

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (NIV)

1 Now, brothers, 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 Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers 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.

46-15-02 -The Heart of the Gospel

Easter, Incarnation, Gospel, Cross, resurrection, salvation

1 Cor 15:1-9

The heart of the Gospel meets the deepest needs of the human heart.

INTRODUCTION: (Scripture reading: Mark 16:1-7; **text** before message)

–[In spring of 1999, one of my daughter’s teachers was hoping to retire. But after his classes one day, he had a fatal heart attack at home. His sudden death illustrates the uncertainty of life. Time can run out before we accomplish our plans. When death will occur is not certain—that it will occur is very certain.] Easter is a greater certainty! It’s ultimate celebration of the Incarnation, the doctrine that summarizes Christian theology. But the Incarnation itself contains two elements that summarize the Christian Gospel: The Cross of Christ and His Resurrection (together these form **the heart of the Gospel** (title).

–These 2 events are 2 facets of God’s future Kingdom breaking into our present world: the Judgment began at Christ’s Cross, and Heavenly life began in His Resurrection. The uncertainty of life on earth makes these 2 events good news for humanity, in fact, the best news ever reported!

–Today’s message is about how **HOM.idea**. The text begins with...

I. The Priority of the Gospel– (As far as certainty is concerned, what is [v.3], of first importance... ?) **Many want...+**

A. +**Certainty** about acceptance with God... the Cross provides...*

1. ***Certainty** about forgiveness– v.3, Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (In Rom 6:23, God’s Word not only proclaims sin’s penalty (“For the wages of sin is death”), but also promises divine pardon (“but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”)

2. ***Certainty** about God’s love, because of...^

a. ^the Incarnation– John 3:16a, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son... (His fleshly body made Him one of us!)

b. ^Christ’s death– Rom 5:8, But God demonstrates his own **love** for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Jesus explained exactly what this kind of love means in John 15:13, Greater **love** has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. **Yet He** went to that Cross **not just for His friends, but for His enemies!**)

B. +**Certainty** about surviving death– v.4, ...he was buried,... he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (The bodily Resurrection of God’s Son meets the human need for certainty about eternal life):

1. God became fully human so that He could fully die and be buried!
 - a. Death's full impact included separation— Isa 53:8 predicted that Christ would be “cut off from the land of the living”—even worse, Psa 22:1 said He would feel cut off from a sense of His Father's presence: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (God chose to find out what the absence of God's presence felt like!) **PTL!**
 - b. according to the Scriptures, Jesus defeated both death and the grave [death's physical result]— Hosea 13:14, I will ransom them from the power of the grave ; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? (A human-friendly hope is not an angelic afterlife or a reincarnated loss of identity, but a destiny of entire, personal reintegration of spirit and soul in an immortal human body, just like Christ's resurrected body!)
2. When Jesus “was raised on the third day,” His defeat of death and the grave made Him the Leader of a new humanity (Upon His return, we will be resurrected in bodies just like His! In the meantime, we carry His resurrection life in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.)

TRANS: Humans can find no greater hope than in these aspects of the Gospel: Christ's Cross offers us new life and His Resurrection retrieves us from the grave! These are of first importance! [Top priority for heart tissue is oxygenated blood. If coronary arteries get clogged, life is in jeopardy. Likewise, it's “of first importance” for Christ's blood to flow to our hearts from the heart of the Gospel!] Christ's Cross & Resurrection **meet the deepest needs in the human heart**: a forgiven past, a presently renewed life, and a future of bodily restoration. “But is this Good News true?” We must look at...

II. The Proof of the Gospel

- A. We live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7), but God lets doubters examine the facts— John 20:27, Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”
- B. The appearances listed in v.5-7 confirmed the early church's faith:
 1. Paul claimed 500 at once saw the risen Christ. (Since many were still alive, they could have refuted Paul's claim, if it was false.)
 2. The apostles and Paul and probably some of these 500 were so convinced at seeing their risen Lord, that they died as martyrs for their faith. (Who would die for something they knew to be a lie?)
- C. His personal encounter with Jesus transformed Paul from one who

persecuted the church of God (v.9), into a vigorous Gospel champion.

TRANS: Being convinced of Christ's Resurrection changes everything. [Two skeptic scholars (a lawyer and an archaeologist) once decided to invalidate the Christian faith by disproving 2 major events: the Resurrection & Paul's conversion. They planned to publish books that would end Christianity. But when they met years later, their research had convinced both of them to become Christians. They ended up publishing books that spread the Gospel. Frank Morison wrote Who Moved the Stone? and Sir William Ramsay wrote St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen]. But being convinced calls for something else....

- ### III. Perseverance in the Gospel— v.1, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.
- A. The world needs the Good News, but we will fail to proclaim it, if we stray from the heart of the Gospel message. [Many formerly faithful churches have done just that, by abandoning faith that God became human, that He died for our sins, and that He rose again bodily.]
 - B. We must remind ourselves to keep our faith planted where we originally took our stand: on Christ's Cross and His Resurrection.
 - C. What guarantees salvation? Persistent faith in this Gospel!— v.2, By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.
 1. If we don't hold firmly to the word of this message, we're back to square one, a life of uncertainty in a world with no real hope!)
 2. Without ongoing faith in this powerful message, the Gospel is powerless to turn us from sinners into saints.
 3. **As a church**, we must persist in proclaiming this human-friendly hope to a lost world marching toward death and the grave, by our united response to this declaration: “HE IS RISEN!”...

CONCLUSION:

—[Someone has said, “There are two things certain in life: death and taxes.”] Taxes we know; death is unfamiliar territory. But Jesus went there and came back alive! By the Cross He met death in battle to redeem us from sin! By Resurrection He defeated the grave so He could raise up our bodies when He returns.

—Easter celebrates Christ's victory and reminds us to keep a tight grip: one hand on the Cross and the other on the Empty Tomb. These two historical and divine realities bring a message of certainty to an uncertain world. They are **the heart of the Gospel** and they **meet the deepest needs of the human heart**.