

Five Core Truths of the Gospel

Pastor Chris Baker //04.09.23 // Centralia FBC

Happy Easter, Centralia! At this time, our kindergarten through third grade children are invited to head out to children's church. We have adult volunteers who will share a gospel-centered message with them and they'll be delivered right back here at the end of our time together.

I invite everyone else to join me in 1 Corinthians 15. You can find that passage on page 1020 of the black bibles in the pew racks.

As you're turning there, I want to tell you the story of two men. These two men both had a great admiration for Jesus Christ of Nazareth. They both claimed to be His followers.

One of them wrote the following statement, ***"to the corruptions of Christianity, I am indeed opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian, in the only sense in which he wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence, & believing he never claimed any other."***

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/jefferson-bible-founders-deism/>)

I believe if you modernized the language a little bit and posted that to Facebook or Instagram today it would get shared and liked without much controversy. The statement essentially says I don't like the 'religion' that has popped up around the teaching of Jesus, but I believe what He said. I believe he was a good teacher, I believe he was a great man, and that He never claimed to be anything else.

You see, the quote in bold (on the screen) was written by Thomas Jefferson, our third president, in 1803. Jefferson is the first man whose story I want you to hear. Jefferson did consider himself a Christian, but not in a way recognizable by our bibles. I saw our bibles because we need to make that distinction since Jefferson went to great lengths to create his own.

Late in his life, he took a razor and scissors and carefully cut out small squares of the text. Then he took them and glued them into a red leather book he had created himself. Long before computers, cut and paste was a much more difficult process for Jefferson than it is for us today.

He went through the gospels and selected everything he liked about Jesus and made his own bible with it. He focused on Jesus's moral teaching and left behind everything else. No virgin birth, no miracles, no resurrection, no glorious ascension back to the Father.

(<https://www.history.com/news/thomas-jefferson-bible-religious-beliefs>)

Jefferson, in the end, reduced Jesus to 84 pages he felt comfortable with. Here's the problem, church: we don't get to reduce the gospel down to our comfort level.

Just because we admire Jesus does not mean we have saving faith in Him. I'm not a very fancy person. One of my favorite places to go out to eat is the Golden Corral. I especially like it with kids because they

have a little bit of everything. Judge all you want about the quality of the food, but you can't argue quantity. You get to go find what you want and put it on your plate. You might have to fight somebody for it, but you've got options, ok?

The gospel doesn't work like that. The gospel is nothing like the buffet at the Golden Corral. We don't get to pick and choose what components of the gospel are true for us.

Timothy Keller, who pastored faithfully for decades amid skeptics in New York City said it well: ***If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.***

(Hope in Times of Fear, Keller.)

That's the argument of the whose story I want to tell you this morning. Jefferson had his bible. He had his interpretation of the events of Jesus's life. A man named Paul had a much more faithful story to tell about Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

His story doesn't begin with curiosity about Jesus like Jefferson's. No, his story begins with animosity toward Him. He hated Jesus, well we know he hated His followers at least. And so as a good Pharisee, he sought to punish those Jews who had converted to following Jesus. As he was traveling to a city called Damascus to do just that, he was struck blind and the Jesus Himself appeared to Paul. He revealed to Paul that the one He persecuted was not some insane preacher, but His is God made flesh. So Paul's whole life changed. Instead of punishing people for preaching the gospel, Paul became the most prolific preacher of the gospel in history.

He preached, he planted churches, and he did it everywhere he went. Often, he'd write letters back to the churches he had served and many of those letters now make up the New Testament.

1 Corinthians is one of those. And instead of cutting out his own gospel narrative, he shares the full truth of Jesus with the church at Corinth in chapter 15. Let's read it together:

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Pray

There is only one gospel

As Paul is rounding out this letter to a church he loved dearly, he asserts one very important truth: there is only one gospel. The gospel that will save them is the gospel that Paul himself received from Jesus, the gospel he preached to them when he spent 18 months with them, the gospel foreshadowed in the Old

Testament that was brought to light in the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth then written about by the other New Testament authors.

On Easter Sunday we generally have more guests than any Sunday of the year and if you don't find yourself in church gatherings often, you might think it's odd that Paul would be going to such great lengths to explain the gospel to the folks he's writing to. After all, they knew the gospel. They staked their lives on the gospel. Being a Christian was dangerous in the first century. These folks realistically would have lost friends and maybe even family members when they made a public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

So, surely they knew the gospel. Everyone who is a member of this church—those of you who call FBC home—surely you know the gospel, right? So why on this beautiful Easter morning are we going to spend so much time tracing Paul's core truths of the gospel?

Because it is very much within the realm of possibility for all of us in this room to confuse the gospel.

The Corinthians, who had Paul as their pastor for a season, later struggled with comprehending the gospel. We see that just down the page. Look at verse 12:

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, "There is no resurrection of the dead"? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith.

Some at Corinth were in error. Either they had changed something about the gospel because they didn't like it or they were genuinely confused. Paul is saying 'the gospel you're living out is not the gospel I taught.' They were denying the resurrection and if the resurrection is to be denied then there's no reason for us to be in this room today.

So here's what Paul does. He lists the core truths of the gospel as a reminder to the Corinthians. He's not saying you have to be an expert in every nuance of theology to be saved. I fear that's what some folks think. To get really close to God or to take Christianity seriously you need to have some sort of academic ability that many of us simply don't have. That couldn't be further from the truth.

The Holy Spirit will grow both our love for and understanding of these truths over time. But it doesn't take deep head knowledge to be saved. It takes a heart that trusts, but it has to be trusting in the true gospel.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they can't treat the gospel like a buffet. The truths of the gospel are not up to me. They're not up to you. The gospel belongs to God and God determines what is true and what is false.

God demonstrated the gospel in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We either believe it or reject it, but we cannot change it.

Paul writes in verse 1, *the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

I preached it, you received it, you took your stand on it—that means you staked your life on it, you are being saved by it IF you hold to the message I preached. Take it as it is, trust it with your whole life, and you will be saved. Or, Paul writes, you believed in vain. Your faith in anything else, whether it's a false religion, or faith in your own goodness, or faith in a Jesus of your own creation, whatever it is it will fail you.

To make sure the Corinthians and the Centralians, for our context today, have 100% clarity on the building blocks of the gospel, Paul lays out five core truths of the gospel. It's not an exhaustive list of every facet of the gospel. Paul wasn't trying to do a dissertation. There are five simple truths in the text. If we're going to embrace the gospel for salvation, these truths need to be settled in our souls.

The first truth is this: Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus is the Messiah

that *Christ*

When Paul writes Christ died for our sins, he's writing a title, not a name. That needs to be pointed out because I think we gloss over it sometimes. It wasn't Joseph, Mary, and Jesus Christ. There wasn't a little mailbox outside their home in Galilee that said Christ on it.

Christ is a title. Christ means Messiah in the original language. Paul is preaching that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. From the very moment sin entered the world, God had been pointing His people to the solution for their sin. It wasn't in their own goodness or their own effort. It was in the one who would come to save them, the Messiah.

Genesis 3, as He is explaining the curse brought on by sin and expelling Adam & Eve from the garden, God was already pointing humanity to the Messiah.

Genesis 3:15, the very first gospel promise of the Bible, God says the seed of the woman will crush the head of sin and Satan.

In Exodus 12, a book we're slowly working our way through during the winter here at FBC, we see this:

21 Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, select an animal from the flock according to your families, and slaughter the Passover animal.

It was the blood of that passover lamb applied to the doorpost that saved the Israelites.

In 1 Corinthians 5:7b we're reminded that Jesus is that Passover lamb. The One who saves us has come.

For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.

There are dozens of other references we could make, but we'll stop with those two because the big truth Paul is pointing us to here is that this man, Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. The gospel fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. He's the Messiah.

And the Messiah died, verse 3.

The Messiah Died

That's not how the story was supposed to go in the minds of the Jews in Paul's day who had been eagerly awaiting the Messiah for generations. They wanted a political and military hero who would liberate His people from their Roman oppressors the way that Moses saved the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

If that's the Messiah you're looking for, then this man who was murdered by those very same Romans isn't much of a messiah.

The Jews, like Thomas Jefferson, had shaped a gospel in their own image instead of accepting the gospel God gave them. They rejected Jesus. But if they had only trusted their own Scriptures, they would have known this was exactly how things were supposed to happen.

Isaiah 53:7

***He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter
and like a sheep silent before her shearers,
he did not open his mouth.***

***He was taken away because of oppression and judgment,
and who considered his fate?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
he was struck because of my people's rebellion.***

***He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
but he was with a rich man at his death,
because he had done no violence
and had not spoken deceitfully.***

***Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him severely.
When you make him a guilt offering,
he will see his seed, he will prolong his days,
and by his hand, the Lord's pleasure will be accomplished.***

The Messiah had to die. But it wasn't a death for the sake of death. It wasn't a meaningless execution, no. We read further into 1 Corinthians 15 and find out that the Messiah's death was for sin.

The Messiah's Death was for Sin

Christ died for our sins.

This is the heart of the gospel. A lot of people will admit Jesus was a great man. He was a moral teacher. He did good things. But none of those things would have been enough, and believing only those things is not enough. The Messiah had to die.

Scripture makes it clear where death comes from. Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death. So when Jesus died on the cross on Good Friday it was for sin...but He had no sin. He was sinless. He was perfect. So He never earned the wage. He died not for His own sin, but for the sin of His people.

He was our substitute sacrifice. He took the penalty for our sin so that we can have the righteousness of God in Him, that we might be transformed, that we might be justified, that we might be sanctified, that we can have an eternal and living relationship with our heavenly Father.

And to further emphasize the historical reality of that death, Paul says He was buried. Just in case there's any doubt in your mind that the Lord Jesus was dead when they brought Him down from the cross, Paul is saying, "He didn't swoon." The miracle of Sunday wasn't a resuscitation. This man was dead; He was so dead He was buried. He was entombed. That's how dead Jesus was.

But He didn't stay dead.

The Messiah was Resurrected

He was resurrected on the third day, Paul writes. I know that in most of our minds Friday evening to Sunday morning is only two days. But according to Jewish law part of the day is equivalent to a full day. Jesus died on a Friday at the ninth hour, which is to about 3 P.M. The claim is made that Jesus rose three days later, on a Sunday. This would mean that he was buried during the daylight hours of three different days.

(<https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/three-days-in-tomb>)

So in the mind of Paul and his audience, Jesus was resurrected on the third day. Not resuscitated. Resurrected. John MacArthur put resurrection into perspective really well:

The truth of the resurrection gives life to every other area of gospel truth. The resurrection is the pivot on which all of Christianity turns and without which none of the other truths would much matter. Without the resurrection, Christianity would be so much wishful thinking, taking its place alongside all other human philosophy and religious speculation.

(1 Corinthians, Moody, 1984, p. 398.)

Without resurrection, we're lost. Without resurrection, we have no hope. Without resurrection, our whole worldview falls apart. This is the truth the Corinthians were doubting! Don't miss that. Church, we have to believe with every fiber of our being that Jesus's resurrection is true all the while holding the hope of resurrection for ourselves. Because if God raised Jesus, then we can have full faith and confidence He will raise us too, if we belong to Him.

Paul has already reassured the Corinthians of this back in chapter 6:14

God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

Church, Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third and it's all according to the Scriptures.

The Messiah's death and resurrection happened according to Scripture

Paul makes that statement twice, at the end of verse 3 and the end of verse 4, so it's important that we don't miss it.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. He was raised on the third day according to Scripture. The whole gospel is according to Scripture— it fulfills the prophecy of the Old Testament.

This was not some plan 'b' that God developed on the fly. It was never in doubt. God set the gospel in motion from before the foundation of the world.

And this eternal gospel authored by an eternal God is the only gospel. And that gospel is still very much alive today, it's very much open to all today. Paul writes elsewhere that 'God wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.' (1 Tim. 2)

Jesus's work is finished, but the Holy Spirit is still working in the heart of men to convince us both of the truth of the good news and our need for it.

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes the true gospel clear for us.

The Christ offered in the gospel isn't a great moral teacher who wasn't raised from the dead, as Thomas Jefferson thought.

The Christ offered in the gospel isn't someone you meet by walking down an aisle, whispering some magic words, and checking off the heaven box on your bucket list. The Christ offered in the gospel doesn't just want one hour of your Sunday and 10% of your income.

The Christ offered in the gospel is alive today, He intercedes for His people while also ruling the world by His power. The Christ offered in the gospel will one day return for His bride, the church—not a building but a people. All the people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who call on His name for salvation.

The resurrection, Paul is saying, is proof that He is in fact the one who is the Lord of the living and the dead, and He will come to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus' resurrection is the forecast of God's verdict on us if we are trusting in Jesus Christ. If we are trusting in the Jesus Christ who is offered in the gospel, the gospel outlined in I Corinthians 15:3-4, then at His coming, His coming for us will be a vindication and a reunion and the most joyful event that we've ever known.

If we are not trusting in Jesus as He is offered in the gospel, then His coming will be the most terrible thing that we could ever imagine, for it will be a coming to judge us.

Jesus said it Himself. John 5:22 The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

And in Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

When He comes, make sure that He does not come for your judgment. How can you make sure? By trusting in the Jesus who is offered in the gospel, as He is offered in the gospel, according to God's word. Belief in Him, believe what the Bible says about Him. Trusting Him, putting the whole hope of your past, present, and future in His hands and saying, "Jesus, save me." Let's pray.

