

# A Timely Reminder

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Amen. Well, last week rounded off quite a lot of things before the summer. I'm sure you'll have noticed if you were with us. We finished our series on worship in the morning. Sunday school ended for the term for the kids, and in the evening we finished off the section of Isaiah that we've been going through over the past few months. In a few weeks' time, Ben Traynor is going to come and preach for us while Joe and I are on holiday, and it'll be after that that we'll kind of pick up our series, ongoing series in Genesis and Matthew.

So all that together has sort of left us with a little gap just this Sunday and next, and instead of dotting about four random things, or indeed starting something fresh or picking up a series while folks are away, we're just going to take this opportunity to do a sort of a mini-series, morning and evening, both this Sunday and next, looking at this chapter here in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 that we began to read through just a moment ago. It is a fantastic chapter that teaches and reminds us of so much gospel truth, and it does so by focusing us on the topic of resurrection. I wonder what that brings to your mind. What do you think when you hear the word resurrection? You'll see that even if you just glance through the subheadings the sub-editors of the NIV have provided for us. This is a chapter, isn't it, all about resurrection. But around this theme, there is so much that the Apostle Paul says and teaches that I trust it will be of great benefit to us as we go through it together. So we're beginning this morning focusing on those just opening 11 verses that we read just a moment ago, where Paul brings the Corinthian church, and all his readers, us included, back to basics.

He reminds us of some foundational gospel truths. In the coming verses afterwards, he will build on that foundation. But before we get to the building, we need to begin here, where every Christian must begin and must return too often to the very heart of the gospel, remembering what it is all about.

Now, that is exactly what we are going to do this morning, thinking, what is it all about? We'll do that by seeing three things that Paul highlights in these verses as absolutely central and indispensable to the Christian faith. But before we get to them, I think it's worth just a brief word on the context that Paul is writing into here, because it will help us understand why Paul writes the way he does and why he focuses on what he focuses on. Because Corinth was a church that was floundering under the influence of a godless culture and society.

A church that was floundering under the influence of a godless culture and society. The world around them was promiscuous and idolatrous and had no time for Christian ideas, such as that of the resurrection.

[ 3 : 4 3 ]     We'll see in a lot more detail this evening why that was and what that looks like. But for the moment, right, what we need to know, I think, is simply that the church in Corinth was surrounded by voices that pressurized them to abandon core gospel truths.

They were surrounded by voices that were pressurizing them to abandon core gospel truths. And some of those voices had started to creep into the church itself.

Questions that were being asked throughout the book of Corinthians. Do we really have to live such morally pure lives? Do we really believe what the Bible teaches about sex? Do we really believe the dead will come back to life? Why not just chop those bits off of our faith?

Those are the voices of some within the Corinthian church. Maybe they thought that them will fit in more with the people around us. We'll become more attractive to them and our churches will fill up if only we make our beliefs more socially acceptable. Those voices had started appearing amongst the church, and you can maybe see the logic. But Paul, rightly, has no time.

No time for such a compromised faith. That is the context Paul is writing into here as he arrives at chapter 15. And so he begins this chapter by bringing the Corinthian church back to the heart of the matter, reminding them of three things, three basic, unnegotiable gospel truths that they must stand firm in.

[ 5 : 41 ] They must hold firmly onto if they want to stand at all. These are the gospel truths that every Christian in every church must ground themselves in.

It is all about God's words. It is all about grace. It is all about God's words. It is all about Jesus. And it is all about grace.

So let us see how Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel they heard and believed, and what we can learn from that. So first we learn that the gospel is all about God's word.

It is all about God's word, not our wisdom. We find out, if you go and read through chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, you find out that there was evidently a lot of chats when the Corinthian church gathered for worship on a Sunday.

So much so that it appears people were talking over one another, and nobody was too sure what was being said at all. So it's hardly surprising that one of Paul's exhortations, you'll see there if you look up to verse 40 of chapter 14, is for good and orderly worship.

[ 7 : 08 ] We need things to be a little more calm around here. But this sort of mishmash of opinions that was being voiced Sunday by Sunday led to another problem.

Because everyone who spoke claimed to have a word of wisdom. But not everyone who spoke was speaking in a way that faithfully reflected God's word.

Lots of people speaking what they believe to be true. Not all of it is true. How do they discern which is which?

Who to listen to and who not to listen to? How do we know who to listen to and who not to listen to?

The answer is very simply, is what is being said grounded in God's word? Not just human wisdom.

[ 8 : 14 ] Human wisdom and discernment do absolutely play a part. Don't get me wrong. We need to be discerning in what we say and how we say it in every and any circumstance. But are those words, is the message based on God's word rather than human wisdom?

The Corinthian church was one in which many voices were saying many different things. But Paul wades into the arguments in verse 1 and confidently says, doesn't he?

Listen to what I told you. Listen to my words. It says in verse 1, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you.

Why is Paul so confident in his message over and above everyone else's? Paul's message. Because if you look there at the start of verse 3, his words were not ultimately his words.

They were passed on to him. They were the words of the gospel, which contained, if you look at the end of verse 3 and 4, all that happened according to the scriptures.

[ 9 : 31 ] Paul's message was grounded firmly in God's word. And so he did not hesitate to say to the Corinthians, listen to me.

Not out of arrogance, but out of a confidence in God's word above his own. If we want to stand firm in our faith, if we want to hold fast to gospel truth and not be blown about by every wind of doctrine that might come our way, then we must remember it is all about God's word, not about human wisdom.

Three areas. I think we need to make sure that is happening in our lives. Firstly, and probably most obviously, ensuring that what we believe, what we believe is based on God's word and not the world's wisdom or perceived wisdom.

It is so easy. I'm sure this has been the case throughout human history, but I suspect particularly in our time. It is so easy for so much of our thinking and therefore so much of our beliefs to be shaped by what we consume day to day through TV, through music, through what we hear or read in the news, through social media, films, so much else besides.

And if we do not remember it is all about God's words, those voices will quickly set the agenda for what we think is good and right and proper.

[ 11 : 10 ] Now, I'm absolutely not saying do not give any of your time to those things. They can and are good and useful in their proper place. But we must remember what their proper place is.

It is all about God's word. And that means we do not come to the Bible after hearing the sometimes very loud voices of our society.

Rather, we can and should and must do it the other way around. If we base our understanding of what is possible and impossible, of what is true and what is false, of what is acceptable and unacceptable, based on what we hear and see around about us, and then come with those goggles on to God's words, we, like the Corinthians, will very quickly find ourselves at best confused, at worst ready to chop bits off the Bible's teaching, ready to deny the truth of the resurrection if science doesn't agree, ready to change our understanding of marriage if society doesn't understand, ready to soften our stance on Jesus being the only way to God if other religions don't like it.

That is what can and eventually would happen if we do not ensure that what we believe is all about the word of God. And so Paul says, start with the scriptures, start with God's word, and then discern everything else from there.

It's really the point he's been making for a whole chapter before this. He's just finishing off the argument here at the start of chapter 15, where he's now boldly saying, listen to me, because what I am saying is not my wisdom or the world's wisdom, it is God's wisdom.

[ 13 : 17 ] So we make it all about the Bible by putting God's word first and letting it dictate what we believe, what is good and bad, what is true and false, what is gospel truth, and what is false testimony.

Secondly, I think we need to make sure that what we hear on a Sunday is all about God's words. Paul is speaking these words particularly off the back of a discussion about what worship should look like.

It's a fitting place to be off the back of our series on worship. Only listen to the words of whatever preacher or minister you are listening to, so long as you are confident they are speaking not from their wisdom, but from God's words.

It's why we encourage you every single Sunday to have your Bible open in front of you as we are preaching. Paul says it back in verse 29 of chapter 14.

Discern what you are hearing. Look at God's word. It is a great thing when I start explaining a point and people look down to make sure that is what God's word is saying.

[ 14 : 31 ] So you can ensure that all is being said is coming from God's word, not Donald's wisdom, which is, let me tell you, extremely limited. It's a great thing to test what you are hearing against the Bible.

It is a great privilege to have the Bible in front of you as you hear God's word preached. Make use of it. And if you ever aren't sure, please ask.

And if you ever think something's wrong, please go and speak to the preacher after the service. Gently and lovingly mention it to him so that he can correct himself if he has got it wrong.

Make sure you believe God's word. Make sure what you hear on Sunday is God's word. And then thirdly, speak God's word to others. We all have many opportunities to speak into people's lives.

Every one of you will have such an opportunity. As soon as the service finishes. If we were in Corinth, you'd probably have that opportunity right now. But when we speak into people's lives with words of advice or comfort or correction or encouragement, make sure those words too are Bible-based.

[ 15 : 54 ] Speak the truth in love to one another. Speak God's words into each other's lives. That is how the church will be built up. Better yet, open God's words with one another.

Read it together. Make sure he is the one speaking first and foremost in every conversation because it is all about his words.

So, first of all, it is all about God's word. Let me just say we are going to have spent most of our time this morning on that point because it captures the context in which Paul writes the rest of this chapter.

And the two following points are ones that he's going to unpack through the rest of this chapter. So, we'll deal with them a little more briefly. Let us turn to each of them now as we go on. We've seen it is all about God's word and that is absolutely true.

But next, Paul shows us what God's word is all about. And the answer is nothing other than Jesus.

[ 17 : 01 ] It is all about God's word and God's word is all about Jesus. Paul explains the gospel he preached to the Corinthians from the word of God in verses 3 to 8.

And there is one unmistakable feature. I've said it twice already so I'm sure I don't need to say it again but just look through those verses and see who the gospel is all about.

It's not about what we do, is it? It's all about what Christ did. These verses, Paul gives one of the clearest, succinct summaries of the gospel.

It is all about Jesus. What did Jesus do? He died for our sins. He was buried. He rose again.

And he appeared to the disciples. That is the gospel in a nutshell. Jesus Christ died for our sins.

[ 18 : 11 ] We are guilty. We are in the wrong and we cannot make it right but Jesus does through his death. Taking every bit of punishment that we deserve.

He was buried. He was not just hung on a cross, he died on a cross and his body was placed in a tomb and the stone rolled over for three days.

He who did no wrong buried in the tomb of a sinner for the sake of sinners. sinners. But he rose again. Death was not the end.

And that is the point Paul is going to spend so much of this chapter unpacking in detail. His resurrection was real and his resurrection is what gives us hope as Christians.

Knowing that not only has the price of our sin been covered for us but that because Jesus rose again on the third day we too have hope of life after death.

[ 19 : 17 ] And Paul is so confident of this fact doesn't he? That he then lists all the people who Jesus appeared to after he had risen from death. He appeared to Peter and the disciples to more than 500 of his followers to James and to himself.

And he stresses in verse 6 doesn't he? He stresses that most of those whom he appeared to are still living. Right? Paul is inviting them to check his working.

Go and ask them. This isn't idle speculation. It is a historical fact with a long line of witnesses ready to testify.

Two witnesses are usually enough as a stamp of authority. How about the best part of 500, Paul says. Imagine them all lining up outside the courtroom ready to testify exactly what they saw.

That's how sure you can be that he died, was buried, and rose again. And that is our gospel. That is our hope.

[ 20 : 25 ] It is our sins Jesus died for when we do nothing other than put our trust in him. Believe the message of God's word.

We have nothing to offer but Jesus, it being all about him, he dies for our sins. And we know the benefits of his blessing not because of our good deeds but because of his death and resurrection.

salvation. If you want to know hope and peace, if you want your sins forgiven, if you want to know you are no longer condemned for any of the wrong that you have done, then give your life to Jesus.

Make your life like God's word in being all about him. And you will. Know joy like no other. Because everything from the very purpose of creation, it is all about Jesus.

And so then, thirdly and finally, because it is all about Jesus, it is therefore all about grace. Why is Paul a Christian?

[ 21 : 52 ] not because he was wise in his life choices, not because he lived a slightly better life than those around him. But, verse 10, by the grace of God, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

Paul's resume, his list of achievements, was in fact a shameful one. It says at the end of verse 9 there, I persecuted the church of God.

But because it is all about grace, even the worst of sinners can know the gospel as their own. The gospel is grace.

Grace means, it means unmerited favor, being given something you do not deserve. That is what Jesus is to every one of his people.

Every Christian, none of us deserve to benefit from his death and resurrection. But every one of us are recipients of his undeserved gifts.

[ 23 : 13 ] If you look there at the end of verse 10, you'll see as well that not only was Paul's conversion an act of God's grace, his ongoing walk with Christ happens only by God's grace too.

God's unmerited favor is what we are utterly dependent on, for our conversion and for our ongoing life of faith. And it should leave us immeasurably thankful to him.

We are always thankful for great gifts, aren't we? And that is good and right and we should be. But so often, I think when we receive something, there's a little part of us, isn't there, that thinks I kind of earned it.

I deserved at least something. Not so with God's favor. we stood entirely indebted to him.

And yet, because of his grace, we now stand entirely blessed by him. There is nothing that compares to the contrast sinners find in their standing before God.

[ 24 : 27 ] What we deserve and what we receive are opposite ends of an unmeasurable universe. universe. It is a gift like no other.

It is all about God's word. It is all about Jesus and Jesus' life and ministry is all about showing us grace. Paul knew that. And the Corinthians, they knew that too.

Paul knew they needed to hear it again. Maybe you've learned nothing new this morning. I do not apologize if that is the case because what I want you to do is remind yourself.

Remind yourself of these core gospel truths and make sure whatever stage of the Christian life you're in, whether you've been a Christian for five minutes or 50 years, that you are still building on this foundation, that these are the roots you are grounded in.

Because this is where we must begin and it is where we must always return. Paul says back in verse 2, by this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you.

[ 25 : 58 ] You only have to be a Christian five minutes to know someone somewhere is going to start telling you that what you believe is wrong. And if our foundation is not well set, those winds might well blow us over.

It's what Paul was concerned for the Ephesian church in that passage that William read for us earlier. In chapter four when he wrote, once the bodies unite in the gospel, then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people and their deceitful schemes.

There is every wind of teaching blowing. There are people with deceitful schemes who are cunning and crafty. I think that is what Paul fears is happening in the Corinthian church, a church being blown about here and there because they are not 100% sure what they believe.

Or they've forgotten the core gospel truths they need to hold on to. They've forgotten where to turn to. If we want to mature in our faith, these wonderful gospel truths are not only where we must begin, it is where we must return time and time and time and time again.

They do not get old. We do not move on from them. We do not grow past them. But we remind ourselves, as Paul reminds the Corinthians, that we must hold dearly on to them, whatever the cost.

[ 27 : 35 ] Because this, this is the only way to life everlasting, the only way, knowing that it is all about God's Word, it is all about Jesus, and it is all about grace.

Hold dearly on to that, and you will stand firm until the end. let us pray before our closing hymn. Father, we thank you and praise you that you have spoken to us.

We pray that you would help us to be shaped by your Word in all things, that we would delight in it, that we would love to spend time with it, that we would love to speak of it to one another.

And we thank you that your Word is all about Jesus, in whom is our hope and our salvation. We pray that you would strengthen our trust in him day by day, and that you would use the people around us to build that confidence, to grow our faith ever deeper and deeper.

God bless you, and we thank you and praise you that we can know the blessings that come with Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, because your gospel is one of grace, and that even we who were so undeserving stand blessed in your presence because you have given us what we did not deserve.

[ 29 : 06 ] And so we praise and worship you, Father, Son, and Spirit, for there is none like you, and there is no gospel like your gospel. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.