

1Corinthians 15:5-11
Resurrection"

"The Gospel's Power is the

1CO 15:5-11 "... he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 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. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 9 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. 10 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. 11 Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."

This portion of Scripture is a section which obviously deals with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But there's more here than meets the eye, and that has to do with the reason Paul mentions some of the proofs of the resurrection of our Lord.

It's not as though these believers in Corinth didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it appears that they were having a problem with the general resurrection of all believers. Paul spends this entire section dealing with Christ's resurrection which then leads to your bodily resurrection and mine.

It seems there were questions being raised by some Christians in Corinth as Paul makes the point in verse 35 of this chapter.

1CO 15:35 "But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"

And then he goes on after verse 35 to explain the difference between a corrupted physical body and a resurrection body which is like Christ's physical resurrection body, and is incorruptible and immortal for those who have trusted in the risen Lord for their salvation.

But what I find fascinating here is that Paul is like an attorney making the case with rock solid evidence that enables each believer in every age to know with certainty that what you believe is not some fairy-tale.

And what was foretold in the Scriptures actually did take place as Christ fulfilled those prophecies, not the least of which had to do with His resurrection from the dead three days after being put into the heart of the earth.

Imagine trying to sell this notion of the resurrection to someone and then having your enemies produce the body of Jesus. In fact, the resurrection of Christ was the nightmare the Jewish leaders tried to avoid. The last thing they needed was to have this Jesus tell all of Jerusalem that in three days after His death He will rise from the dead and then have it come true.

MAT 27:62-65 "The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64 So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." 65 "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."

The Sanhedrin understood the ramifications of having this word of Jesus appear to come true even if it was a deception. Again, if you can't produce the body and Christ's disciples tell everyone He has risen, this would cause chaos in Jerusalem and jeopardize the status of the Jewish leaders as the common folk want answers from them.

But, if they can make sure the body stays in the tomb there will be no question that this Jesus was none other than what they accused of being, and that is a deceiver.

Paul begins to explain that none of this was a deception and he's got the proof; the proof in the eye witnesses and the proof of his changed life from going about persecuting the church, to being a defender of Christ and His church in the time span of one day on the road to Damascus.

1 Corinthians 15:5 ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Here's the proof. Peter was the one who denied Jesus Christ three times in one night, where just before he had promised Jesus that he would never do such a thing.

MAT 26:31-35 "Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. 32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." 33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." 34 "I tell you the truth," *Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."* 35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same."

So, why does Paul mention Peter first? And notice that Paul identifies Peter by his Aramaic name, Cephas. Well, one of the things this does is to show the amazing grace our Lord has for us and Peter.

John MacArthur makes the point that "Peter had forsaken the Lord, but the Lord had not forsaken him. Christ did not appear to Peter because Peter deserved to see Him most, but perhaps Peter needed to see Him most."

Now we know that Peter was not the first person to see the risen Christ. That privilege went to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who went to the tomb early in the morning to finish the preparation of the body. But they were met by a startling sight. An angel met them at the tomb.

MAT 28:5-10 "The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." 8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

It was shortly after this incident that Peter first saw the risen Lord. But then Paul mentions a collective group he calls the twelve in our text. Now Paul knows that right after the resurrection there were only eleven of the original disciples of Christ, but this was a common expression designating which eleven; and this is the eleven which originally made up the twelve. This would

distinguish this unique group as, not just eleven disciples, but the disciples who were the apostles of Jesus Christ.

And so, now we've got these eleven eye witnesses together with the two Mary's who went down to the tomb. But Paul isn't through building his case for the risen Christ as he brings in more eye witnesses.

1CO 15:6 "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."

Keep in mind that after Jesus rose from the dead He stayed with the disciples for another 40 days before ascending back to the Father. I don't know if you've ever wondered why He did this, but part of the reason was to help establish the fact that He was alive and that it was common for Him to appear to the believers.

Imagine what a witnessing tool that would have been. Can you picture the conversation? "Yeah, I personally saw this Jesus who died on a cross last week. He really is alive." The other person says, "But I thought the Sanhedrin put that myth to bed by producing the body; didn't they put guards at the tomb?"

"You need to get your facts straight. The guards are fighting for their lives because they lost the body. Actually, the body isn't lost. If you hang out with me you'll see Jesus for yourself. He's alive and He is the Messiah we've been waiting for."

For forty days Jesus appeared to his disciples, and what Paul tells us here is that He actually appeared to over 500 disciples, or brethren, at one time. Where He appeared to them we're not told.

But since these people are all identified as brethren it may be very likely that they were all gathered for the common purpose of worshipping the Lord, maybe even on the Lord's Day. What better place to have so many believers gathered together than at a worship service.

And again, don't lose sight of what Paul is trying to accomplish here. He's verifying the facts with eye witnesses. If you were to take this case to a court of law, with these witnesses, the evidence would be indisputable.

In fact, in recent years, there have been a variety of prominent attorneys and judges and scholars who have actually tried to disprove Christ's resurrection from the text of Scripture. And in

every case where these people were intellectually honest with themselves they confirmed Christ's bodily resurrection, with some of them becoming believers.

Why? Because this evidence screams of this event actually happening in history. One contemporary scholar and critic of the resurrection did a painstaking study of the life of Christ and came away with the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world. You know him as Josh McDowell who wrote the book, "Evidence that Demands a Verdict."

If you've not read this book you need to buy it and read it. It's exciting stuff as he documents the reliability of our faith and the God in whom we trust for our salvation. He starts with how the bible was prepared, how we got the books of the bible we have. He moves to Jesus and the historical setting in which He lived and those historians outside of the church who spoke of him as a real person in history.

Josh McDowell does a section on the claims of Christ. I mean, Jesus made some pretty outrageous claims, from claiming to be the Messiah to actually being God Himself. The title of that chapter is "Lord, Liar, or Lunatic." And the rest of the book deals with all of the evidence of the actual resurrection and the prophecies dealing with Jesus. Good stuff.

But Paul doesn't have to go to the library to research all of this stuff, because he was there. In fact, he makes the point that these 500 brethren who saw the Lord at the same time were mostly all alive, although some had fallen asleep, or died.

The inference from Paul to these Corinthians is that if you have any doubt about the validity of the claims that Jesus rose bodily from the dead just ask these people, they're alive, available and willing to declare that Jesus is the Son of God who appeared to them.

Now, as I said earlier, part of the reason Jesus stuck around for 40 days was to show people that He was alive. But He wasn't some sort of phantom. He continued to carry on His earthly ministry during that 40 days as He spent time with His disciples and one of the main things He did was to continue His teaching ministry among them.

ACT 1:3-5 "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared

to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Before Jesus was crucified He spoke about the kingdom of God. How many times do we see Him saying to His disciples things like, "This is what the kingdom of God is like." And then He goes on to give a parable about the Kingdom of God.

And of course that precious passage which dealt with the disciples keeping the children from Him.

MAR 10:14-15 "... He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, *for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*. 15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

And now, what is Jesus doing after His resurrection? He's continuing to teach His disciples about the Kingdom of God. But imagine what a difference a resurrection makes in making the Kingdom come alive as Jesus not only tells them but shows them this future life for them in the Kingdom of God as He is the life.

These 500 brethren can bear witness to the fact that just as our Lord appeared to His disciples on many occasions, they saw Him for who He was; the same Jesus who went down into the tomb is the same Jesus who came out, only now with a glorified physical body.

We're told that He ate with His disciples. They touched Him as did Thomas who initially didn't believe He rose from the dead. His reaction to that event was to worship Jesus Christ, as he said, my Lord and my God.

These 500 who saw the risen Christ were not delusional as some have made them out to be. There is actually a theory among some psychologists that these 500 wanted to see Jesus so bad, that they missed Him so much, that they all entered into one great hallucination at the same time. It's called the hallucination theory.

But if this theory is correct then your faith and mine is based upon a vision or a hallucination. Josh McDowell quoting Gresham Machen says that if true "the Christian Church is founded upon a pathological experience of certain persons in the first century of

our era. It means that if there had been a good neurologist for Peter and the others to consult with, there never would have been a Christian Church."

But can we trust the witnesses of the first century? Absolutely. Simply because we're separated from them by some 2,000 years we have so much documentation regarding the resurrection that it transcends time. We have thousands of reliable documents which make up the New Testament which all verify the truth.

In comparison we have just a handful of documents, for example, which are in existence that make up the writings of Homer or Plato. And yet, the world of scholars don't even give their writings a second thought as being authentic.

We have eye witnesses who are placed at the scene of the event and whom Paul is saying to the Corinthians, go ask them yourselves if these things are so. In fact, Paul says, just ask me. I also saw the risen Christ along with some others.

1CO 15:7-8 "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."

He appeared to James; the same James who is known as the Lord's brother. Again, this is a classic example of an antagonist who did not believe the works of Christ, but after seeing with his own eyes, he becomes a believer and spends his life advancing the kingdom of God through the gospel of our Lord.

You might remember that the family of Jesus felt that maybe He was a little off; certainly His brothers did.

JOH 7:2-5 "But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, 3 Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5 ***For even his own brothers did not believe in him.***"

Imagine having your own family not believe the claims you make and even the miracles you perform. At this particular time before the resurrection they still don't believe He is the Son of God and Messiah.

And yet, in His grace, the risen Jesus comes to His brother James. What a heartfelt reunion that must have been. Just days before you

saw what they did to your brother as He hung on that cross, bloodied and beaten and abused. You saw His body taken down.

‘He’s dead, my brother Jesus is dead. I couldn’t accept His claims, but He didn’t deserve this. He was still my brother and I loved Him.’

Imagine how he grieved as he tried to comfort his mother Mary recounting the good times they had as a family and how He had only done kind and loving things for them and the community.

And in his grief Jesus appears to him. ‘James, how ya doin’? I’m back. Tell our mother everything is great and My work is complete and I love you all very much.’ Look for Me again in a few days because I’m here for the next forty.’ ‘In fact, I have every intention of seeing Mary, who is blessed among women.’

It is this same James who would later write of the risen Lord, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." (JAM 1:1)

Imagine the witness that would be. The very brother of Jesus who didn’t believe, all of sudden does a 180 degree turn to serve Jesus, the Lord.

In fact, this is the same testimony of Paul as he says, "and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 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." (1CO 15:8 -9)

It’s the apostle Paul who is probably one of the best evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What would turn someone around from trying to destroy the church one day, and the next desiring to love and serve this Jesus he had seen as a heretic, a deceiver and impostor? Paul was no friend of the church before he met Jesus.

ACT 8:1-3 "***And Saul was there, giving approval to [Stephen’s] death.*** On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But ***Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.***"

ACT 9:1-2 "Meanwhile, ***Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.*** He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if

he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."

Paul was not exaggerating when he says to these Corinthians that he does not even deserve to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God. He didn't simply write bad things about the church. He didn't simply call Christians bad names. He participated in the death of Stephen and possibly others either directly or indirectly. Saul was a bad man.

But what he saw on the road leading into Damascus, where he was going to arrest Jews who embraced this false Messiah, was the Messiah Himself. Remember the incident as Paul records it?

ACT 9:3-6 "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

I can guarantee you that Saul would never have taken the course he did in being the apostle to the Gentiles, putting his life on the line many many times for our Lord, if he thought for a moment that he was hallucinating this appearance of Jesus Christ.

He saw the risen Lord. We can trust Paul's testimony. You and I have the benefit of having a man who would have destroyed the church and yet in the twinkling of an eye was confronted by the risen Savior and then committed his life to Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

Paul identifies himself in our text as one untimely or abnormally born. The Greek word here for abnormally born was a term used for an aborted baby or a still born child. And in a sense Paul was one who saw himself as being born without life, while claiming to be a servant of God as a Pharisee.

But as John MacArthur points out, "the use of the term in the sense of an ill-timed birth, too early or too late, seems to fit Paul's thought best. He came too late to be one of the twelve."

And yet, in His grace Jesus Christ had come to give him life and a new birth to a living hope and the responsibility of being that special servant, that apostle of Jesus to the world.

He knew he didn't deserve it any more than we deserve it and yet he gloried in the fact that he was shown grace and love and mercy from the hand of the One he used to persecute as he persecuted Christ's church.

1CO 15:10-11 "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. 11 Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."

What did the resurrection of Jesus Christ produce in Paul's life? It produced life, hope, forgiveness and a purpose for the rest of his life in this world as he took his responsibilities very seriously as unto the Lord. In other words, this grace was not without effect. The effect was a new creation in Paul's life.

And his appreciation was so great that he worked as being a servant of Christ all the more. Just look at the life of Paul as he traveled the world to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to far-away places. Look at the bulk of the letters of the New Testament. They come from the hand of Paul.

And yet he doesn't boast of anything except the One who met him on the road to Damascus that day and stopped Paul from going down a road to destruction and arrested him as He met him with grace and love and turned him around to a life of serving the risen Christ, as he served the church of Christ he once persecuted.

Paul's goal is always the gospel.

1CO 9:22-23 "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."

But, the gospel has no power without the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and Paul would not have wasted his time had he thought this Jesus was someone other than God Himself.

Whether he brings this message of hope or someone else does, it makes no difference to Paul as long as they bring the true gospel message to the world which saves, as people embrace the Savior by faith.

1CO 15:11 "Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."

These Corinthians believed the message. But with their belief they must show themselves to have a new life as they are new creatures with a new nature. And this is the message for us as well. If we have met the risen Lord then we too have a resurrection life in Christ.

To have a resurrection life is to have a life with purpose and power to the glory of God. May we never forget why we've been saved. We've been saved unto eternal life, with the operative word being life in a future kingdom with Christ being our King of kings and Lord of lords.

Let's live this life in the power of the Holy Spirit and may we live with the same conviction Paul had who saw the risen Lord.

And may we understand that the same risen Lord who appeared to the disciples and Paul some 2,000 years ago is the same risen Lord who came to us and said, "come follow Me." May that be our goal; to follow and then lead others to the great Shepherd of the sheep who lives forever and ever.