**The Resurrection of Christ**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

**Key Verse: 15:3-4** “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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”

The book of first Corinthians is Apostle Paul’s letter sent to the Church of Corinth during Paul's stay in Ephesus approximately in AD 55. The city of Corinth was one of the dominant commercial centers of the Mediterranean world. Just like any other Greek cities, people in Corinth were interested in Greek philosophy and placed a high premium on wisdom. However, like any large commercial city, Corinth was a center for open immorality. Corinth contained at least 12 temples to worship Greek gods. One of the most infamous was the temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, whose worshipers practiced religious prostitution. The Corinthian church was plagued with numerous problems of immorality under the sinful influence from the city of Corinth. The Corinthian church was immature and unspiritual, so Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthian church to instruct and restore the church.

In chapter 15, Apostle Paul draws all Corinthian believers’ attention to the core of the gospel. Let’s read verses 1 and 2. “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”

After talking about various issues among Corinthian believers, Paul wanted to remind them of the gospel. Why did Paul need to remind brothers and sisters in the Corinthian church of the gospel? Didn’t they already know the gospel that was preached by Paul? Many of us have studied the Bible for decades, but sometimes we forget about the gospel. According to Jesus’ parable of the sower in Matthew 13, we may fail to hold onto the gospel for the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth. We are easily distracted from the gospel because of our sinful nature to love the world rather than God. It is hard to focus on God’s word when we are surrounded by so many problems including job problems, family problems, financial problems, health problems, and relationship problems. When we are swamped with many problems and troubles, the best solution is always going back to the gospel. In verses 1 and 2, Apostle Paul addressed the importance of the gospel for our salvation. We can be saved by the gospel only if we hold firmly to the gospel. The gospel is like a rescue rope from God for us who are falling into the deep valley of death. Our savior, Jesus can pull us up and save us only when we hold firmly to the rescue rope, the gospel. However, many Christians often ignore the gospel and don’t pay much attention to it. They are like double-minded Christians who want to serve both God and money. When we hold onto the gospel loosely and live as a lukewarm Christian, we will not be saved. Revelation 3:16 states, “So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”. May God help us hold onto the gospel with all our heart and strength until we enter the kingdom of heaven.

Then what is the gospel? There are many important events and words from God written in the Bible. The Bible consists of a total of 66 books, which contain about 788,000 words. It is almost impossible to remember or understand everything in the Bible. However, there is the essential and most fundamental truth that all Christians must accept, understand and remember. Let’s read verses 3 and 4. “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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”. Paul preached the gospel to Corinthian Christians as his first and foremost priority. The essence of the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead. Why did Jesus Christ die on the cross? It was to save us from our sins. Sin entered the world as the result of Adam’s disobedience of God’s commandment. Romans 5:12 states, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned”.

During the COVID pandemic, we have heard of the news about COVID deaths every day. In the last 2 years, more than 6 million people in the world died of COVID infection, while almost 1 million lost their lives in the US due to COVID. However, COVID is not the only cause for death. About 150,000 people die every day globally because of heart attack, cancer, stroke, and accidents. Every single human including us has to die sooner or later as the consequence of sin regardless of their backgrounds. Even the smartest, richest, and most powerful human beings in history were not able to escape from the death penalty due to sin. Many of you have Apple phones. Do you still remember Steve Jobs who first introduced revolutionary smartphones to the world? Steve Jobs who is considered the most successful and accomplished businessman died of cancer at the age of 56, about 10 years ago. Despite his wealth and reputation, even Steve Jobs could not avoid death. During his commencement address at Stanford University in 2005, Steve Jobs talked about his experience about his cancer diagnosis and surgery during his speech.

“This was the closest I’ve been to facing death, and I hope it’s the closest I get for a few more decades. Having lived through it, I can now say this to you with a bit more certainty than when death was a useful but purely intellectual concept: No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don’t want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life.”

Unlike his wish to live a few more decades, Steve Jobs died from pancreatic cancer complications 6 years later after his commencement speech at Stanford. Although Steve Jobs knew some truth about death, his statement that death is very likely the single best invention of life was wrong because death is not an invention like iPhone but the consequence of sin.

Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Because we are all the descendants of Adam, we are born with the sin virus. All humans suffer from the sin virus and eventually die. We know that a number of COVID vaccines have been developed, but none of them are a perfect cure. However, God provided the perfect cure for all mankind who are dying of the sin virus. Jesus Christ is the savior sent by God and sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins. On the cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Jesus forgave all sinners by sacrificing himself on the cross as the ransom for all. Jesus’ forgiveness on the cross is more powerful than the power of sin and death.

It is also important to understand that Jesus died on the cross and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Jesus was not a random person who suddenly appeared and claimed that he was the Messiah. All that Jesus did in this world was to fulfill God’s prophecy in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 prophesied Jesus’s suffering and death on the cross. Let’s read Isaiah 53:3-5, “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus said to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Jesus was buried in his tomb and was raised on the third day. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to Cephas who was Peter. Peter was filled with fear when Jesus was arrested and had trials before the high priest in John chapter 18. He denied Jesus three times even before a servant girl. However, in Acts chapter 4, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and testified before the Sanhedrin. Let’s read Acts 4:8-12, “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

When the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law as well as the high priest heard Peter’s testimony, they were astonished by his courageous speech. Peter became a totally different person. What changed him completely like this? It was Peter’s personal meeting with the resurrected Jesus that transformed him from a fearful man into a fearless servant of God.

Jesus appeared to not only Peter but also other disciples and many more people. Let’s read verses 5 to 8. “and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.”

After the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time. Jesus’ death and resurrection had happened only about 20 years before Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church was written, so most witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection were still alive and they vividly remembered their personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus. Jesus made his resurrection not secret but public, so that more people could witness his resurrection and celebrate it together because Jesus’ resurrection is the promise for the resurrection of all believers.

Lastly, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Apostle Paul. In verse 8, Paul said that the resurrected Jesus appeared to him also, as to one abnormally born. Paul described himself as one abnormally born because he persecuted believers before he met and accepted Jesus. In Acts 9, Saul was breathing out murderous threats against Jesus’ disciples. He asked the high priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus to take believers as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. When Saul fell to the ground, he heard a voice to him saying, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul asked, “Who are you?” and Jesus replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” The light of the resurrected Jesus made Saul blind, but it opened Saul’s spiritual eyes. Although Saul was notorious for his persecution on believers, Jesus chose him as an instrument to proclaim his name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

Let’s read verses 9 to 11. “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. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”

Although apostle Paul is considered the most important servant of God in the history of Christianity who preached the gospel to many gentiles and established many churches, he kept his humbleness because he always remembered who he used to be. At the same time, Paul remembered the grace of God that was with him. Although we are all undeserving sinners before God, we have been called to be Jesus’ disciples and received the mission to preach the gospel on campus. We are saved not by our hard work but by the grace of God.

Every life on Earth goes through a life cycle, which consists of birth, growth, aging and death. No one can go against the flow of life cycle although many people try hard to slow it down. I was born, grew up, and now I am aging. I used to be familiar with the word “young”. People used to call me “young man” or “young missionary”, but I realize that I am gradually walking away from the word “young” although I feel like I am still 30 years old. I am sure many of you are feeling like this. There were days when we were younger and fresher, but those days quickly ran away from us. There is an American pop song called, “Yesterday when I was young”. Although this is not a Christian gospel song, I found that the lyrics of this song contains some truth about life. The song goes like,

Yesterday when I was young,

The taste of life was sweet as rain upon my tongue

I teased at life as if it were a foolish game

The way the evening breeze may tease a candle flame

The thousand dreams I dreamed, the splendid things I planned

I always built to last on weak and shifting sand

I lived by night and shunned the naked light of the day

And only now I see how the years ran away

Just like this song, yesterday when we were young, we felt like our youth would stay with us forever, but the truth is that our life is short and there will be a moment of last breath waiting for everyone. It sounds sad, depressing and miserable, but this is an undeniable truth for everyone no matter who we are. If our lives end in death and there is nothing after that, everyone’s life would be utterly meaningless and tragic. We may also experience heartbreaking death of our beloved ones including our family members, friends, and coworkers even before we experience our own death. A death that impacted me the most was my father’s death. My father passed away at the age of 54 due to cancer when I was only 16 years old. When he was diagnosed with a cancer, it was already too late for any medical treatment. I still remember those final months of my father. On an evening when I saw my father staring at the sun setting, I thought about what his life was like for the first time as his youngest son. He was born in 1937 during the Japanese occupation and experienced the Korean war when he was a teenager, and then lived as a poor blue-collar worker until his final days, which made me think that his life must have been very hard and tough. My father spent his last few months in a Christian prayer house because God’s miracle was the only hope for him who was in the final stage of cancer. During his last home visit, I saw my father very briefly. He looked very skinny and painful. It was the last moment that I remember about my father. He passed away in a few months after that. I resented God who let my father die at that time, but many years later, I learned that even during the darkest time, God was working through the Holy Spirit to save me in a few years at college and to convert a complete atheist like me into a missionary.

It has been already 30 years since my father’s death, but while I am getting older, I realized that I am becoming more anxious about death, which makes me helpless and depressed. However, Jesus’ resurrection gives me a hope for my own resurrection and gives me great courage to overcome the fear of death. In John chapter 11, before raising up Lazarus from the dead, Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Jesus is the almighty God who created the universe and all life on Earth in the beginning, so I believe that he is the source of life and has the power to defeat death.

The resurrected Jesus appeared to Peter and Paul and transformed them into powerful and courageous servants of God. I believe what changed Peter and Paul was the faith in Jesus’ resurrection and the hope for their own resurrection. Many of us here also met Jesus personally. Therefore, we are also the witness of Jesus’ resurrection. May God help us firmly believe the gospel that Jesus died for our sin, was raised from the dead, and defeated the power of death. May the power of Jesus’ resurrection empower us to boldly proclaim the gospel on campus like apostle Peter and Paul. Let’s read the key verse 3 and 4 together. “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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”.