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Sermon Notes

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The Eternal Gospel: Proclaimed Once Again

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

In March 1974, a group of peasants digging a well in drought-parched Shaanxi province in northwest China unearthed fragments of a clay figure – the first evidence of what would turn out to be one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of modern times. Near the unexcavated tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi – who had proclaimed himself first emperor of China in 221 B.C. – lay an extraordinary underground treasure: an entire army of thousands of life-size terra cotta soldiers and horses, interred for more than 2,000 years.

Over the past 35 years, archaeologists have located some 600 pits, a complex of underground vaults as yet largely unexcavated, across a 22-square-mile area... In one pit, long columns of warriors, reassembled from broken pieces, stand in formation. These clay soldiers exhibit an astonishing individuality. ...The site ranks with the Great Wall and Beijing's Forbidden City as one of the premier tourist attractions within China.

Clearly Qin Shi Huangdi was desiring to carry his power beyond the grave. But he also longed to extend his life on earth – perhaps indefinitely. Alchemists informed the emperor that magical herbs were to be found on what they claimed were three Islands of the Immortals in the East China Sea. The emissaries most likely to gain entry to this mystical realm, they asserted, were uncorrupted children; in 219 B.C., Qin Shi Huangdi reportedly dispatched several thousand youngsters to search for the islands. They never returned. Four years later, the emperor sent three alchemists to retrieve the herbs. One of them made it back, recounting a tale of a giant fish guarding the islands. Legend has it that the first emperor resolved to lead the next search party himself; on the expedition, the story goes, he used a repeating crossbow to kill a huge fish. But instead of discovering life-preserving elixirs, the emperor contracted a fatal illness.

As he lay dying in 210 B.C., 49-year-old Qin Shi Huangdi tried to consolidate power for his posterity, but a shrewd advisor had other plans. He concealed the stench of the emperor's rotting corpse by masking it with a large purchase of salted fish. So ended the life of a powerful emperor over two thousand years who sought to live forever with an army that could travel with him to the next life.

Burial customs all over the world:

- Egyptians built pyramids and embalmed their kings as mummies... the pyramids had everything needed for prosperity in the next world
- Romans and Greeks put coins under the tongues of the dead to pay passage across the River Styx
- Vikings put their dead warriors in boats along with their weapons and other prized possessions and set the boats ablaze and afloat
- Maya dead were buried with maize in their mouths for the journeys; Mayan people also were buried with whistles carved in the shapes of the gods so they could find their way to the spirit world

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only TRUE answer to the worldwide problem of death

I. The Eternal Significance of the Gospel (vs. 1-2)

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

A. The Need for Constant Reminders

1. James ... someone who looks at his face in a mirror then immediately forgets what he looks like

Deuteronomy 4:9 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.

2. God set up the Passover Feast as an annual reminder

Exodus 13:14 "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'"

3. Joshua : stones from the Jordan “What do these stones mean?”
4. Jesus set up the Lord’s Supper as a constant reminder of His death, His blood of the covenant: DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME
5. So Paul sets himself out to remind the Corinthians of the gospel
 - a. A church that forgets the gospel has ceased to be a church...
 - b. BUT... a church that never gets past these basic facts is still immature...
 - c. But on Easter Sunday, it is right for us to be reminded

B. The Gospel Never Changes: It is the Same that Paul Preached

C. The Gospel is Received

John 1:12-13 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

1. “heart of flesh” as opposed to the “heart of stone”

Ezekiel 36:26-27 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

2. The Gospel must be received BY FAITH... we cannot GO THERE

D. The Gospel is Foundational: **on which you have taken your stand**

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Matthew 7:24-25 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house ..."

E. The Gospel that Saves

Vs. 2 By this gospel you are saved

1. Saved = from danger

Matthew 3:7 "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

1 Thessalonians 1:10 Jesus ... rescues us from the coming wrath.

- a. Have been saved AND are being saved
2. Salvation an ONGOING WORK...
3. HOW??? By the SAME GOSPEL that first saved you!!

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes

Romans 1:17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

4. This is why Paul wants to remind the Corinthian Christians

F. IF: The Challenging Word... You Must Keep Holding On

1 Corinthians 15:2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

1. We must CONTINUE in the gospel truths we heard and became convinced of; we must run with endurance the race marked out before us... running right to the very end of the race
2. OTHERWISE: we will have "believed" in vain... for nothing... because our so-called faith proved to be counterfeit

II. The Unchanging Facts of the Gospel (vs. 3-4)

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

A. Received and Passed On

Galatians 1:11-12 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

1. Saul of Tarsus... one of the most amazing conversion stories in all of church history
2. What Paul RECEIVED he also PASSED ON

Jude 3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

B. First Importance

1. Paul says that this gospel message was passed on to the Corinthians as of
FIRST IMPORTANCE

2. The Bible is full of truths from God...

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

3. BUT this gospel of FIRST IMPORTANCE...

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 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 ⁴

C. Christ is the Gospel

1. First and foremost, Christ IS the gospel

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

2. The facts Paul asserts here are focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ

3. The word "Christ" = "Anointed One"...

Acts 10:38 God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power

a. Jesus of Nazareth, the world calls Him

b. As to His human nature, son of Abraham and of David

c. BUT declared with power to be SON OF GOD by resurrection

d. Jesus, identified also as God by the signs and wonders He did

Acts 10:38 God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Matthew 11:5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

D. Christ Died for our Sins According to the Scriptures

1. First fact of the Gospel that Paul asserts: Christ's ATONING DEATH

2. Garden of Eden ... all sin deserves the DEATH PENALTY...

Romans 6:23 *The wages of sin is death...*

3. Christ's death on the cross took away the death penalty... the real death is eternal death in HELL...

Matthew 20:28 *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

4. "According to the Scriptures..."

Psalm 22:1 *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me...?"*

Psalm 22:14-18 *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

Isaiah 53:5-6 *he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

5. Christ had such a strong sense of this Scriptural fulfillment

Matthew 26:53-54 *... how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"*

Matthew 26:55-56 *At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶ But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled."*

E. Christ was Buried

Isaiah 53:9 *He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

1. It also gave plain evidence to the bodily resurrection of Christ

John 19:40 *Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.*

John 19:41-42 *At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

John 20:3-9 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

F. Christ was Raised on the Third Day According to the Scriptures

1. The third step of the simple gospel here: Christ's resurrection
 - a. This is the supernatural origin of the Christian religion
 - b. This is the reason we are here today... why we Christians come here EVERY week... not just on Easter Sunday
2. The Bodily Resurrection of Christ was predicted in the Scriptures

Psalm 22:22 I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.

Psalm 22:29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him-- those who cannot keep themselves alive.

Isaiah 53:11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Psalm 16:8-11 I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ¹¹ You have made known to me the path of life

3. The significance is overwhelming!!! DEATH HAS BEEN VANQUISHED!!! WE CAN LIVE FOREVER!!!
4. "On the third day..."

Matthew 12:40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

5. PREDICTED in the Scriptures ahead of time so we may BELIEVE

III. The Eyewitness Proclamation of the Gospel (vs. 5-8)

1 Corinthians 15:5-8 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

A. He Appeared to Eyewitnesses

- To Mary Magdalene (John 20:14, Mark 16:9)
- To women returning from the tomb (Matthew 28:9-10)
- To Peter later in the day (Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5)
- To the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:36-43)
- To the apostles, with Thomas absent (John 20:19-24, Luke 24:36-43)
- To the apostles, with Thomas present (John 20:26-29)
- To seven disciples by the Lake of Tiberius (John 21:1-23)
- To more than 500 people, probably on the Galilean mountain (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- To James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- To the eleven apostles in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20)
- At the ascension, after forty days of appearances (Acts 1:3-12)
- To Paul on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6, 1 Corinthians 15:8)
- To Stephen (Acts 7:55)
- To John on the Island of Patmos (Revelation 1:10-19)

B. These Eyewitnesses Testified to the Resurrection

1. The Scriptural standard is: “On the testimony of TWO OR THREE witnesses” everything stands
2. “Five HUNDRED” witnesses... that would be considered to be a slam dunk in any court of law
3. We do not know exactly when this happened... In any case, these FIVE HUNDRED eyewitnesses proved an absolutely essential link to the rest of the world

C. These Eyewitnesses Proclaimed the Gospel

1. The Apostle John was one of them

1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and

heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

2. The other Apostles also eyewitnesses:

Luke 24:38-40 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

3. This is the message that has transformed the entire world... the history of the world... and it has come again here to FBC this morning to transform your life as well!!

IV. Applications

A. Come to Christ!!

B. Keep Coming Back to the Gospel

1. By this message we are saved... IF WE HOLD FIRMLY TO IT
2. Keep feeding on these truths day after day
3. Keep reminding yourselves of this: Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; Christ was buried; Christ was raised from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures
4. ALL MY SINS are forgiven!!!
5. I have the power to walk in newness of life by the risen Christ

C. Pursue Holiness based on the Resurrection Message

Romans 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

D. Proclaim this Good News!!

1. We are not eyewitnesses... but none are needed
2. We have the Scriptural testimony of these things
3. It is our responsibility to proclaim this doctrine, this gospel, to the lost around us

E. Rejoice: Death Has Been Conquered Forever!!

Revelation 1:14-16 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Revelation 1:17-18 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.