

**Easter Sunday (2024)**

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1 Corinthians 15:1-11

TLC, Keene, NH

*Of First Importance*<sup>1</sup>

*“For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, (and) that he was raised on the third day.”*

**Introduction**

So, what would you say is *the* most important thing in your life? Something that gets to the heart and soul of who you are, or what you do?

What is of “first importance has us coming back again and again because we can’t live without it.” It spur us on. It fuels our reason to live. (Nielsen, *CPR*, 28:2, 27)

So, what’s *that* important to you?

**Main Point:** Into a sea of needs, and our *greatest* need – to be delivered from sin, death and hell – Jesus comes, crucified, died, buried. Where, deliverance cannot be ours without that *greatest* chapter of the Gospel story – Jesus’ resurrection from the dead! Yes, let the Easter people of God find their firm foundation on this blessed hope.

WHAT’S OFTEN IMPORTANT IS NOT NEAR AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT IS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE: CHRIST CRUCIFIED AND RAISED FOR US ALL.

Amen.

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A blessed Easter! Where, of course, every Sunday is now Easter Sunday. Yet, Easter Sunday “is different, because it proclaims in a more pronounced way that ‘*this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God ... who was crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men, was raised up by God, thus loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for death to hold Him.*’ (Acts 2:23-24).” (Carr, *CPR*, 28:2, 29)

It is this that Paul brings us to in our text this morning.

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<sup>1</sup> Title, general outline, along with personal reflections drawn from Nielsen, *CPR*, 19:2, 27-28.

<sup>1</sup> ***Now I (would) remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached*** (“good news-ed”<sup>2</sup>) ***to you, which you received, in which you stand,*** <sup>2</sup> ***and by which you are being saved,*** *if you hold fast to the word I preached* (“gospelled”) *to you—unless you believed in vain* (casually, inattentively, which is tantamount to not at all<sup>3</sup>).

The Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection is *the* most important matter under heaven. It is *the* reason we come back to this place, to this festival, year after year. Nothing else. “Not a building. Not a pastor. Not money. Jesus, alive and active among us is what brings us back.” (Nielsen, 27)

Where, Paul is adamant, passionate, unflinching on this point:

<sup>3</sup> ***For I delivered to you as of first importance*** *what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,* <sup>4</sup> ***that he was buried, that he was raised*** (as He still lives<sup>4</sup>) ***on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures ...***

Do you know when this truth becomes *really real* for me? When I stand in front of a casket and see the lifeless body of someone I’ve dearly loved. Here, we come to know and believe that this is not a pipe dream. It is not the end. For *all* who have died in the faith, I *will* – we *will* – see them again!

But there is also a present reality to Jesus’ resurrection as well! That because Jesus is risen, our lives are given a meaning and purpose *now*. Each day becomes a day teeming with life. Each day becomes a day to say with David, “*This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*” (Psalm 118:24)

Though, I’ll be the first to admit, there are some days I’d rather not even get out of bed. Where, I can just imagine what it must have been like for Peter and the others, who hitched their hopes to a Man now laid in a borrowed tomb.

Perhaps you’re feeling that today – even for all of the festivity and mirth. Where, after we walk out of this service this morning, it won’t take long for things to get back to normal. Life will seek to take back over and push the importance and joy of this day to the side.

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<sup>2</sup> Carr, *CPR*, 28:2, 29

<sup>3</sup> Carr, 29

<sup>4</sup> The other actions – “died” and “buried” are completed actions (aorist), while “was raised” is in the perfect tense, completed with ongoing effect (see Carr, 30)

Where, the culture we swim in isn't much help. Taxes and a contentious election are just around the corner. There are memorial/funeral services to plan, estates to be settled. There are children still to be raised, and doctors to visit. As for coming back to God's house next week, or the week after, the luster of this day will likely have already worn off for many, as we return to "normal."

But *then* ... something brings us back! Resurrection! Alleluia!

<sup>5</sup> **He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.** <sup>6</sup> **Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.** <sup>7</sup> **Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.** <sup>8</sup> **Last of all, as to one untimely born ("miscarried, stillborn"<sup>5</sup>), he appeared also to me.** <sup>9</sup> *For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

Pastor/author Ben Patterson once wrote of a tribe in the jungles of East Asia. A missionary showed them a movie about Jesus, the first time they'd heard of Him. The people were totally engaged, so much so that when Jesus, whom they had seen heal the sick and be adored by children, was beaten by jeering soldiers, they began to shout and demand the outrage stop. The missionary had to stop the film and tell them there *was* more to the story. Whereupon, restarting the movie, he had to stop it again when Jesus was nailed to the cross. "There's more," he said, as the crowd wept and wailed loudly Jesus' death. The movie was restarted again: this time, though, the scene was the resurrection. At which, pandemonium broke out. A party erupted. Deafening jubilation. People were dancing and clapping each other on the back. Christ is risen indeed! It was if they were eyewitnesses themselves – for the first time. (Adapted from Patterson, *LeadershipJournal.net*, April 13, 2004, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/leader/newsletter/2004/cln40413.html>)

Jesus resurrection changes everything, where into the fray, and into the midst of our flighty, forgetful, and over-extended lives, the resurrected Savior appears! Where, if this is your first time hearing this, then today is a *really* good day! I'd love to hear your story. Let's talk! Over coffee or a beer, this week or the next. I'll buy. I'll even throw in a donut or a pretzel! Your choice!

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<sup>5</sup> Here, Paul may have had in mind some particular instance of this, or alluding to Numbers 12:2, in which Moses' sister Miriam is stricken with leprosy when she and Aaron challenged Moses' authority. Aaron compares her to a "stillborn child," possibly resonating "with Paul's awareness of his own rebelliousness against God." (Hutson, *Feasting on the Word (C)*, 1:331; from Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 328-29)

For the day the resurrected Savior met me was the best day of my life! Where, for all who encounter Him, every day they get to live in the power and presence of Jesus becomes a day of purpose and hope, a day to come back, again and again, to the heart and core of who we become and what we would do with our lives.

Yes, how would “Jesus become of first importance when tomorrow or Thursday seems like just another day?” (Nielsen, 28)

✚ When we return again and again to our first love. Not content to simply live on the memory of what we’ve heard or received, we will want to know more. We will want to go deeper and deeper still into the love of God.

Yes, after that first Easter morning, the early church didn’t simply live on the memory of Jesus appearing to them. They continued to come back, again and again to confession and forgiveness ... to prayer ... to hospitality ... to attending to God’s Word ... again and again to service to others in His name.

What else does the Holy Spirit invite us to do?

✚ To rejoice to return to and recite what is most important: “I believe ... in Jesus, Christ, His only Son, our Lord ... [that on] the third day He rose again from the dead” ... allowing the Gospel story shape our own.

Yes, we will seek to baptize children in the name of this Jesus. We will long to receive the Lord’s gifts at His Table of grace. We will revel in the joy of attending to God’s Word, all the while growing up, in and out in our faith. We will continue to sing – full-throated – our hymns, and pray our prayers in faith. We will continue in the joy of our fellowship together as we eat, pray and love as a Church.

*<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we preach (“announce” the Good News) and so you believed.*

✚ Finally, by the grace of God that makes me what I am, and makes you what you are, we will live for Him, sharing Jesus and the life He has poured into us. Yes, never tire asking yourself “how can the difference that Christ has made in your life [become] a real and compelling story for others, [one] that touches their own deepest needs?” (Jones, *Feasting on the Word (C)*, 1:331)

Wherein, “Whenever Christ turns a life around, heals a marriage, transforms a bitter heart, forgives a sinner, teaches a fearful person to love, or shows a greedy person how to give, there is a witness ready to take the stand to tell the good news of God’s grace.” (Galloway, *Feasting on the Word (C)*, 1:330)

So, “whether you’re at work or school or with your family or in the car or wherever is so important that day, it’s not just another day. It’s another day with Jesus. It’s another day he has made.” (Nielsen, 28)

### Conclusion

In a variation of the story I shared on Good Friday, the owner of another drive-through coffee business in southwest Portland, Oregon, was surprised one morning to have one of her customers not only pay for her own mocha but also for the coffee of the person in the car behind her. It put a smile on the owner’s face as he told the next customer that the car ahead had paid for her drink. That customer was so pleased that she paid for the drink of the person in the next car. That started a chain, each person paying for the coffee of the person in the next car. This went on for two hours and 27 customers.

That’s how the message of Easter spread, one passing it on to another.

Wherein, we rejoice again this day – but not only this day – but also for the rest of our lives, rejoicing to join our voices with the Church of God this day, saying:

*“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”*  
(Isaiah 26:9)

WHAT’S OFTEN IMPORTANT IS NOT NEAR AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT IS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE: CHRIST CRUCIFIED AND RAISED FOR US ALL.

Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

*Amen.*

*[Friday E-mail:]*

*“The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-ling for you and not for me:  
For me the angels sing-a-ling-a-ling, they’ve got the goods for me.  
Oh! Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling? Oh! Grave thy victory?  
The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-ling for you and not for me.”*

Such is little ditty that can be traced back to British airmen, who flew their missions during WW I. It’s made other appearances, even in an early Salvation Army hymnal, but given that incredibly dark period of world history, one can readily see why St. Paul’s words on the resurrection were in the forefront of many people’s minds. The hope of the resurrection was the *only* thing to provide faith and hope in the face of death.

It’s what Holy Week is all about, as the Lord would bring us to relive and retell that of which is of *“first importance.”* As St. Paul exclaims in **1 Corinthians 15:1-11** – the Epistle reading for this coming Easter Sunday – *“For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, (and) that he was raised on the third day.”* Arguably, this is *the most important* News in the entirety of Scripture, one upon which our faith and life – even our death – is founded upon. As Paul will go on to exclaim in this pivotal chapter, *“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised ... your faith is futile and you are still in your sins ... (Indeed) if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”*

But guess what? If you haven’t heard – spoiler alert – Jesus is, in fact, raised from the dead. I know, for many this is nothing more than a myth. Or, for others it is news not worthy of considering, or can easily be dismissed. But there is scriptural evidence, eyewitness evidence, documentary evidence, and socio-cultural evidence that Jesus truly rose from the dead. And then, there is faith, borne in us by water and the Word, confirmed time and time again in the lives of those who have received Christ as their Savior. That Jesus rose from the dead is true!

So as we enter into the heart of Holy Week – Good Friday, and Easter Sunday – may I invite you to do three things? **FIRST**, return often to your first love. Not content to live on the memory, seek to go deeper still into the love of God. **SECOND**, rejoice to make that bold confession again and again, allowing the Gospel story to shape your own. **FINALLY**, never tire asking yourself “how can the difference that Christ has made in your life [become] a real and compelling story for others that touches their own deepest needs?”

The hope of the resurrection most assuredly has brought us hope – confirming our faith. It would seek to bring hope still! But only as it becomes of *“first importance”* – not just for a day, but throughout the entirety of your life. SYOS