



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

March 31/April 1, 2018 - Jeff Bucknam

This is the Gospel - (1 Corinthians 15:1-6)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

Some of you will know that this weekend is not just Easter weekend, you'll also know that it is the finals of the NCAA college basketball tournament, right? Yeah, there's a few of us who know that. And last night was the national semi-finals, tomorrow and Monday is going to be the national final game. Big basketball fan, I am, especially college basketball. It's a good time. I bring that up because one of the greatest coaches in the history of coaching was a college basketball coach called John Wooden. He was a really small, slight man, he used to coach UCLA back in the 1950s and 60s, they won like 10 straight titles, which is a pretty big deal, okay? Some of the best players in the history of basketball, actually, played for him. He has a funny thing about him though, one of the things that makes him, kind of, really famous is what he used to do with his teams, the first time that he would gather them together for their season. You know, instead of getting them all on the court and running through a few plays or teaching them, you know, the importance of rebounding or whatever, he actually would gather them together in the locker room, all of these, like, the top players in college at the time, the top high school recruits are now coming in, they're all sitting there together, seasoned guys who have played basketball for a long time, he sits them all down and he would say to them, "Here's how you put on socks." No kidding, that was his approach. In fact, later on in his life, here's what he said. He said, "The first thing I would show our players at our first meeting was how to take a little extra time putting on their shoes and socks properly. You play on a hard floor, so you must have shoes that fit right. And you must not permit your socks to have wrinkles around the little toe. It's where you generally get blisters, and you don't want wrinkles around the heels as well." And so he would sit down and he would put these socks on, and he would show them how you need to smooth out all parts of the...okay, everybody together, he'd get them to put these socks on, these really big guys putting their socks on, and then, "Here's how you put shoes on, you lace the laces through each eyelet and then you pull tight each one." Some of the players would say, "Why are we doing this? This makes no sense at all."

"Because I want to start with the basics," he would say. "Sometimes you lose sight of the basics."

There are some college coaches who have followed in his footsteps. Instead, of course, of doing the socks and shoes, they've moved on to the basics of basketball. They hold the basketball up, I've actually been in a locker room with a coach who did this. Before the team takes the court for the first time, they hold the basketball up and they say, "Gentlemen, this is a basketball. The goal of the game is to put this basketball through the opponent's hoop more often than they put it through ours. Is everybody agreed?" Yes, of course, you're like, yes, this is ridiculous, can we go out and do some drills and practice for a little while? Sometimes in the middle a season, coaches will stop the team and



gather them together, during a timeout in the middle of the game, and they will say, “Listen. I don’t care how many times you can dribble between your legs, I don’t care how many people are watching you and clapping for you. The goal of the game is to put the ball through the hoop.” Back to the basics.

You know, in every area of life there is a tendency to lose sight of the basics. Businesses know this, the reason they put their little mission statements on t-shirts and signs above the doors of the business is to remind their people, over and over again, why are we here? They say that vision leaks, and so you always have to go back to the basics. And in the Christian church, I think that’s the case as well. Oftentimes we can get involved in lots of different debates, important debates, about spiritual things, if you’re part of the church, and been around the church for a while, you know that there’s lots and lots of debates about important matters that we get involved in and we get really excited and fired up about them. Is God sovereign? Are people free? Wait a minute, how can both of those work together? If God’s exhaustively sovereign and people are free on a level, then that can’t possibly work together, let’s fight. Alright? We have a debate about that. What’s the nature of hell? Is it real, is it not, is everyone going to be saved in the end, if there is a hell is it outer darkness, is it actual fire, do things disintegrate in fire? Should I have the gift of tongues, should I not have the gift of tongues? Should we use it in the church? How is it that that kind of thing...we love talking about these things and admittedly, they’re really important discussions. The Bible has a lot to say about most of them. But sometimes we need a Wooden moment. Right? A John Wooden moment, where we hold it up and say, “This is the gospel. This is what it does, this is it’s contours, let’s just get back to the basics.”

This passage in 1 Corinthians 15 is that moment for the Apostle Paul. He draws the attention of the Corinthian church back to the basics. What is it that we believe, one of the base things that are the most important for us to understand regarding this gospel? And so in 1 Corinthians 15, I’ll just read the passage for you, and you can notice how he talks about the basics. 1 Corinthians 15:1-6,

“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. 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, 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.”

So here’s what I want to do in the next few minutes. I want to point of five things about the gospel. Now, I had 15, and then I shrunk it down to 5, and most of you who come to church here know that usually I have 3 points and only have time for 2. So, ready? Let’s run. Here we go.



[The Gospel is News to be Proclaimed]

Number one: the gospel is news to be proclaimed. The gospel is news to be proclaimed. I get that from 1 Corinthians 15:1:

“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.”

When I was in seminary, I delivered packages all over the buildings of the seminary, drove a little golf cart around, delivered packages. There was this one spot that I had to deliver a lot of packages to, and there was a little sign on the desk that I would pass by several times in a day. And the sign had a quote from supposedly St. Francis of Assisi. It's a quote many of you would have heard. On it it read: “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.” Now I would think about that a lot during the day, and I totally get the impulse in that, like if you've been around Christian church or Christians at all, they talk a lot about a lot of stuff, and their lives don't always match it. So what the quotes is kind of saying is, listen, if you're going to err on one side, speaking or acting, maybe you should act more and speak a little less. So I get that. It's just, the problem is the quote itself is not true. It's not true because you cannot preach the gospel, which is good news, that's what the word means, without using words. People don't report news without words. You know this, right? There was a day when we used to watch the six o'clock news. Now, nobody does that anymore, I get that, yep, you're on Netflix instead, or just getting it from Instagram or Twitter or whatever, but there was a day when you watched the six o'clock news. Can you imagine a news anchor reporting the news without words? Right? There's a war in Iran, there's a war <shooting a gun> in I-<pointing to himself> ran <running motion>. Spring is here, spring <makes bird with hands> is here <pointing downwards>. Not there, here. No of course, that's silly, that's ridiculous, it's not a game of charades. Charades drives me nuts. People ask, “Do you want to play charades?” No! I don't want to...talk! If you've got something to say, say it! Use the words that you have. That's what a reporter does, that's what news...if you've got news and you walk through the door of your house and you report it to your spouse, you don't just <acting>, you report it. You don't live it out. That's just the way the gospel is.

Paul uses a language, he actually uses an image at one point, in some of his letters, of a herald. So the language of a herald. He calls himself, “I'm a herald.” 2 Timothy 1:11,

“And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.”

“I'm a herald.” The Greek word there is “κῆρῖξ.” It's the word for town crier. Right? Ding ding ding ding, hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. In the ancient world, if you wanted to go and take over a city, you, the king or queen, would go and you would lead your troops and you would surround that foreign city with your troops, and then you would send in an emissary, you'd send in a κῆρῖξ, a messenger. And they could go and knock on the door, the walled cities in those days, they'd knock on the door of the city, and they would open up a little bit, and the emissary of the king would then boldly, because he comes from a king, a coming king who has surrounded the city, stands in the middle and he says, “Hear ye, hear ye! The king is offering amnesty, he's offering forgiveness, he's offering peace if you're willing to



bend your knee. He's a better king than the one you've got, so bow to him, swear fealty, (that's the word they used to use) swear allegiance to him, and there will be no war. But if you fight, you are doomed." That's the message, that's what a kírjx does. That's what the gospel is, something that you herald boldly. You speak it.

[The Gospel Saves Us if We Continue in It]

Number two. The gospel is news to be proclaimed, number one. Number two: the gospel saves us if we continue it. Look at 1 Corinthians 15:2 with me,

“By this gospel you are saved, [it's present tense, you are being saved] if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”

So my family and I, we went to some people's house the other day for dinner, and we bought, we were supposed to bring dessert, so we went to Costco and got a pie because no one makes pies as cheap and as big as Costco. Yes? Right? I mean, yeah, you take the cover off, and you pass it off as your own. “Where'd you get the pie?”

“Baked it.”

“No, you didn't, there it is, is looks like a Costco pie, there it is.” You bring the Costco pie to the folks. We got out of the car and our little girl, 8-year-old, said, “Can I carry the pie?”

“Mmm...mmm...” I had visions of the pie all over everything. So I said to her, “Okay honey, when you take this pie inside the house, I need you to know that if you drop it on the ground, you won't be able to eat any. Like, I'm going to clean it all up, and we're going to eat it, but you don't get any.” And so what does she do? Well the pie that she was holding in her hands, now she hugs a little bit, right? And she walks really slowly, you know? We go inside, have dinner, we come back out. She finally gets to the door. [Laughter] Okay, so what have I done? Well, what I have given her is a motivating warning. Every parent in the room knows that you motivate through warning all the time. Teachers do it, politicians, you motivate through, police do it. The warning is meant to motivate. You don't want to have to follow through on it. You will, but it's meant to motivate. We deal with this all the time. The box on the side of the road that has wires coming out of it, and there's a picture on the side, and the pictures of a guy like, “Ahhh,” and there's a jagged line through him. Right? And the point is, if you touch this box, there's a good chance you'll look like this guy, electrocuted to death. And so you're like, okay, I'm not going to touch it. It's a motivating warning.

I was in Australia, and we were actually in a location where they were doing some cliff diving and on the top of the cliff at the cliff diving, they was actually a sign that the government had put up, and it was a picture of a guy jumping off of a cliff and a shark mouth underneath. [Laughter] And so I didn't swim there, right? Because, if you swim here, Jaws might get you! It's a motivating warning. It's the goal of that sort of thing. What you have in this passage is Paul issuing a motivating warning. He's basically saying, “Again, if you hold firmly to the word that I taught you, you believed it, and if you hold firmly to it, then you will be saved.” So there's a condition upon your salvation. And that is that you continue in the gospel that you held at one point. If you deviate from it at some point in the middle, you've believed in vain. I'm always surprised at how many Christians are surprised at this. When you



say this publicly, from a pulpit or something, I'm always surprised that not more people talk about it, or pastors talk about it, because you can't get through a book of the Bible without something like that said. So just because I feel like I need to prove it to many of you who are believers here, I'm going to give you two examples, in Paul's letters themselves, where he says basically the same thing. Here's the first one, it's in Colossians 1: 21-23. So, if you asked me, "Hey Jeff, can you summarize the Christian message, you know, in very simple terms, I would either take you to 1 Corinthians 15 which is the passage we're studying together here now, or I'd go to Colossians 1:21-23, because just listen to the way that he summarizes the gospel message, what's happened to Christians, here it is:

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, [so like, the Cross, he had reconciled you to God with a purpose, to present you holy in his sight, he doesn't want to just leave you as you are, he wants to transform you into an image of his holiness] without blemish and free from accusation [so all of this, what God has done for you is of grace]— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel."

So all of this is true about you, if you persist in it. If you don't persist in it, then it's not true. So he uses an image about the people of Israel at one point, is my second example, to try to get this idea across. So earlier in the book of 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 10, he's speaking to the Corinthian church, and he's basically saying, "Look, the people of Israel had basically the same experience that you guys had. Right? They were saved, they had a testimony, if they were asked, 'Describe your salvation' they could do that, and then they were baptized, and they took communion, they do the Christian stuff." Let's take a look at what he says, 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors [so, the people of Israel] were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea."

Right? They were saved out of Egypt. They had a great testimony. Way better than your testimony! Can you imagine, telling that one? "Okay, so I was on the shore of the Red Sea and Moses held his stick up and then all of a sudden it parted and I walked through!"

"Really?"

"Yeah, I used to be in bondage and now I'm free."

"They were all baptized [verse 2] into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. [So they have a baptism] They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. [So they take a communion of sorts. Eating the bread of God and drinking the drink of God, they're just like you!] Nevertheless, [verse 5] God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did."



In other words, they make it through the wilderness and they get to the Promised Land and they stand there and God says, “Okay, go forth and take the land I’ve given you.” And they’re like, “Nah. People in there are really big.”

“Yes, but the word of the Lord is to you and the promises are given to you and I’ve saved you for this purpose.”

“Eh. We’d rather go our own way.” What Paul is saying is, if that’s what happened to them, that was given as an example of what sometimes happens to us. Just so we’re clear. What I’m saying is that true salvation belongs to those who not only receive the gospel but continue in it. It’s not so much about how you start the race, but how you finish it that counts. I’m using that image of race now because that’s an image that’s used throughout Scripture, especially by the Apostle Paul, to talk about the Christian life. He says, at the end of his own life, he says, “I have kept the faith, I have finished the race. And now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge will award me on that day. I’ve finished the race.” He tells the Corinthians at one point, he tells them, “Run to win the prize. That’s the goal of the Christian life is to run in such a way as to win the prize.”

You ever been to a race, been involved in one? I’ve watched the New York City Marathon live. On one occasion my friend Alan ran in it, Alan was a really gifted runner. He used to train with me, I would ride my bike next to him and he would run. [Laughter] So my wife and me and his wife all went to New York to see him, he qualified for the New York City Marathon, and so he was going to run this race. And the New York City Marathon has got so many people starting in it, basically you start it as a walk, because everyone is so jostled together. But at the beginning of any race, there’s a whole bunch of people around it screaming, “Yay! You’re amazing! Good job!” And then if you go to the end of the race, the same thing is being said. Now people are more spread out who are running it, but, “Yeah! You did it! You’re amazing!” We had decided that we would have three spots along the race that we would see Alan. The beginning, and we’d see him at the end, and then we were going to go to the 20 mile mark, we had mapped it out so we could get there. The 20 mile mark, right, 26 miles is the race, 20 mile mark. I had actually picked up a piece of pizza, I mean, what, 99 cents? I can’t pass that up. Pizza and a Coke, and I was standing at the side of the races scores, Alan comes running by, “Go! Good job! You’re doing great Alan! Wonderful!” I’ve never gotten a worse stink-eye from anyone than Alan in that moment. Seriously, I’ve seen people who were near death, he was nearer death than anyone I had ever seen in my life, he looked awful. He looked terrible. “You want some pizza?” That’s the way races work though, right? There’s a beginning and then there’s an end, but it’s the difficult middle where you’re tempted to quit, right?

And this is why Paul uses this image, he’s trying to say, listen, we tend to celebrate the beginning of faith. If you come to faith in Jesus, we’re all going to cheer. That’s awesome. Rightfully so. And if you finish, I know at our funerals we don’t rejoice, but we don’t rejoice for our sakes, we’re sad for our sakes. But if you’re a believer and you die in Christ, God’s rejoicing, we’re rejoicing, because you’re with him. The goal of your faith has been realized. So “yay” at the end and “yay” at the beginning. But in the middle, it’s where people tend to give up, right? Where the struggles of life tend to come in, and they affect us on levels that make us just want to quit. Sometimes we feel near death. Sometimes we look near death. And we give up.



So the question that we have to ask then is, look, if finishing is what counts, then surely God has given us something to help us in the difficult middle, right? And the answer is yes, there's quite a few things he's given us. So I'm just going to name a couple, one of them is the Word, Scripture, and prayer. God has wanted to communicate with you his character, who he is, what he's like, through Scripture, and so if you commit yourself to studying Scripture, investing yourself in it, studying it by yourself and with other people, you'll hear from God regularly, and then you will respond to him by prayer and sharing your heart with him and he will lead you through Scripture and through prayer, and there will be this conversational situation going on. That's how relationships last, right? I mean, if I got married to my wife and then I said to her a couple moments after the marriage, "Now that we're married, I'm not going to talk to you any longer." And she'll say, "Well fine, I'm not talking to you any longer." That's not going to last. Communication is the bedrock of good relationships. Right.

So he's given you the Word and prayer, but he's also given you friends. He's given you the church. We are the people eating the pizza on the side. I know, sometimes we look like we're not helping that much, but you know it's always easier to run a race or to ride a race when you have friends with you. Talk to anybody who's a cyclist. You know, you can draft the people in front of you. When you get tired and there's somebody who's going faster than you are, you can sit behind them and barely pedal and they just drag you along. Right. It's the velociraptor rule. Right? Don't get caught being straggled off the end, because as everyone knows who watches those Jurassic movies, those guys get eaten. If you're with the group, you can make it. So avail yourselves of the things that God has provided so that you might finish the race. Because the gospel saves us if we continue in it.

[The Gospel is About Jesus Dying for our Sins]

Number three: the gospel is about Jesus dying for our sins. 1 Corinthians 15:3, he says,

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance [what is the most important thing, Paul? This:] that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures..."

Now wait, what does that mean? It's a very shorthand, what does it mean that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures? And Paul's basically saying, look, if you go back into the Old Testament, and you see how God has acted with the people of Israel, you will see a thread running through the entire thing that leads you to Jesus. So for the sake of review, before the people of Israel came across the Red Sea, they were under bondage to Egypt, and the way that God released them from under bondage to Egypt, you remember 10 plagues? And the 10th plague was the nastiest one. It was plague on the firstborn. God came to the people of Israel and said, "Listen, here's what I'm going to do. I am going to visit my judgement upon the people of Egypt by taking their firstborn child and yours as well, unless you take a perfect spotless lamb, you kill that lamb, and you take the blood from that lamb, and you apply it to the doorpost of your home, and then tonight when the angel of death is sent over your city, every time he comes to a blood painted doorpost, he will pass over it. But where he does not see that, it means that he does not see faith in that home, and therefore he will judge. So in other words, you need a substitutionary sacrifice. You need the blood of something else to take the punishment for you, or you can bear it yourself. Well, of course the faithful people, they put the blood



on their doorposts and they are free, they go across the Red Sea, and when they get out, they go out into the wilderness, God gives them his law, a big portion of God's law is the sacrificial system. People in our day, we don't really realize what worship was like for them. To worship God meant going to the temple by taking a spotless animal, a perfect animal, not one of the mutts of your groups, but a spotless, best animal, you come and you offer the sacrifice. And this is not a clean experience, folks. When you go to the temple, there is blood everywhere, it stinks like blood, you are probably splattered with blood at points. You walk through rivers of blood, you offer the sacrifice, they burn it on the altar, and then you walk away, and the message that you should have received in the entire experience is, my sin costs lives. Right. Yours, unless you have a substitutionary sacrifice. So then, when Isaiah, one of the prophets, starts talking about the Messiah, a deliverer who's going to come, he starts talking about that Messiah in a way that talks about him as being a substitute for the sins of the people. He's going to be like those sacrifices. So Isaiah 53:5-6,

“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. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

You can see why Jesus at the last supper, he's sitting there and he says, “Okay I'm going to take bread and break it, and tomorrow I'm going to the cross, breaking bread, this is my body, given for you.” Takes the cup, “This is my blood, shed for you.” What is he saying? “Guys, think about all of the substitutionary sacrifice imagery, that's me. I'm the lamb whose blood needs to be painted on the doorpost of your heart, I am the sacrifice whose blood runs through the temple. I am the one who will go to the cross for you.” At the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a belief in what we tend to call the Great Exchange, meaning that your sin is placed upon Jesus, who takes your punishment for that sin on the cross, and his righteousness is given to you freely as a gift. That doesn't mean that you stand before God kind of on an even playing field and you've got to earn your keep now. No, his righteousness, meaning the goodness and moral quality of Jesus is now yours, so that when God looks at you, those who are Christians, he sees Jesus there. Because of the exchange.

And the best illustration I can use to try to convey that is one I've used before, but it's the best I've got. When I was in college, we had a movie, I was the star of the movie, it was called *On the Court*. My friend Colin, he was my roommate, and he had to do it for his film class. And the story was really, well, dumb. Anyway, the story was about me, I was being picked on and beaten up, and all sorts of stuff, and then finally there's this basketball game where the guy who's picking on me, I get to dunk on his head, and then I get to stand over him, and then I rip my shirt off and go, “Aahh!” I know, bad script. It wasn't great, right? When it came to that particular moment though, like when I was reading this script and he was saying, “Okay Jeff, you're going to have to dunk on him,” we went to these little elementary school dunk hoops, because there's no way I'm dunking on anyone. But okay, so, “You dunk on him, and then you come down and you rip your shirt off.” I said, “Colin, listen, I can do almost all the stuff in this, but I'm just going to tell you, when I rip my shirt off and I go, ‘Aahh,’ no one's going to be impressed at all by what they see there. Right, they're going to be like, ‘Oh, that's um, there's more there than there should be.’” So I said, “What are you going to do?” He said, “Don't worry about



it.” We had a guy, Mark, who lived in our dorm, who was just huge. He worked out everyday, he had black hair like I did. So he said, “Well what we’re going to do, is I’ve told Mark that what we’ll do is we’ll have you come down, you’ll dunk, and then we’ll have a different scene where he rips his shirt off, right? We’ll get this shot of just his chin down. And he’ll rip his shirt off and go ‘Aahh’ and we’ll cut back to your face. See?” And I’m like, “Stand-in. Yeah, stand-in! Okay.” So we go through this whole thing, and the first showing of *On the Court* was in our dorm, and there were all sorts of people there, right? So there was this girl who I was interested in here, and a girl I was interested in here, and we’re watching this show and it gets to this last scene and I jump up, “Aaahh!” And I dunk on my friend Jason, he was the bad guy, and bounces off his head, and the shot comes to me, but it’s not me, Mark rips his shirt off, “Aahh!” The girl next to me goes, “Mm-mm.” <Smiling> Right. She is attributing to me merit that is not mine. And yet, that’s what you get, Christian, for all of eternity. You get the merit of Jesus. You’re going to be there 10,000 years, and wonder how you got there, and you’re going to point to the Great Exchange. And you’re going to say, “It’s not me, it’s him.” That’s good news. So the gospel is about Jesus dying for our sins.

[The Gospel is True]

Here’s the fourth one: the gospel is true. We’ll read verse 3 again and then finish the passage to 1 Corinthians 15:3-6,

“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, 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.”

Notice he goes from small to large, right? He appeared to 1, and then to the 12, and then to over 500. This resurrected, back from the dead, like physical -touch him. Jesus came back. Do you know, the world ever since this first was proclaimed, has always thought that it’s ridiculous. People don’t come back from the dead. If there is a finish line, it is death. In the early Greek setting, they didn’t even want the physical body to come back. They thought the physical body was just, what a waste, you know? If anything, we’re hoping for kind of a non-physical, ephemeral abyss somewhere, where my spirit can go and live, and be freed from the confines of the body. But most people just didn’t believe in any afterlife at all. You know how in our tombstones we sometimes put RIP? Like rest in peace, so it’s an acronym that stands for something, they had one like that, it wasn’t rest in peace. Their acronym was for this: I wasn’t, I was, I am not, I don’t care. So you can walk through Greek cemeteries, that’s what you’d see on a tombstone, an epitaph. I wasn’t, I was, I am not, I don’t care. When Paul brings up the resurrection to some of these Greek philosophers at a place called Mars Hill where he’s trying to convince them of Jesus and the truth of the resurrection and the truth of who Jesus is, as soon as he mentions the resurrection they’re like, “Haha, you idiot! Nobody buys this! Fools would buy it. But nobody who’s got a brain.”



It's not much different today, you do know, of course, today is April Fool's Day, which is like an atheist's dream today, right? Because Easter and April Fool's, I've read a few tweets this morning that are kind of funny, and they're like, "How fitting! How fitting that you stupid Christian people believe this concocted, made up, exaggerated story, have rooted your lives on it, celebrate with your families about it, when the truth is, it's all a big joke." Look, it might make you feel better. I know, you go to church and someone stands up in front and says, "Yeah, there's hope after death," but that's just because you don't have the courage to face it. If you have the courage, if you have the intelligence, you would acknowledge that this is all just fool's error.

What I love about this passage though is it engages in this debate a little bit, because what Paul has done here, did you notice? He says, "Look, I'm not the only person who you can ask about this. This didn't just happen in some vision I had at some point. You can talk to lots of people who saw him." 1 Corinthians 15:4,

"He was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 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."

"Some are still alive, you want their addresses? I could write it down for you. You can go and you can visit, sit across from them over a cup of tea and ask them what they saw. And every single one of them will say he's alive." It's interesting about the history of the Christian church, you would think if this were a lie, because that's the argument, right? These guys just made it up, or it just sort of grew over time. You would think that if they knew that this was a lie, that at some point one of them would have recanted, right? They would have said, "Oh," under threat of death, "Oh, you're right, we're stupid, we made it all up." But none of them did. The apostle James was actually at the top of the temple, the way he was killed was he was stood at the top of the temple and they told him, "Recant," and when he wouldn't they pushed him off the temple, and he fell, supposedly to his death, but when he hit the ground, he didn't die. So they came to him on the ground with their stones and clubs, and said, "You want a second chance? Recant. Just say it was a lie." And he wouldn't, because he saw him.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is true, the resurrection is true, and you do know what that means then, that means death is defeated. That means the great enemy that every single person on the planet faces is beaten. And that if you want to join the winning team, it's there for you.

[The Gospel Must Be Received]

Here's my last one, number five: the gospel must be received. I want to go back to 1 Corinthians 15:1,

"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."

My wife and I, when we were younger and we didn't have enough money for her to go to college, and so we made an application to the federal government in the United States for grant money. We didn't



know if we would get any at all, and we thought, no way, because nobody gets those things. I don't know anyone who gets any money from the government, for anything. It's like the lottery, right? There's no way. There's stories about them somewhere, but I don't know who they are. Well we got this big packet in the mail, and the front page of the packet, we pulled it out, and it said, "Congratulations. You have..." and then it listed off all these things. It was thousands of dollars. It was actually more than enough to pay for her school. Oh, it was a happy day. We used to live above a morgue, and we were dancing in the morgue, right? Baahh!

My wife, Jeanne, looked into the packet a little bit more when we calmed down, and she pulled out a paper and it said that, "You need to sign this paper, you need to commit yourself to the program, you need to commit yourself to all of these things, in order for you to receive it." She's like, "Ahh, we've got to sign it." So we're signing it and signing it, putting it into envelopes, sending it away. It doesn't count unless you sign. Well that's true of the gospel too. You can see that the gospel is true and even acknowledge its importance, but God wants more than just mental ascent. He wants you to sign on. He's saying, "Right, so I've sent my herald into the city, and he's proclaimed it to you now, what are you going to do, you going to bow your knee? I offer victory over death. All you have to do is bow your knee. Continue, and you will see, too, that you will be raised.

So here's the basic, this is the gospel, okay, ready? Jesus died for your sins, the just for the unjust, to reconcile you to God, he rose again to demonstrate his power over sin and death, and point you to what you too will experience if you follow him. Now he calls you to turn away from your old manner of life and follow him. So what say you? Will you bow the knee? Will you respond to the herald? You have everything to gain. Let me pray for us,

Father, I'm so thankful for the gospel message, I'm thankful for the truth of it, and I'm thankful, Father, that there are different kinds of people who are listening to me today. I'm thankful, Father, that there are people here who have never signed on with you, and I pray that my words would be yours, and that you would be convicting them now, by the power of your Spirit, and you'd be moving in their hearts, Lord, that they would say, "No no, I want what you offer." And that even as they sit, right there, right now, that they would respond to the message, to the call of Christ, to bow the knee, by just saying, "Lord, thank you. Thank you for your death on the cross, thank you for rising again on the third day, to promise victory over sin and death. I commit myself to you." It's as simple as that, Lord. And I know that there are other people here, Lord, who are in the middle of a race, and it's getting hard, or it has been hard, it's probably why they are sometimes absent from the community of faith, and I pray Father, that you would help them in this moment to be reminded that the faith that continues is the faith that counts. That you would move in their hearts, to redouble their efforts, to commit themselves once again to the gospel. And Lord, we're thankful, more than anything, that you raised your son, the Lord Jesus, from the grave, the firstfruits of all who will follow. And we count ourselves among that group. And we praise you for it now, in Jesus' good name. Amen.