

## **“Is He? Really? Yes!” (1Co 15:1-11)**

**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.**

How do we say it on the Easter morning? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! This is the most joyful greeting, the truly Good News for every living being! The dawn of the New Creation, the beginning of everything good that is yet to come to those who love God. Christ is risen!

Now, let me ask you – is He? Really? How do you know? Be serious about this question. This is a very important question. Because it goes to the very heart of what we believe and what being a Christian is about.

Is He, indeed, risen? I remember that when we became Christians, a dear member of my family used to say it again and again. “Look at you! You both are educated people, – how can you believe that Jesus rouse from the dead? You know it’s impossible. No one comes back from the dead. When someone dies, they are dead and that’s it. Have you seen anyone coming back?”

What do you say? The resurrection of Jesus is the great stumbling block of Christianity. It most certainly can be one of the greatest obstacles for someone to embrace the message of the Bible.

The fact is that most of the New Testament teaching sounds pretty good to almost every human being. All the things about love, and treating others well, and being honest, and caring for one another, etc., it’s a good stuff.

The New Testament could be quite a useful and well accepted book, except, this resurrection from the dead thing. It kind of messes everything up. Doesn’t sound intellectually attractive. Nor appealing. Like an old, weird story.

Not for the smart people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That’s why many churches have even decided to explain the resurrection not as a real event, but simply as a spiritual transformation. When you change your mind and become a better and

more spiritual person. Can we make Christianity more reasonable? Easier accessible? Without those strange things? Such attempts are nothing new. Similar things were happening already in Corinth, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Sometimes we may have these doubts as well. When we hear others pridefully sneering at what the Bible teaches. When the wise and rich and powerful of this age make fun of Christianity, as it becomes more and more common these days. We may choose to keep silent about what we believe to be true. We are weak...

On the other hand, the resurrection of Jesus from Nazareth is ... it is the Gospel, the Good News, the very heart of God's message to the fallen humanity. If you take the resurrection out of the equation, what are we left with?

Then we are left with one more religion of good morals. One more belief system that teaches you how to be a nice person. We can't be Christians without having the resurrection of Jesus as the very heart of what we believe.

Take the heart out and we become like many other walking dead who believe that they are Christians and must be going to heaven because they are nice people. At least when it works for them and doesn't cause them any difficulties.

Paul the apostle knew it too well. This is, why he writes. "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, – that Christ died for our sins... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day..."

This Good News you received, in this Gospel you stand, and by this Gospel you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word that I preached to you. Unless you believed in vain." Did you hear?

This is the very heart of God's message. Christ died and was raised again. Now listen carefully to this and pay attention. What is Paul saying? By this message you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word that I preached to you.

This message is what saves us. Not our running and sweating. This message. Jesus died for your sins. And He was raised again. For you. If you hold fast to this message, if you cling to it as a drowning person to the hand of his rescuer, then you are saved. From death, and sin, and devil, and hell.

You are saved by the message about Jesus' resurrection. This is, why Christians around the world and throughout all times have rejoiced so much in the very fact, that Jesus is risen. His resurrection means new life for us as well.

Now, let us review once more why we believe that Jesus from Nazareth is risen. But first, let's think, how do we know anything that we believe to be true. From ... yes, other people. Directly. Or through books. Or through different media.

But how do we know whether we can trust what we hear? If we trust the person who delivers us information, right? Imagine, that one of our little ones would tell you that the last Sunday during the evening service she saw the angel of the Lord standing next to the altar?

What would you think? But what if three or four of the children would say so? But what if the adults who were present would say the same thing? Would you believe it? I guess you will need to ask those who were there the last Sunday.

Now, let's look how do we know about Jesus' resurrection. First, we need to be clear that people back then were not naïve, they didn't believe that the resurrection was possible. Even more, for them it wouldn't make much sense.

The reigning understanding in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman empire was that the flesh is bad, and the spirit is good. They were waiting for deliverance from the body into higher spiritual realms, not for the resurrection of the body. This is, why Paul was ridiculed in Athens. What a stupid idea... the resurrection of the body.

And even if the people among whom Jesus walked and taught may have had a higher view on our bodies, they knew it as well as we do, that once someone is dead, they are dead, and they don't come back.

Remember, Jesus repeatedly taught His disciples and everyone who was present that in Jerusalem He will be murdered, and then on the third day He will be raised up again. How many times did He repeat this message to His disciples?

Even the chief priests and the Pharisees had heard it well. But when Jesus died, what did they do? They were in despair. They thought that everything was over. Their hopes were out of window. They couldn't believe that Jesus would be raised up again. Things like that do not happen. They knew it.

But then it happened. For the first time since the Fall. Remember, how Paul lists the people who saw the risen Jesus. And his is not even a complete list. Women saw risen Jesus. Mary Magdalene grabbed His feet in excitement and Jesus had to calm her down.

The disciple on the road to Emmaus ate with Jesus. Then as Paul wrote "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." They all saw Jesus, many of them touched Jesus, ate and drank with Him after His resurrection.

Again, pay attention to what Paul writes. "Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep."

When Paul wrote this letter, most of the people who had seen the risen Jesus were still alive. Meaning, there were hundreds of people traveling around who had seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes. This is how the news about this unbelievable event spread so rapidly to all corners of the Roman empire.

Thanks to eyewitness. This is also how the apostle went around telling about the resurrection. “What we have seen, we are telling you, so that you too may be saved and have the fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

You have heard the message and you have held fast to the words that were preached to you. This haven’t been in vain. For the resurrection of Jesus has opened for us the doors to the infinite treasures of our loving God.

Jesus’ resurrection is not simply a past event. He is risen and that changes everything, for each one of us. Because Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, He is the first among many brother and sisters.

It means that the resurrection of the body is real. We will have new perfect resurrected bodies, where sin and death will have no power over us. It means that the life everlasting is real. New bodies, new life where we will see Jesus face to face as He is and where we will be like Him.

It means that we will live in Paradise, in the new heavens and new earth, in the presence of the Holy God, together with all His chosen people from all ages, celebrating in everlasting joy and blessedness.

It means that Jesus has taken care of all our sins. That whatever we have in our past, all of that is taken care of. We will have this new life, pure, joyful, blessed, enriched by the most wonderful fellowship with all God’s children.

It also means that our lives are not meaningless. They have the ultimate meaning. This is the time of grace, where we hold fast to the Gospel and do our best to invite more and more people to join God’s eternal banquet.

It also means that Jesus is with us, as our risen Lord. That He can be present bodily with us whenever He promises. That He is indeed with us both in His Word and in His Holy Meal. Pouring out His Spirit over us.

It also means that we can know the truth. That Jesus is the only way. It also means that we don’t need to toil trying to earn our good standing before God. It is given to us as a gift. Because Jesus was raised, and you will be too.

You see, the resurrection of Jesus means millions wonderful things for those who love the Triune God. The news about Jesus’ resurrection are the Good News. The Gospel. It is at the very heart of who we are.

You are people chosen and redeemed by gracious God. You are people made one in Jesus Christ and destined to live with Him forever. Take joy and great comfort in these words, for they really change everything.

Jesus says to you: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26) Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!

And the peace that surpasses all our understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.