

LESSON 196

CHURCH AND RESURRECTION

Related Scripture: I Corinthians 15:39-58

KEY VERSE: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Corinthians 15:57.

Lesson Scripture: I Corinthians 15:3-20

Introduction:

A so-called Christianity that does not believe in a bodily resurrection is not Biblical Christianity. The self-styled "Jehovah's Witnesses," like many modernistic infidels these days, disguise their unbelief by continuing to use old terms facts of the gospel and the significance of these facts.

Human Witnesses, 5-7.

Besides the infallible testimony of the written word, God provided human witnesses to the resurrection of His Son. As Peter expressed it in the house of Cornelius, "Him (Christ) God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." (Acts 10:40, 41.) Many supposed historical events have very little evidence to verify them. It has been well said that, even from the standpoint of human testimony, the resurrection of Christ is the best authenticated event in the history of the world.

Grace Abounding, I Cor. 15:8-11.

Paul now adds his own personal testimony to the evidence already cited. God's grace abounded to the extent of furnishing one more eyewitness to the resurrection through the miraculous vision and conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

Last and Least, 8, 9.

Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. Last of the apostles called and commissioned by the Lord, Paul spoke of himself as an aborted child, or "one born out of due time," and so "the least of the apostles." The latter part of verse 8 is explained by verse 9.

Great by Grace, 10.

When we are small and weak in our own eyes, we can find greatness and power in the grace of God. So Paul the least became Paul the greatest of the apostles, as God's grace is not vain (empty). Paul was careful to remember that his great labors were really the work of God's grace that was with him.

Agreed with Apostles, 11.

Paul and the original apostles were in complete agreement in their doctrine, and members of the church at Corinth had believed their preaching of the gospel. We need to stay with that kind of preaching.

Gross Abnegation, I Cor. 15:12.

It is not surprising if a lost world denies the resurrection. A lost sinner naturally prefers not to believe that he must rise from the dead to face God in judgment. Yet even among the heathen there is a persistent belief in resurrection or in some kind of future life, contrary to the natural inclinations of sinful minds.

But what shall we say when people who profess to be Christians deny the bodily resurrection which is the essence of the Christian hope? What shall we say when people who have supposedly believed the gospel deny the very fact that gives effect to the gospel—the fact that Christ "was raised again for our justification" (Ro. 4:25)? What gross abnegation of hope is this? "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

Gloomy Alternative, I Cor. 15:13-19.

For the sake of argument, the apostle gives some consideration to the supposition that the truth is error and error truth. Suppose that there really were no resurrection! It is a gloomy alternative.

Vanity of Vanities, 13, 14.

No resurrection of the dead means that Christ has not risen; this means that while denying their scriptural meaning. So they speak of a "spirit body" of which the Bible says nothing, but deny the reality of the spiritual body of flesh and bones that the Bible tells us about. (I Cor. 15:44; Lu. 24:39.)

Without the Biblical doctrine of resurrection we have no gospel. This is the emphatic teaching of I Cor. 15. The apostle Paul reviews the content of the gospel message, and three times (vv. 2, 14, 17) warns against the possibility of a vain faith. In verse 2, "in vain" means "to no purpose" or "without success"; in verse 14, "vain" twice is from a word that means "empty"; and in verse 17 the word "vain" means "foolish." Any way we look at it, a "Christianity" without a bodily resurrected Christ is a vain, useless, hopeless religion.

True churches of the New Testament pattern have as their only Head the risen Christ, now in heaven but coming again to change His people into His likeness. (I Cor. 15:50-53; Philip. 3:20, 21; Ro. 8:29; I Jn. 3:2.)

Outlining the lesson, I Cor. 15:3-20, we may note:

1. Gospel Affirmed, vv. 3-7
 - a. Heavenly witness, 3, 4
 - b. Human witnesses, 5-7
2. Grace Abounding, 8-11
 - a. Last and least, 8, 9
 - b. Great by grace, 10
 - c. Agreed with apostles, 11
3. Gross Abnegation, 12
4. Gloomy Alternative, 13-19
 - a. Vanity of vanities, 13, 14
 - b. Falsehood and folly, 15-17
 - c. Misery of miseries, 18, 19
5. Glorious Antecedent, 20

Notes on the Printed Text:

Gospel Affirmed, I Cor. 15:3-7.

Here we find clearly and simply stated the content of the gospel or good news through which we are saved. It is the same gospel preached by Jesus and John the Baptist, the same gospel preached before to Abraham, the same as announced by God Himself in the garden of Eden. (Gen. 3:15.) There is no excuse for any reader of the Bible to be confused in this matter.

Yet it is a sad fact that multitudes of people, including religious teachers and supposed Bible scholars, have been so thoroughly confused and blinded by Satan that they have vastly different ideas about the gospel. There is no salvation in the countless perverted gospels of Satanic invention and human imagination, but there is everlasting salvation in the one true gospel of Christ as set forth in His word, and nowhere more definitely affirmed than here.

Heavenly Witness, 3, 4.

"According to the scriptures . . . according to the scriptures." Do not overlook this key phrase. Do not attempt to reduce the gospel to a mere statement of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He died for our sins (that is, for the sins of believers), and that death was according to the scriptures—the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament and the historical scriptures of the New Testament. He was buried, and that was according to the scriptures. On the third day He rose again, and that resurrection was according to the scriptures, prophetic and historical.

'So we have the heavenly witness or testimony of God's own word to the our preaching is mere sound void of meaning; this means that Christian faith is an empty sham. Then we must say with Solomon in one of his darker moods under the sun, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." (Eccl. 1:2.)

Falsehood and Folly, 15-17.

Moreover, if there is no resurrection of the dead, the apostles and 500 religious brethren were liars; Christ has not risen; faith is foolish; there is no salvation; we are yet in our sins.

Misery of Miseries, 18, 19.

Christian happiness depends on a living hope for a better life. A hope limited to this life is worse than no hope at all. Too many people have enough religion to make them miserable but not enough to make them happy. We can "glory in tribulations" because we know that "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." (Ro. 5:3, 4.) But if we cannot hope for resurrection, "we are of all men most miserable."

Glorious Antecedent, I Cor. 15:20.

Enough of devilish darkness and despair! Why dally in the darkness when the sun is shining? Christ has risen, and His resurrection insures ours. He is the Firstfruits, the glorious Antecedent, the divinely appointed Forerunner, Who has opened the way for us who are now His brethren through a spiritual rebirth to become His brethren through a rebirth of the body, and so to bear the heavenly image of our Creator for an endless eternity! (Col. 3:10; I Cor. 15:49; Ro. 8:29.)

Key Verse:

"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Corinthians 15:57.

"Death is swallowed up in victory." (V. 54.) Death defeats us all, but in the resurrection death itself is defeated. Our ultimate victory is in and through Christ, "thanks be to God."