

Easter 2014 - What's the Most Important Thing I Need To Know?

April 20, 2014

Good morning! My name is Pastor Kurt. Welcome to CrossWinds Church on this beautiful Easter morning. What do you think we are talking about today? I will give you one guess. *The Resurrection!* Take out your sermon notes. If you brought a Bible, turn to 1 Corinthians 15. If you didn't bring a Bible, your sermon notes should keep you up to speed with our study. I am going to pray and then we will get to business.

Jesus, we want to thank you we have this special day to celebrate. A day when we remember that the tomb was empty. You are alive. Our sins are forgiven. The curse of death is conquered. Satan, sin and death are defeated. You are reigning and ruling from the right hand of your father. Thank you for your grace toward us. Thank you for loving us. Thank you that all who repent of their sin and seek to make Jesus their savior have new lives. We ask that you would send the Holy Spirit into our lives in a powerful way this morning as the Word is opened. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Is anyone suffering from from the same problem I have? It is called information overload. I have a Facebook account to keep up with. There is also Twitter. I am afraid to start on Instagram because I am already too busy answering text messages. The red bubble on my email icon always seems to be in double digits.

In addition to the information that is pushed at me, there is all the information I am supposed to find on my own. We are supposed to be up to speed on world news, the local news, the weather, and the intricate details of the Affordable Care Act that nobody seems to understand other than the name is oxymoronic because it is going to cost me more. There is just too much information. Does anyone else feel that way?

When I get too much information, I start ignoring information. I stop checking Facebook. I let unread emails pile up. I totally skip Twitter. I wish somebody could sort through the information for me and say, “Here are the four or five important things you need to know. The rest can wait for later.” Wouldn’t that be nice?

I can’t simplify your life for you, but I can simplify the message of the Bible for you. The Bible has a lot of information. It can feel overwhelming. This morning, I have sorted through the Bible and I am just going to give you the most important information you need to know. It is all found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

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. 1 Corinthians 15:1–2 (ESV)

What is this gospel? The gospel simply means good news. There is world news, nightly news and local news. There is a lot of news but most of it is bad news. The gospel is good news. For once in life, things are not getting worse. Things are getting better, much better.

What is getting better? That is a two-part story. First comes the bad news. The bad news is that each of us is hopelessly addicted to sin. We are rebels against God in our thoughts, actions and motives. We are selfish and arrogant. Just admit it. No matter how hard we try, we just can’t break free from our sin. We promise ourselves we won’t sin, but hours, days or even years later we go right back to what we promised ourselves we would not do. That is a problem.

God is just. That means he is fair. He will punish sin. The fair punishment for sin against an eternal being is always eternal punishment. That is what we deserve. That is the bad news.

The good news is the God of the universe is not just fair so nobody gets away with their sins, but he is also incredibly loving. God's own son permanently took on human flesh. His name is Jesus. He died in our places for our sins. God poured all the punishment we deserved on his own son. Jesus took the punishment we deserved. He died when we should have died.

Jesus didn't stay dead after he took the punishment we deserved. He rose from the grave and conquered Satan, sin and death.. This is the good news. This is the greatest victory in the universe. That is the victory we celebrate today.

What should I do with this good news? Paul said we need to receive it. That means we don't just hear information about how much God loves us through Jesus but we receive it into our lives in a personal, life-transforming way. We change our whole lives and our lives center around what Jesus has done for us. Whatever we do, we are to orbit around honoring and thanking Jesus rather than ourselves. That is the most important message we need to hear. The Bible says that when we ask Jesus to forgive our sins and we center our lives around him, everything in life changes.

Paul told us this good news about Jesus is not just something we need to receive into our lives but it is something we have to keep holding on to throughout our lives. We have to hold fast to it. Otherwise, we believe in vain.

Don't drift from Jesus. It is easy to look for something new. It is easy to think we need to move on to bigger and better things rather than simply trusting in Jesus. I tried Jesus, now I need to try yoga and herbal teas. Paul said, "Don't drift." The only way to know God is to build your life on God's love for us through Jesus that we don't deserve and to keep holding on to it.

If we think we are smart and try moving on from this, we put a hole in the bottom of our boat and sink the whole thing.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received... 1 Corinthians 15:3 (ESV)

What Paul told us is here are the most important things we need to know. This is what is of first importance. He also wants us to know this is not something he made up. What Paul did is quote an ancient church creed. Scholars tell us this creed predates the writing of the letters in the New Testament. It considered by scholars to be one of the oldest, agreed upon statements by Christians about what we believe. They are the most important things Christians need to know and agree upon. Here we are, 2,000 years later on Easter, studying and believing the same things they believed from the first Easter. Our faith has not changed to any degree.

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, 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 (ESV)

Paul gave us four lines of evidence to bolster the claim that Jesus rose from the dead to assure us that placing our faith in Jesus is altogether wise and good because it is grounded in historical facts.

What are the most important things I need to know?

1. Jesus died.

Today, Jesus' death is under attack. Some religions don't believe Jesus died. For example, Islam teaches Jesus didn't die. I ran across an article on the web by a Muslim called, "65 Reasons to Believe Jesus Did Not Die on the Cross."¹ Many people do not believe this. The question is, "Did it actually happen?" The Bible tells us Jesus underwent a flogging, which is a brutal form of whipping that left a man near death. Many men died from a flogging as their flesh, muscles and ribs were torn from their bodies. After his flogging, Jesus bled profusely. He was then crucified by professional executioners. They nailed his hands to a cross bar and his feet to a main post. The cross was invented by the Persians but perfected by the Romans around the time of Christ to be the most hideous form of death they could conceive. The cross was intended to slowly suck the life out of someone by torture and agony until they finally gave up their will to breath out of exhaustion and pain.

After he died on a cross, the Roman executioner thrust his spear into Jesus' side piercing his heart sac, causing water and blood to flow from his wound. The separate flow of blood and water shows Jesus was dead long enough to have his blood and serum separate. Placing a hole in his heart further

¹ <http://www.themuslimtimes.org/2012/04/religion/christianity/65-reasons-to-believe-jesus-did-not-die-on-the-cross>

guaranteed his death. As part of the job of a Roman executioner, they were to ensure the one they crucified was dead or they would be crucified in their place. They made sure Jesus was dead. That is why they thrust a spear into his heart.

Why did Jesus die? Jesus died in our places for our sins. This is what the Old Testament told us would happen. Jesus' death was not a mistake but it was always God's plan.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:4–6 (ESV)

For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14 (ESV)

So Christ died. It is a historical fact. Nobody came off a cross alive. Why did Christ die? He died as a substitute sacrifice for our sin. God remained fair because sin was punished. Yet God is incredibly loving because his own son took the punishment we deserved because God loves us.

When we hear that Jesus died for us, it is God tying together the strands of ultimate justice against sin and evil and ultimate love together by pouring that punishment upon his own son, Jesus.

2. He was buried.

After Jesus' body was taken off the cross, it was wrapped in 100 pounds of spices and strips of linen. Some of the spices were sticky so he was literally cocooned like a butterfly in a 120-pound full-body straight jacket. Jesus was poor so his body would normally be thrown into the town garbage dump. There

was a secret disciple. He was wealthy and he had recently hewn his own tomb out of stone in Jerusalem. He gifted his tomb to Jesus.

We find this also didn't happen by chance, but hundreds of years before God told us this would take place through the prophet Isaiah.

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

Jesus' tomb would be easy to verify. Have you been to a graveyard recently? Can you tell who was rich? Of course you can. They have huge monuments for a grave. I think it was the same for Jesus. A rich man's tomb would be a prominent tomb that nobody would mistake. Everybody knew where Jesus was buried. Nobody had the wrong tomb.

To make sure nothing happened to his body, the Bible tells us they rolled a stone over the entrance of the tomb. The government put a seal on his tomb so if there was tampering, everyone would know. They posted a guard of soldiers to make sure nobody stole the body.

The second undeniable fact of history that the very first Christians agreed upon is that Jesus was buried.

3. Jesus rose from the dead.

The third important fact the early creed teaches us is that Jesus rose from the dead. This sets Jesus apart from everyone else. No other religious teacher can claim this. Wikipedia has an article on the burial places of the founders of world religions.² The founder of the Bahai faith has his body buried in Acre,

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burial_places_of_founders_of_world_religions

Israel. In Sri Lanka you can see a tooth of the great Buddha who founded Buddhism. Muhammad's body is buried in Medina, Saudi Arabia. Everyone has a grave, except for Jesus. Why? The tomb was empty. This sets Jesus apart from every other religious teacher who ever taught.

This is very important. Jesus made some bold claims. He claimed to be God. Jesus claimed to be the only way anyone can have their sins forgiven. Jesus claimed all other religions were wrong when he said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Those are bold claims. The only way to back those claims would be to do something only God can do. Rising from the dead is something only God can do. Rising from the dead is something no other religious teacher has ever done.

Everything hangs on this. The early creed tells us there is strong evidence.

4. Jesus appeared alive.

Who did Jesus appear to?

A. Jesus appeared alive to his friends.

...and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 1 Corinthians 15:5 (ESV)

Jesus appeared to Peter. Peter was a leader of the disciples. He was part of Jesus' inner group of three. He was a bit of a coward and denied Jesus three times before he was crucified. Peter lacked courage until he saw Jesus risen from the dead.

Jesus, being full of kindness and love to Peter, like he is to us, reinstated Peter as a disciple after his failures. After meeting the resurrected Jesus, Peter

went from a coward to a man of courage. He went from afraid of a junior high girl on the night of Jesus' crucifixion to preaching to a crowd of thousands on the day of Pentecost as he declared Jesus is alive. Peter went on to write two books of our Bible, 1 and 2 Peter. They eventually crucified Peter upside down because he refused to recant his firm conviction that Jesus is alive. He met him and talked with him.

It was not just Peter who died because he claimed Jesus was alive. Church history tells us 10 of the remaining 11 disciples died hideous deaths for refusing to recant their claim that Jesus was alive and is just as real as the person sitting next to you. That may not sound impressive because today we have people willing to die for their faith all the time. There is a difference. *People are willing to die for a faith they hope to be true. People are not willing to die for a faith they know to be false.* Nobody dies for their own lies. Ten of the 11 disciples died claiming Jesus was alive. They were not dying for a lie.

Jesus also appeared to Thomas. Thomas was the one who refused to believe. Even after all his friends saw Jesus and swore Jesus was alive, Thomas thought it was all part of a bad April fool's joke. When Jesus later appeared to Thomas, he put his finger in Jesus' side to prove to himself Jesus was real and not a ghost. Thomas put his fingers in Jesus' side for the hard-core skeptics among us. If you find it hard to believe Jesus is alive, you are just like Thomas. Thomas touched the resurrected Jesus for you. After Thomas' encounter with the resurrected Jesus, in John 20:28, Thomas called him, "My Lord and my God."

B. Jesus appeared alive to large crowds.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)

Paul said that over the next 40 days Jesus appeared to crowds of more than 500 at one time. Some claim the depressed disciples were hallucinating when they saw Jesus. Some claim seeing the resurrected Jesus was just like claiming to see Elvis walk by you in the mall. It was a momentary hallucination of a wishful-thinking brain. The problem is hallucinations are individual events, not group events. Having a group hallucinogenic experience of a risen Jesus that 500 people could touch and put their fingers in his wounds just doesn't happen. Jesus was not in hiding. His appearances were not half-a-second glimpses in a dimly lit room. They were long and drawn out. There were multiple people in the room. There was conversation. Sometimes Jesus, even ate lunch with people.

Jesus' resurrection was widely known. People were meeting him at the local coffee house. Everybody was tweeting about it. It was all over Facebook. It wasn't just one person doing a selfie with Photoshop. It was hundreds of people with Jesus at one time. Jesus was mobbed like a rock star signing autographs.

Paul said, "You doubt this? These people are still around. Message them. Skype them or talk to them on FaceTime. They have emails and cell phones. They use social media; check the story out for yourself."

C. Jesus appeared alive to his family.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 1 Corinthians 15:7 (ESV)

Jesus appeared to James. James and Jude were Jesus' half-brothers. They were brothers through his mother, Mary, but they were not immaculately conceived of the Holy Spirit. Joseph was their father. We don't have any evidence that James or Jude followed Jesus before his resurrection. I am sure they thought he was nuts. Most of us would have a problem considering our brother to be God, even if he was the perfect child. In my house there are too many pranks between my kids for anybody to be considered God. When we meet people who claim to be God, we have them committed.

What we find is that after Jesus rose from the dead, James, Jude and Mary, his own mother, worshipped Jesus as God. They were so utterly convinced that Jesus had conquered death that they worshipped him. By the way, good Jewish boys do not worship just anybody. They would have known from their youth that worshipping anything or anyone other than the true God of the universe was a one-way ticket to the Lake of Fire. You don't get that one wrong. They were convinced Jesus was alive and Jesus was God in the flesh, alive from the dead.

D. Jesus appeared alive to his enemies.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 1 Corinthians 15:8–9 (ESV)

Some of you may say, the reason his family, friends and the crowds claimed Jesus rose from the dead is because they were pulling off an elaborate hoax. That hoax is still around thousands of years later. It is called the church.

The guys who believe that read too many Dan Brown novels. Here is the problem with the mega hoax theory ... Paul.

Paul was not friend or family of Jesus. He was an enemy. He hated Jesus with a loathing hatred that few of us can comprehend. One of our first introductions to Paul is in the book of Acts at the unjust murder of a Christian named Stephen. Paul was the coat boy watching people's jackets so they could get maximum velocity from their pitching arm as they threw rocks at Stephen's head. As Stephen's head was getting bashed in Paul was on the side with a smile on his face giving two thumbs up to the crushing of Stephen's skull. Paul was dedicated to stamping out Christians by having them arrested and killed. until on the road to Damascus the risen Jesus appeared to him! He was stuck with the incontrovertible fact that Jesus is very much alive. Christians were not insane. Jesus' resurrection is not a conspiracy theory like Roswell, flying saucers and aliens. It is the truth. Not only is Jesus alive but everything Jesus said was therefore proven true. Jesus is God. Jesus took away sin. Jesus conquered death for himself and for us. Jesus, as the Son of God, deserves our worship.

Paul had a complete transformation. He went from a murder of Christians to a pastor. He went from devoting his life to destroying Christians to making Christians. The Bible tells us he was shipwrecked, homeless, beaten, left for dead, impoverished, and suffered in prison many times all because he wouldn't stop talking about the one thing he was convinced was true. Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus is alive.

Would we be so foolish to believe the theories of speculators who are teachers in universities who come hundreds and thousands of years after the fact? They are people who weren't eyewitnesses. They are people who are speculating for novelty, for money, to write books and get degrees on speculation. They are sinful and rebellious against God.

Only a fool would replace the eyewitness accounts of people who had nothing to gain and everything to lose by telling the truth with the guesses of speculators who come thousands of years later. Only a fool would fail to believe the earliest truth Christians agreed upon with the theories and speculations of people who are in it for money. Believe the truth. Jesus is alive!

What is the most important message I need to hear?

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. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. 1 Corinthians 15:10–11 (ESV)

Some of you this morning think that Christians are not good people. I would agree. They are not. Some of you think Christians are hypocrites. You're right. They are. Paul said that "*it is only because of the grace of God that I am what I am.*" The only reason Paul was making Christians instead of killing them was not because he was smart or slick, it was all about God's undeserved grace. God reached into his life on the road to Damascus and showed Paul the truth. God does not choose to reach into people's lives, soften their hearts to the truth and draw them to trust in him because they are lovely people. God does not choose to reach into people's lives when they hear about Jesus because they are deserving people. Why does God reach into anybody's heart and draw them

to Jesus? It is all about God being gracious to us when we don't deserve it. That is the good news of the gospel. That is the good news through Jesus that we began with. God loves us when we don't deserve it. Christ died for our sins, and we don't deserve it. Jesus rose from the grave and conquered Satan, sin and death for us, and we don't deserve it. That is the most important message in the world that we need to hear.

It always cracks me up when things go wrong in somebody's life and he shakes his fist at God and tells God he isn't fair and he isn't getting what he deserves. I agree with those people. God is not giving any of us what we deserve. If God gave us what we deserved we would already be in the Lake of Fire. God gives us what we don't deserve with life, health and strength. He is super kind by giving us Jesus.

Conclusion

Today, as we celebrate that Jesus rose from the grave, which is the greatest victory in the universe, I have to ask you, have you received the truth of the greatest victory in the universe into your life? Is it just information you could care less about, like a sales flyer for a grocery store, or does Jesus mean everything to you?

The Christian life is about Jesus loving us, and out of gratitude, us loving Jesus back. Today we invite you to receive Jesus' invitation of salvation, forgiveness and grace.

No matter what you have done, you are not any worse than Paul. If God's grace could forgive Paul and transform him into a leader of the early church plus

write a large portion of our New Testament through him, there is hope for all of us. If God's grace is big enough for Paul, it is big enough for you.

In a moment, we are going to take communion. While the communion is being passed, I invite you to talk to Jesus in prayer asking him to forgive your sin, telling him you love him and giving him control of your life. He loves you. He is delighted to hear your prayer. After communion is passed, I invite old Christians who have known Christ for years and the new Christians who have trusted in Jesus today to take it together with me

Just as we can touch the bread and cup, it is a reminder that Jesus is not an idea or a theory, he is a person that is just as alive as every one of us in this world. He loves us and died for us. When he rose from the grave, it is not that he just was alive. He is alive today. The Bible says he is seated at the right hand of God hearing our prayers and waiting for his return.

After communion, we are going to sing and take the roof off this place in celebration. We were made to worship God the Father and Jesus, his risen son. On this day, it only seems appropriate that we close our morning by singing our hearts out in thanks to Jesus. For accomplishing the greatest victory in the universe. The most important things I need to know in the Bible are how that victory was won. The most important message I need to hear is that Jesus' victory over sin and death becomes my victory over sin and death when by faith I give him my life.



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