

The Cross (*It's Empty Now*)

THE STORY #10 - Pastor Gary Combs - Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026 – Luke 15:1-8, 20-22

INTRO: Good morning church! Today, let us greet one another as believers have done on this Resurrection Sunday for centuries: “He is risen! He is risen indeed!”

We’re continuing our series called THE STORY: How the Bible Explains Everything. This is a 12-week journey through the meta-narrative of Scripture, from creation to consummation, where we see that the Bible is not a collection of disconnected stories, but one great story of a holy God rescuing His broken world through Jesus Christ.

So far in The Story, we’ve traced it from creation and the garden, through the fall and the flood, to God’s covenant with Abraham; from the exodus and the law, to the conquest and the kingdom under David; through the heartbreak of exile—and then last week, to the arrival of Christ, the long-promised Savior who stepped into history to redeem what was lost.

But today, in this message, we reach the climax. If the Bible is the Story of everything, then the Resurrection of Jesus is the hinge upon which everything turns. We aren't just celebrating a religious holiday; we are celebrating the day the ending of your story might be rewritten... from "Death" to "Life."

Need: Why are we here today? Because deep down, we all feel the weight of a "broken story." We feel the guilt of past failures, the fear of what tomorrow holds and the uncertainty of a world that seems to be spinning out of control. We need more than a moral lesson; we need a miracle. We need to know that the grave isn't a dead end, but a doorway. And that the same power that brought Jesus back from the dead is available to give us a fresh start today.

Trans: To understand how we fit into this victorious story, we must look at how we respond to the "first importance" of the Gospel, which is the Good News that Jesus saves!

BODY: In the apostle Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he reminded them of the first importance of the gospel he had preached to them in order to strengthen their faith in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection and warn them from believing in vain. We can rightly respond to the gospel of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. How can we rightly respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ? The text gives **three right responses** to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; 20-22 (ESV) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ... 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

THREE RIGHT RESPONSES TO THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION:

1. Receive the gospel truth.

EXP: (1, 3-4) Paul emphasized that this isn't a new idea; it's what was "delivered" (3) and "received" (1,3), both to him and by him to them. It is grounded "in accordance with the Scriptures."

“**Gospel**” (1) (εὐαγγέλιον, *euangelion*) - Lit., “good news.”

“**Received**” (1,3) (παραλαμβάνω, *paralambanō*) (Aorist) - to receive something transmitted. Receiving in everyday terms means “exposure to,” but receiving in Scripture means to “embrace it.”

“**Delivered**” (3) (παραδίδομι, *paradidōmi*) - to give into the hands (of another), to deliver verbally

“**First importance**” (3) (πρῶτος, *prōtos*) - first in rank. The gospel is first in importance.

“**In accordance with the Scriptures**” (3, 4 - 2x) (γραφῆ, *graphē*) - Lit., “writings.” Scripture. Which ones?

“**Christ died for our sins**” (3) (ἁμαρτία, *hamartia*) - to miss the mark; to sin. Christ is our Lamb of God.

Isaiah 53:5-6 (ESV) ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.

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Psalm 22 (ESV) ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ... ¹⁶ ... they have pierced my hands and feet ... ¹⁸ they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

“He was buried” (4) (θάπτω, *thaptō*) - to bury, inter. Again, what Scriptures?

Isaiah 53:9 (ESV) 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.

“He was raised ... on the third day” (4) (ἐγείρω, *egeirō*) - to arouse from sleep, to awake; to arouse from the sleep of death, to recall the dead to life. What Scriptures?

Psalm 16:10 (ESV) For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

Hosea 6:2 (ESV) After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

[Jesus quoting Jonah 1:17] Matthew 12:40 (ESV) For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

ARG: To “receive” in Scripture means to welcome, believe, and personally embrace Christ and His gospel so that it takes hold of your life, moving you into right relationship with God as your Father.

John 1:12 (ESV) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

ILL: Think of a life-saving medicine. You can believe the medicine works, you can admire the pharmacist who made it, and you can even study its chemistry, but it only saves you when you receive it into your system.

APP: Have you moved beyond knowing "about" the Good News of Christ's Resurrection to personally receiving the Resurrected King? Have you personally received Christ as your Lord and Savior?

2. Stand firm on the gospel witness.

EXP: (1, 5-8) Paul lists the eyewitnesses: Peter, the Twelve, 500 people at once, James, and finally Paul himself. He is saying, "Check the evidence. Call the next witness. I'll put you in touch with them!"

“You stand” (1) (ἵστημι, *histēmi*) - to cause or make to stand. The perfect tense describes an action that was completed in the past but has ongoing, permanent results in the present. Past Action: You took a stand when you first believed the Gospel. Present Reality: You are still standing there; it's a fixed state of being.

“He appeared” (5; 4x) (ὀπτανομαι, *optanomai*) - to look at, behold; to appear.

“To Cephas ... the twelve” (5) - Cephas "stone" another name for Peter and to the twelve disciples.

“More than five hundred brothers at one time” (6) (ἐφάπαξ, *ephapax*) - once, all at once; one occasion.

“Still alive” (6) (μένω, *menō*) - to remain, abide; meaning still alive.

“To James ... the apostles” (7) (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*) - James, brother of Jesus, plus other apostles.

“Last of all ... to me” (8) (ἔκτρωμα, *ektrōma*) - untimely birth, Paul saw Jesus later on the Damascus road.

ARG: Standing firm isn't about our effort, but the foundation we're standing on, namely the testimony of the risen Christ and His gospel!

1 Corinthians 16:13 (ESV) Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

ILL: - In John 20, on Easter evening, Jesus appeared to the disciple in a “locked” room, saying “Peace be with you.” Then, He showed them His hands and side. But Thomas wasn't there, Jesus appeared again to them.
- In a court of law, an eye-witness changes everything. Paul is calling the witnesses to the stand to show that our faith isn't a “blind leap,” but a step onto the solid rock of Christ's resurrection!

APP: When your health fails, when the economy dips, or when your anxiety rises, where are you standing? Notice I asked “where?” Not “how?” Stand firm on the eye-witness evidence that Jesus is risen!

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3. **Hold fast to gospel hope.**

EXP: (2, 20-22) Paul told believers to “hold fast to the word” (2). He said that “in fact Christ has been raised from the dead” and he calls Him “the firstfruits” (20), which points to Lev. 23:9-14, where the firstfruits were the first handful of grain offered from the harvest. It was a “promise” that the rest of the crop was coming. Because Christ is raised as the “firstfruits,” His resurrection guarantees ours. He is our gospel hope!

“**Are being saved**” (2) (σώζω, *sōzō*) (Present passive: the recipient of the action) - saved, kept safe.

“**Hold fast**” (2) (κατέχω, *katechō*) (Present active) - to hold fast, keep firm possession of. Hang on to.

“**Unless you believed in vain**” (2) (εἰκῆ, *eikē*) - in vain. Scholars like Gordon Fee note that Paul was addressing a real danger in Corinth that some were denying a bodily resurrection. But Paul warns...

1 Corinthians 15:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.

“**But in fact**” (20) (νυνί, *nunī*) - for emphasis; just now. Christianity stands or falls on this historical fact!

“**Raised from the dead**” (20) (ἐγείρω, *egeirō*) - same word from verse 4.

“**By a man came death**” (21) (θάνατος, *thanatos*) - the death of the body. By Adam, who sinned.

“**By a man has come also the resurrection of the dead**” (21) (ἀνάστασις, *anastasis*) - a raising up.

“**In Christ shall all be made alive**” (22) (ζωοποιέω, *zōopoieō*) - to cause to live, make alive, give life.

ARG: **We hold fast to hope of resurrection. Not by power of our grip, but by the quality of His faithfulness.**

Hebrews 10:23 (ESV) Let us **hold fast** the confession of our **hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Paul's comparison between Adam and Christ reminds us of our condition apart from Christ:

Romans 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ILL: Have you ever watched someone rappel down a cliff, or maybe you've done it yourself? Picture it: you're standing at the edge, leaning back over what feels like empty space. Every instinct in your body says, “Don't do this.” But you trust the rope, and you begin to step down. Now think about it, what's really holding that person up? Is it their grip? No. In fact, they're not even clinging to it with all their strength. What's holding them is the strength of the rope and the security of the anchor point above them.

APP: The question is not, “How strong is my grip?” but “How strong is what I'm trusting in?” Do you have resurrection hope? If you don't, you're “believing in vain.” When you hold fast to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, you are trusting in a rope that cannot break and an anchor that cannot fail!

CONCLUSION: Today, we've seen that the Story of the Bible didn't just reach a “happy ending”—it reached a new beginning! Think about the divine “scheduling” of this story. For centuries, the Jews celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits as Leviticus 23 commands on the “day after the Sabbath” (Lev. 23:11) following Passover.

- **Friday (Passover):** While the Passover lambs were being sacrificed, the Lamb of God was on the Cross.
- **Saturday (Sabbath):** While the people rested, the Author of the Story was silent in the grave.
- **Sunday (Firstfruits):** On the first day of the week, at the very moment the High Priest would have been standing in the Temple waving the first sheaf of the harvest before God, Jesus was walking out of the garden tomb!

Jesus was the “Firstfruits.” He was the first “sheaf” of a brand-new kind of harvest, a harvest of believers who will rise again. If you are “In Adam,” the story ends with death and judgment. But if you are “In Christ,” the story never ends. The Cross and the tomb is empty, and because of that, your future is full and never-ending in Christ Jesus!

Will you: 1) Receive the gospel truth? 2) Stand firm on the gospel witness? And 3) Hold fast to the gospel hope?

Let's pray.