our sins; he embodied and fulfilled the redemptive purposes of God. We sing:

Our God is an awesome God  
He reigns from heaven above  
With wisdom, power, and love  
Our God is an awesome God

However, what is most awesome about him is not expressed in this praise song nearly as plainly as in Paul's letter. That God redeems relates his promise to Eve (**your seed will bruise his head**) to the rescue of Noah when God redeemed Noah and his family from the wrath of God upon the unrighteous who perished in the flood. That same redemptive God called Abraham, called Israel, and raised up Moses to lead his people out of bondage in Egypt. And after raising up judges, and kings and prophets, all servants of redeeming love, at the last God sent his very own Son to set us free from bondage to sin, fear, death and Satan. The conclusion of that last redemption is what we rehearse this Palm Sunday—the event which inaugurates the last week, the passion week, leading up to Resurrection Sunday. **That Christ died . . . was buried . . . and was raised on the third day** again, in **accordance with Scripture!** (v. 4) Three facts: died, buried, and raised are features in f Holy Week. What they express is the miracle of resurrection and this is a wonder of above all wonders. And the wonder of it is everlasting. It doesn't time out. It is a miracle, and a sign, and a wonder.

After this, Paul summarizes (and condenses) for us the resurrection appearances. The list is not complete, nor exhaustive for those familiar with the accounts of it in the gospels will note the omission of any reference to the women who first encountered and saw the risen Lord. The omission is not fatal to the record because scripture confirms scripture and the kindest interpretation is that Paul was signifying the leadership of the church in referencing Cephas, the twelve (and the five hundred witnesses at one time). **Then James, to all the apostles and last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me.** It is quite striking that the appearance of which we know the most is that pertaining to Paul! (Yes, the Damascus Road encounter is largely reported to us.) But Paul, sensing perhaps that this claim could be attributed to boasting, or to pride and self-promotion, adds

several qualifying phrases: **last of all, untimely born, least of all . . . unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church.** (v. 9)

There follows one of my favorite declarations in the New Testament: **But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain.** (v.10) And there is a reason for this preference on my part. As A. Maclaren points out:

The Apostle was, all his life, under the hateful necessity of *vindicating his character and Apostleship*. Thus here, though his main purpose in the context is simply to declare the Gospel which he preached, he is obliged to turn aside in order to assert, and to back up his assertion, that there was no sort of difference between him and the other recognized teachers of Christian truth. *He was forced to do this by persistent endeavors in the Corinthian Church to deny his Apostleship, and the faithfulness of his representation of the Christian verities.*

Paul recognized that it is only by grace, “the only thing which will transform and ennoble character and will produce fruit that a man need not be ashamed of.” Grace is the two-fold “root and product—of the active love of God, exercises with words of love toward sinful creatures, and with the gifts with which that love comes full charged to men.” All, the love and the gifts, are “stored up in Jesus Christ and through Him are made accessible to us . . . ennobling our character, and investing us with graces and beauties of character, all strange to us apart from these.” Herein lies the secret to the successful, or exemplary Christian life—a life which grows in nobility, in purity and in Christlikeness as **we are being saved . . . as we persevere in faith.**

With verse 12, Paul delves into the controversy, or debate surrounding the **resurrection of the dead**. We, being too familiar *perhaps* with the resurrection of our Lord, do not properly savor its significance! **How can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** Obviously, there are some in the Corinthian church who are doubters. There are always those who have questions about the truth of God, the truthfulness of Scripture in the church. I always think of Satan’s **Did God indeed say . . .** at this juncture.

Furthermore, this is why I invited the church to look over, and contemplate Acts 2:17-21. Peter says, **But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ‘And in the last days I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.’** Are we indeed in the last days? What signs would you look for to ascertain that we are in the last days? **My Spirit**, the Spirit of God . . . on all flesh? **You sons and daughters will prophecy.** Okay, if that is the case, when exactly will that happen? Within what framework? Will they only prophecy for the ensuing decades to the “Apostolic Age?” And then what? Will they cease? Now, for the record, the Scripture asserts neither of these positions—the limitation to the Apostolic Age, nor the cessation of the prophesying! Either such teaching must be imported to the text! **Will prophecy** has a continuous sense to it and it is mainly tied to **the last days**. In the last days, there will be prophesying **by sons and daughters** and visions and dreams. All classes of mankind, slave and free, will be swept up in this great move of God. And Peter, lest we forget is declaring *his day to be participant* in that “end time.” It is an

explanation of the current circumstances. We are quite aware of that peculiar moment was: devout Jewry from throughout the known world were gathered in Jerusalem for a festival, celebrating first fruits and the giving of the Law. The airwaves of the city were alive with praise and declaration. **We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.** (2:11) I think, that to those being attentive to the text, this description settles the matter of what *kind* of prophecy will occur in the end times. There will be testimonies of the **mighty works of God**. Is **this** drawing out the significance of what's into the text? I think so. I needn't import anything to understand this, not dispensational theory . . . nor speculative end times imagery. **And I will in those days pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy.** There and then, which we must answer, "Is that here and now?"

**I shall grant wonders in the sky above.** When Joel utters this, what occurred at the time of Jesus could certainly be in view. But when Peter declares the fulfillment of it, that is chronologically impossible. He must have some future occurrences in mind, things that we might see if we are indeed in the last days. **And signs on the earth below, blood and fire, and vapor of smoke . . . darkness . . . a moon into blood.** (vv. 19-20) *If we are in the last days, then we may anticipate such things currently . . . they do not belong to the past! They aren't "ceased" in any meaningful use of the word.*

Well, what do we know about the timing of these **last days**? We know they shall precede **the great and glorious (or terrible) day of the Lord**. That day **shall come**; and it shall be **that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.** (v.21) There is, again, a clear precedent for the fulfillment of that day with the crucifixion of the Lord:

**3 This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I glorified You on the earth, [a]having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.**

**Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself.** That is, I think, the plainest meaning of Christ's intercession. But, again, in the mouth of Peter, the significance cannot be buried in the past and must, I suggest, anticipate the Second Coming, and the Final Judgment—which is why sustaining **terrible** with **glorious** seems most apt. There we must leave it.

Back to the resurrection controversy. It is excellent for those who take up a position on doctrine to think it all through. It must follow logically, and what comes forth must proceed from what came before: **If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.** (v. 13) But what if an objector arises who says, "Well, I didn't; witness it, I didn't experience it; therefore I cannot say whether it happened or not." God help us if reality is hung on such a thin thread! You probably haven't experienced the mountains of ice in Antarctica. That proves nothing except the limits of your own experience. They can exist truly whether you have first hand evidence or not! Perhaps another objector, less psychological or subjective than the last, says, "Well, I believe that what is going on now and what has been going on forever are the same. Therefore, because I do not see resurrections happening now, they never did so." Once again, all that this proves that your experience is limited. And that cannot be shrugged off with "Well, no one has experienced

everything.” True enough, humanly speaking. But God who is as omnipresent as he is omniscient and everlasting, he has participated in and experienced it all! That is why when he tells us that something is so, we might well receive it.

The resurrection of Jesus, a central article of the gospel and our faith, is a given in the faith-based reality we inhabit. But Paul doesn’t stop with logic. He proceeds to say **And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.** (v.14) Of course. **We are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.** If it be not true, I am constrained to declare unbelievable things based on the resurrection of Jesus—I am compelled to declare things “too good to be true” and to do so with frequency. I should not be surprised that my credibility is suspect. Indeed, all my colleagues in the faith should be equally suspect; unless, of course, they equivocate. As many do in our day, “I cannot define what a man, or woman is. I don’t know when life begins. “I cannot say” is “I will not say,” is evasion for political reasons. There can be no justice if those set up for judgment cannot discern even basic truth—or will not because they fear “cancellation.” A man, or woman is a soul-endowed creation of the living God who has an existence on many planes, often simultaneously: biological/genetic, psychological, emotional, social, economic, political, legal and intellectual as well as spiritual and who, through redemption, may obtain/attain to everlasting life. (It’s not that difficult.)

Resurrection is crucial because it is a vindication of the death Christ died to obtain the forgiveness of our sins. It signals divine acceptance of the sacrifice and approval to the war as finished. It is God yes addressed to his beloved son. Further resurrection is **the first fruits of those who have died (fallen asleep)** v. 20. It is the reversal of all that befell us through the sin of Adam and Eve, of all the depravity and rebellions, treason and betrayal that our race is so fond and capable of. God is rescuing us from death, dust and oblivion and the resurrection of Jesus is just the beginning. **Then comes the end**—oh, this is what we’ve been looking for!—**Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father having destroyed every rule, and power and authority** (v.24) . . . **until all his enemies are under his feet** (v. 25) And this is the culmination of salvation history, **All things in subjugation to him (Christ) . . . that God may be all in all.** (v.28) I have many other outrageous things to share with you—that your Easter season might be full of truth, joy and confidence; but this will be a start.

**Amen.**