

December 3

1 Corinthians 15-16, Acts 19-20

Happy December 3<sup>rd</sup> everybody! I'm Margie Alford, the Connections worship leader and I welcome you to the December 3<sup>rd</sup> Project 4:4 accelerator. Our reading finishes out 1 Corinthians and tags on a few verses in Acts.

### 1 Corinthians 15-16

Paul has dealt with an incredible range of issues in this Book, but most of them have been practical issues -- ethical ones: division in the church; immorality in the church; how to handle those questionable "gray areas" like eating meat that had been offered to idols; proper decorum in worship and the appropriate exercise of spiritual gifts. These are all matters of Christian living.

The last major issue Paul tackles in I Corinthians though is not ethical, it is doctrinal. In chapter 15 he defends and explains the doctrine of the resurrection.

It would not be too extreme to say all of Christianity rises or falls on the fact of the resurrection. In point of fact, that is exactly what Paul is saying here! "If Christ is not risen -- our faith is useless and we are still in our sins." More than that if Christ has not been raised then when we die we will not be raised either. The resurrection of Christ then is absolutely foundational. Deny it and there is nothing left that is worth keeping.

Here are 4 main point of how Paul dealt with the resurrection of Christ.

It is the doctrine of the resurrection that "roots" Christianity into the soil of history and it is that historical foundation that makes Christianity such a distinctive religion compared to almost all the other major religions of the world.

Because of the connection of the person of Jesus Christ to human history, Christianity is very different than other religions. It invites the outsider -- the non-believer to evaluate and test its truth claims by the very same criteria that would be used to test any historical witness. The record is open. We are invited, even challenged to check it out. At the point of its most spectacular claims; -- that God invaded history in the person of Jesus Christ, and that this same Jesus actually died, was buried and then rose from the dead, the evidence is both abundant and overwhelming. To become a Christian you do have to exercise faith, but it doesn't have to be blind faith!

The second thing we need to emphasize then is that there is a massive amount of available evidence that Christ actually did rise from the dead. Admittedly, it was easier in one sense, for Paul's readers to "validate" this incredible claim than it is for us today. Easier for them because at the time this chapter was written there were still nearly 500 living witnesses of the event! All they had to do was check the record. We can no longer cross examine living witnesses of that event, but we have their written

testimony. The risen Christ appeared to more than 500 people after His resurrection. Some of them were believers who were not expecting Him to conquer death.

The third point is this: The presence of Paul's defense of the resurrection at the beginning of I Corinthians chapter 15 is a strong indication that the reason some in Corinth were having trouble believing in the resurrection of Christ is because it was just as difficult then as it would be not for the normal person to believe that anyone could conquer death.

They knew, just as well as you and I know, that dead men do not rise. That is what makes the resurrection such a powerful truth. Jesus rose physically from the dead. If He didn't then Christianity is a bunch of nonsense. -- A hoax. It's that simple.

The fourth big idea that I want you to take with you from First Corinthians is that Christ's resurrection is all the proof you and I need to be sure one day we too will rise from death. Paul calls Him the "firstfruit" of them that sleep. You and I do not need to wonder what is beyond death's door for us. The Bible tells us what will happen. It says that at Christ's return the dead will be raised imperishable. We can be absolutely certain it will happen because it already happened to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Because He lives, we also live.

Verses 7-10 of chapter 15 tell us a lot about what made the apostle Paul "tick." He calls himself both an apostle -- an office of great importance and authority but He also says He was one "abnormally born." The Greek word there is the word for an "abortion."

Paul had an incredible view of himself as one who was both very important (only because God had chosen him) and at the same time one who was incredibly insignificant and unworthy.

The cause of this incredible transformation from abortion to apostle is explicable with one single distinctly Christian word: grace! "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."

Did you catch the reference in passing to Paul's having fought wild beasts in Ephesus? We know from Acts about a mean crowd but Paul may have literally been thrown to the lions -- other first and second century Christians were. That tantalizing little reference reminds us of how many things we do not know about this incredible servant of Christ.

Paul mentions at the beginning of chapter 16 about the collection that the Gentile churches took up to relieve the needs of famine stricken Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Remember, we are one body. When Christians in China -- or Bosnia -- or Rwanda suffer, we do too -- and we bear a heavy responsibility to help take care of them.

I've enjoyed the last few days with you in 1 Corinthians. I leave you with these words of Paul, If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Have a great day everybody.