

The Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Key Verse 15:2a

“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.”

These days we hear of some shooting in our city or another mass shooting in our nation or world regularly. They are frightening and make us feel on edge all the time. Sometimes, if you are like me, we find ways to distract ourselves from dwelling on these things, thinking they probably won't happen to me. But when I heard the news stories of two survivors of the Parkland high school shooting committing suicide just a few days apart from each other, my heart broke. Even though they survived the tragedy that day, darkness and death still took its toll on their lives. I mourn with their families and with the world.

But there is hope.

Jesus said, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” This is what I received at our UIC Easter Conference. It's not just that Christ forgives us all our sin, but it is also *when* Christ said those words, at the peak of his suffering, moments before his death. After Jesus' betrayal, unjust trial, beatings, suffering, mocking, humiliation, and nakedness all on display for the world to see, Jesus did not curse the world or God, rather he said, “Father, forgive them..” Jesus had hope beyond hope. Jesus had mercy and grace that tore through the wickedness all around him. Jesus saved others, but he did not save himself. But although he died at the time, death could not keep its grip on him.

These next three weeks we are taking a break from John's gospel. It is the Easter season and traditionally we take this time to remember Jesus' death and resurrection. The Gospel is so deep and wide that we can approach it in almost any book of the Bible. This year we have chosen 1 Corinthians 15 as our Easter passage, split between three parts. I will be taking the first part.

Context: This letter was addressed to the church in Corinth. Corinth was a place in which parents advised their children to stay away from. There may have been a saying, “What happens in Corinth, stays in Corinth.” The Corinthian church was pioneered by Apostle Paul, and it was a church that was full of all kinds of problems that led to deep divisions and hostilities as can be seen by reading this

letter from the beginning. The letter reads like a response to all the gossip that happens in a church, the factions, the superiority of some members over others, and more. Some of the issues they faced included a man who was in an immoral relationship with his step mother, and also a hotly debated topic of whether it was OK to eat meat sacrificed to idols which, apparently, almost all the edible meat was at the time. I believe that these things were only the tip of the iceberg for that church. Basically, this church was in a hot mess, much like the city these people belonged to.

Paul talks about a lot of the church's problems directly and topically, as well as going into beautiful passages covering topics such as unity (ch 12) and love (ch 13) and finally, after all this he finishes his instruction with a reminder of the gospel and goes more deeply into the power and glory of the resurrection.

Paul says "...by this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you." (vs 2) He states very matter-of-factly the Gospel narrative in a few short statements and then goes on to defend and explain the significance of the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul summarized in verses 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, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

What does it all mean? Since the following passages will go deeper into the glory and power of the resurrection, I will focus more on Jesus' death for our sins. I want to reveal why it is important that we come to the cross of Jesus, in our own brokenness. It is not easy, we come hesitantly, maybe even scared, but we need to go through this in order to really appreciate the resurrection of Jesus.

1. Jesus died for our sins

I have two related topics I will talk about regarding Jesus' death for our sins. First, is the importance of confession, or laying down our sin at the cross of Jesus, and the second is receiving the love of Jesus on the cross.

First, confess and receive grace

The Gospel is the good news, but it records one of the most violent, disturbing, and tragic events in human history. Few accounts rival the betrayal, injustice, torture and humiliation that Jesus went through that eventually led to his death. But these are not things that we should turn our gaze from, rather the scriptures recorded them specifically that we may all face this, look at it directly, deeply, and even excruciatingly. It is because if we ignore it, we are ignoring our deepest darkness and sin. In our UIC Easter conference two weeks ago, M. Paul Shin shared us a clip of Jesus' suffering and crucifixion from the Passion of Christ. Many turned their eyes, I think we all want to at such graphic scenes of cruelty and pain.

Jesus' suffering and death, however, is a call to confront sin as it is, without minimizing its effect. It is not easy to confront our sins or the sins of the world around us. Instead, we hide, try to forget, or numb the pain and shame that is actually always there.

When we come to see Jesus' death on the cross, like a mirror in our own soul, or the soul of the world around us, we see the darkness that resides in us and among us. It's so hard to face this because there is a fear that it will expose us, or it will engulf us in itself. But in reality, hiding and pushing sin down only gives it more power over us, holding us captive.

I have many stories of God's grace from growing up in the church, but I also didn't know true grace until I opened my heart, including my deepest secrets that caused me the most shame. Once, I remember being in the basement of one of my friend's house in Toledo and writing an honest confession to God. My family had already moved to Akron by that time. I don't remember whether I wrote this as a testimony or just journaling, I just remember shakily but steadfastly, almost like led by a spirit, writing my confession of my sins, especially my sins of lust which I kept so hidden and secret because I felt so shameful about it. I could never be truly open about my feelings and shame and guilt, generally sharing only surface sins that satisfied a repentance topic in my testimony, but only after I confessed to God confronting my inner anguish and sin, could I feel the mercy and grace of God personally.

Sometimes, just confessing to God one on one is enough. God wants us to open our hearts wide to him, as we are, and he does not judge us, but understands our sorrow, because he came to suffer with us and for us. We may not go through the same suffering that Jesus went through, but at the same time, we know that Jesus understands our suffering. "By his wounds we are healed." Our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus, who died for the redemption of my sin. The theology

of the cross became real to me. It was the Holy Spirit that prompted me to confess to God and it was the Holy Spirit that convicted me of the grace of God on my life, and this broke the power of my sin and shame which had crippled me from within.

God's grace is revealed even more when we share our testimony to others. The light of God's love dispels all darkness. I was so moved to hear the life testimonies of Jonathan, Brooke, Suvd, Mary, and Michelle at our UIC EBC two weeks ago. They poured out their hearts, their hurt, their shame. I won't share what they wrote since it is their testimony, but it was so heart-moving to see how their story doesn't end in despair but in God's grace and is continuing to work in their lives.

While I believe confession is powerful, perhaps it is just the beginning of opening our eyes to the world around us. God's grace doesn't end with ourselves, but reflects on how we relate to others. Through confession and experiencing the grace of God, we grow in the compassion of our Lord to embrace one another. As Bible teachers and shepherds, one of the most powerful things we can do is to be with someone in their brokenness, not with pointing fingers, but with grace, because we have been in the darkness as well, and Jesus died for them as much as for us.

Second, God demonstrated his love for us on the cross

Romans 5:8 says "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Around 2008 I was no longer a boy, not quite a man, and engaged to be married. I was so excited and scared at the same time. I was deeply in love, or at least the emotion of it, but at the same time, I knew that I was imperfect in so many ways my soon to be wife may not have realized yet. What if, in the future, my wife would become so sick and tired of me? What if she didn't respect or even love me? So many "what ifs" crossed my mind. At that time, Christ's sacrifice for my life became personal to me.

When we think about our life, we take solace in the meaning and value of our lives. Or we don't. Often we get stuck by our shortcomings, our failures, and our life becomes a constant worry or hustle for worth and meaning. Is my life worthy now, or is it dependent on achieving some goal or getting out of my current rut?

I'll be worthy when I lose twenty pounds.

I'll be worthy if I can get pregnant.
I'll be worthy if I get/ stay sober.
I'll be worthy if everyone thinks I'm a good parent.
I'll be worthy when I can make a living selling my art.
I'll be worthy if I can hold my marriage together.
I'll be worthy when I make partner.
I'll be worthy when my parents finally approve.
I'll be worthy if he calls back and asks me out.
I'll be worthy when I can do it all and look like I'm not even trying.
(Brene Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*)

It is as if these things will make our lives whole. But, really, the constant striving for worth leaves us still with our faults and shortcomings and never satisfies. But, Christ's death on the cross, while we were still sinners, reveals the value God bestows upon your life *now*.

Some people love beautiful people, but God loved us when we were not beautiful and his love makes us beautiful. Kind of like the beauty in *Beauty and the Beast* transformed the beast into a beautiful human being by her love for him, except the beauty is not a beautiful woman, but God himself. And God did not just love us, but demonstrated his love on the cross, giving his one and only son to die for us.

What is your life worth?

One of my favorite movies is *Saving Private Ryan*. It's not an easy movie to watch because of the violence and death toll that WWII brought, but it depicted the value of one life so poignantly. Near the end of the war, the president himself formed a special group of people who were ready to go home. Their last mission was to save one private Ryan from his post. Ryan was the only surviving son of a widowed mother, where his three other brothers had already fallen in war. It was a mercy mission. It didn't have any war objective, but to bring this boy safely to his mother so that she may not be crushed under the weight of death. It gives me chills, because in the process of saving this lowly private, the company of soldiers sacrificed their own lives. I realized that that was what Jesus did for me. In order to save me and give me hope, Jesus, the son of God, gave his life on the cross for my sins.

What is your life worth?

God answered that by the death of his one and only son, Jesus, on the cross. Your life is invaluable, worthy, and treasured. We can believe this by faith, and live not by human standards or expectations, but the love already poured out on us.

By God's grace, my wife and I will be celebrating ten years of marriage this year. She has certainly known me better than perhaps anyone, including all my sins and weaknesses and shortcomings, yet she has embraced me all the more. I thank God for her love for me, but even more, I thank God who demonstrated his love for me by the sacrifice of His one and only son, Jesus.

Jesus' suffering and death reveals that salvation is not just a series of feel good messages or some sort of "if you believe in good things, good things will follow". In order for salvation to be found, let us come to the cross of Jesus, where he suffered and died. We need to confess our brokenness from our sin and the sin and darkness of the world we live in. We can lay them all at the cross of Jesus, where he suffered and died to bear witness to our own suffering and death, and in so doing, we ourselves die to the power of sin. Even more so, we live in the light of God's love, poured out for us on the cross.

2. He was raised on the third day

1Co 15:4 "...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.."

Going into college, I was a self proclaimed atheist, thinking of myself a rational person. I used to dispute the facts of the Bible and of the resurrection. I can attest that very rarely will reason and proof change an unbeliever's mind. Rather it gives more certainty for a believer to scoff at the unbeliever, and vice versa. The best argument for Christ's resurrection and the truth of the Gospel is the changed lives of those who believe and testify to the power of Jesus' death and resurrection. We may not be able to see and feel the risen Jesus, touching the nail pierced hands and feet like the apostle Thomas did, but we can see and hear the testimonies of those like Jonathan and Brooke and others I mentioned. They are witnesses to the truth of Jesus' resurrection among us.

In the time of Paul's writing, the witnesses were numerous. "Jesus appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."

The risen Jesus changed fearful and even Christian persecuting disciples, like Paul, into powerful, spirit led witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus. Many of these witnesses even gave their life for this truth they believed. Many have done so throughout history and continue to this day.

Like the prodigal son, I retreated to college, moving away from home. I experienced freedom. OK, I was a little bit of a nerd, and my wild living was mild to say the least, but I did embrace my own free will and sought my heart's desire in my own way. I also found myself rather alone and never really belonging anywhere. One thing that stood out in my mind were my parent's quietly supportive prayers for me, despite my rebellious spirit. My second year, a UBF Korean missionary family came and established a worship service in their apartment off campus and the following year, Columbus UBF was officially pioneered by Dr. Henry Park's family and other families joined them. I felt like God was somehow doggedly pursuing me. Somewhere in my heart, I missed the acceptance and love, the friendship and community of the church I grew up in and I came back, albeit with some reluctance.

Where the message of risen Christ reigns, there you will find a loving community that can move the hearts of the lost to recognize their need for salvation and perhaps even to come to the cross of Jesus and believe.

I was restored to God, and have been restored again and again as I am reminded of the Gospel after being jaded or getting caught up in the hustle for worth. We need to hold firmly to the gospel, every day and every moment, and live it out in our lives.

Jesus rose from the dead, that we too may live a new life today

As we will hear from the next messages, Jesus' resurrection from the dead is that we too may experience new life after death. It is not just after we physically die, although Jesus promises eternal life, but it is also for the here and now. It is the same life that was given to Peter at Pentecost and to Apostle Paul after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. It is what the Bible says that when we believe "we have crossed over from death to life."

Resurrection faith enables us to get up in the morning and to live and love as Christ did each and every day as he saw the sick and marginalized of the world, and made

disciples from among them who would change the world. Jesus calls us in our new life to shine the light of Jesus to a dark and dying world. To quote from our John's gospel study, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

In summary, the Gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection heals us and transforms us. We confess the darkness of our sin, and we lay it at the cross of Jesus, where he bore the sin of the world upon himself. His grace and love and the power of his resurrection gives us new life, new hope, and new power to be a light rather than be engulfed by the darkness. More than ever, we need to shine the light of the Gospel of Jesus to this world as Gospel witnesses.