



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Rock Solid Faith: Sustained By the First-Important Things

1 Corinthians 15:1-58

Introduction

1. The assignment for this lesson: using the theme, *Rock Solid Faith*, choose one lesson. How do I pick just one? Especially when several good topics I might have chosen were already taken.
2. As it happens, I was reading an excellent primer on the case for Christ, who is, of course, the cornerstone on which everything rests (Acts 4.11; Eph 2.20; 1 Pet 2.4-8). One paragraph says:

So, as far as the New Testament is concerned, there is a great deal at stake in the question of whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead: the very validity of the Christian faith. And it is more than a bit ironic that so many professed Christians today fail to grasp this aspect of the gospel (South, 121).
3. That idea led me to return to the passage that speaks of the things about Christ that are of “of first importance” (1 Cor 15.3). That takes us to the bedrock foundation of rock-solid faith.
4. At a time when push-back against the faith seems to be increasing, returning to 1 Corinthians 15 and the first-important things will help us to [a] be reminded and/or [b] review these things to reassure others. First-important things therefore help sustain our faith.

Body

- I. Sustained Because of the Difference Made by the First-Important Things.
 - A. First-important things have always been primary in the preaching and practice of our faith.
 1. They are the indispensable essence of the good news (v. 1).
 2. They were where all gospel preachers began.
 - a) The language of passed-on tradition (vv. 1, 3) takes us back to the beginning.¹
 - b) He says that the other apostles customarily preached the same message (vv. 11-15).
 - B. We should therefore see the pride of place Paul gives to the first-important things.
 1. “First importance,” translates one word (πρῶτος, *prōtos*) that is *plural* in number.
 2. All the events in vv. 3-8 are together “of first importance.” Note *four* uses of “that” (ὅτι, *hoti*) (like a colon in English), delineating *four* distinct events (vv. 3-5). It therefore follows:
 - a) Death, burial, resurrection, and appearances are four parts of one event (cf. Rom 4.25 where “deliver over” is “for trespasses” and “raised” is “for justification”).

¹ 1 Cor was written only two decades after the crucifixion. Paul says the teaching is even older (cf. Gal 1.18-19). Many critical scholars also agree that the tradition cited in 1 Cor 15.3-8 goes back to the earliest preaching (see Habermas, 127-133).

- b) The appearances are the evidence that Jesus really was raised and were as vital to the early preaching as the death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Acts 2.32; etc.).
- 3. Indeed, if we focus just on the space/number of words used, Paul said *more* about the appearances than he did the death, burial, and resurrection (vv. 3-4 vs. vv. 5-8).
- C. This means the truth of first-important things is the deciding factor in whether we should continue in the faith and can be confident in hope.
 - 1. Without the resurrection, we might as well live like the Epicureans and admit our faith is “futile” (μάταιος, *mataios* [cf. Eccl 1.2 LXX]; vv. 17, 30-33; cf. 12, 14, 16).
 - 2. It matters for our hope: Without what is of first importance, we are faced with despair with nothing to console us; we are only to be pitied (vv. 18-19).
- D. Recalling first-important things strengthens us against pressure from skeptical challenges.

II. Sustained Despite the Challenges of Skepticism.

- A. We sometimes think — and skeptics keep this narrative alive — that the reason beliefs like the resurrection (and miracles generally) found a receptive audience in antiquity was because they were not as enlightened as we moderns are and therefore were susceptible to gullibility.
 - 1. The questions quoted in 15.35 show that some then asked the same questions we hear now.
 - 2. This points to the flaw in merely human wisdom: no matter how adept we are in discoveries, inventions, and exercising dominion over our world, we cannot find ultimate answers on our own (cf. Jer 10.23; 1 Cor 1.18-31).
 - 3. Many don’t acknowledge how often they accept things without knowing *how* they work.
- B. Paul’s answer: remember the God of the impossible (cf. Gen 18.14; Matt 19.26).
 - 1. Three illustrations call them to remember and see more clearly (see the emphatic “fool” in v. 36 - this is a “use your common sense” argument).
 - a) How farming works: what comes out of the ground does not look like what went in. How does it happen? God’s power (vv 36-38).
 - b) The nature of animals: different kinds of flesh for different creatures (v. 39).
 - c) The skies: different glories for different heavenly bodies (vv 40-41).
 - 2. Verses 42-49 explain what must follow: If God can do those familiar things, can he not create resurrection bodies that will be different from our current bodies?
 - a) The question of *how* need not deter us, for the change we will experience is similar to, yet more glorious than, the way God has always worked (vv. 42-44).
 - (1) “Perishable” (capable of decay) versus “imperishable.”
 - (2) “Sown in dishonor,” literally a loss of the rights of citizenship; versus “raised in glory,” with more blessings than we can now imagine.
 - (3) “Weakness” (of debilitating illness) versus “power.”
 - (4) “Natural,” pertaining to the life of the natural world (ψυχικός, *psuchikos*), versus “spiritual” (πνευματικός, *pneumatikos*), regarding the life with God.
 - b) Verses 45-49 show that the goal that awaits is only to be expected since we can be assured there is more to life than the physical.
- C. The climax of Paul’s argument comes in vv. 50-57: ultimate victory awaits, but cannot be realized in our present bodies.
 - 1. What awaits us are imperishable bodies suitable to our new existence (50).
 - 2. The change will come to all, even to those who have not yet died (51-53).

3. Then, we will see what we must not forget now: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (54). Its sting and power are gone. Our last and most feared enemy is beaten (55-56; cf. 26).
4. This conquest (for that is the significance of *vīkos*, *nikos*) comes through Jesus (57).

III. Sustained To Continue in Life and Ministry.

A. *Nothing* is more practical for life than first-important things.

1. Despite success, knowledge, wealth, or power, many ultimately find despair, especially when trouble hits or they must face their mortality. But, Christ gives victory!

B. *Nothing* is more practical for a church that must keep serving in a resistant world.

1. Paul says that those who build on first-important things will “always abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (v. 58; cf. vv. 10-11, 14).

Conclusion

1. On October 29, 1941, Winston Churchill visited Harrow School to hear the traditional songs he had sung there as a youth and to speak to the students. Great Britain had stood alone for most of the two years since World War II began. They pushed back in the Battle of Britain (July-Sept. 1940), withstood the Blitz (Sept. 7, 1940-May 10, 1941), and were enduring deprivation, destruction, death, and national isolation.
2. He recalled the despair at the time of his last visit ten months before, spoke of improvements in their situation since, and said that there had been “no flinching and no thought of giving in.”
3. He then urged, “Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never — in nothing, great or small, large or petty — never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy” (Churchill).
4. Paul expressed the same sentiment for a higher cause. The victory he envisioned is more lasting and over a foe more fearsome than Hitler. We claim that victory through Jesus! We keep on declaring it because he won! Let us never give in, but remain steadfast and immovable.

Sources Cited

Winston Churchill, Harrow School Speech, Oct. 29, 1941, at https://www.school-for-champions.com/speeches/churchill_never_give_in.htm#.WyPkZKknbIE. Accessed June 15, 2018.

Gary R. Habermas, “Why I Believe the Miracles of Jesus Actually Happened,” in *Why I Am a Christian: Leading Thinkers Explain Why They Believe*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman, rev. & exp. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006).

James T. South, *Just Jesus: The Evidence of History* (Chillicothe, OH: DeWard Publishing Company, 2012).

David Anguish
June 20, 2018
www.davidanguish.com