

ESF Easter day message
4/21/2019

The Blessed Life in the Resurrection
1 Corinthians 15:1-11

¹ Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. ¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

A week ago, Tiger Woods won the 2019 Masters championship golf tournament. It was an epic and a dramatic win. He had not won a major championship in 11 years, since 2008. He had been struggling with a shameful scandal, severe injuries to back and leg, and several surgeries. 17 months ago, he was ranked 1,199th in the PGA world. He is now 43 years of age. Generally speaking that age may be considered young. But in the world of pro sports, it is old. Some big companies who had sponsored him dropped him. Most sports analysts thought that he would never win a championship again. In terms of winning a championship,

he was like a dead man. But somehow he overcame all those trials, and won the championship. Many people who watched or heard of his winning, were moved to tears. Because it was like a dead man coming back to life. It was like a resurrection.

Such a story can inspire us not to give up when we are struggling with pain from our weaknesses, failures and trials. But the resurrection of Christ not only inspires us not to give up but also helps us overcome all failures and trials victoriously. In fact, the resurrection of Christ is the backbone of Christianity.

Paul says that if there is no resurrection, Christian faith would be groundless, useless and powerless. With much undeniable evidence, Paul proves that the resurrection is not fiction but a historical fact. Then he explains what a blessed life we can have in the resurrection.

The resurrection is grounds for unshakable faith

When we believe in Jesus, we expect something good to happen in our lives. But when something bad happens to us, our faith may be shaken. If a situation in our lives becomes worse, tragic things happen in our lives, or a loved one gets terminally ill and dies, we may get discouraged and our faith in Jesus may be shaken.

But today, Paul shows us how we can keep our faith strong in spite of all the bad things, tragedies, or even death that comes our way. It is to build our faith upon the resurrection. The resurrection gives us an assurance of unshaken faith. *..I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.* Here by “the gospel” Paul means the gospel of Christ’s resurrection.

If we build our faith upon what happens in our lives, our faith may be shaken. But if we build our faith upon the resurrection, our faith will never be shaken and it will stand firm no matter what happens in our lives. Because the resurrection gives us the power to overcome the

power of death and the power to overcome all tragedies and evils in our lives.

The question is, “how can we be sure of the resurrection?” Did the resurrection truly happen or not? If it really happened, is there any undeniable evidence that can firmly convince us to believe it? If it really happened what does it have to do with our lives today?

Here in verses 3-7, Paul gives the undeniable evidence of the resurrection. Paul says that after the resurrection, the risen Lord Jesus appeared many times at different places and to different people. According to Paul’s record here and the records of the gospels regarding the appearance of the risen Jesus, there are at least 9 different appearances of the risen Lord.

- (1) To Mary Magdalene and the other women as they returned from the sepulcher, after having seen the angel who told them Christ had arisen (Matt. 28:8-10; Mark 16:9-10; John 20:11-18).
- (2) To Peter, just before evening of the day of Jesus’ resurrection, but under undetailed circumstances (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).
- (3) To the two disciples, Cleopas and another, on the way to Emmaus, in the afternoon of the day of Jesus’ resurrection (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-32).
- (4) To the ten apostles, Thomas being absent, together with others on the evening of the day of Jesus’ resurrection at their evening meal (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25; 1 Cor. 15:5).
- (5) One week later, to all the eleven apostles, probably in the same place as the preceding appearance (Mark 16:14; John 20:26-29).
- (6) To several of the disciples at the Sea of Galilee, while they were fishing (John 21:1-24).

(7) To the apostles and more than 500 people and James, the Lord's brother, on an appointed mountain in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6-7).

(8) To those who witnessed the Ascension at Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:19; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-12).

(9) To Paul, who did not believe in Jesus at all and even persecuted the followers of Jesus (Acts 9:1-9, 22:6-11, 26:12-18; 1 Co. 15:8).

After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to his disciples many times, but many of them still did not believe in His resurrection. So what did the risen Jesus do to help them believe in the resurrection? He constantly emphasized the Scriptures that talk about his resurrection.

The most compelling evidence is the promises and records of the resurrection in the Scriptures which are the most reliable books of all.

In Luke 24:25-27, He (The risen Lord Jesus) said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

In Luke 24:44-46, He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

Various historical documents and archaeology evidence proclaim this message: the prophecies of the Bible have a 100% accuracy rate. When it comes to Jesus and his resurrection there are Old Testament prophecies: prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus. In Acts 2 the apostle

Peter preaches a sermon based upon exactly this line of thought. He took his Jewish listeners on a tour of the OT Scriptures (Psalm 16:8-11, 110:1) that prophesied Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The result? 3000 Jewish people turned in faith to Jesus Christ that day.

The reason we can be sure of the resurrection is because the Scriptures testify about the resurrection.

When you search all the evidences of the resurrection, and the trustworthy records in the Scriptures, you can stop doubting and believe in the resurrection. And your faith will be unshaken no matter what happens in your life.

The resurrection comes in believers' gathering

When we see the records in the New Testament of the appearances of the risen Lord Jesus, 7 out of 9 times He appeared at places where believers gathered together. Jesus can reveal His resurrection to anyone individually. But Jesus is more pleased with revealing His resurrection to believers when they gather together.

That is why the author of Hebrews encourages believers to gather together as often as possible: *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching* (Hebrews 10:25).

In ancient Rome, Christians were persecuted severely. They were misunderstood by unbelievers as people who drank human blood--because of Christian communion--drinking the blood of Christ. Roman emperors thought that they were dangerous rebels who denied the authority of the emperor as a god or a son of god because Christians confessed that only Jesus was the Son of God. Christian gatherings were prohibited by the Roman government. Christian gatherings were illegal.

But Christians kept gathering together risking their lives. They used the sign of the fish to secretly communicate to each other (ΙΧΘΥΣ

(Ichthus). This is an acronym for "Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ", (Iēsous **C**hristos, **T**heou **Y**ios, **S**ōtēr), which translates into English as "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior").

If gathering is not important, why did they risk their lives to gather together?

Not only in ancient Rome, but throughout church history, Christians have gathered together in all circumstances, even in the midst of severe persecution against their gathering.

Today in America, nobody is persecuted for gathering with Christians. That creates another problem. Americans feel so free that they don't want or don't think they need to come to church gatherings. Some people argue or think that as long as they believe in Jesus in their hearts, it does not matter whether they go to church or not. Of course, we can serve the Lord and worship the Lord alone. But participating in gatherings with believers is not an option for true Christians. It is the command of the Lord. It is the most important way to receive the powerful presence of the risen Lord.

The believers in the first church in Jerusalem were able to experience the power of the resurrection every day when they gathered together diligently. Acts 2:44-47 “.... All the believers were togetherEvery day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. ... praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Although you may receive God's grace when you pray alone or worship alone, you always receive more abundant grace when you gather together with other believers and worship the Lord together.

When you come on Sunday to meet together with other believers, you are not just participating in routine religious rituals, but you are sharing in the presence of the risen Lord Jesus and receiving the power of the resurrection.

So, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

The resurrection enables us to overcome failure and live with hope

While Jesus was suffering on the cross by powerful people, Peter publically denied Jesus, and all the other disciples fled away. They became failures in terms of their faith in Jesus. At that time, they were in total despair and were overwhelmed by fear. They felt that they had lost everything. To follow Jesus, they had given up everything-their jobs, their friends, their families. While Jesus had been with them, they had been excited at his authoritative teaching and miraculous power. But Jesus had died on the cross. His dead body was buried in a tomb of rock. The entrance of the tomb was completely sealed with a large stone and was secured by guards.

After following Jesus for three years, their lives ended with nothing but the horrible death of Jesus. They were unable to go back to their home town. What could they say to their home town people about their faith in Jesus? How could they see their friends and relatives? They had nothing to be proud of in their faith of Jesus. They could not go out into the streets of Jerusalem either. The unbelieving crowds were hostile to them. People might try to arrest them and kill them too. They were terrified by the fear of death. Their situation was completely dark and hopeless. There was no way to get out of the darkness.

Then the risen Lord Jesus appeared to them on that Sunday evening. *On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*(John 20:19). When they were in the darkest despair, the risen Lord came to them with the victory of the resurrection. Suddenly their fear was gone. They were filled with joy. The bright light of hope filled their hearts. They shouted, *"Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise God!"*

When the risen Lord Jesus came to them, he restored their lost faith (John 21:1-23). Jesus used the power of the resurrection not to condemn their weak and powerless failure, but to restore them from failure. Through the power of the resurrection, Jesus maximized God's grace in their lives. Paul testified what a marvelous grace he had received through the risen Lord Jesus in verses 8-11: *last of all he (the risen Lord Jesus) appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. ...I do not even deserve 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 to me was not without effect.*

When we follow Jesus, we may face similar situations as the disciples. We may lose everything we have. We may be put in a complete darkness, or complete despair. We may lose our faith and become failures.

But the Lord used such situations to make His resurrection power real in our lives also. With the power of the resurrection, He helps us overcome failures.

So if you fail and are in dark despair, remember the power of the resurrection of the Lord and seek the power of the resurrection. The risen Lord will restore your faith.

No matter what happens to us, through the resurrection, the Lord also gives us hope for the future. The most powerful force in our lives is death. If there is no resurrection, death finishes everything. So those who do not have the power of the resurrection have to say, "Everything is over" when they face death. Those who do not have the resurrection must give up on hope in front of death even if they have everything in this world. They must say, "Everything ends in vain."

But those, who have the resurrection, can still hang on to hope even after everything fails, even when everything goes wrong, even when they lose everything in this world. Because the resurrection enables them to

overcome the power of death, which is the greatest problem and greatest tragedy in their lives.

With the power of the resurrection, nothing is impossible to overcome. With the power of the resurrection, the Lord always gives us a chance to recover, restart and redeem ourselves from failure, tragedy and defeat. So, with the power of resurrection, rise again.