

Of First Importance (1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

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[0 : 00] I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles if you have them. Feel free to ask for one. We've got a few out the back if you need to borrow one.

But otherwise, I trust that you'll turn on your phones. And flip to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. I'm going to read from verse 1 to 11. And then Pastor Albert will preach from this passage.

This is the word of the Lord. Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve.

[1 : 23] After that, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all, he appeared to me also, as to one untimely born. For I am the least of the apostles, and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Whether then it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed. This is God's Word.

Thank you. It's such a privilege to preach the Word of God. In the last two weekends, I've preached five sermons, four of them are different.

[2 : 40] It took a bit out of me, but it was very honored, because we are preaching the Word of God. And I feel so unworthy. Yeah, I feel very much like Paul.

I don't know why God would call me. But yeah, this is a privilege. Can I have the PowerPoint? Come on. Yeah. Yep.

I preached this passage this morning at Barry's Induction. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I think a lot of people can say that.

People can recite that. Even non-Christians can quote that. Oh yeah, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But, but, the last phrase, of whom I am the worst.

that's got to be a very personal conviction. Right? We got to have a very personal relationship with Christ before I can actually say the last phrase of this verse.

[3 : 43] Everybody, non-believers, even Satan can, can quote that. You know, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. But, of whom I am the worst.

There's got to be a deep, a personal encounter with God before I can say that last phrase.

That's the gospel. You know, I'm not worthy. As I said this morning, I work hard, I work 10 hours a day, I work 50 hours a week, and then I get the salary.

That's the wage. You somehow, you earned it. All right? I work hard, I play hard, I compete with my, with my, with my competitors, and I won that match, no matter if it was rugby or tennis or whatever.

That's the trophy. I, I gave my best. And I work hard, and, and, and long, long serving in PCBC.

When I retire, the church gives me some sort of a, a plaque, a reward.

[4 : 51] That's a reward. Right? But when I, I can offer nothing, and someone gives me a gift, that's grace.

This is what I have from Christ. This is grace. This, this is the gospel. The gospel that saved me. All right? This is the passage we have just read.

And Paul was reminding the Corinthian Christians of, he was mentioning the essence of the gospel, and, and, and retelling them again, they need to hang on to it in order to be saved.

Now, of course, they knew it. Of course, they, they believed in it. But somehow, Paul wanted to remind them again. Maybe he sensed something was wrong.

And there was something was wrong. It was, people was preaching some sort of, um, um, no resurrections. There's something wrong.

[5 : 53] So, Paul had to remind them, hey, you better revisit, what do you believe? All right? So, I think this passage today, even with us here in PCBC, the will of God, maybe want to remind us again today, we are to stand firm with the hope of Christ's saving grace.

I mean, there are challenges. There are different circumstances in life. But are we standing firm? Are we holding on to this, this gospel that save, saves us?

Sure, we, we, we, we hear the gospel. We, I know what I believe. But, let's examine ourselves.

Now, Paul here, actually, um, that was a lot of concerning stuff.

All right? Paul was addressing the Corinthian Christians. And there were questions that, that maybe the, the Corinthian church was, was asking Paul. And Paul was addressing each issues.

And that was, that was the, the things that concerning them. And Paul was answering them. And bit by bit, chapter seven, it was about sexual and, and, and relationships and husband and wife stuff.

[7 : 13] Virginity. And chapter eight was food offering to idols. Chapter 12, spiritual gifts. And, before this chapter 16, the collection of God, the Lord's people, something here, Paul wanted to deal with, was the issues of, resurrection.

They, now next week, I believe Pastor William will share, something, we will talk about, they wouldn't, they had no issues with the resurrection of Christ, but they had the issues with, there's no resurrection of the body.

And Paul said, how can it be? If Christ died and rose again, how come do you believe that there is no resurrection of the dead for you guys? That's, that doesn't make sense.

So, Paul was very, very, very, it was, very, he was very serious, okay?

Now, when he was talking about the spiritual gifts, he, he, he made suggestions. And he said, you know, we're looking in the mirrors, all right? We, we, we, we're not seeing things very clear at the moment.

[8 : 18] That's okay. I mean, there's tongues, there's prophecies. I mean, different people could have different sayings. Yeah, that's fine. but here, Paul was saying, now, this is for, of first importance.

This is a, a serious warning. You better take heart. Okay? Look, if you're looking into your car, sitting, and you ignite your car, when you, you know, and this, this warning lights, keeps on, you won't carry on driving, and ignore it, right?

You won't. And somehow, someday, you could have ended up, stole, your car stole, on motorway, in the middle of motorway. You don't want that happen. All right?

And, and maybe, even causing accidents, losing lives. So, this is a serious warning. That light came up, it's a serious warning.

And Paul says to, to, to the Corinthians Christians, right? I want to remind you of the gospel, I preached to you. And if you see, signs like this, I don't know why this is upside down.

[9 : 35] You know, right? This is actually the, the, the side, that road, you know, that road from, Stancom, to, to Olmiston, to Olmiston, um, Plaza, all right, center.

It took three, four years, for that road to build, goodness me. You know, anyway, um, they put up that sign, all right? Trespass, trespassers, we prosecute it.

All right. I don't think the aim was to press, to, to prosecute you. The aim was, there's danger. You better not, better not trespass.

It's a stern warning. So Paul, here, was, warning the, the Corinthian Christians, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you, of the gospel, I preached, to you.

Let's have a look at it. Paul, warned them, to hold fast, stand firm, of the gospel. Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you, the gospel I preached to you, which you have received.

[10 : 43] They have received, right? They, they believed, and, on which you have taken your stand. They stood, hard, fast, all right?

They believed, okay? And by this gospel, you are saved. If you hold firmly, to the word, I preached to you, otherwise, you have, believed in vain.

So, Paul's sensing, could be something, that is, maybe, the, the people, they are, wavering about. Something that, they're, they're shaking.

So, Paul really want to, remind them again. That word, remind, that's, that word, really, means, declaring to you. I want you to know, once again.

No, so, that word, came from that word, gnosis, gnosis is, knowing, but I want to, want you to, know again. Okay? To hold, firmly, that is to, stand up, as, to be, to have this, fixed status, a prolonged, form of, standing.

[11 : 54] So, you have to, stand, fast, hard, and, know, what you are, no matter, whatever come at you, you stand. Indeed, in verse 12, says, there was false teaching, no resurrection, of the dead.

So, Paul, was, warning them, reminding them, hey, re-examine your faith, know, what you believe. If it's, wrong concept, your life, leading, you're not going anywhere. If, if there is no, resurrection of the dead, what we preach to you, is useless.

So, our, our, our, our, our, first of the month, you know, do we truly know, do we truly believe, that simple, Jesus, the death, his death, his burial, his resurrection, is, is the core, of, what we believe. Right? If, if anything less, there's no gospel. All right? You, you have these guys, you meet these guys on streets, and they, they actually, come knocking on your doors.

[13 : 14] And interesting, you know, in Chinese, they're called, mō mōn, ha? And it's Mormons, okay? In Cantonese, it's, mō lé gō mōn, you know? To touch, to touch your, your doors, you know?

I mean, these, these guys are nice, all right? These guys are sincere, they're very polite, they're well-dressed, right? But the problem is, they, what they, preach to you, the message, it's no saving grace.

No matter how nice, how sincere they can be. But they work, they have to work out their salvation. And there is no assurance until, they reach heaven.

If, if they reach heaven at all. So, it's a good time for us to remind ourselves, do I truly believe? Do I hold fast to the gospel that I have heard, I have put my life on 10 years ago? 15 years ago?

[14 : 24] What happens now? And that word gnosis, it's not just head knowledge. You know, in the Bible, gnosis, always, the knowledge, it's always more than just head knowledge.

It's a relationship. The Bible says that, love the Lord your God with all your hearts, all your minds, yes, knowledge, all your soul, and with all your strength.

That's the whole, holistic response to the saving grace of Jesus. Christ, Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Can I truly resonate with Paul? Yes, I am the worst of all. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I agree with you.

Yeah, yeah, truly. Yeah, amen. Yeah, Christ, Jesus came into the world to save sinners. but somehow it's a little bit remote. I can't identify my relationship with him now.

[15 : 29] We have to hold fast, stand firm. Yes, we waver at times with, you know, with the circumstances that come to us and at times we feel we might be a bit far away from Jesus, but he's always faithful.

We can always come back to him. At times, yeah, I mean, as pastor, I have my spiritual low as well, you know, but he's always faithful.

How many have actually in this? It's the English equivalent of Cheryl's, right? But I think this is much better than Cheryl's, right?

It comes with congee, you know, you eat with congee or actually soybean, very nice. But you want to eat it when they're just fried up, hot, you know, but you leave it overnight, you know, soggy, right? And Chinese actually when left overnight, or in Mandarin, it's so, it's not nice at all.

[16 : 55] And that phrase to describe someone who's, he's okay, so, so, no expectations, nothing in life, no, no, no desire for any excellency, any improvement, that's no fire, no fire, no fire.

Are we like that? Oh, I believe I'm a Christian, yeah, yeah, but I'm going to sing, sing praises. What Christ is living me, yeah, hallelujah, yeah, yeah.

you know? You know? Hold fast to the gospel. And in, and, and the letters to the seven churches remind us that there are, there are people who are, who tolerate with false teaching.

There are, there are churches who left their first love, allowed idolatry, compromised, and lukewarmness. We are like that too.

We're not exempted. And Jesus knows it. But, there are warnings. We are to hold fast, to reveal, to, to reflect. Where are we now?

[18 : 17] Well, it's not the issues with the gospel. God has, finished, completed. It's us.

But we can always come back and be assured. So, Paul goes on in verses three to seven. Be convinced of the gospel. For what I have received, I pass on to you.

That's the verse of the month, right? Of first importance, right? That, nothing more important than this, that Christ died for our sins according to the scripture and he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the scripture.

Christ died for our sins. He was buried and he rose again. A simple statement. Of course, there are other foundational truths about the gospel as well.

But this is, this, this is of most importance. If Christ did not die, we're still in our sins. And if Christ did not rise again, what we preach, useless, wasting of time.

[19 : 32] Why am I standing here talking about it? We have to work out our own salvations. But because this is the foundation of first importance, Paul wanted to restate that again to the, to the Corinthian Christians, Christ died for our sins.

He was buried, truly dead, well and truly dead, certified. He was not kind of fainted somehow and people mistaken and buried him alive. No, he was well and truly dead.

and, but, but the hope was he rose again on the third day. And, and, and it was, it was not just accidental.

It was, it was foretold in the Old Testament scriptures. Three hundred and something prophecies from the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, the life, the death, of, and the resurrection of, of, of the Messiah, Jesus, right?

And, and as he said that there are many, over 500 people who actually witnessed his resurrection and some for those contemporary at the time, some of them, you know, they're still alive and you know them.

[20 : 51] Some have, some have died but there's still people alive. You can ask them. You know that you believed in it. Right? And I saw it even though I was not worthy but he appeared to me.

He appeared to me. Wow! On the way to Damascus even though I was not worthy to be a disciple, apostle but he called me and entrusted this commission, this mission to me.

Look, they, you can, you can stand firm, be convinced. and Paul was making every effort to let them know that what you, Corinthians, you're believing, you have believed, you put your life in, on, it's true and let's keep on standing.

And maybe there are times in our lives, we go through life's different stages, we have different challenges and at times, yeah, we have doubts.

When we face difficulties, sicknesses, issues with our families, relationships, you know, at times we doubt.

[22 : 13] okay, there are there are many temptations in life, there's circumstances, even there are false teachings, there are cults around and every these these forces will drag us away from the from the essence of the gospel that we we have put our lives in.

But as Paul said, look, the worthy that the gospel is trustworthy. God has planned it.

There are witnesses who could testify that. I have personally experienced that. So keep on believing. Keep on believing.

Maybe I don't know what are you going through in our lives, in your lives at the moment. Maybe there are doubts, maybe there are questions that you want to ask, there is no answers.

Let the Spirit of God put us, transform our hearts and minds to revisit and may we be convinced of the gospel that we once have put our lives in.

[23 : 45] May we be ignited again by God. This is so sweet, this photo.

Sooner or later, I'll be like, me and my wife will be like that. When you look at it, you don't need to say much. You look at it, they have been through lots and lots of ups and downs, thick and thin, different pains, sorrows, joy, you know.

This is our relationship with the Lord. our belief is not just knowledge as the Bible always says, it's relationship.

Just to remind ourselves, when we first put our lives, put our trust in Jesus, no matter how long it had been, we've been through a lot of good times and bad times.

We've been through a lot of pain, we've been through a lot of sorrows, we've been through a lot of joy, we have experienced successes in him, we have failed him, but all along these years, these times, he is faithful, he is still with us.

[25 : 16] Even at times I failed him, he is still with us. Surely, I mean, as old couples, even like me and my wife, it's coming 30, 32 years anniversaries, I mean, there are a lot less flowers sending, card writings, and yeah, a lot less of heart thumpings, right?

But I still say to him, oh, every time I go back home, every time I leave home, I say, I love you, honey. Ask her, testify that, yeah, yeah, you know, give her kiss in the morning, I give her kiss before I leave home, yeah.

But what have been, we have been through the last 30-something years, it's very enriching and very confirming. This is so with my Jesus and me.

If it was only just knowledge, I can, I can, you know, I know this is a woman that I'm married to, all right?

I know how she thinks, and that's it. There's no relationship, there's no emotions, no affections. It won't, it won't last very long. But loving the Lord with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, all my strength, and letting him to really embrace me from within, from without, top to bottom, inside, through, fill me.

[27 : 03] And I have this assurance, convincing, assurance of his presence with me. You know? Unlike, unlike these, these guys, they have to work out their salvations.

They have to work and make sure they earn enough to get to heaven. You know? But we don't. We celebrate the risen Lord.

This is the, I always remember this picture. Thank you, Pastor William, to invite me to join in this sunrise service. All right? It's actually, Billy was actually reading the scripture there.

Was it, were you praying there or reading scripture anyway? That was a bunch of Christians from all over different denominations mainly from the east, right? But some actually came from North Shore, actually.

These two actually came from my church. That's Frank and Cecilia. And Samuel was there as well. It was a very special moment, you know? We celebrate the risen Lord on the first, on Easter Sunday.

[28 : 13] And how assured was that? I don't have to depend on what I do. Of course, I can't depend on anything I can do. But it's because Him, He died for me, He rose again, and I have that assurance.

And I was just there just to be embraced by His presence. Let the assurance of the risen Lord, the gospel, help us through, embrace us.

And lastly, when we hold fast to the gospel, we can be convinced of the gospel, it's very natural that we will share, we will proclaim, we will preach, we will testify the gospel.

And Paul's testimony was, for I am the least of the apostles, and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God was with me.

[29 : 31] Whether then it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believe. And God, because of what we experienced, and He commissioned us to share the gospel.

And for Paul, his own testimony was, I am not even worthy. I was the worst of sinners. And He had commissioned me to announce, to proclaim this message to save sinners.

I mean, worst of sinners, to preach a message to save sinners. How ironic is that? You know, I'm not even worthy.

But it's not in what we are, but in the message, in the powerful gospel that Christ has accomplished. Interesting, it says, I worked harder than all of them, but yet not I. Remember the song? Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

[30 : 41] That's very ironic, isn't it? Somehow I work hard, I work hard, but it's not me. It's Christ working through me. So, in a way, yes, we work hard, we preach, we share, we testify, but yet it's not me.

But yet I need to commit myself. I need to give my best. Right? but that's the beauty of how God can use you and me.

So, Paul was reflecting on his own commission, despite his wretched past. It was grace. So, he was very compassionate, he worked hard, but in that sense of a grateful heart.

because of the amazing grace that he experienced and that sweet relationship that he has enjoyed.

Naturally, he just shared wherever he was, whatever he was doing. So, that should be us. You know, if I don't have this kind of gratitude, if I don't have this kind of relationship, sweet relationship with the Lord, ask me to go and share the gospel with someone, that would be hard labor.

[32 : 12] Right? If we don't even convince of the gospel that we're believing, if we don't have this joy in us, that's hard work.

Right? But because we have that, because we are standing firm, so sharing the gospel with others would be a natural thing.

So, that's Paul's attitude. Right? He says that a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus may display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

When other people seize me, look, that guy, he could even be saved, and he would even be used by God, well, we have hope, man.

[33 : 33] You and I can do it as well. And he became a standard of God's patience to wretched sinners. grace. It's 34 years since I graduated from the seminary, and that was my first year in the church in Hong Kong.

And I think 34 years, I have made a lot of mistakes. And at times I would have drifted somehow, even though I was a pastor.

I could have drifted away from the Lord at times. And spiritually, I could be in a very low point at times, because we are human beings as well.

We're not saints, right? But along these years, what I can say, of course I can't compare myself to Paul, right?

But the things that he has experienced, I think I can resonate with that. I don't even, I'm not even worthy.

[34 : 59] Why he would save me? and why he would choose me? And that long suffering patience he had with me?

And slowly he changed me, mold me, shaped me. He has considered me faithful. I'm not even faithful myself.

He considered me faithful. faithful. He credited me as faithful. That's why, by his grace, I'm still able to serve him.

I think like all of us, God loves us all. Let us pursue on God's love. And to grow and to serve in his grace.

Someone says that, you know, being a disciple is a lifelong thing. And to willing to offer aspects of our lives to Jesus, there is no such thing as just wanting to be a Christian and not being a disciple.

[36 : 20] yes, we are in his grace, but we just cannot just sit there, oh, okay, let your grace shower upon me, and I'll just get wet. And until you come, I'll be like this.

No, we should, when we have his grace shower upon us, we should grow in his grace. And to testify him, to share.

And when we share his goodness, this gospel, we need to have this life that's compatible to the gospel that has changed me.

Otherwise, you know, what I share with who I am is a big gap, is a big difference. People wouldn't believe in it. Look at you.

You say, you're a Christian, you've been in church for 30 years, look at you. I'm even better than you, you know. And surely the gospel can change us and transform our lives.

[37 : 21] Martin Luther once said, a religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, suffers nothing, is worth nothing. Nothing.

No, there is something. Christ wouldn't do anything for nothing. He gave himself so that you and me can be saved.

and to have the life, fullness of life, abundance of life. And let's experience that.

Let's live it according to his promise. Right? So maybe this message of warning from Paul, maybe God may be speaking to our hearts.

Right? I want to give you, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you. What's that gospel to you? Is this some statement that you can recite?

[38 : 34] Or is this something that is really deep in my heart? Now I'm not talking about perfection. no one's perfect. But let's say something that I truly want to stand firm on.

And I'm truly convinced of his presence in me. And I'm truly willing to offer my life to him. And Lord, take my life and lead on.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this powerful gospel. That since Jesus died on the cross, that has transformed many lives.

That has changed this world. And Lord, you have changed my life. And I ask Lord that we offer our lives to you, that you continue to transform us to be more like Jesus so that we experience the fullness of life that you have promised to us.

Thank you, Lord. May your will be done in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.