

SECTION 3

EXCELLENCE IN PREACHING

“PREACH THE WORD; BE PREPARED IN SEASON
AND OUT OF SEASON; CORRECT, REBUKE AND
ENCOURAGE—WITH GREAT PATIENCE AND
CAREFUL INSTRUCTION.”

2 TIMOTHY 4:2

THE RESURRECTION

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8

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Turn to 1 Corinthians 15 in your Bible as I preach today on the subject of the gospel of Jesus. These are the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 beginning with verse one, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

In one sense of the word, you could say that Paul was a *full gospel* preacher. About the closest we find to that terminology is in Romans 15, verse 29 where he said, “I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” Also, he said earlier in that chapter in verse 19, “I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Therefore, in a real sense Paul could be described as a *full gospel* preacher. I understand that there is some redundancy in that phrase because if it is the *gospel* it is *full*, and if it is not *full* it is not the *gospel*. In the sense that Paul gave the end time message of the total revelation of the truth, of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the Lord Jesus, Paul indeed was a *full gospel* preacher. I hope that is true of you who preach and all of you who witness as well, in the sense that you are faithful to give *fully* the message as God has revealed it to us in His Word. Preachers today encounter two opposite pressures when it comes to matters of the gospel. On the one hand there are those who indicate that the gospel is not full enough. They believe that you have to add to the gospel. They contend that you have to put something else with the gospel to give it enough power. As a result we have a signs and wonders and miracles movement today. Such a movement says that there must be demonstration of the miraculous in order to create the necessary atmosphere of power for the gospel. I would remind you that in the New Testament more is said about the end times and the antichrist in the realm of signs, wonders, and miracles than in terms of true believers.

But those who say the gospel is not full enough would give us a kind of an “enriched bread gospel.” “It’s all you ever wanted in a gospel and more!” Yet Paul said in Romans chapter one verse 16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it (that is, the gospel) is the power of God.” So on the one hand we have those who say the gospel is not full enough. On the other hand we have those today who say the gospel is too full. They espouse that modern congregations and the culture in which we live are not able to receive

the entire message of the gospel. Therefore, you have to leave out some of the sterner elements of the gospel lest you offend your listeners and drive them away. You don't give them the whole message. The gospel is too full so you withhold part of the gospel. This is what I would call today a "gospel lite." It is the gospel of the eight commandments and you get to pick them. It is the gospel of the eight percent tithes. It is the gospel of the 45 minute service and 15 minute sermon. It's all you've ever wanted in a gospel and less! It is "gospel lite." But I would remind you that Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it (the gospel) is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." From a pragmatic standpoint, what is the difference between the liberal who does not believe the essentials of the gospel and as a result does not preach them, and the conservative who says he does believe the essentials of the gospel but does not preach them, lest he causes offense? Paul and you and I should be *full gospel* preachers. We should be faithful to give to our culture today the entire revelation of the gospel as God has given it to us in the Bible. Someone said, "He who would always be relevant must speak on things eternal." Someone else said, "He who marries the spirit of the age is destined to be a widower in the next." And so, you see, we must not be unfaithful. We must give the *full gospel*. As revealed in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul was faithful to do that.

He said in verse three, "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received." And then with that little connecting conjunction *for* that appears in the King James Version he shared four simple statements that summarize the two basic provisions of God's Good News, God's gospel, that solve the two basic problems of mankind. The first is the problem of sin. God's provision for sin is the death and the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's God's provision for the sin problem. Christ died to pay for our sins. He was buried to put away our sins. The second problem is the problem of death. What is God's provision for the problem of death? Paul continued, "That He was buried and that He rose again the third day and that He was seen." God's provision for the death problem is the resurrection and the appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's look at this provision now for the death problem. Paul said in verse four, "Christ rose again." Christ rose again to conquer death. Christ rose again. This is the same Jesus Who was virgin born, Who lived a sinless life, Who died an atoning death, Who was buried in that tomb. The Bible says that this same Jesus rose again.

Now the resurrection of Jesus Christ does many things. One of the things that it does is vindicates the words of Jesus. Jesus specifically said that He would come back from the dead. It seems as if it just went over the heads of the disciples every time He told them. It seems as if they just totally missed it although several times Jesus specifically predicted that He would die and be buried and that He would be raised again from the dead. Jesus said some absolutely amazing things in His ministry. For instance, can you picture Jesus standing there in the garb of a Galilean peasant and saying that He always existed? This was an astounding statement. And could you imagine that here stands Jesus Christ and He claims that He has the power to forgive sin? Astounding! Or think about when Jesus said that one day He would judge the world. An astonishing statement! But the most astounding, astonishing of all the statements Jesus ever made is the statement that He would die, He would be buried, and three days later He would come back from the dead. Now ladies and gentlemen, either Jesus did or He did not. Either Jesus did what He said He would do or He

did not. Either Jesus is alive today or He is not. The gospel is the Good News that He died, He was buried and He rose again just exactly as He said He would.

Now think with me a moment about this picture. Jesus has been buried now in that tomb. He has been in there for three days and three nights. Then up there in heaven the Father looks at the earthquake angel and He says, "Earthquake angel, I want you to go down to the tomb of Jesus and I want you to roll away the stone." And about that time there was a commotion in the lower parts of the earth. As Jesus goes walking through hell and Jesus says, "Three days from now I'm coming out of here." And Death, the old grim reaper, stands at the entrance of the tomb and he says, "I've got the keys of death. Millions have come into my dungeon and none have returned." Yet on that third morning the Lord Jesus Christ comes to old Death and says, "Give Me the keys. I was alive, I died, and I am alive forevermore." And so heaven's earthquake angels came and that old tomb began to shake. And those soldiers began to rattle and that stone began to roll and rolled over against the tree and says, "He's alive!" And the branches of the tree waved at the birds and says, "He is alive!" And the birds flew up to the clouds and said, "He is alive!" And the clouds flowed through the gates of heaven and said, "He is alive!" And the angels shouted up and down the streets of gold and said, "He is alive!" "Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Savior waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!"

You see Jesus kept His word! Houdini was a great escape artist of another day. When Houdini died he said to his wife before his death that he would leave a sign, which was a secret word, that would let her know he was making contact with her from the other world. Every year on the occasion of his birthday, she burned the candle and she waited for the secret word. But the word never came because Houdini could not keep his word. Jesus said to his disciples, "They'll put Me to death. They'll bury Me. Three days later I'll come back from the dead." Jesus, ladies and gentlemen, kept His word!

Now the tense of the words changes in the passage. Up until this point the words have been in aorist tense. Christ died, *apethanen*, aorist tense; He was buried, aorist tense. But when it says He rose again, the tense changes to the perfect tense. This tense refers to something that took place in the past which has present, continuing, abiding results. Do you know what this means? This means three days after Jesus was buried, He rose again. Three days later He was alive. But it also means three months later Jesus Christ was alive. It means three years later Jesus Christ was alive. It means 3,000 years later Jesus Christ will still be alive. He rose again 2,000 years ago, and He continues to live today. You and I serve a living Savior. He's real to me. Is Jesus real to you? Jesus Christ is more real to me than any of you who are in this place this morning. He's real to me! He's real to me! My blessed Lord is real to me! He is a living, bright reality. Oh, yes, my living Lord is real to me! He's vindicated His word. He said he would come back from the dead.

But that's not all. **Jesus not only vindicated His word, but also He validated His work.** Because, you see, the work of the cross is validated by the resurrection. The resurrection is God's receipt that He has accepted the work of His Son on the cross of Calvary. The great question is, "Was the work of Christ on Calvary sufficient? Did He indeed pay the price of the sins of the world?" This is an important question. Since it can't be done hastily there is a three day examination period. The angels come and they observe

the sacrifice of Christ. They pronounce it sufficient and adequate. The saints of old come, examine the sacrifice of Christ, and they announce it to be adequate. The Father comes and examines the work of Christ on the cross and He pronounces it adequate. "Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph ov'r His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose!" He vindicates His word. He validates His work.

The resurrection is the central fact of human history. The resurrection is also the most astonishing fact of human history. The living Christ says to the tomb, "Prevent Me." He says to science, "Explain Me." He says to technology, "Duplicate me." He says to history, "Repeat me." He says to you and me, "Believe me, for whosoever shall believe that God raised Him from the dead has eternal life." Through resurrection, He conquers death. Now there's a big problem, isn't it? It is the problem of death. That is the problem that all of us face. Someone says that death is the subject that people spend an entire lifetime trying not to think about. Death, that final enemy, walks the corridors of our hospitals and lays its calling card at a baby's crib. And a mother's cry is heard. Death, the old grim reaper, points his scythe to a plane in the sky. It crashes and old death walks silently among the debris. Death is the old bully that taunts us. Max Lucado compares death to the old bully on the block of life. Death is that old bully, isn't it? Death is that old bully that taunts us on the playground, isn't it? Death is the one who accuses us and frightens us at every corner of life. Death is the one that shakes his fist at us and says, "I'm gonna get you. I'm gonna catch you sooner or later." And we do everything in our power to try to outrun old Death. We jog to keep us physically strong, to keep our cardiovascular system up to the proper levels. We eat proper food trying to prolong our lives. We go and take our physicals on a regular basis trying to outrun old Death. When you are a young man, you start in the race of life and you look way, way behind you and observe another runner is behind you. Yet you don't think a great deal about it because you are young, filled with energy, and running fast. But as you continue to run in life you begin to look back and notice that the runner is gaining on you. So you try to run a little bit faster, but every time you look back, you see that the runner is gaining on you. When you get older, you find that you can't run quite as fast as you used to run. You find yourself looking back more frequently. And you find that that runner, old Death, is gaining ground on you. The bully is catching up with you.

Have you ever had a bully come after you? I remember when I was younger, we had a bully at our school. He got mad at me for something one day. I don't remember what it was, but he shook his fist at me on the playground and said, "Vines, I'll get you down at the corner of the school when school is out." I dreaded it all day long. I knew that was the way I had to go home. I had to meet the bully on the corner beyond the school. After the final ring of the bell, I made my way home. As I was walking down the street, I looked down to the corner and there stood the old bully. My little heart began to leap up into my throat. I was so frightened. I was so afraid. As I got almost to the corner where the bully was, my good friend Donald, who was a mammoth of a boy, and later went on to play college football, came up beside me and said, "Vines, do you want somebody to walk down to the corner with you?" And I said, "Donald, I sure would like it if you would." Boy, I want you to know that we went down there where that old bully was and my friend Donald looked that bully in the eye and said, "You got anything you want to say to us?" I said, "Yeah, you

got anything you want to say to us?” And the old bully dropped his head and said, “Naw.” And my buddy Donald and I walked on home.

You see, ladies and gentlemen, death is the old bully of life and all of us have to face the bully sooner or later. But the Good News of the resurrection is that we have an Elder Brother named Jesus Who has already been that way. He has already stared down the old bully of death; therefore, you and I don't have to be afraid of death anymore. “I won't have to cross the Jordan alone. Jesus died all my sins to atone. When the darkness I see He'll be waiting for me. I won't have to cross the Jordan alone.” The gospel, the *full gospel*, is the Good News that He died, that He was buried and that He rose again the third day. He conquered death.

But then notice it also says, “And He was seen.” Just as the burial proves the crucifixion of Christ, the appearances prove the resurrection of Christ. There are approximately ten appearances of Christ as best I can tell in the New Testament. Paul gives six of them in this passage. There are several reasons for these appearances of our Lord after His resurrections. One is, of course, to validate the ministry of the apostles. That's why in the first chapter of Acts, one of the specific requirements for being in the office of the apostle was that the person had been an eye witness of the resurrection of Jesus. That's why in this restricted sense there are no apostles today, because there are no eye witnesses of the literal resurrection of Jesus. Not only does it validate the ministry of the apostles, but also it serves to authenticate for you and me the reality of the resurrection. Again in Acts, chapter one, it says, “He showed Himself alive by many infallible, unmistakable proofs.” These resurrection appearances proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ was indeed alive. They took place over a period of forty days. Sometimes He appeared in public settings. As you move down through these verses you read that He appeared publicly to the twelve on several occasions. You will also notice in this passage that he appeared to over 500 people at one time. Someone said, “Well, those people just had a hallucination. They just hallucinated and thought they saw Jesus.” Those who know anything about hallucinations know that people who have hallucinations are expecting to have them. They also know that hallucinations never occur to such large groups of people all at the same time. Yet over 500 people saw the living Lord Jesus Christ, and they become the nucleus of the early church. These were individuals who were literally set on fire by the news of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrection was the central part of the preaching of the early disciples. These men were willing to die for their testimony that Jesus Christ was really alive. You see, friends, the living Christ changes lives. People are never again the same after they meet the living Christ.

Another one of the greatest proofs of the resurrection of Jesus is the existence of the early church. The twelve saw Him publicly; over 500 saw Him publicly. He also appeared privately on several occasions. Paul mentioned some of those here. He mentioned in verse five that He was seen by Cephas, Simon Peter. Don't you love Simon Peter? He's one of my favorite characters in the Bible. You know, Simon Peter suffered from “hoof and mouth disease.” Every time he opened his mouth he exchanged feet. He was always putting his foot in his mouth. You know what I mean? He was the guy who got out there the night there was a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus came walking on the water. And old Simon Peter said, “Lord, let me come and see You out there on the water.” And Jesus said,

“Come.” By the way, do you want to know how to walk on water? Get permission from Jesus. If He doesn’t give you permission you probably shouldn’t try it. But old Simon Peter went scrambling over the side of the boat and the disciples were thinking, “Can you believe that? This takes the cake. He’s done some dumb stuff, but this is the dumbest of them all.” After he takes off, he gets his eyes on the waves instead of on the Lord. He gets his eyes on the storm instead of on Jesus and he begins to sink. He then prays one of the shortest prayers in the Bible, “Lord, save me.” You notice that when you’re in trouble, you cut out those fancy church prayers. He didn’t have time for one of those, “Oh, Thou great God of heaven and earth...” He simply cried out, “Lord, save me!” Simon boasted, “Lord, I don’t know about this other crowd. I wouldn’t be surprised if they all deny you, but you can count on me, Lord. You can depend on me, Jesus.” But he got by the devil’s fire that night. While the devil’s little disputers began to nip at him, before you know it, it was over. Three times he denied he even knew the Lord. Oh, God, help us when we deny our Lord by lip or by life. And then the Bible says, “The Lord looked at Simon Peter (and it broke his heart) and Simon went out and wept bitterly.” We are told that in Jerusalem from then on, every time Peter walked the streets of Jerusalem, people would crow like a rooster and he would burst into tears. But now Jesus was alive. He said to those disciples, “Go tell my disciples and Peter.” The Lord had a private meeting with Simon Peter. The next thing you see is Simon Peter on the day of Pentecost. Now rather than facing one little hand maiden, he faces thousands to whom he courageously preaches the gospel. He boldly charges them with the death of the Son of God in the book of Acts, chapters two and three. What made the difference? These words, “And He was seen of Peter.” Seeing Jesus changes lives.

But that’s not all. It says He was also seen of James, the half brother of Jesus. He was one of the family members that didn’t believe in Jesus. They were embarrassed by Jesus. They came to get Him one time because they thought He had gone crazy. They were so embarrassed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, when you thumb through the pages of the New Testament, you come to the book of James which was written by none other than the half brother of our Lord. James moved from unbelief to belief. He moved from embarrassment to the enthronement of Jesus Christ. What made the difference in James? These words, “He was seen of James.” You see, an experience with the living Jesus always changes your life. You are never the same after you meet Jesus.

Paul said that He was seen publicly. He was seen privately as well. Paul also said, “He was seen by me personally.” Look at verse eight. Paul said, “And last of all He was seen by me personally.” As one born out of due season, *ektroma*, a word that was used in those days for an abortion. Paul said, “I was an abortion.” He said, “I was like a dead fetus.” Paul was saying, “My religion left me a dead fetus on the Damascus Road.” That’s what he said religion did for him. It left him a dead man. Yet on that Damascus road the apostle Paul said that he saw a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun and when it struck him, it caused him to fall into the dust under conviction. Then he heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecute thou Me?” And he said, “Who art Thou, Lord?” He then got the shock of his life, because the voice said, “I am Jesus Whom thou persecute.” He thought Jesus was dead and gone. He made the astonishing discovery that Jesus Christ was eternally alive. And he said, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?” He was an absolutely changed man.

By the way, I think those two questions Saul asked on this occasion are the two great questions of every Christian: “Who art Thou Lord; that is, Who is Jesus, and what would You have me to do?” As a believer, those are the two big questions in life to ask the living Lord Jesus. You will spend the rest of your life finding the answers to those questions: Who are you, Jesus, and Jesus, what do You want me to do? When you find the answers to those two questions, you’ll find an effective and fruitful Christian life. Jesus found Paul dead and left him alive.

Several months ago you remember reading in the newspaper and seeing on television the tragic story of the mass suicide of the Heaven’s Gate cult. Thirty-nine people in California committed suicide. They dressed themselves in black and put on brand new Nike shoes. Their bodies, all except for the last two individuals who completed the process for everyone else, were covered with purple cloth. They were followers of a man named Marshall Applewhite. He had an interesting life. He had problems with homosexuality. He had been a professor at several schools. He had been in a psychiatric hospital for a period of time where he met the woman for whom he left his family. They established a cult, the Heaven’s Gate cult. It was founded upon a mixture of obscure passages in the Bible and New Age philosophy. Thirty-eight people followed him in suicide. He had a “gospel.” Applewhite had a “gospel.” He had an “answer” for the sin problem. His “answer” for the sin problem was castration. He had an “answer” for the death problem. His “answer” for the death problem was suicide. He had a “gospel of salvation.” His “gospel of salvation” was wrapped up in a theory about a spaceship hidden behind the Hale-Bopp comet. Now, what is a comet? A comet is just a ball of liquid gas and dirt. Applewhite had a “gospel of salvation” wrapped up in a dirty snowball. Applewhite found people alive and left them dead. Jesus finds people dead and He leaves them alive.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a resurrection gospel that brings us back to life from the deadness of our sin. We have a gospel that promises us eternal life beyond the reality of our death. Everybody who meets Jesus is changed for the better. I was a nine year old boy sitting on the second row in a church service on a Sunday night. Our preacher was preaching and I don’t remember a thing in the world he said. But I do remember that the lights from the building reflected off his glasses while tears rolled down his cheeks as he faithfully preached the gospel of Christ. That night while I was sitting there as a nine year old boy, Someone came walking in that building with a crown on His head and a cross on His back. He stopped right at my pew and said to me, “Young man, what can I do for you?” I said, “Oh, Sir, do for me that which I cannot do for myself.” Then I went forward and I gave my hand to the preacher and my heart to Jesus. I walked out of that building that night a changed little boy. When I walked out of that building the stars all lined up in celebration march. The branches of the trees were waving their hands as a welcome as I walked out. When I walked out I could have well been singing, “Because He lives I can face tomorrow. Because He lives all fear is gone because I know, I know He holds the future.” Ladies and gentlemen, that’s the Good News we have to preach. It is the Good News of the crucifixion, that Christ died and He was buried. It is the Good News of the resurrection. He arose again, and He was seen, and He will still be seen to this very day. What a gospel! I’m a *full gospel* preacher and I hope you are, too!