

Jesus Our Living Hope

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Pastor John Miller

I'm going to read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Paul says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the Gospel..."—by the way, in these first four verses, that is the theme; Paul is presenting the good news—"...which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved..."—so Paul preached the Gospel, they received it, they were standing on it and by it, they were saved—"...if you hold fast that Word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain." They could have a misdirected faith, a faith that's not real or a faith that is not truly in Christ. "For I delivered to you first of all..."—or "of most importance"—"...that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

In the oldest book of the Bible, Job, an important question is asked in chapter 14, verse 14: "If a man dies, shall he live again?" We know that "It is appointed for men to die once." So whether or not a man dies is not the question. The question is, "Shall he live again?" I believe that answer is "Yes," because Jesus said in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." Our hopes beyond the grave lie in one person: Jesus Christ; in the historic facts that He died on the Cross for our sins, He was buried and then three days later, He rose from the dead.

When it comes to knowing what happens after you die, you have two sources of authority: number one, human speculation; and number two, divine revelation. There is a lot of human speculation about what happens when we die, but I choose to believe divine revelation. That divine revelation is found in the Bible.

"The B-i-b-l-e; that's the book for me.

I stand alone on the Word of God;

The B-i-b-l-e."

The Bible tells us what happens after we die. And it also tells us that through Jesus Christ, there has been a way made for us to spend eternity with God in heaven. So there is hope beyond the grave, and there is hope only in Jesus Christ, our living hope.

Let me explain why Paul wrote this chapter in 1 Corinthians. Up to this point in his epistle to the Corinthians, he had been dealing with practical problems in the church. Now he switches to a doctrinal problem. The doctrinal problem was that there were Christians in Corinth, a Greek city, who were being influenced by Greek culture. The influence of Greek culture and Greek philosophy made them believe in the immortality of the soul but not of the resurrection of the body. They believed you would live after you died, but they didn't believe you would have a body to live in. They believed you would just be a spirit. So the Greeks were dualists: they

believed that material things were evil and only spiritual things were good. They wanted to be free from the body.

That's not Christianity. Christianity sanctifies all of life, including the human body. The human body, in and of itself, is not sinful or evil. It is neutral; it can be used for the glory of God, or it can be used for sinful, wicked purposes. And the fact that God became a man in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, when He came to earth by the virgin birth in the Incarnation, indicates that God sanctified the body. And in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ we see that because Christ arose, our bodies will rise, too. Not only will believers rise, but unbelievers will also be resurrected. They will stand in judgment before the throne of Christ.

Christianity is not just a philosophy. It is not primarily moral teachings. Christianity is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. It's about His work and His person.

First, I want to explain who Jesus is, as simply as I can. The Bible teaches that there is one God; the Bible is monotheistic. There aren't many gods but only one God. That one God is triune in His nature; we call it the Trinity. He is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

You say, "Wait a minute, Pastor Miller. You just told me that there is only one God." There is only one God. But then we have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Not three separate gods, but one in essence, yet separate in persons.

You say, "Well, I don't understand."

Welcome to the club. I don't understand it either, but isn't it awesome?! I don't understand my phone either, but it's awesome. I don't understand my car, but it's awesome. I don't understand my dog, but it's awesome. God transcends all those things; He's above our understanding. If God were small enough for our brains, He wouldn't be big enough to meet our needs. So I don't struggle with the fact that God is triune, "God in three persons, blessed Trinity."

Thus, Jesus is the second person of the Godhead. Jesus is the one who came from heaven to earth. He came to earth through the womb of a virgin. Her name was Mary. Christ was conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit. Theologians call it the "hypostatic union," which means "two natures." Jesus was fully human—sinless humanity—and He was fully God. So Christianity teaches that He was the God-man, fully God and fully man in one person. No one ever before and no one ever since is the God-man; only Jesus. He is the only unique Son of God. There have been a lot of men who wanted to become gods, but there is only one God who actually became a man; that's Jesus Christ.

So we have the Incarnation, God becoming flesh. The word "incarnate" is Latin and means "becoming flesh." So God became flesh. That brings God near; He understands your sorrows, your tears, your loneliness, your hurts and your weaknesses. Jesus was tired, He cried, He was hungry, He was thirsty and He was abandoned by friends. He understands your sorrow. He understands your pain. God is not far off; He came near in the person of His Son, Jesus

Christ.

I've talked to people who have said, "If there is a God, why doesn't He say something? Why doesn't He speak?" He has spoken. The Bible says in Hebrews 1:1 that "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things." So God is speaking to us in Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation was for one primary purpose: for the Crucifixion. "A body You have prepared for Me." Jesus came and took on flesh so He could go to a cross and die in your place. He would be buried, then raise from the dead and ascend back to heaven to be exalted at the right hand of God the Father. We have the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension—Jesus ascended back into heaven—and there He is seated and exalted at the right hand of God the Father. Now He lives to save. He is alive right now, and He can change your life. It's the power of the Gospel, the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to save.

What did Jesus come to do? I want to break it down for you, in verses 3-4. First of all, Jesus came to die for our sins. Verse 3 says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." You can take that to the bank! The reason for the Incarnation was for the Crucifixion. Jesus didn't just come to talk about love and give us good, moral teachings and be an example—He did do those things—but He came primarily to give His life as a ransom. Hebrews 10:5 says, "When He came into the world, He said, 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.'"

Notice in verse 3 there are three important facts: number one, Christ died; number two, why He died—"for our sins"—; and number three, it was "according to the Scriptures."

The death of Christ is a historical fact. No one disputes the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified. Jesus gave Himself to die on the Cross, so He was crucified. For six hours, 9:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon, Jesus hung upon a Roman cross. He uttered seven statements while on the Cross. One of the last statements He uttered was, "It is finished" or "Tatelestai." It means "paid in full" or "it is done." Then He dismissed His spirit, bowed His head and gave up the ghost. So Jesus gave Himself to death on the Cross. This fact that Jesus died on the Cross is important to understand.

Then, secondly, it's important to understand why He died. Jesus died "for our sins." The implication of this is that we are sinners. If Jesus died "for our sins," then it implies what the Bible teaches: that we have sinned. And the Bible teaches that. It says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is no one righteous; no, not one."

You might be saying, "I didn't come on Easter Sunday to hear about being a sinner." Well, you are. Granted, some of you are bigger sinners than others. Don't let that make you feel good. "I'm a sinner, but not as bad as that guy sitting right next to me!" We're all sinners.

Do you know that pride is a sin? The Bible says that "The proud He knows from afar."

Unforgiveness, jealousy, hatred, anger. Jesus said that if you have hatred or anger in your heart toward another, you've already murdered them. Try driving the freeways of southern California without killing somebody! Jesus said that if you look lustfully after someone, you have committed adultery in your heart. God sees our hearts. We've lied, stolen, used God's name in vain, not worshipped God the way we should, we've let other things come before Him. So the implication is that He died for our sins, so we are sinners. "The wages of sin is death," but Jesus died for those sins.

Now this is so important: the death of Jesus Christ was a substitution. Theologians call it "the substitutionary death of Christ." It was done in our place. It was voluntary, substitutionary and it was propitiatory: He died to satisfy the demands of God's holy, righteous law. In this case, Jesus died for our sins; He took our place. So it was my sin but His death. My sins were placed upon Him at the Cross, and He paid for them in full.

Now notice, thirdly and also in verse 3, that Jesus' death was according to the Scriptures. Our authority is the Bible, the Scriptures. When Paul says "the Scriptures" in verse 3, he is referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. There are two ways that the Scriptures spoke about Jesus' death "for our sins": in type and in prophecy.

One of the types is found in Genesis 22, where Abraham took Isaac, his son, placed him on an altar, lifted the knife and was going to plunge it into his son. But God stopped him. He told Abraham that in the bushes was a ram that was caught by the horns, and Abraham was to take Isaac off the altar and put the ram on the altar instead and slay the ram, in substitution for Isaac. This is a picture of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

Can you imagine being sentenced to death, you're waiting to be put in the electric chair or before a firing squad when someone steps up and says, "No; wait a minute! I'm going to die in your place." You are released and freed and someone dies in your place and you get to live! Amazing! That's what Jesus did. He says, "I'm going to die for you. I love you. I'm going to take your place." Jesus is holy, and God's law must be paid to be satisfied.

The Old Testament also spoke in prophecy. Six hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah 53:4-6 said, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Six hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah spoke about Jesus dying on the Cross and bearing our sorrows, our grief, our sins, our iniquity; that "by His stripes we are healed." 1 Peter 2:24 says, "...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree," just as 1 Corinthians 15:3 says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

Notice the second fact, in verse 4: "He was buried." Why would Paul make a statement like that? Didn't he already say that "Christ died for our sins"? Why was it necessary that he would

repeat and say that “He was buried”? The answer is because you can’t have an actual, literal, physical resurrection—like Jesus had—unless you have an actual, literal, physical death. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus actually died physically. His Resurrection was not spiritual; His body didn’t lie in the grave while He rose from the dead in the spirit. His body was quickened; His body was resurrected. So you have a physical death in order to have a physical resurrection.

I say that because one of the theories to disprove the Resurrection is known as “the swoon theory.” That theory is that because of His whipping, His exposure on the Cross, the spear thrust into His side and His loss of blood, Jesus just swooned or passed out. This theory says that He really didn’t die; He just fainted. Somehow they got Him off the Cross, wrapped Him in grave clothes, put Him in the tomb, sealed the tomb with the stone, and somehow, instead of finishing Him off, it revived Him. He overtook the Roman guards, and He rolled the stone away. He hopped down, went to His disciples and somehow got into the room and convinced them that He was risen. It just doesn’t make any sense! The disciples were hiding behind locked doors. Something happened to transform their lives; that was nothing short of the risen Christ.

A woman wrote years ago to J. Vernon McGee and said, “Our preacher said that on Easter, Jesus swooned on the Cross and that His disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?”

Dr. McGee replied, “Dear sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip for 39 heavy lashes, nail him to a cross, hang him in the sun for six hours, run a spear through his side, embalm him, put him in an airless tomb for three days and see what happens.” I love that.

What ludicrousness to think that Jesus didn’t die! Pilate marveled when Joseph of Arimathea came to him to beg for Jesus’ body because He was already dead. Pilate sent his soldiers out to make sure Jesus was dead before He was buried. Jesus died physically and His body was placed in the tomb and was sealed and three days later, Jesus rose actually and bodily from the dead.

Let me share the third fact of the Gospel in verse 4. This is why we celebrate on Easter. It says, “He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” Isn’t that good news? Jesus died, Jesus was buried and Jesus rose. Psalm 16:10 says, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol...”—or “in the realm of the dead”—“...nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” or “decay.” That is a Messianic, prophetic psalm in which the psalmist is speaking of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection is recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All four of the Gospels describe and explain the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It tells us in Mark 16 that “Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week...”—which is Sunday—“...they came...”—that is, Mary and Mary Magdalene, Salome and the other women with their spices—“...to the tomb.” They were going to finish the job of anointing the body of Jesus for burial. Jesus died on Friday, and at sundown on Friday, the Jewish Sabbath started, so they didn’t have time to do the full

preparation of the body. They wrapped him in grave cloths and hurriedly buried Him. They wanted to go back to finish things.

When they got to the grave, three surprises confronted them. Number one, the stone was rolled away. Don't you love that? On the way there, these women were saying, "What about the stone? How are we going to get in?"

"Oh, don't worry about that. We'll figure it out when we get there."

The men were hiding behind locked doors crying and all upset. The women said, "We'll take care of it." God bless you ladies. "Can't figure it out, but it'll work out." And when the women got there, the stone was already rolled away from the entrance to the tomb.

I hate that; when I'm freakin' out worrying about things, my wife says, "Oh, just pray. The Lord will take care of it." So we pray, He does take care of it and I look like a dodo bird.

So why worry? Jesus took care of it; the stone was rolled away. It's estimated that stone would have weighed at least two tons. The Bible says that it was at a great distance away from the tomb, and there was an angel sitting on it.

The second surprise was when they went into the tomb and saw two more angels. One was at the head and one was at the foot when Jesus' body had lain. So they were blown away at seeing these angels.

Another theory is that the women went to the wrong tomb. Jesus didn't really rise; they just had the wrong tomb. Well if they had the wrong tomb, the angels also had the wrong tomb. I can't imagine that the angels would get their angelic GPSs wrong. "Well, gee, Gabriel. I think this is the spot. What do you think?" That would also mean that the Romans got the wrong tomb, the Jewish authorities got the wrong tomb and the disciples got the wrong tomb. That's not going to happen. If you buried a loved one on Friday and go back on Sunday, you don't forget where you laid him. You don't go with your flowers and say, "Where'd we put Uncle Harry?"

"I don't know. Just throw the flowers out there anywhere. He's out there somewhere." No; you know right where you placed him. There's a cemetery that's very near and dear to my heart; I know exactly where my parents are laid. I can take you right to the spot. I know where it is.

The women knew where Jesus was laid, so they went right to that tomb. That dispels the theory that they went to the wrong tomb. The angels were there.

The women had a third surprise. The grave cloths were there, but the body of Jesus was gone. The grave cloths were still there, laying in the shape of a body. And at the head and the foot there were these two angels.

The angels had a message to these women that first Easter Sunday. The angel said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not

here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” I love that. The first Easter sermon ever preached was preached by an angel. I love the angel's invitation to the women, “Behold, check it out! Look at the place where He was laying.” They were meant to think with their minds and look with their eyes to determine what it means that the body of Jesus Christ was risen.

There was one more evidence of His Resurrection. Not only was the tomb empty, but Jesus was seen alive, 1 Corinthians 15:5-11. So the evidences for the Resurrection were that the tomb was empty, Jesus was seen alive after His burial and the lives of His disciples were changed. That's a glorious truth.

In verse 5, Jesus was seen by Peter. Peter needed to meet the Lord, because Peter had denied Jesus and needed forgiveness. Jesus rose from the dead to forgive your sins. If you failed Him and disappointed Him, “If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.”

Then Jesus was seen by the 12, verse 5. I believe that Thomas was part of that group. We have the term “doubting Thomas,” meaning someone who doesn't believe. Thomas said, “I'm not going to believe unless I see Him myself.” Thomas was from Missouri, the show-me state. He said, “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” No sooner did those words get out of Thomas' mouth, that Jesus appeared to him right there in the room. Then the Bible tells us that Jesus said, “Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” I believe that Thomas then fell to his knees, and he said, “My Lord and my God!”

Isn't it significant that Jesus didn't correct Thomas? He didn't say, “No, Thomas, don't call Me 'God.' That's blasphemy.” No; Jesus accepted that veneration and worship. So Thomas was taken from doubt to belief, from fear to joy; he saw the risen Christ.

In verse 6, Jesus “was seen by over 500 brethren at once.” Paul makes it clear in verse 6 that many of them were still alive at that time. “I can give you their phone number. You can call them and interview them and question them.”

Another theory that is disproved here is that they say that the disciples wanted so much for Jesus to rise from the dead that they hallucinated. They wanted so much for Jesus to rise from the dead that they thought they saw Jesus. How do you get 500 people to hallucinate at once and see the same thing? And many of them were still alive and could testify to what they saw.

Not only that, they didn't want Jesus to rise from the dead. They didn't believe He would rise from the dead. They thought their hopes were dashed. They wanted Him to set up the kingdom. Instead, He was crucified, and all hope was gone in their hearts. So they weren't psyching themselves up to believe something that wasn't true. It wasn't a hallucination.

In verse 7, Jesus was seen by James. This is the only place in the Bible where we learn this:

this is James, the Lord's half-brother. You say, "Well, what do you mean by 'half-brother'?" After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph consummated their marriage relationship and had other children. One of them was James, Jesus' little brother. Think about that. The Bible indicates that one of His brothers, James, during His life and public ministry, didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. His own family didn't believe. One time they came to rescue Him; they thought He had lost His marbles.

You can understand that; it's kind of hard to believe that your big brother is the Savior of the world, the Messiah. You're playing in the bedroom, and He jumps up on the toy chest and says, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

You go, "Wow! Mom! Jesus is flippin' out! He thinks He's the Messiah!"

But after Jesus was crucified, buried and risen, He appeared to His little brother, James. I wish I heard that conversation. Can you imagine Jesus saying, "I told you so! Why didn't you believe Me?" Then James came to faith in Christ and wrote one of our New Testament books, the book of James, an epistle of applied Christianity. So James came to be a believer; that Jesus Christ was the Lord and Savior of the world.

Then in verse 7, Jesus was seen by all the Apostles and probably by the group that met in Galilee.

"Then last of all," verse 8, "He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." This is Paul describing the fact that he saw the risen Jesus. When? He's talking about his conversion in Acts 9 on the road to Damascus. We knew him as Saul at that time, a very strict, religious Pharisee, who kept every jot and tittle of the law. Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians. He hated Christ, he hated Christianity, and he was going to arrest Christians and put them in prison. He persecuted them and killed them. But when he was on his way there, at high noon, there was a great light shining from heaven. It struck Saul to the earth, and he heard an audible voice from heaven saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"

Saul answered back, "Who are you, Lord, that I may serve You?"

This audible voice came to Saul saying, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute." No doubt Saul thought, I'm dead! I'm history, because I've hated Jesus and I've persecuted Him and His followers! But at that moment, Saul was converted and his eyes were blinded until he went to Damascus, and Ananias came and prayed for him and Saul received his sight. Saul became the famous Paul, the Apostle. God took this persecutor and made him a preacher.

Jesus is alive and changes lives. He still changes lives today. If we were to have a testimony service, we would have a testimony service of the lives God has been changing through the power of the Gospel.

Now I want to address what the Resurrection means. It means three things. First, it means my sins can be forgiven. Did you know that because Christ rose from the dead, our sins can be

forgiven? Any sins. There are no sins too great.

“Well, Pastor John, you don’t know how sinful I have been or how wicked I’ve been or how dark and deep is the pit I’ve lived in.” God loves you and He will forgive you. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all and every sin. There is no sin too great. He said that whoever comes to the Lord, “He will in no way cast out.”

You might be thinking that you are too sinful or too wicked. You don’t even know why you’ve come to church today. God brought you here. It is no accident that you are hearing this message. God wants you to know that He loves you, He sent His Son to die for you and He can forgive you of all your sins. Your heart can be pure before God. He can give you a new heart, and He can take that sinful burden of guilt and shame away.

The second thing the Resurrection means is that I have His purpose. Not only do I have His pardon, but I have His purpose. There is meaning in life. In the Greek world, as well as in our world, there was no hope beyond the grave. A common inscription on a gravestone was, “I was not. I became. I am not. I care not.” Think about that: no hope.

But Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” There is hope in Jesus Christ, and it brings purpose in life. When I go through hard times, He is with me. He said, “I’ll never leave you nor forsake you.” If you’re a Christian, you’re never alone. He is with you to help you, to comfort you, to strengthen you, to give you His counsel, to provide for and to guide your life. That’s why David said, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want....He leads me....He guides me....He anoints my head....My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” It’s all because Jesus lives.

I have His pardon, I have purpose in life and thirdly and lastly, Jesus will keep His promise. This is so precious. Jesus said in John 14:1-3, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house...”—which is a reference to heaven—“...are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

The fact that Jesus lives indicates that He is coming again. He will return again, and He will take us home to heaven. What a glorious prospect that is. I know that one day the Lord will return; either by death I’ll go to heaven or by Him coming to take me home in the rapture, and I’ll be with the Lord forever.

So you ask, “Well, Pastor, what shall I do?” Number one, you need to realize that you are a sinner. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We’re all in the same company.

By the way, our sin separates us from God. So that’s what Jesus came to do: to reconcile us back to God. Jesus, being God, could lay His hand on God the Father, and being man, He could lay His hand on man and is the perfect bridge-builder. Jesus is our high priest; He brings us to God.

But right now, you must realize that you have sinned, and that “The wages of sin is death.”

Secondly, you need to realize that Jesus died and rose for your sin. God has made provision. We read it today in the Bible; that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...and that He rose...according to the Scriptures.” So He was crucified for our sins, and He was raised for our justification.

Thirdly and lastly, you need to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. You need to turn from your sin, and you need to trust Jesus, and Jesus alone, as your Savior. You’re not going to heaven because you’re a good person. You’re not going to heaven because you came to church on Easter Sunday. You go to heaven for one reason only: because of what Christ did for you. But you must appropriate it by faith.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, it says, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” God wants to give you a free gift, and we receive it by faith. We exercise faith every day. It means simply that I trust in Him, I believe in Him, I put my faith in Him.

Everyone trusts something. What are you trusting for the hope of heaven? What are you trusting for eternal life? If you are not trusting in Christ alone, your faith is misplaced, your faith is false. The only thing that will get you to heaven is Jesus Christ. He came from heaven, He died, was buried, rose from the dead, and He wants to take you back to heaven. It’s summarized pretty well in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Have you believed in Christ? Have you trusted Him? I want to give you an opportunity right here, right now. There is no reason for anyone not to have their sins forgiven, not to have the assurance that when you die, you will go to heaven. If you don’t know that and you don’t have that assurance, put aside your pride, put aside your sin, put aside your ego and come humbly and broken to the foot of the Cross and believe in Jesus Christ.