

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters 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 is I or them, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

“The boy fell asleep in church and died.”

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.

The tragedy of the boy falling asleep in church and dying is not a new story. Still you might want to sit up straight, keep your eyes on me and pay attention. It is a true story. It happened in the city of Troas. The Apostle Paul was talking. A boy named Eutychus was seated in the window of an upstairs room when Eutychus fell asleep, fell to the ground from the third story window and died. The Apostle Paul, the Scriptures say, “*went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘He’s alive!’*” (Ac 20).

This Eutychus’ resurrection experience is told by Luke in his Acts of the Apostles, chapter 20. And it’s interesting to me that only two chapters earlier in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 18, the Apostle Paul started a Christian congregation in the city of Corinth. It’s interesting to me because if I were to write you an e-mail about what I believe about the resurrection dead, I would likely write to you about my very own personal experience with the resurrection of the dead if I had such an experience. From what can pieced together, it’s seems best to see Paul’s writing to the Corinthian believers happened first, around the time of the Acts of the Apostles chapter 19, and the Eutychus’ resurrection experience taking place not all that long after the letter to the Corinthians was mailed.

Bummer. Right? We love personal experience, but when Paul writes to the Corinthians about the resurrection of the dead the Apostle Paul isn’t writing about the resurrection of the dead on the basis of a personal experience, but on the basis of Scripture, that is, the Bible and on the basis of eye-witness testimony.

The Apostle Paul writes starting in verse 3, “*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*” According to the Scriptures. The Scriptures is what Jesus will use Easter evening with two disciples walking to the town of Emmaus (Lk 24). In his ministry, the elder Apostle Paul will tell his younger ministry partner Timothy how, “Scripture is God-breathed” and “able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Ti 3). This wisdom was already shared in the Old Testament. The prophet Jonah in the great fish for three days and for three nights was a sign, pointing to Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. The prophet Isaiah articulated these three events with this clarity: “*He was pieced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.*” “*He was assigned a grave with the wicked.*” And, “*After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life*” (Is 53:5, 9, 11).

“I believe in the resurrection of the dead” on the basis of Scripture. But God, who by his divine nature, is generous, also offers us eye-witness testimony. In his writing to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul shares these names and number, “*that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters 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.*”

“I believe in the resurrection of the dead,” or “I believe in the resurrection of the body,” is a statement of faith we confess regularly in our church services. And because we confess this faith so regularly and because we confess this faith with our mouths at the same time, there is danger that some of the gravity and the great importance of what we believe can be lost. When we jointly confess, “I believe in the resurrection of the body,” with the same voice that says, “I believe tomorrow is Monday,” there is danger that some of the gravity and the great importance of what we believe can be lost. This is not to say we need to put some “soul” in the speaking of our creedal statements, but it is to say we would be wise to think more deeply on the gravity and the great importance of what we believe about the resurrection of the body.

In his opening verses of this long chapter, the Apostle Paul articulates what is all at stake: *“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ²By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a].”* How important is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ? It is of first importance.

This is not to say other teachings or doctrines of the Bible are unimportant. The doctrine of God’s providence is important. The doctrine of God’s providence is the teaching of how God provides for you. God can provide for you with miracles, but God normally provides for you with natural means, that is, with your God-given mind and your God-given abilities, with your God-given parents or God-given spouse.

More important than the family you go home with today is the Word of God I am preaching to you today and the Word of God Pastor Sellnow will preach next Sunday. More important than the work you go to tomorrow is the gospel ministry we do together as a congregation and the gospel ministry we support outside of our congregation and around the world. The doctrine of God’s providence is important, but the resurrection of the body is of first importance and serves our family and work. Because of the resurrection of the body we will see our family members who have died in the Lord again. Because of the resurrection of the body we will be reconciled with God and with believers we bristle with here on earth. Because of the resurrection of the body our day job can serve as an example on how Christians work for Jesus and as an opportunity to witness our faith to the world. Better than any earthly profit are the gains of souls that can be made for the kingdom of God.

Since this gospel ministry has now been handed to us, let’s look at how Paul viewed his gospel ministry work. He writes, “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. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

I’m not sure if Paul is being humble or bold. “Least of all the apostles” is very humble. “I worked hard than all of them” is very bold. What we can say is Paul was NOT apathetic to the gospel ministry. Paul cared very deeply about this work. And he identifies this work as grace, grace made Paul equal to the other apostles and grace had an effect on Paul as grace had an effect on the other apostles too.

The good news of Easter is the resurrection of the body, but the good news of 1 Corinthians 15 is God does not leave faith in the resurrection of the body to chance. The Arizona Wildcat basketball team had a chance to win last night, but as soon as the ball was thrown into the air, that chance was over. Games of chance are fine and fun, but are you taking a chance on your faith in the resurrection of the body or taking a chance on the faith of others? Jesus doesn’t take a chance on our faith.

Jesus not only was raised from the dead. Jesus appeared to numbers people numerous times over the 40 days before his ascension into heaven. The Apostle Paul not only preached the gospel about the resurrection of Jesus in the city of Corinth. Paul also wrote this letter as a reminder for them about the great importance of the resurrection. And almost 2,000 years later, this gospel ministry has made its way to us, to you. What grace has come to us, to you! May this grace not only make us grateful for this gospel ministry, but also have the effect on us to participate in the gospel ministry both here and at home and to give it our all. Amen.