

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

There have always been people who have said that there is no resurrection from the dead. "When you are dead," they say, "you're dead." Still others believe that body cannot arise but only the spirit lives on. They have trouble with the bodily resurrection of Jesus. There was a sect of the Jews called the Sadducees who said there was no resurrection of the dead and argued with Jesus about it. When St. Paul spoke to the intellectuals in Athens and told them of the resurrection some of them sneered at him. It is illogical that a dead body should arise. How is it possible that the billions of people whose bodies have turned to dust be put together and come to life again? However, that is exactly what the Bible teaches.

The Prophet Job said, "After my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh shall I see God." And in the Book of Daniel it is written, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake.

The teaching of a resurrection was under attack in the Christian congregation at Corinth. In his first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 15 St. Paul deals with the matter of the resurrection and urges his Christian brothers and sister to ***Hold to Their Easter Hope***. They were to cling to the message of the resurrection because of its importance, because of its certainty and because of its power. Someone who is without hope is a very sad individual.

St. Paul had spent many months in Corinth establishing the Christian congregation there. In his letter he reminded the Corinthians of what he had taught them. He wrote, "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you." He had told them the Good News about Jesus. They believed that Gospel and made it their confession. The message he taught worked faith and conferred upon them the forgiveness of sins. It was the power of God unto salvation. Now the Corinthians must hold fast to that Gospel. The faith of the congregation was under attack. They were tempted not to believe that Gospel Paul had preached. If that should happen all would be lost. The Bible says, "Be faithful unto death."

Paul briefly restated the Gospel, "For what I received I passed on to you. As of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Paul had taught that Jesus was sent by God to save sinners. He told how Jesus, God's Son, took the place of all people and by His innocent suffering and death made payment for the sins of the world. Jesus bought forgiveness for all mankind. This was in agreement with the promises of the Old Testament. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, "He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed."

The fact that Jesus truly died and offered Himself for the sins of the world is shown by the fact that He was buried and then was raised again according to the Scriptures.

The resurrection of the Savior is important. Later Paul would write, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins." If there is no resurrection then there is no Christian religion. The resurrection testified that Jesus was the Son of God come to save us. If He did not arise, He was a fake and a liar. The resurrection testifies that all sins have been forgiven. Jesus was made responsible for all sins. If He had not made satisfaction for them all, He would have had to stay in the grave. Finally the resurrection is the assurance that all who believe in Jesus will arise as He did to

everlasting life. The resurrection is the corner stone of Christianity. That is why Paul says, "Christian, hold fast to your Easter hope."

Hold fast to that hope because it is based on fact. When the angel first announced Jesus' resurrection His disciples didn't believe it. They had to be convinced. Remember doubting Thomas who said that unless he touched the Savior's wounds he would not believe Jesus was arisen. However, not only Thomas but many people saw the risen Lord, not once but many times during the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension. He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve, and after that He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time. Many of that number were still alive when Paul wrote this letter. Anyone who doubted could go and ask them what they saw. Jesus appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Recall His coming to them at His grave, on the way to Emmaus, on Easter Sunday evening and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and at the place of His ascension.

Finally, Paul saw Jesus because the Lord appeared to him on the way to Damascus. Eye witnesses staked their lives on the fact that Jesus arose. Do you think Paul and the others who died for something they did not believe in? The point is that our Christian faith is not based on some pious thoughts of some holy men. It is not based on myth it is based on fact. Fact: Christ came to earth to save us. Fact: He died for our sins. Fact: He arose again and fact: we will arise again on the last day.

The final reason for holding to our Easter hope is because of its power. Paul experienced that power. The Gospel of Christ caused him to believe so that he confessed Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Paul experienced the power of the Gospel and it impressed him deeply. He knew he had not right to have the blessings of Christ's resurrection. He called himself one abnormally born. He was himself as a miscarriage, as a baby born dead. But by the amazing grace of God Paul, the one time enemy of Christ had been brought to faith in Jesus. Now he was an apostle, one officially sent to preach the Gospel. He didn't deserve that honor.

The message of the Gospel had transformed him. He said, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." The grace of God is His undeserved love. Paul was well aware of his unworthiness and was amazed at the love that God has shown him; not only that, Paul was amazed at the power of the Gospel in him, what it had made of him. Now he was permitted to work harder than all the apostles but he was not bragging. He said, "Not I, but the grace of God that was in me."

The message of Christ and his resurrection was true no matter who preached it; whether it was Paul or someone else. That was what the Corinthians heard; now let them hold on to their Easter hope.

You heard me earlier say that a person with out hope is truly a sad individual. Dear friends, God has been gracious to you and given you hope. Hold fast to your Easter hope. Christ did take away your sins, He did indeed arise and He will come again. On the last day He will raise you from the dead and give to you and all who believe on Him everlasting life. Hold to that faith, confess that faith. Remember that the message of the resurrected Savior has the power to bring the blessings of forgiveness to others. Another reason to confess your faith in the resurrection is so that your loved ones might be comforted when they stand at your grave side. It is so they might know that they are saying, "So long" and not "Good by." The hope of the resurrection is your protection against the fear of death and what lies beyond. Christ's resurrection assures you that you

too will arise and that your dear Lord is waiting to receive you in paradise. Continue to fortify that faith with the Gospel. One of the reasons we gather for worship on the first day of the week is that every week we commemorate Easter. Every Sunday is a little Easter in which we remember that we have a living Savior, that we are forgiven and that because Jesus lives we too will live again. Amen.