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Pataskala Church of the Nazarene
March 24, 2008

"The Simple Truth That Changes Lives"

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

Sometimes when I am in a counseling situation there is a lot of talking but very little understanding.

Generally it is my job to try to help an individual or a couple see what the issues really are.

And often there is so much other "baggage" that it becomes hard to sort through everything.

Now I don't want anyone here this morning to take offense to what I just said – what I just said can be the truth.

But the same can happen at Easter.

There is so much going on.

There are extra services, a bigger crowd usually, the involvement of the kids, old friends, and family gatherings. Easter bunnies, chocolate eggs and candy, sumptuous meals with family members.

But all the activity can blind us to the real issues.

We can find ourselves enjoying the "production" and missing the message.

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Those who helped me put this service together do not want that to happen to you this morning.

So - I take you to 1 Corinthians 15.

Now Remember the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to a troubled church.

They had asked a number of questions and Paul sought to answer them.

There were a number of problems that needed to be addressed and some of their thinking needed to be corrected.

And as the Apostle Paul gets to this point of the letter he seeks to bring these believers back to their original foundation.

They had become lost on side issues.

That often happens to me when I meet with people. I am guilty at times of changing the subject going everywhere. Do you know what I mean?

These Christian believers in the Church of Corinth had become focused on form rather than substance.

We pastored a Methodist church in Yazoo City, MS during our time in Seminary.

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They were what we refer to as a liturgical church.

Every Sunday morning we followed a certain form for the worship service.

Now – let me be clear – I’m not saying anything is wrong with that – but sometimes the form of worship takes the place of the substance.

Paul was calling the Church of Corinth back home to the basic truth on which they first started.

That's what I want to do for us this morning.

I doubt I will say anything new . . . but I do want to reaffirm what is important in the hope that you will be able to regain some spiritual focus in your life.

“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 Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers 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.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

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Paul lists for us the real issues – this is the substance . . . the foundational truths of the gospel.

First - IT WAS A RECEIVED TRUTH

Paul begins by telling us that these truths are not something he dreamed up.

They are not from a mysterious vision like Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons had.

These truths did not **"just come to Paul"** like the author of the popular but non-Christian book **"Conversations with God"**.

These truths came from the teaching of Jesus and from those who studied with Him.

These truths are based on verifiable evidence.

They are historical not imaginary.

Paul is not the only one to emphasize the factual nature of the gospel.

In the beginning of his gospel, **Dr. Luke writes to Theophilus,**

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and

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servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:1-4)

Peter seems to have anticipated the reluctance of people to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In his second letter he writes,

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain.” (2 Peter 1:16-28)

I know that we live in a day and age when many people measure truth by their preference.

If something sounds good to them. . . it is true for them.

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When these things no longer sound good or "work", then they are no longer considered to be truth.

The writing of the Da Vinci Code and other such writings are testimony to this fact.

But folks, this is nonsense.

Something that is true or not true is independent of how we feel about it.

George Bush is the President of the United States regardless of how you feel about him.

When we come to the gospel we need to be reminded that these are things that actually happened regardless of how we feel about them.

And the Apostle Paul's argument is simple . . . **if what we declare is true, is true . . . then we must address that truth.**

CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS . . . according to the Scriptures

The second main truth is that Christ died for our sins.

The first implication is that Jesus' death was a willing death.

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On Friday night we watched a segment of the Passion that showed Jesus willingly going to the cross for our sins.

And Yes, Jesus was arrested on a trumped up charge and tried in a "kangaroo court", **but . . . He could have avoided the crucifixion.**

If Jesus had taken a different tactic,
If He had put on any kind of defense,
He could have sidestepped the cross.
But instead He went willingly to His death.

Secondly, Jesus' death was purposeful.

Now – folks, don't get the wrong idea! He didn't just die to be a martyr.

He died because His death would bring forgiveness for our sins.

His death was planned by Him and His Father in heaven so that we might have forgiveness of ours and hope for an eternity in Heaven.

In **John 10** Jesus told his disciples, ***"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."***

In **Mark 14:24** Jesus told his disciples, ***"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."***

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When the angel spoke to Joseph at Jesus' birth, the angel said, ***"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save his people from their sins."*** (Mt. 1:21)

In **1 John 2** the apostle wrote, ***"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*** (1 John 2:2)

The Biblical teaching is this:

Each one of us has broken God's law countless times.
And as a result, we must face the judgment of God.
Since these crimes are committed against the Lord of the Universe they are capital offenses and will result in an eternal death.

Jesus, God in human form, lived a sinless life.

He never broke these laws.

Consequently, He is the only One who can serve as our substitute.

The reason He can serve as substitute for all of us is because of the value and significance of His office as Son of God.

His life is infinitely valuable because of who He is.

So, Jesus takes our penalty upon Himself so that we might be forgiven.

But let's be honest.

Anyone can say they were dying on someone else's behalf.

Anyone can pretend to be a martyr.

I can tell you that I have a disease that was really meant for you . . . but why would you believe me?

There must be some other verification that what I say is true.

So for now . . . just note that the claim was that Jesus died for our sins.

He was our substitute . . . the sinless man dying for sinful humankind.

Next – Jesus was Buried.

This is significant because it means that Jesus died an actual death.

He did not merely have a near death experience . . . He was dead and He was buried!

The conclusion of everyone was that Jesus was dead.

Could they have made a mistake? NO!

The Romans were not as medically advanced as we are . . . but these men made a living at killing people.

If they were to make a mistake . . . they would be killed in that person's place.

They were going to make SURE the person was dead.

Jesus was gone.

And as a result of this, the mindset of the disciples was one of abject depression.

These disciples and followers had placed all their hope on Jesus.

They had bet their lives and livelihoods on the fact that Jesus was going to be the Messiah.

Now they felt they were just one of many who had fallen for a false prophet.

These men were not trying to start a new religion . . . they were trying to start over.

They would keep a low profile for awhile and hopefully they could return to their jobs and

everyone (including them) would forget the whole thing.

Have you ever been in that situation?

Maybe you took a bold stand on an issue . . . but you were shown to be wrong.

Or maybe you put all your hope in some "get rich quick" scheme and it went bust. Dru and I did that one time.

Maybe you were engaged and planned a big wedding and then you found out that your future mate was not what he/she appeared to be.

The wedding was canceled and you felt the whole world was laughing at you.
If any thing like that happened to you . . . you know how the disciples felt.

They were discouraged, disappointed, and humiliated.

JESUS WAS RAISED on the Third Day . . . according to the Scriptures

This is of course, IS the key event.

Jesus came back from the dead!!

Paul takes great pains to show that everything hinges on the actual resurrection of Christ.

Paul affirms that this was a bodily, literal and physical resurrection.

Believe it or not, in church today there are Pastors and parishioners who will sing about the Resurrection of Christ . . . but they don't really believe that Jesus literally came back from the dead.

They are celebrating that the spirit (not the Holy Spirit . . .but the attitude, the perspective and desire to do good) of Jesus lives on in His followers.

We have said things like this when someone we love dies.
We say they really do live on in their children and grandchildren and in the people they influenced.

But this is not what the Bible is saying about Jesus. R.C. Sproul says,

The issue, as Paul sees it, is "either-or." Forget the dialectical "sort-of-both-and." Either life is meaningful, or it is not, and there can be meaning only if something follows life. If life ends in annihilation, then ultimate reality is the grave. If there is no resurrection, we can have no pretensions of human significance. [R.C Sproul, RENEWING YOUR MIND p. 136]

There is real evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead,

There is the empty tomb

There is the fact that the tomb was guarded by temple soldiers so no one could steal the body

There is the absence of a corpse (which, if produced would have stilled Christianity)

There are the grave clothes that were left in the grave as if the body disappeared

There is the change in the men who were discouraged and depressed

And, of course, there were the eyewitnesses
HE APPEARED TO

Paul tells the readers in Corinth that Jesus appeared to Peter, to the disciples, to his half-brother James, to the other apostles, and to over 500 people at one time.

And then Paul adds that Jesus also appeared to him.

And then he tells the Corinthians that, ***"most of them are still living."***

There was a time when people claimed that the story of Christ was made up centuries after Jesus.

But archaeology has shown this notion to be a fantasy.

The records are too close to the actual events.

Paul actually wrote this letter.

And the witnesses to the resurrection were still living.

Paul is inviting his readers to check it out.

He said; don't just take my word for it . . . talk to these witnesses yourself.

Let me give you an illustration.

For example: I could say that I played a round of golf at one of Jack Nicholas' course up in Dublin, Ohio. And I could also tell everyone that I played a round with Jack.

I could go further and say that I actually beat Jack in the round we played.

I could say these things but . . . Jack Nicholas is still alive!

He could be contacted to verify or discredit my story.

Of course, I didn't do that! But here's the point I'm trying to make

Paul urges people . . . he urges you . . . to check your facts!

Look at the evidence.
 Listen to the testimonies.
 Don't take his word for it.
 Don't take mine.
 Check it out for yourselves.

Look at the way the discouraged disciples turned into bold proclaimers of the resurrection.

Look at how these early believers were so convinced of the resurrection that they were willing to die tortuous deaths rather than deny the validity of their testimony.

Notice that no one from that day wrote a "tell all" book exposing any deception.

IMPLICATIONS

This is an important issue.

A very important issue.

The most important issue.

If these things are true there are many things we know.

What Jesus said about forgiveness is true.

Jesus and his followers made great claims about the significance of Jesus' death.

They said that He gave His life as a payment for our sin.

We saw that this was a bold claim but one that needed further verification.

The resurrection is that verification.

The man who said He was giving His life for us died and came back from the grave testifying that the sacrifice was sufficient.

You and I can be forgiven!

Isn't that staggering news.

Some of you believe that after all you have done, forgiveness is out of the question.

But the sacrifice of Jesus Christ can cover even what you have done in the past.

We can be made right with God!

Second, there is life beyond the grave.

And with that truth we learn that there is meaning to life now.

Life is not meaningless.

This is not all there is.

As we stand at a graveside we don't have to try to convince ourselves of what we know isn't true.

Instead, we comfort ourselves with what is obviously true based on the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

There is a future life.

There will be a reunion.

Third, the way to life goes through Christ.

Since Jesus is the only one who came back from the dead in this manner He becomes the most credible witness.

Jesus said that He alone holds the key to life eternal.

People don't like what Jesus said, but he didn't stutter. ***"I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."*** (John 14:6)

The conclusion is clear: Other religions are false.

Please understand what I am saying.

I am not saying that any church that is not exactly like ours is wrong.

I am saying that any church or religion that does not affirm that Jesus died, was buried, raised, and appeared to others . . . is false.

Any church or religion that affirms that you can get to Heaven in any way other than trusting in the work of Christ on our behalf is leading you away from the true God, not toward Him.

It doesn't matter how "fulfilled" a person may feel.

It doesn't matter how nice a person becomes.

It doesn't matter how much media influence or money a person has.

It doesn't matter how much you "like" a particular form of thought.

It doesn't even matter how sincere a person is.

If they teach that we can get to Heaven in any way other than through the crucified and risen Christ, they are agents of the Devil.

There is only One who returned from the grave.

There is only One who proved beyond any reasonable doubt that they were telling the truth. . .

and that One is Jesus Christ. He says **He is only way.**

I know this isn't popular with the world out there. I understand they would call me legalistic and too radical!

I know I may very well be branded as a fundamentalist extremist.

But I don't see where else I can go based on the evidence.
Jesus stands alone.

He was crucified, buried, risen, and seen by others.

You can't believe Him and also affirm other ways of salvation.

Finally, we must recognize that eternal judgment is also real.

I don't want to end on a "downer" but I have to bring out a final implication.

If we refuse to trust Christ . . .
if we turn away from God after He has reached out to us . . .
then we will face eternal judgment.

If God takes sin seriously enough to provide His only begotten Son Jesus as a sacrificial lamb on the cross . . .

He will certainly take action against those who will not accept His grace.

You can snicker,
you can deny it,
you can keep telling yourself that you're a pretty good fellow without Christ . . .
but you are headed for an eternity without God.

Jesus tells us that in the last days God will separate the sheep from the goats.

He will separate those who trusted and followed Christ from those who did not.

Those who embraced God's gift and those who ignored it.

The one group will be granted eternal life.

The other will given eternal torment and separation.

I don't in any way want to spoil your Sunday in church, but friends - Easter is not a game.

It is an event with the most serious consequences imaginable.

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Easter is not about candy, or bunnies, or even church for that matter.

Easter raises the most important question of your life . . .

On who or what will you build your hope of life beyond the grave?

There are lots of things that surround the celebration of Easter.

It's easy to get distracted.

But when all the excessive baggage is removed, it comes down to the simple truth that Jesus died, was buried, rose from the grave, and appeared to many witnesses.

But this isn't just information to recite . . . it's truth to build your life on.

You can shrug it off . . . but friend, listen to me, you do so to your peril.

I would encourage you to receive the message, to believe it, and to make it the reference point of everything else you do.

If you do, you will find forgiveness for your past, new life in the present, a relationship with God that is real and vital,

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and you will have a solid and sure hope beyond the grave.

So, now you have the truth, what you do with it is up to you.

Invitation:

One day I had to respond to the truth. I am so thrilled that I made that step to follow the Resurrected Lord.

Would you respond to Him this morning?