

Happy Easter. It's been a while since I've seen some of you...maybe since Christmas. It's good to see you back. It's like a family reunion, twice a year we get together. If you have your Bibles, grab them. We're going to be in 1 Corinthians 15 tonight. Now, we are within the framework of a certain culture. And what I mean by that is you and I for the most part dwell in the suburbs of Dallas/Ft. Worth. We find ourselves within the confines of the Bible Belt, and there's all these kind of oddities and kind of weirdness to a life in suburbia, Bible Belt, D/FW area. And as a pastor within that cultural context, I find myself in the same conversations over and over and over and over again when it comes to spirituality. Like, people want to talk traditional vs. what we would call ourselves, more missional and focuses. They want to talk music. They want to talk about dress, whether it's right or wrong for me to be wearing blue jeans right now, whether this angers the Lord or not if we should wear hats or not wear hats, how loud should the music be. You know, you have to deal with weird statements like, "Well, I want my kids to know the hymns, and they don't know the hymns." In the end, I want my kids to know Jesus. I don't care what song they're singing. I end up getting into these questions about whether beer or wine is sinful whether it's not. I always try to be really honest: light beer is sinful, regular beer is fine...according to the Scriptures. We get into whether we're allowed to see certain movies or not. I always end up once a week, no matter how hard I try to find it, over a cup of hot tea, talking about the end times. And I try to be honest: I don't know. I know He's coming back. I know I want to live today like I actually believe that, but if you get too deep outside of that, you're going to get into a lot of conjecture. And so, we end up talking about that often. I end up talking a lot about philosophy of ministry in terms of small groups and Sunday school and why we do them. And on and on and on it goes. Eldership vs. deaconship vs. staff led. We're in the Bible Belt, this is what we do. I'll even find, "Hey, what do you think about this church? What do you think about that church?" Like, everybody's been wounded by some church around here. If you stay here long enough, we'll light you up too, but that's a part...everybody's sinful. You're not going to find a non sinful place. It's going to happen. Wherever you gather sinners, redeemed or unredeemed, sin happens. They'll try to bait you, "Did you hear what such and such is doing? Hmm?" That is, "Tell me your dislike for this. I'm open. You can do that with me. You can maliciously gossip under the guise of the kingdom. Let's do this." This is what I find myself in. And then, if the seminary guys get through the filter that we've built to try to avoid them, I end up having to talk Calvinism vs. Arminianism and I end up talking gifts, whether the gifts are dead or whether the gifts are alive and well. And this is what we do, because if you're a churchman in the Bible Belt, these are kind of consuming ideas. I mean this is what we talk about, "How do we...My church doesn't do Sunday school...Well, beer is evil, it'll kill you..."

And we love to get together and talk about what in the end, although important, are peripheral things. They're not the main thing. In fact, in some of those instances, they're so far down the line, they're not even numbered. So, what's the main thing? What is, as the apostle Paul will soon tell us, what is of first importance? Because I think that if you get the main thing down, then there's all this grace all over the place. If you get the main thing down, then all of a sudden, there's a lot of grace and there's a lot of freedom and there's a lot of friendships vs. non- friendships and a lack of grace and a whole lot of judgment. Yeah, if we could just get the main thing down, then all of a sudden, maybe all the other things aren't as important. Maybe I'm wrong, but maybe I'm right.

Let's get into 1 Corinthians 15:1-2. "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance..." Everything else gets melted away here because

Paul, who wrote 75% of the New Testament, the guy that wrote this book that we're in, is going, "Of everything I wrote, of everything I talked about, of everything I unpacked for you, let me give you what's of first importance. Let me give you what you can't mess up. If you mess this up, everything else is off. Even if it's right, you're off in how you operate in it. You've got to get this right." Okay, so here we go. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures." Now, if you've been here the last four or five weeks, this is all we've talked about. And these are kind of strange ideas if you're a non-churchman. Sin...I mean, what is sin? What is it not? Who are we to tell you what sin is versus what sin is not. Let me give you the best definition of sin that I know of in light of who God is. Sin is, in the end, the elevation of anything other than God to ultimate. That's sin. And we've talked through it like this over the last four or five weeks. There is a creator God that made everything. He not only made everything but is ultimate aware of everything. So He's aware of everything at the macro level. He knows where every star is, He knows the orbits around the solar system that planets travel, He knows the depths of the seas, He knows the height of every mountain in every mountain range on every planet in every solar system in every corner of the universe. He knows it all at the macro level, but He also knows it all at the micro level. Every cell, every atom, every bit of mitosis, He knows it all. He knows every thought, He knows every event, He knows every event at every level of happening and how those events play into other events and lead into other events and other events at every level of those events happening and how it flows throughout all eternity. And He never has a headache over any of it. And I got a little one just saying it. And He made everything...everything, air, ocean, stars, sex, marriage, children, family, everything for the glory of His name, to be gloried in, to be enjoyed and to be worshiped. That's the reason for everything. Now, here's sin. Let's talk about sin. Sin is, at any moment, when you take things given by God for the worship of God and make those things ultimate and therefore glory in them rather than in what they were given for. So in the end, sin is when I say, "Money is what I'm after. It's what I'm all about. It's what I'm going to get. It's what my life's about. It's the air I breathe. It's what I want. It's the sole purpose my existence." Money is not intrinsically evil, but by making money ultimate, you've fallen into sin. We can do the same thing with sex, we can do the same thing with family, we can do the same thing with marriage. Those things are not ultimate. They're secondary, given to produce praise.

So, what's God's just and right response when we take His creation and we take the emotions He gave us and the passions He gave us and the love He gave us and the vitality He gave us and instead of laying those things on Him, we put it on a sports team? First of all, how infinitely dumb do you look in the universe? Like when you're nervous before the game, when you're angry during, when you cry afterwards. I mean, in the scope of the universe, you're kind of looking dumb. I was reading a great book this week called "Death by Suburb." If you haven't got it, look it up. It's a phenomenal book. And in that book, he says, "Soccer is dumb when your wife is dying of cancer." How perpetually ignorant do we look when death is coming for us, inevitably coming for us and we're spending every hour of every day accumulating trinkets and TV channels? I'm not saying there's anything wrong with trinkets. I have some. I like TV channels. They're not wrong and sinful; they just are when they're ultimate. Yeah, this is what sin is. And surely, everybody loves to push back and go, "Oh, who are you to say what sin is?" I'm nobody to say what sin is. I'm just trying to tell you what the Bible says about what sin is and how it works. And listen, if you don't want to listen to me, at least listen to your own culture that screams out at the top of its lungs that something's intrinsically broken about it. I mean, can't you go buy any one of a thousand self-help books right now? Is that not our culture going, "Something's broken," and then, just the irony of ironies, going, "You can fix it" despite the fact that we haven't been able to?

Alright, so Jesus comes and dies over this, our belittlement of God. You and I belittle God. We're like Shaquille O'Neil celebrating a dunked basketball. It's just madness, taking what He gave us naturally and glorying in ourselves in it. What's God's just and right response to this? Well, the Scriptures say He creates hell, and hell is a worthy response to the belittlement of God's name in the universe. But hell is insufficient in that it does not create worshipers. No one is ever excited about justice who's guilty. No, they love mercy. So, hell's insufficient. But the problem is how can God love

and forgive men and women who consistently and constantly belittle His name? Would that not further belittle His name? The answer is yes. So, He sets into order, from the very beginning, this Levitical system, this Day of Atonement, these two lambs. This one gets stabbed in the throat and drained of its blood. And then this other one gets prayed over and all the sins of Israel go on this goat and they release it into the wilderness and call it the scapegoat. And then, God in the flesh, Jesus shows up on the scene and has His blood drained and carries away the sins of the world. So, what's of first importance? The sacrificial, ransoming, expiating, propitiating cross of Jesus Christ.

But he doesn't stop there; he keeps going. "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, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." Now, here's something very intriguing. Mainly, when you hear the cross of Jesus taught, it just kind of stops there. But it doesn't stop there when New Testament writers address it. They don't address the cross of Jesus Christ and the resurrection as two separate instances but rather one in the same event. Over and over again, you'll hear about the cross and the resurrection, the death and the resurrection. These ideas are inseparably linked to one another. Christ died on the cross, absorbed the wrath of God, carried away the shame of mankind, was buried...this is the idea that He actually died. There's a lot of National Geographic and Discovery Channel speculation about whether He was dead or not. I still contend that when you get beat nearly to death and hung on a cross for at least eight hours, lungs filling up with blood, and then get stabbed in the heart underneath your ribcage by a spear, you don't pop up two days later. I'm just contending that you don't just show up two days later going, "Touch My side. Go ahead, feel My hands, Thomas." I'm just contending. Maybe they had some kind of miracle herb. Now, here's what I don't want to do. I don't want to get into apologetics and go, "Let me show you why the resurrection had to happen." I don't want to do that because I don't have time, but I'll let Paul defend the resurrection of Jesus. He does it well. Verse 5, "...and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." By the way, this is an unbelievably interesting list here, and we'll talk more about that in a second. "...and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep." That's the New Testament way of saying they died. Verse 7, "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." Now, this is a very interesting list of men and women who are still alive who saw the resurrected Jesus, and he's offering this as evidence that He did indeed rise from the dead.

And as we go down this list, you'll start seeing what I mean by "here's his defense." Peter, one of the twelve, never figures it out while Jesus is here. The one moment that he gets encouraging news from Christ, four verses later, Jesus calls him the devil. He is a constant coward, and the one shot he had to fight, he even blew that and just cut off a guy's ear off instead of actually ending something. He talks big, never delivers and in the end, is an outright coward. A few hours before the arrest of Christ, he says, "Even if I must go to death with You, I will not betray You." Jesus pats his head and goes, "Give me a break. I'm God in the flesh. By tomorrow morning, man...three times." And Peter argues with Him. Now, this is what I mean when "Peter, what in the world's going on?" I mean, Peter has already said, "God has told me You are the Messiah, You are God in the flesh." So, he's arguing with God over this? "Not me? What do You know...Messiah?" So sure enough, three betrayals. "I do not know Him...I do not know Him...I do not know Him." What could have possibly happened that turns this frightened, arrogant man into the father of the church, who in the end is no longer afraid but allows himself to be crucified upside down? But that's not even the amazing one on this list to me. The amazing one on this list to me is James. Why would that be amazing? It's His brother! It's Jesus' brother. And not only that, it's the brother who thought He was crazy a little earlier on in the game. He shows up and tries to grab hold of Jesus because he thinks He's crazy. What could have possibly happened to James that, in one hand, he's going, "My brother's crazy" and now all of a sudden, he's worshipping Him as God, leading the church in Jerusalem and is willing to be martyred over this? I mean, what miraculous event could have made him go, "It was true. I thought You were just being a punk?" And then, I think the other big one here is he's going, "Listen, there's 500 who saw Him. They're still alive. Go check it out. I'm not making this up." They're still alive. This is eyewitness stuff.

So, we've talked at length about what's occurring in the cross of Jesus. We've done that for four or five weeks now. I want us to talk tonight, just for a few minutes, about what's occurring in the resurrection of Jesus and then what that means for you and me. So, I want you to flip through a couple of places with me. Go over to Romans 4, we'll pick it up in verse 23, "But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord..." So there's the resurrection. "...who was delivered up for our trespasses..." Okay, so listen. Christ went to the cross because of our sins, but listen to the next line. "...and raised for our justification." At the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find evidence that all of the wrath of God toward sinful man was absorbed in Christ. There's not going to be another Jesus, there's no further need for sacrifice, that's Hebrews 9. Jesus says in the cross, "It is finished." Christ being resurrected is where we find our justification before God, right standing before God, not in doing moral acts, not in attending church, not in not cussing, not in not drinking light beer. I could go on and on and on here, but you do not stand justified in front of God because of any good works. You stand justified in front of God Almighty by the grace of God, justified by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this is what we've got to grasp. I think people think I'm bitter towards the church. I'm not bitter towards the church, I'm a pastor. Do you know how ironic that would be? "I hate the church." "What do you do?" "I'm a pastor." No, I'm not bitter against the church; I just think somehow we got off, and there's all this talk about morality and people are conforming themselves to these moral codes, but they don't know Jesus. Who cares? It's the resurrection of Christ that justifies. It's why it's so important, that's why it's so big. It proves that all the wrath of God was poured out. It's gone. For the elect, it's gone. There is no more wrath. There's none. So Jesus sees you and He's like, "My son, my daughter, perfect, spotless, blameless."

Okay, let's keep going. Go over to Acts 2. This is on the same line. We'll pick it up in verse 36. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." In the end, the Jews were looking for the promised Messiah, that from Genesis 12, God set into motion that there was going to be an atoning for sin that would bless the entire world, that the glory of God was going to transcend on every corner all over the Earth and it was coming in this Messiah. And God raises Him from the dead to say, "It is finished." This is it, the Messiah. There won't be another one coming, there isn't a third testament about to be written. This is it. The Messiah is here. Salvation has come. All those Old Testament passages of people walking in darkness have seen a great light, the suffering servant, Psalm 22, all of it points to this Jesus.

Let's go one more and then we'll get into what does this mean for you and me. Let's go to Acts 26. I'm trying to just hang out right here. Here we go, verse 22, "To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass..." So, what did Moses and the prophets say would come to pass? "...that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles." The resurrection of Christ shows us the fulfillment and the power of the sovereignty of God and that He keeps His promises to His children.

Alright, but the things we're walking through here, they're kind of ambiguous in their framework. I mean, in the end, we're going, "Okay, He raises Him and we're justified," and there are some big theological words there but what does it mean for the fact that you and me as we brave the cold tonight, get in our car and head home? What does it mean for us? Turn with me to Ephesians 1. Now, these next two texts that we're going to be in are just unreal for those who will hear. And I know not all of you are going to hear. Like I know some of you are here tonight just because it's Easter and this is what you do. I know not everyone's going to hear this, but I know some will. So hear this. We'll pick it up in verse 15. "For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the

saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might..." What great might is working in us? The same great might, verse 20, "...that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." Now, try to get here with me. The same power, the same supernatural, God-saturated power that healed the wounds of Jesus and resurrected Him from the dead is now at work in those who believe. In the deepest parts of our being, the Holy Spirit of God, the power of God is at work restoring and breaking down and rebuilding and healing wounds and replacing broken parts and putting together fractured bodies. The same power that was at work in Christ is now at work in us. It's at work in us. Who? All of us? No, not all of us. Those who believe. Because most people don't run there. They run to Barnes & Noble and they get whatever book Oprah told us to get and try to become whole people. You do not intrinsically have anything within yourself to fix yourself. Believe me now or believe me later, after 25-30 years of struggling with some hidden, secret, cyclical sin, you're not going to be able to do it. You don't have the power to raise unto life that which is dead. And all of us, according to Ephesians 2, are born broken. I know this because my son bites us. Everyone always thinks that's funny, but in the end, my son's going, "I'm frustrated. What's the answer? Physical violence is the answer." Where did that come from? We don't watch violent cartoons in my house. Where did that come from? Where does my son intrinsically get, "I will inflict pain on someone for depriving me of what I want?" He's got a wicked little heart. I love him. I would lay down my life for him. We had to call an ambulance for him a couple of weeks ago because of a febrile seizure; I was sobbing and pleading with Christ on high. I am crazy in love with him. He's got a wicked little heart, he needs to be redeemed. I'm begging Christ for it. Because my daughter thinks she's worthy of everything. "I want that...I want that...Get me that...Give me that...I should be able to have it...I want that now...Give me that now." Where did that selfishness come from? Now Lauren and I, we don't have the perfect marriage, we've got a good marriage and a strong marriage and a marriage that we serve one another. I'm fasting from coffee, I'm getting up and making her coffee going, "Here, take it. Get out of my face." I want to serve her; she serves me back. My kid is not learning that from us. Now, she is learning some wicked things from us, but I won't talk about those tonight. Where does her selfishness come from? She's born broken. You're not going to be able to fix it. Your lust, you're not going to be able to fix it. Your bitterness, you're not going to be able to fix it. Your rage, anger, that stuff that's been following you around, those deviances that have been following you around, you don't possess the power of life and death, you can't resurrect anything. Christ can. It's why we don't celebrate us; it's why we continually celebrate Him. Because we can't. That's the mantra. And I know some of you hear on TV a different mantra. I promise you, they're the unsilent minority. Anyone who boasts in themselves is a liar. We boast in the cross and the cross alone. The same power that is at work in raising Christ from the dead is at work in me and at work in all who believe. It's such a great promise. I wish we'd run to it more often.

Alright, one more. Let's go over to Romans 8. We'll pick it up in verse 33. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." Now, did you just hear that? I could preach on that verse for eight weeks. He goes, "Who's going to bring a charge against God's elect when it's not their behavior that justifies them but God alone?" Man, that'll preach. Verse 34, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." That is a phenomenal text. Not only is all the power of the resurrection now at work in those who believe, but now for those who believe, because of the resurrection, there is not condemnation for us and nothing can separate us from Christ. Now, I'll tell you why that's such good news. Growing up in church, I feel like I got lied to a lot, because I thought they gave me this picture of perfection that was supposed to occur as soon as I said that

little mantra and got baptized. And so, I came up and I grabbed the hand and I repeated, "Dear Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner. Please forgive me. Amen." and I was baptized. And I was loving the Lord. But what happens when you love the Lord and there's still this lust in your heart that kind of haunts you a little bit? What do you do then? Because where I was, I didn't even feel it was safe to talk about that because everybody was so busy pretending that they didn't struggle with that. Like, everybody else just got saved and fluttered about in Shekinah glory all of the rest of the days of their life and I was all stuck in the mud. It's like, "When do I get my wings?" What happens when you fall in love with Jesus but there's still some bitterness there? What happens when you fall in love with Jesus but you still have all these issues? See, the told me that I wouldn't have those issues anymore once I got saved. I mean, that was the whole premise and framework of the gospel! "Get saved, because then you won't..." And I got saved and kept on doing. So then where am I supposed to go? Because apparently, Jesus doesn't work for me. Praise Christ for Romans 8. He goes, "Oh, no no no no. We'll work through this, but I'm not letting you go in the meantime. Oh, we'll get there. I started this; I'll finish this. If you need any reference points, check out Genesis 12 and how I fulfill it in the resurrection of Christ. I'll finish it. I started it; I'll be faithful to finish. Don't give up. Keep walking, keep pressing in, keep confessing. Find God loving, Christ exalting believers and do life with them. Get help, get guidance but don't give up. I'll heal you. And I won't let you go in the interim. I won't let you go. There is no one who can condemn you. I don't, and if I don't, no one can. Who'll even bring a charge against you? You're Mine. What court could they possibly charge you in? Everything's Mine." You know what He's talking about? He's talking about those voices inside of us that constantly condemn us. "Aw, you can't love Jesus; look at this. Look at this lust you have in your heart that you can't shake. There's no way Jesus loves you and you love Him." God's here going, "You're listening to him? Do you know that I'm going to kill him one day? I'm going to crush him and torment him forever. Do you know that the smoke of his torment is going to billow up as an incense into heaven for eternity? I wouldn't listen to that one." Who will bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. This is what the resurrection is to us. To those who believe, the resurrection is power working in our hearts. It's not perfection, it's power working in our hearts. It's that as we stumble about on the path to sanctification, Christ holds fast.

This is of first importance, that Christ was crucified, buried and raised. So, I know some of you believe, not all of you but some of you believe. Praise be His name but some of you don't. In the end, Jesus and the church and these ideas, they're not there to condemn you or judge you, they're to set you free from judgment and condemnation. That's why He died. That's why we're here, not because we think we're better than you but because we know we're not. So we're not trying to point you into, "Hey, do life our way." Don't do life my way; we're trying to point you to the cross. We're trying to say, "His way, the way of the cross..." So this I proclaim to you tonight, and it is of first importance. Beer or no beer: we can talk later...over a beer. Pre-tribulation, post-tribulation: we can talk another day. The music's too loud, you like hymns better: we can talk about it, let's do it later though. Do the gifts still exist or did they cease with the death of the last apostle? Alright, we'll talk, but not today. Today this I proclaim to you is the only thing that matters, that Christ was crucified for the redemption of sins and that He was buried in the ground because He was dead and God the Father brought Him back to life and that same power is available to those who believe. And for those who believe, there will be no condemnation, no judgment, nothing that will be able to separate us from the love of Christ Jesus.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women, some of them good friends of mine, some of them, I've never seen before. I know we come in here tonight as humans. I know we come in here tonight with some baggage. I know we come in here tonight, some of us struggling with sin, some of us caught in some pretty dark patterns, some of us would still be religious but don't have much of a relationship with you. And we'll talk some of these things next week, Father, but I pray that we might hear the good news tonight. Like earlier in Ephesians, You said that You enlighten the eyes of our hearts to see. And I guess that's what I'm praying for tonight, that you would enlighten the eyes of hearts to see, because we live in this unbelievably dangerous religiosity here in the Bible Belt that would keep our focus on everything except what actually matters. And how insane is it that so many of us have these dominant opinions on peripheral ideas

and no idea about Your cross and resurrection? So then there is no grace when we discuss these topics, there is no forgiveness, there is no love, just venom. Help us. Help Your bride. Help the church. Help us as individuals and fill us with Your Spirit's power. I pray if there be struggles in this room that we might find ourselves running to You, You whose power courses in our soul, if we'll just tap into it. We love You. I think it's most of our confessions that we want to love You more than we do, so help us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

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