



FISHHAWK

FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

ME. YOU. AND THE EMPTY TOMB

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

GETTING STARTED

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Most people acknowledge that Jesus was a real man who had a profound impact on the world. However, not everyone believes in the meaning of Easter—that Jesus rose from the dead. What do the people you know who doubt this fact believe instead? Have you ever spoken with them about it?

When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, what possibilities are there that it's not true? What changes if it is true?

Jesus Christ cannot be ignored because He altered the whole of human history. Even for those who don't believe in Jesus, they recognize that He was a real man and that billions of people have been changed by His life. Even the way we tell time is broken up before and after Christ—B.C. and A.D. The year of your birth reflects the number of years after Christ. But not all people believe in Jesus, and many doubt the resurrection. Many believe the resurrection to be a hoax or a fable, but what changes if it is a fact? If the resurrection is a fact, you have no choice but to believe in Jesus.

DISCUSSION

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4.

Why would Paul need to remind the Corinthians of the gospel? What is the purpose of remembering the most basic of all Christian beliefs?

When Paul remembered the gospel in verses 3-4, what elements did He believe were essential to remember? What, in Paul's mind, were the facts of the gospel?

The gospel is not only a message that saves us, but also a message that sanctifies us. The gospel changes us and makes us new. Choosing to remember the gospel is the pathway for Christian growth. Paul saw the gospel as being of "first importance." Having established the priority of the gospel, Paul defined the

gospel: it is the good news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day in victory over sin and death. Billions of people have reordered their lives because of Jesus' empty tomb. The empty tomb is the first evidence that Jesus rose from the dead.

Why did it matter that the gospel was “in accordance with the Scriptures,” which Paul stated twice in as many verses?

What makes the Scriptures a reliable record and testimony of the empty tomb? How have they verified this claim to you?

The Scriptures are God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), which means they come to us directly from God. When Paul said “the Scriptures,” he meant the Old Testament. The accounts we have in the Old Testament predict many of the circumstances and events of Jesus' life. Too many events align for this to be merely a coincidence. Additionally, records of Jesus' life began to circulate rather quickly after His death. No other figure in the history of humanity is as well attested as Jesus Christ. The evidence is simply too much to ignore.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:5-8.

After rooting the gospel in the empty tomb and the Scriptures, what did Paul appeal to next? Why should this next piece of evidence be compelling for us, even today?

Why do you think Paul recorded all of these witnesses to the resurrection? What was he trying to show in doing so?

We've been studying the letter of James to the church in Jerusalem. What was James's background? What was Paul's? What does it prove that these men eventually claimed Jesus as their resurrected Lord?

We can believe that Jesus rose from the dead because people saw Him. Hundreds of people saw Jesus walking around alive and well. It is an indisputable fact that Jesus was crucified, and the only reasonable explanation for hundreds of people seeing Him after His crucifixion is that He rose again. Hundreds of people do not all experience the same thing without it being true. At the time of Paul's writing, many people were still alive who could prove or disprove the eyewitness testimony. It would have been too risky to stake such an important claim on something that could be so easily disproven. Christ was also seen and believed by people whose lives were forever changed and whose letters survive to this day.

Are you more likely to trust something that you only heard about or something that you saw with your own eyes? Explain.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:9-11.

Look at John 20:19-23. Where did all of Jesus' disciples go after He was buried? In seeing and spending time with the resurrected Jesus, how were their lives changed?

A witness is defined as "a person who sees an event." How are we witnesses to Christ's resurrection even though we are not eye witnesses?

People can dispute facts, but a changed life is harder to dispute. People are not so easily changed. Paul rejected Jesus and killed Christians; yet after he saw Jesus, his life was never the same. All of Jesus' disciples died for their faith. Church history paints a picture of violent deaths and persecution, but all of these disciples went to their graves without denying their Lord and the change He made in their lives. People seldom give their lives up for a hoax or a fable. They found something in Jesus that was worth living—and dying—for. Both the faith of the early church and the continued faith of the contemporary church are evidence that the resurrection is real.

Read Colossians 2:14. What exchange was made at the cross and through the resurrection? What gives the resurrection the ability to change lives?

What about you? How has Jesus changed your life? Why is this in and of itself evidence for the resurrection?

Three universal issues we all face are death, sin, and problems of this life. How does the cross make sense of all these issues and speak powerfully to them?

If the resurrection is true (and it is), it is the most significant event of human history. It is the point on which everything else pivots. Our sin is gone and the righteousness of God stands in its place. You are free and no longer condemned. The resurrection changes lives in a way that nothing else can. When we enter into a relationship with Jesus by faith, He changes everything about us. Our issues do not magically go away, but we have a Savior who is with us in the darkest nights of our soul and who will never leave us.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What will you do this week to remind yourself of the gospel through which you were saved and upon which you stand?

The gospel transforms communities as well as individuals. What difference has it made in the way you relate to other people both inside and outside the church?

Easter gets people thinking about Jesus in a way they may not at other times of the year. Is there anyone you know who is still questioning the resurrection? Would they have a conversation with you about how it has changed your life? How might you set that up?

PRAYER

Praise God for coming back from the dead to offer us forgiveness and faith in His name. Thank Him for truth that transforms, and ask that He would use His resurrection power working through you to draw other people to Himself.

MY NEXT STEPS

1. This week, I will let someone know that I am ready to begin a relationship with Jesus.
2. This week, I will take the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus and His resurrection with someone in my life.
3. This week, I will turn to Jesus first to find the strength needed to manage the problems that arise in my life.
4. Yes, I will come back to FFC next week to deepen my relationship with Jesus by hearing what James, Jesus' half-brother, has to say about the conflict and arguments I have with other people (James 4:1-12).

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11

15:1. Paul appealed once again to the Corinthians as brothers as he began to talk about the resurrection. By this affectionate term Paul affirmed the Corinthians in their basic commitments to Christ's resurrection, wanting to remind them of the elements of the gospel, not to challenge their acceptance of it.

The gospel, or good news, is the message of God's saving work in Christ. Up to this point, Paul had oriented the gospel message around Christ's death, but here he preached the gospel by emphasizing the resurrection. He also affirmed his belief that the Corinthian Christians had received this gospel message and had taken their stand on it. In Paul's day being a Christian was more than intellectual assent to a group of doctrines. The social price that followers of Christ paid forced them to take a stand in a hostile world.

15:2. Anticipating the importance of what he would say about the resurrection, Paul made it clear that anyone who did not hold to the gospel he had preached could not be saved. Only by this gospel could they

be saved from God's judgment. Salvation comes through belief in the good news of Christ's death and resurrection.

Yet, Paul added an important qualification. They are saved, if they hold firmly to the word. As he indicated throughout this epistle, Paul believed that saving faith would set itself apart from insincerity through time. True believers persevere in their commitments to Christ. Paul did not mean that truly regenerate people could lose their salvation, nor that truly regenerate people were without sin and failure. He understood, as the entire Bible teaches, that saving faith proves itself over a lifetime.

Paul warned that if the Corinthians had once trusted the gospel of Christ but did not hold fast to that gospel, then they believed in vain. In other words, their temporary commitments to Christ would not benefit them as they had hoped. Anyone who turns away from belief in the resurrection of Christ puts himself in a precarious position. He or she stands in line for God's judgment, not for his eternal salvation.

15:3-4. Paul next explained why it was important for the Corinthians to believe his teaching about the resurrection. He justified his insistence that they hold fast to the gospel, insisting that the resurrection was central to the gospel message. Why was this so important? Why was the resurrection a necessary element of the gospel? First, Paul received and passed on this gospel. In rabbinic Judaism, this terminology described the transmission of authoritative religious teachings. Paul told the Corinthians to maintain the gospel as he had given it to them, because it was a sacred tradition, not a human tradition. Second, he delivered this gospel teaching as a matter of first importance. In other words, nothing was more central or more important in Paul's conception of gospel than these teachings. Paul summed up his gospel as having two main concerns: the death and the resurrection of Christ. Both of these took place according to the Scriptures. Paul repeated this phrase to emphasize the importance of the scriptural witness and to demonstrate that the resurrection's importance paralleled the centrality of Christ's death. He spoke first of Christ's death, declaring, "Christ died for our sins." Christ's substitutionary death on behalf of believers brought salvation to those who would otherwise have been lost.

When Paul said that Christ's death was according to the Scriptures, he probably had in mind Isaiah's prediction that the son of David would suffer on behalf of the people of God (see Isa. 53:1-12). Second, Paul referred to the resurrection. Christ was buried, but he was raised on the third day. Paul never said that Christ raised Himself. Instead, the apostle taught that God the Father raised Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 1:4; Gal. 1:1). The resurrection was also according to the Scriptures. Paul probably had in mind Isaiah 53:10-12. The prophet explained that the son of David would come back from the grave to bring great blessings to God's people. Paul also may have thought of Psalm 16:10, a passage in which David recorded that God would not allow His Holy One to see decay. Jesus defended the idea of resurrection in the Old Testament by asserting that God was the God of the living (see Matt. 22:31-32). By including both Christ's death and resurrection as essential elements of the gospel, Paul precluded those who denied the resurrection from claiming salvation in Christ.

15:5-8. Paul continued by adding a third element that expanded the second. Christ was not simply raised from the dead. He also appeared; people saw and heard Him. Paul did not repeat the refrain "according to the Scriptures" here, because no particular prophecy focused on appearances of the resurrected Son of David. But Paul did note that several people saw the resurrected Christ. These included Peter, the Twelve, more than five hundred of the brothers (most of whom were still living), James, all the apostles, and Paul himself. Although Paul's main idea was that all of these people bore witness to the resurrection of Christ, his list had at least three major concerns. Christ appeared to: (1) figures of central authority in the church (Peter, the Twelve, James, all the apostles); (2) large numbers of people (Twelve, five hundred, all the apostles); and (3) to Paul himself. Paul declared that Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus "last of all ... as to one abnormally born." The expression "last of all" probably indicates that Paul was the last person to see the resurrected Christ. Viewing the resurrected Savior was a requirement for apostleship (see Acts 1:21-22). Yet, Paul admitted that his own situation had been extraordinary, because Christ came to him in a miraculous manner after the ascension. Thus, Paul saw himself as having been "abnormally born." This expression is difficult to translate, because it occurs only here in the New Testament. In an effort to express his humility, Paul compared himself to an untimely born child, indicating some degree of inferiority to those who had lived with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

15:9. In explaining why he spoke of himself in this way, Paul admitted to being the least of the apostles, not even deserving the title, because he persecuted the church of God. This probably resonated strongly with his detractors. They most likely thought, “Obviously he is the least—that is why we favor Apollos and Cephas.”

15:10. But Paul went on to defend his apostolic authority by pointing to God’s choice of him. As Paul considered his background, he had no doubts that he had been called as a Christian and as Christ’s apostle (I am what I am) only by the grace of God. Paul taught elsewhere that the Christian life begins by grace and continues through God’s grace received by dependent faith. Here the apostle evaluated his own life in these terms. Not only had he initially believed because of God’s grace, but every good thing in his Christian life also came from the grace of God. At this point, Paul concerned himself with one particular aspect of God’s grace in his life. Divine mercy had great effect, or result, on his service to the body of Christ. This is the same type of argument he used in 9:1-27 to defend his apostleship. The one who had once persecuted the church worked harder than all the other apostles. Paul assessed the situation honestly, not speaking proudly as if he had accomplished anything on his own. He reiterated that he did nothing in his own power. He performed only by the grace of God that was with him. Paul knew himself too well to take credit for the good he had done in Christ’s service. He knew that the only source that could produce these good works through him was the grace of God. Because he relied so strongly on God’s grace, he became one of the most effective apostles.

15:11. Paul closed this section by bringing his readers back to the main idea. The Corinthians must believe that Christ had been resurrected. On this, all the apostles agreed—Christ’s resurrection was central to the gospel. All of the apostles continued to preach this message, and the Corinthians at one time had believed it as well. Paul hoped they would reaffirm their commitment to Christ’s resurrection.