

Easter 2019

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 — What Is The Most Important Thing I Need To Know?

April 22, 2019

It is great to have you on resurrection Sunday. Jesus has risen!

(Response: He has risen indeed!) If you are visiting, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are glad to have you. It is no secret that we are going to study the resurrection. I will pray and we will get to business.

Father God, we thank you for this great day. Thank you for a day to celebrate the most important event in the history of the world, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We thank you the tomb was empty. We thank you sin is forgiven. We thank you death is conquered. We thank you that salvation is offered to all who will receive your free gift. Jesus, we ask that as we study this morning that we would grow to love you more, see you better, and follow you more passionately. Send your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and quicken our minds to understand the Bible so all of us will treasure you as our savior, Lord and king. Amen.

We are constantly bombarded by information. Our mailboxes and inboxes are filled with junk mail. The do-not-call list should be renamed the does-not-work list. Now telemarketers are even calling our cell phones. We have cable television with more than 200 channels but most programs are continually interrupted by commercials we don't want to see. Most of us spend lots of time on the Internet. With just a few clicks, our screens are flooded with non-stop information and advertisements we didn't ask to see. Our cell phones are constantly buzzing. Our social media accounts are constantly updating. We live in an information-filled world where we are harassed with information we don't need to know and don't want to know. Wouldn't it be great if we could get rid of the noise of information and simply focus on the important things we need to know? This morning, I am going to help us do that.

According to the Bible, there is just one piece of information the entire world must know and act upon. That is the truth about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That is, without question, what happened to Jesus is the most important piece of information in human history. It is the most important piece of information to respond to in human history. Why is it so important?

One reason the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is so important is because it is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions. It is how we know we can trust Jesus instead of other religions.

Other religions are based on the unverified advice of a leader who died without proof that anything he said was true. Christianity is based on the hard evidence that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and also rose from the grave to life in order to prove everything he claimed while living is true. There is a big difference between unverified advice from people who died and stayed dead compared to the words of someone who died and then factually and historically came back to life from the dead to prove everything he said was true. The resurrection is what sets the Christian faith apart from all other religions. It is why we know what Jesus said is true. It is why we don't follow other religions.

This morning we are going to study the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus from the lens of 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. In those verses, Paul explained what the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ does for us. Then he explained why we can trust it as a true, verified fact of history.

What does the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ do for me?

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. 1 Corinthians 15:1–2 (ESV)

Paul told the Corinthians that he wanted to remind them of the gospel he preached to them. What is the gospel? Gospel is the Greek word for good news. Life is filled with bad news. I don't care what news network we watch, the news is always about bad. The news is about crisis, rape, war, murder, famine, death, and lots of political and racial hatred. Every news organization focuses on bad news, because life is full of bad news. Some of you are like me. You don't like watching the news because it is too depressing.

Paul said there is hope. There is the gospel, which means good news. The good news Paul was talking about is the best news in the world. It is news so good it is worth gathering to celebrate every weekend. This news is so good that it eclipses all of the other bad news and gives us joy even when the world around us is falling apart. What is this good news?

It is the news that God loves us. It is that he sent Jesus, his son, to live the perfect life we cannot live. Jesus then died in our places, for our sin. After he paid for our sin on the cross, he rose from the grave to new life. When we place our faith in him and give our lives to him, our sins are forgiven by Jesus, and we also are risen to new life, like Jesus. That is good news.

Paul also said we need to do something with the good news about Jesus. We need to receive it, stand on it, hold on to it, and we will be saved by it. Most of the information in this world is white noise. We hear it and we can ignore it. It ultimately doesn't matter. That is not true with Jesus. What Jesus did on the cross and with the empty tomb is the most important information in the world. We

must receive it. That means means we can't ignore the good news of Jesus, like we do with other information in the world. We must take it into our lives and respond to it. In addition, we must stand on it. Standing on something means to make it foundational to your life. It is what you build your life upon. What Jesus has done for us on the cross and with the empty tomb must become foundational to our identities. Paul then said we must hold on to this information. We must not drift away. If we drift away from the most important information in the world, we are drifting away from the most important thing we need in the world.

Paul said if we receive this news, stand on it, and hold on to it, we will be saved by it.

After Paul told the Corinthians what the good news of Jesus can do for them and why it is the most important thing they needed to know and hold on to in their lives, he explained to them why they could know this was not just good news but true news. This is reasonable. Jesus rising from the dead is an extraordinary claim. How can we know it took place when we were not there?

How do I know the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is a fact of history?

At this point, Paul quoted an early church creed. A creed is a statement of belief people join together to state to others they agree upon. Scholars who study the letter of 1 Corinthians tell us Paul penned this letter no more than 20 years after Christ's death. Here he was quoting a creed that dated back to only a handful of years after the resurrection. It was written by early Christians possibly five or fewer years after Christ rose from the dead. This might be the earliest statement of what Christians believed about Jesus that we have on record.

We always hear the Christian faith has drifted and we don't believe what the early Christians believed. That is not true. This is what earliest Christians claimed about Jesus and what they believed about Jesus. It is the same thing we claim and the same thing we believe. Nothing has changed.

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. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 (ESV)

Paul began by saying this is of first importance. This is the most important piece of information you need to know. It is also what he received. It is the early creed he was taught when he first became a Christian. Let's study our way through the creed.

Jesus died for our sin according to the Scriptures.

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies telling us Jesus would die for our sin. God told us Jesus was coming to die for our sin thousands of years before it happened. The Old Testament prophesied that God would send his son to earth to take on flesh, that he would be born of a virgin, that he would be born in Bethlehem, that he would live without sin, that he would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, that he would be crucified, that he would be laid in a rich man's tomb, and that three days later he would rise from the dead to take away sin and conquer death. All of this was in the Old Testament, written hundreds and thousands of years before Jesus came.

Prophecies of Jesus death and resurrection are not just in the Old

Testament but are also in the New Testament. Jesus constantly told people he would die and rise from the dead, while he was still alive. Jesus prophesied about vivid details of his death and resurrection that nobody could have known unless he was God. For example. Jesus predicted the exact day he would die. He predicted the day he would rise.

In Matthew 20, Jesus said he was going to Jerusalem where the chief priest and the scribes would condemn him to death, mockery, scourging and crucifixion but on the third day he would rise.

In Matthew 26, Jesus predicted the day of his death. He said he would be crucified on Passover.

In Matthew 29, Jesus predicted he would be handed over to the Romans.

The most common prophecy of Jesus' death that he predicted was that he would rise again in three days. How could Jesus know those details and be so specific on those details unless he was God? Nobody knows the day of his death, how he will die, who will kill him, how things will unfold. Jesus' death and resurrection were not just prophesied in the Old Testament, but Jesus also gave vivid details about this before his death.

Is Jesus' death documented outside the Bible? Yes. The death of Jesus is not just in biblical history. It is a solid fact of secular history. Tacitus was an ancient non-Christian historian who wrote about the death of Jesus. Josephus was another ancient historian who also wrote about Jesus' death and resurrection. There are 39 prominent historical sources we have from the ancient world that document world history that took place while Jesus was alive. Twenty-

two of those 39 talk about the death of Jesus, and many provide details. Eleven of those 22 sources of ancient history are non-Christian in origin.¹

The death of Jesus was something everyone in the ancient world knew about. It took place publicly during Passover in the city of Jerusalem when it was overrun with people. It was watched by scores of people. It was well-documented by multiple non-Christian historians from that time. Jesus was killed by a squad of four Roman soldiers whose sworn duty was to make sure he died. Jesus' friends watched him die. Jesus' enemies watched him die. When he was dead, to make sure he was dead, one of the soldiers thrust a spear into his side putting a hole in his heart to ensure he was dead. Pilate made the Roman soldier who killed Jesus certify his death before Jesus' body was released for burial. Survival from crucifixion in the ancient world was unknown, just as survival of the guillotine was later or lethal injection is unknown today.

In spite of the claim of this early church creed that Jesus died and the multiple secular accounts from history that Jesus did indeed die, today, some people do not believe in the death of Jesus. Some people claim Jesus simply passed out on the cross and revived in the cool of the tomb. Religions, like Islam, claim Jesus did not die. That is preposterous. This early creed tells us the death of Jesus is a fact that all early Christians agreed upon. In addition, prior to his crucifixion, Jesus underwent a brutal flogging. Floggings tore sheets of flesh off the body and yanked ribs out of the body. Many men died from the pain of the flogging before the cross.

¹ John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), preface, p. 9.

Jesus died on the cross. Make no mistake about it.

What makes Jesus' death so important? While lots of people die brutal and unfair deaths, Jesus' death was different. Jesus was sinless. He died as the perfect substitute for our sin. God took all of our sin and put it on Jesus. While hanging on the cross, God the Father poured out an eternity of his wrath for all of our sin on his own son. Jesus suffered and died in our places for our sin. Jesus died paying the penalty for sin we deserve.

What this means is when we see Jesus dying in horror and agony on the cross, we must remind ourselves, that we deserve to be on that cross. Jesus was suffering the horror and punishment I deserve for my sin. Jesus loves me so much that he chose to take all the suffering I deserve and die in my place as a substitute to pay for my sin. I deserve to suffer the way Jesus suffered. I deserve the horror Jesus endured. The good news is God the Father loves me. The good news is Jesus loves me so much he died for me. That is why Jesus came for me. This is the most important news in the world. This is the good news. This is the news we must receive into our lives. We must stand on it. We must not drift away from it.

Jesus was buried.

We must also insist and take our stand upon the fact that Jesus was buried. After Jesus died, his body was taken off the cross. It was prepared for burial. In that day, preparation for burial was not unlike mummification. They wrapped Jesus' body in strips of cloth and more than 100 pounds of spices. Some of those spices were sticky resins, similar to pine sap. That kept the strips

of cloth in place and glued them like a cocoon around the body. Jesus' body was then placed in a tomb.

Jesus didn't have money for his own tomb so a quiet but affluent disciple of Jesus named Joseph of Arimathea gave his own personal tomb in Jerusalem to be used by Jesus. This fulfilled what was prophesied about Jesus in Isaiah 53, which is that Jesus would be laid in the tomb of a rich man in his death. Since this was the tomb of a rich man, it was a large tomb. It was an easy-to-find tomb.

Extraordinary precautions were taken by the Jewish leaders to ensure Jesus' body was not moved or stolen from that tomb. Roman guards were placed at the tomb. A stone was rolled in front of the tomb. History tells us the gravestone rolled in front of the entrance of the tomb would have weighed between one and two tons. Mark 16:4 tells us the stone was very large, so the two-ton variety was selected. One early church writing tells us the stone selected was so large 20 men could not roll it away.² Lastly, the Roman seal was placed on the tomb to ensure it was not disturbed. If it was disturbed, the seal would be broken, which would incur the wrath of Rome. The penalty for breaking the Roman seal was usually death.

Most of us do not appreciate the presence of the Roman guards at the tomb to guarantee Jesus was untouched. Roman guards did not falter. This week, I learned the punishment for a Roman guard losing his weapons or deserting his post while on duty was death. Knowing that falling asleep on the job was punishable by death produced flawless attention to duty.³

² Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* rev. ed. (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), p.216.

³ <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Easter-Articles-Resurrection-Facts-to-be-reckoned-with.pdf>

Matthew 28 tells us how things unfolded that resurrection morning. An angel from God appeared at the tomb, rolling back the stone. His appearance was so brilliant these hardened guards trembled and became like dead men. They collapsed to the ground in fear. After the angel rolled away the stone to reveal the tomb was empty, the guards ran to the chief priests to tell them what happened. The Jewish leaders agreed to concoct a story saying the disciples stole the body at night while the guards were asleep. That is a bad story. If Roman guards fell asleep on the job, they suffered the death penalty. How would the disciples roll away a stone that was so large 20 men could not move it while not disturbing the Roman guards? If the guards were asleep, how would they know who stole the body? They were supposedly asleep!

The early creed has told us two things all early Christians believed about Jesus. First, he died. Second, he was buried. Now comes the good news.

Jesus rose on the third day.

This is what makes Jesus different from everyone else in human history. Everyone saw Jesus die. There was no question Jesus was dead. The spear pierced his side. Everyone knew where Jesus was buried. There was no question Jesus was buried. It was a prominent tomb. It was a sealed tomb. It was a guarded tomb. But on that first resurrection Sunday, it was an empty tomb. Did you notice that even the worst critics of Jesus, like the chief priests in Jerusalem, did not try to argue that the tomb was not empty. The apostles were preaching night and day that Jesus was alive and rose from the dead. The apostles were preaching that they met with Jesus, talked with Jesus and touched Jesus.

All the Jewish leaders needed to do to stop the apostles was to produce the body of Jesus, the body they kept sealed and guarded in a tomb like they were protecting the gold of Fort Knox. All the Jewish leaders needed to do was carry Jesus' dead body around town saying, "He is not alive. He looks dead to me." They couldn't do that because tomb was empty. I am sure an exhaustive search was made by the Jewish leaders but no body was ever found. As the angel told the guards, "He is not here. He is alive."

For the apostle John, when he ran to the tomb on that resurrection morning, what convinced him that Jesus rose from the dead was the odd position of the burial clothes. Remember they were wrapped and glued around Jesus' body, making a cocoon. Jesus' body was gone, but the wrappings were still in place, collapsed on themselves. Jesus' body just disappeared from inside of them. Only the cloth wrapped around the head was disturbed. That was folded up next to the cocooning clothes.

Human nature reveres the burial sites of great leaders. People make pilgrimages to burial sites to honor the dead. The Jews travel to Hebron to visit Abraham's grave. Muslims make pilgrimages to Medina where the prophet Mohammed's body is found. Buddha's body was cremated and his remains were distributed to different Buddhist temples around the world. We can see the remains of Buddha. There are no remains of Jesus. His tomb is empty. Remember that unlike all other religious leaders who started a religion then died and stayed dead, Jesus didn't try to start the Christian faith. The Christian faith

began after Jesus died and rose from the dead, letting everyone know that the truth he told us about God and himself is indeed true.

Jesus appeared alive.

Jesus appeared alive to his friends.

In a criminal trial, most juries will convict someone based on the testimony of two eyewitnesses. Sometimes juries convict someone based on one eyewitness. When a modern trial lawyer has three eyewitnesses for a crime, his chances of conviction rise to more than 99 percent. Multiple eyewitnesses certify something as undeniably true. As we look at Jesus' resurrection, we see there were far more than three eyewitnesses of his resurrection from the dead. There were thousands of people who met with Jesus, talked with Jesus, touched Jesus, and ate with Jesus. The most famous eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus were the apostles, his friends.

They were 11 eyewitnesses who claimed Jesus was alive. We are tempted to dismiss their claims of Jesus' resurrection because it feels like they would be biased in favor of Jesus rising from the dead, since they were his closest friends. Don't let their friendship with Jesus undermine the validity of their testimony about the resurrection of Jesus. Each of them did not want to believe Jesus rose from the dead. They were presented with solid and overwhelming evidence that Jesus was alive and were forced to believe in the resurrection.

None of the apostles recanted from their claims that Jesus was alive. As a result of their unwavering claims that Jesus rose from the dead, all but one of them died painful deaths because they refused to recant. Peter was crucified

upside down. Andrew, Philip, Simon, Bartholomew and James were also crucified because they wouldn't recant that Jesus was indeed alive and they met him. Matthew was put to death by the sword. Thaddeus was killed with arrows. Thomas by the spear. John was boiled in oil, but he survived and ultimately died a natural death from old age although I am sure he was disfigured from the attempt on his life.

Folks, people may die for a conviction, but they won't die for a concoction. All the apostles didn't make up the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. If they did, they wouldn't die for a claim they knew wasn't true.

We must realize, Jesus' apostles were not predisposed to believe he rose from the dead. In the Bible we find Jesus appearing alive to them as a group five times. When the apostles were with the resurrected Jesus, they talked with Jesus, they touched Jesus, they ate food with Jesus. Maybe the first time, they talked and touched the risen Jesus they woke up the next morning and thought they were out of their minds. They talked with one another the next day making sure they were not losing their minds because they talked with Jesus, who was a dead man. The second time they talked with the resurrected Jesus, they were probably still trying to process what happened. Then it happened a third time, a fourth time, a fifth time. The Bible tells us Jesus met with them many more times, but we only have five recorded in the Bible. Understand they were not predisposed to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Continually meeting with the resurrected Jesus is what forced them to believe Jesus rose from the dead.

One of my favorite apostles is Thomas. He gets a bum rap because the nickname we give him is doubting Thomas. The truth is we are no different than Thomas. Even though Thomas' closest friends swore Jesus was alive, he wouldn't believe them. Imagine meeting with your 10 closest friends who all swore to you Jesus was alive. Thomas refused to believe because dead people don't rise. He said he would not believe until he put his finger in Jesus' wounded side. A week after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his apostles again, but this time Thomas was with them. Jesus said to Thomas, "Touch me and see." Thomas' immediate response was not to question Jesus was alive but to fall down and worship him. Thomas was forced to believe because the evidence was so strong he couldn't help but believe.

Jesus appeared alive to strangers.

In the Gospels, we find 12 separate appearances of Jesus alive between his resurrection and return to heaven 40 days later. The Bible tells us there were many other appearances of the resurrected Jesus that are not recorded in Scripture. Jesus appeared to individuals, like Mary Magdalene at the tomb. He appeared to two people at once and even took a walk with them on the Emmaus road. He appeared to groups of 11 at one time with the apostles. Paul told us Jesus even appeared to more than 500 people at once. Jesus appeared to people in the country and in the city. He appeared in Jerusalem and in Galilee 70 miles to the north. Jesus appeared everywhere.

One thing that is important for us to realize is groups do not have the same hallucination. Hallucinations are by nature individual experiences, not

group experiences. When a group of 500 people talk with Jesus, touch Jesus, and eat with Jesus, that is something that literally happened, not wishful thinking of one person imagining that happened.

Jesus appeared alive to his family.

Paul mentioned that Jesus also appeared to James. James and Jude were Jesus' half-brothers. They both had Mary as their mother, but James and Jude had Joseph as their father. Neither of them believed Jesus was the son of God when he was alive. As we learned in our study from the book of Mark, Jesus' family thought he was nuts. More than once they tried to take him away to the funny farm. Even though Jesus fed the 5,000, walked on water, cast out demons, and healed thousands of sick suffering with every disease imaginable, they still wouldn't believe in him.

Jesus' family saw him die. They saw him buried. When Jesus rose from the dead, it says he appears alive to James, his half brother. James and Jude, the brothers of Jesus, went from laughing at Jesus to believing he was God and praying to him as God because of the incontrovertible evidence that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared alive to them. What would it take for you to begin worshipping your older brother as God? About the only thing that would convince anyone is a resurrection from the dead. James and Jude became pastors and early church leaders. They wrote books of the Bible that bear their names. James went on to become the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Jesus' family members were forced to believe that Jesus is alive and that Jesus is God against their wills because of the evidence of his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus appeared to alive to his enemies.

The last witness of the risen Jesus was Paul. We must remember that Paul began life with a level of hatred for Jesus that was fanatical. He despised anyone who believed in Jesus' resurrection. In the book of Acts, Paul even participated in the public execution of Stephen, a leader in the early church. Paul made it his mission in life to arrest and murder Christians.

This all changed when the risen Jesus appeared alive to him on the road to Damascus. Paul was also forced to believe that Jesus was indeed alive and risen from the dead. Paul was completely transformed after Jesus appeared to him. He went from a murderer of Christians to a pastor of Christians. He went from putting Christians to death to preaching the hope of Jesus at their funerals. He went from a man who devoted his life to stamping out the story of Jesus' resurrection to spreading the story of Jesus' resurrection to the entire world. Paul gave up a comfortable life to be shipwrecked, homeless, beaten, left for dead, impoverished, imprisoned and ultimately put to death because he wouldn't stop telling people that Jesus is alive.

My friends, the eyewitness testimony of Jesus is overwhelming.

Everyone in the early church agreed Jesus died. The early church believed Jesus was buried. The early church agreed Jesus rose from the dead. The early church believed Jesus appeared alive to scores of people. He

appeared alive to his friends, strangers, his family and even to his enemies.

Everyone was forced to believe Jesus was alive against their wills because they met with Jesus, talked with Jesus, and ate with Jesus.

Remember that people are convicted of murder based on the testimony of two or three eyewitnesses. The resurrection of Jesus is verified by thousands of eyewitnesses who were not predisposed to believe Jesus rose from the dead. They were forced to believe Jesus rose from the dead when they met with him.

Why is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the most important piece of information we need to know? The Bible tells us that if we miss this truth we will die in our sin. We will spend eternity suffering the just consequences of our sin. We will live the rest of our lives addicted and being destroyed by our sin. The death and resurrection of Jesus is our only hope.

This is why Paul began by telling us we must receive this truth. We must stand on this truth. We must hold on to this truth because we are saved by responding to this truth.

What have I done with the most important thing I need to know?

I ask you today, have you received the truth of the resurrection? Paul said we must receive it. We must stand on it and not fall away from it. That is the only way the work of Jesus on the cross and empty tomb will benefit us.

So I ask you, do you know Jesus? Do you belong to Jesus? Do you pray to Jesus? Do you sing to Jesus? Do you live for Jesus? Do you love Jesus? Do you open your Bible and read it to meet Jesus? Do you look forward to the day you will see Jesus face to face?

I invite you today to receive the most important news in the world into your life. I invite you to stand on that truth, to hold on to that truth and to be saved by the truth of what Jesus has done.

It doesn't matter what you have done. I am sure none of us are worse than Paul, who was murdering Christians. If God can love a man like Paul, then transform him from a murderer of Christians to writing a large portion of the New Testament and spreading the good news of Jesus around the world, God can forgive you and use you in ways you can't imagine.

If you are not a Christian, ask Jesus to forgive your sin and he will. He loves you. Give your life to Jesus. The risen Jesus is alive. That is the most important piece of information in the world, and it changes everything.

We are going to close our service with more worship and taking an offering. If you are a visitor, don't feel compelled to give. You are a guest. An offering is one of the ways those who love Jesus worship him, and it keeps the bills paid. We will also sing to Jesus because we love him. We love him for what he did on the cross and with the empty tomb. It changes everything about our lives now and forever.

If you are not a Christian, while we are worshipping Jesus, we ask you to give your life to Jesus and become a Christian. That is all we care about today. We want you to know the truth of the resurrection. It is the most important information you need to know in this world. Anyone who receives it, stands on it, and holds on to it will be saved by it. We want that for you.

As we sing our final songs of worship to Jesus, talk to Jesus and give your heart to him, then join your new brothers and sisters in Christ singing with gratitude to Jesus for dying on the cross and rising from the grave to forgive us from our sin and give us new life.



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