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Of First Importance — The Cross and Resurrection at the Center

May the power of the cross and the victory of the empty tomb fill every pulpit, every pew, and every Christian heart — and may the Good News of the Gospel be received with joy by sinners in need of a Savior.

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The Christian faith is not a mere collection of doctrines — a bag of truths. Christianity is a comprehensive truth claim that encompasses every aspect of revealed doctrine, but is centered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, as the apostolic preaching makes clear, the Gospel is the priority.

The Apostle Paul affirms this priority when he writes to the Christians in Corinth. In the opening verses of [1 Corinthians 15](#), Paul sets out his case:

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. 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. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy 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 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.



Paul points directly to the events of the cross and resurrection of Christ. He is not concerned with just any gospel, but with the only gospel that saves. This is “the gospel I preached to you,” Paul reminds the Corinthians. The same Paul who so forcefully warned the Galatians against accepting any false gospel reminds the church at Corinth that the very “gospel I preached to you” is the gospel “by which you are being saved.” Their stewardship of the gospel is underlined in Paul’s words, “if you hold fast to the word I preached to you.”

Paul’s statement of priority is a vital corrective for our confused times. Without hesitation, Paul writes with urgency about the truths that are “as of first importance.” All revealed truth is vital, invaluable, life-changing truth to which every disciple of Christ is fully accountable. But certain truths are of highest importance, and that is the language Paul uses without qualification.

And what is of first importance? “That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,” and “that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” The cross and the empty tomb stand at the center of the Christian faith. Without these, there is no good news — no salvation.

Paul gets right to the heart of the matter in setting out those truths that are “of first importance.” Following his example, we can do no less. These twin truths remain “as of first importance,” and no sermon is complete without the explicit affirmation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So it was then, so it is now, and so it ever shall be until Christ claims his church.

As Paul reminded the Corinthians — and now instructs us — the Gospel is at the center of our faith, and the cross and the empty tomb are at the center of the Gospel. “So we preach, and so you believed,” Paul encourages us. [1 Cor. 15:11]

May the power of the cross and the victory of the empty tomb fill every pulpit, every pew, and every Christian heart — and may the Good News of the Gospel be received with joy by sinners in need of a Savior.

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. [1 Corinthians 15:56-58]

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