



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

“Easter Before Christmas? Why Not?”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for the ministry of the word of God which the Holy Spirit has given to us in years past in which -- through which we have come to understand the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the light of the word of God which has truly enlightened our minds and hearts and brought us to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal. We thank Thee for the forgiveness of sins and all of the other blessings that belong to the salvation which Thou hast, in the eternal purpose, worked out for our benefit.

We're grateful for the Holy Spirit who teaches us and instructs us. We thank Thee also for our fellow believers who are used by the Holy Spirit to encourage us and to be instruments in the sanctification of each of us, how necessary it is for us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. And we pray that as we meet together this evening, that we may profit from our time together from the word of God and especially from the ministry of our great Triune God to us.

We pray for each one present, for their family, for their concerns, for their needs. We pray especially for those who would wish to be here but for various reasons are unable to be with us. We think of those who are ill or sick or have some serious trials through which they're going, we pray for them. We've pray for those who've requested

our prayer especially. We remember them and their many needs. We bring them before Thee, Lord. We ask that Thou art minister to them in a way that will honor our savior and be in accordance with Thy wonderful will for each of us and for them.

We pray that our meeting this evening may bring encouragement to us in our Christian lives. And if there should be some who do not yet have the assurance of a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, that means eternal life, we ask that this may be the time in which they respond to the good news, receive it for themselves with the benefits that have been won by the sacrifice, the blood sacrifice of our great savior in Jerusalem on Calvary's cross.

We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] Well, we're coming in our study to one of the great chapters of the word of God, 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and surely one of the greatest that the Apostle Paul has written. And our subject this evening is “Easter before Christmas? Why Not?” And in a moment I will just briefly make a comment regarding the title. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 1 through verse 11 is our subject for this evening.

A couple of weeks ago, I had lunch with Dr. Charles Ryrie and in the course of our discussion of various things -- we served on the faculty of the seminary together for about 20 to 25 years, and I hadn't seen him in a long time. And we talked about a lot of things, but in the course of our discussion one of the things came up that I thought was rather interesting. He had said that someone of his students, I think, had asked him for some information about what was the thing that he sought in his writing -- for Dr. Ryrie has written a number of books -- what was the thing in his book that he always sought to have in his mind? The young man was looking for some help. And Ryrie said to me, “I told him something that was actually told me, and it was this: “The main point is always to be sure that the main point is the main point.” Well, anyone who has read Dr. Ryrie's writings knows that that is essentially what he has followed because he writes very simply

and to the point. And one gets the impression always that the main point that he has in writing is to be sure that the main point is the main point. And he always centers in on something that is for him the main point.

Well, 1 Corinthians chapter 15, it's very plain that the apostle's main point is to talk about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the things that flow out from it. So our main point, particularly this evening, is going to be the goal of making the resurrection our main point. A. M. Ramsey who was later the Archbishop of Canterbury said with reference to the early Christians, "For them, the gospel without the resurrection was not merely a gospel without its final chapter, it was not a gospel at all."

So we all know, I think, who have read the Bible, how important the resurrection is; important for the sake of the gospel. It's actually extremely important for our Christian lives. Easter is the day on which the Christian church historically celebrates the resurrection. Now, the Apostle Paul knew nothing of Easter, for he celebrated every day as Christ's victory over sin, over death, and over Hades. In verse 20 he says, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." And if you read Paul's writings you understand that everything for him involves the presence of the risen Christ in his life and in his ministry, everything. Easter was, for Paul, every day. It was a celebration of the living messiah in his life and in his ministry.

So he thought the thing symbolized -- that is, the resurrection of Christ, was critical for every living day. Now, I confess that sometimes when Easter comes around I wonder why we celebrate Easter for this very reason, because Easter is every day for a Christian. It's the day in which we, as we live out our lives, recognize our Lord's living presence with us. Now, of course, there is a sense in which Easter in our lives is not completely fulfilled because the resurrection of the body has not yet come to pass. But nevertheless, the resurrection is something that should be -- the resurrected life of our Lord is something that we should be cognizant of, should realize, should experience every living day that we have.

So why not Easter before Christmas? We are faced with expounding the text that has to do with the resurrection of Christ, and this Sunday is Christmas, and so we're going to have a little bit of emphasis upon Easter before Christmas. But I hope we realize that when we talk about Easter, we're talking about something that should be present all the time in our lives: the experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church's replacement of the Sabbath by the first day of the week as their day of meeting recognizes the critical difference. On the first day of the week, our Lord rose. Not only this that, in the experience of the believers, it was the first day that was so significant. When they went out to the tomb on that first day of the week after he had been crucified, it was on that day that they had the experience of meeting the risen Christ; Mary Magdalene meeting him on the first day of the week. They had meetings on the first day of the week. John chapter 20 points out: and our Lord came and came into their presence on the first day of the week. So the conjunction of the resurrection and the experiences of the earliest believers meeting together on the first day of the week when our Lord supernaturally came into their meetings, led the Christian church to stop celebrating the Sabbath as the day of meeting, but meeting on the first day of the week.

Now, as characteristic we know of the Christian church to try to unconsciously bring in things from the old covenant into the day of the new covenant, and we do have a great deal of that. We have, for example, religious men who pose as Christians who wear garments, special garments. That is simply bringing over into the age of the Christian church of things that pertain to the Old Testament and the Mosaic regulations and the garments that the priests wore in carrying out their ministry. That has been characteristic of the Christian church because we have not always recognized what a tremendous difference this age is from that age. In fact, it's the clue to understanding the Bible; to understand that the Old Testament reveals the working of God in the Mosaic law and in the things that pertain to the Mosaic law; whereas now, we have the Mosaic law has been satisfied by our Lord Jesus Christ; done away with. We now live in the age of

the spirit who indwells each one of us, who is to guide us and direct us in our Christian life. The law is still a useful instrument. Still for our edification, we read the Old Testament; it is very edifying for us. But one of the first things we must learn is that we are responsible ultimately to the living presence of our Lord through the spirit in our lives day-by-day. We walk not by the Law of Moses, we walk by the Spirit.

So every one of us, every one of us -- not somebody who stands behind a pulpit and lectures and tell us others how to live a life sometimes which we're not living ourselves -- but every one of us is responsible to learn what it is to walk by the spirit of God. So the church's replacement of the Sabbath by the first day of the week is designed to recognize the fact that we live in a new time. We live by new power, the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. In fact, in this very epistle, you will notice the next chapter begins in chapter 16 in verse 1 and 22,

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."

Easter is now part of the life of the local church. It meets on the first day of the week, our Sunday.

Now, we turn to 15 -- chapter 15 and, first of all, in the first four verses Paul gives us what might be called a review of the apostolic gospel. Perhaps you have not realized this. I confess there was a time when I hadn't realized this. I was reading 1 Corinthians, but I didn't realized this; that this is the earliest account of the resurrection. It's found in the writing of the Apostle Paul because this epistle is earlier than our gospel accounts. And so this is the first account of the event of the resurrection.

Now let me read verses 1 through 4:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

You might wonder: why did Paul talk to the Christian church in Corinth about the resurrection? Well, really, he doesn’t tell us at the beginning as he does in his other chapters. When he goes through the other problems that the church was having, he starts out usually by saying, “Now concerning.” That’s one of his characteristic expressions; now concerning spiritual gifts and so on. But he doesn’t tell us here until verse 12. In verse 12 he says -- verse 12 he says,

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”

So obviously, there were some people in the Corinthian church who were denying the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Right here in the Christian body in the fellowship, so to speak, they were denying that our Lord Jesus had been raised from the dead. There is no resurrection of the dead, they were saying.

That raises some interesting questions because one might wonder: why is it that there would be at this time some who were in the Christian body who were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? Perhaps it would be helpful to remember what the people living in Corinth and in that part of the world really believed. That might help us to understand why it was so difficult for them to grasp the resurrection of the dead. To

the Greeks, the body could not be consecrated. The body was matter. The Greek term was *bule*. The body was *bule*. It is the source of all evil; matter. It's the shackle; it's the handicap; it's the prisonhouse of the soul. But to the Christian, of course, the body was not evil. The Christian, from the Christian Revelation, knew that our Lord Jesus had come, had become incarnate, had taken to himself a human body. That, in itself, told the Christians that the body was not something evil. Our Lord Jesus Christ would not take something evil.

So he had taken this human body upon him and therefore the body was not to be despised. It was not despicable. It was not contemptible because it had been inhabited by the second person of the Trinity. To the Christian, therefore, the life to come involves the total man, body and soul. In other words, the Christians, contrary to the Greeks and others, believed in the resurrection of the body, not the immortality of the soul, which was characteristic of them. So that's one reason why the Corinthians were having trouble, some of them, with the resurrection of the body.

Now, we also know from our Lord's encounter with the Pharisees that the Pharisees -- that is, those who understood something about the Old Testament -- did believe in the resurrection of the body. The Jewish Messianic viewpoint, which was theirs, was a viewpoint that involved the resurrection of the body. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body, as you know, and these were some of the controversies that our Lord had with these bodies of people. So you can understand, I think, why it would have appeared to the Greek people, a very little thing to be desired to go back into the body which was evil. So the idea of the resurrection of the body and the rejoining of the body, after one had been released from the body, was something that the Greeks, some of them -- most of them probably-- were having very -- a great deal of difficulty in accepting. This was the skepticism that Paul faced at Athens and that the Christians faces in the modern world.

One of my former teachers, who was Professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, speaking about the apostle's ministry in the city of Athens went on Mars Hill. He discussed such things as the resurrection and finally even mentioned that it was by means of the resurrected Christ that the world would be judged. They mocked and some of them said, “We will hear you again about this.” And my old teacher used to say, “Twenty centuries have echoed the laughter of the Areopagus concerning the resurrection of the body.” We have people today who just like the Greeks then do not like the idea of the resurrection of the body.

But now coming to the gospel itself, what does Paul talk about first? Well, he talks first about the saving power of the gospel. Notice the second verse, by which also you are saved if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain. I want to just make one comment and then pass by because it really doesn't come up here except that I think in our day with so much emphasis upon baptism, the comment needs to be made. It's interesting that the apostle says that men are saved by the gospel. Notice he says: by which also you are saved.

Now, what is interesting about that to me is that back in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians -- this first epistle -- the apostle says something rather interesting. He says in verse 13, when he's talking about the divisions in the Christian church there, he said,

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name.”

Now, in the next chapter, he says, “(He) determined not to know anything among them say Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

Now, if baptism was essential to salvation, how could the apostle say that he preached the gospel to them? He says in verse 1, "Moreover brethren I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you." How could he say: I preached the gospel to you if baptism is part of the gospel and he rejoices in the fact that he had not baptized any -- but a couple of people, incidentally; Crispus and Gaius. That very fact lets us know that baptism is not essential to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But now here he says, "By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which was preached unto you."

Now, I would like for you to notice these points. Notice that he says, "By which you are saved, if you hold fast that word that is preached to you -- unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died...that He was buried... that He rose again."

Now, coming back to verse 1, he says, "Which I preached to you, which also you received." So notice now he said I preached to you the gospel, you received the gospel, and then he says by which also you are saved if you hold fast the word which I preach to you. Notice the third and fourth statements of Paul: he mentions in which you stand. I preached, you received, and now you have -- in which you now stand. That expression is a word that we could translate something like this: In which you have taken your stand. I preached, you received, and you have taken your stand in the possession of the life that comes from our great God in heaven through the gospel. And then the fourth thing: by which you are saved.

Now, this expression may be rendered very literally: by which you are being saved. That raises a question. Being saved. What does that mean? Well, it could mean, of course, that something that is true, that the work of salvation is a continuous work in our hearts. We have been saved -- Bible teachers tell us correctly -- we've been saved from the penalty of sin, but we're not completely saved. The Bible talks about sanctification and growth and grace and things like that, so it's possible for us to understand that we have been saved, but we are being saved in the sense that the

remaining power of sin in our lives -- because we still have the sin principle with us -- is being gradually removed by the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of our Triune God, grounded in what Christ did on Calvary's cross. We know that that is what is taking place. It may be standing at idle in some of us. We have not made much progress -- many of us, but we know it will be completed because we know that when Christ comes we are to be like him.

So he may be saying by which you are being saved in the sense that you believe the gospel, you now have the Christian life within you, you are growing in grace and in that sense you are being saved not from the penalty of sin -- that has been done -- but from the power of sin in your daily life. That's a simple fact that we often here Bible teachers remind us of; something to keep before us all the time of course. Now, that's one way to understand it. I'm not sure that that's not the way. But I want to suggest to you that it might mean something else. It might mean by which you are being saved in the sense that the work of salvation is taking place in the company of this body of believers, and believers are being added to the body, and so the being saved would mean that others are entering into the experience of salvation, too. So he could be speaking of that. It's impossible to be absolutely sure, in my opinion, what Paul means at this point. At least I should say it's impossible from what I know of the Scriptures to know the answer to that, and I haven't seen anybody else's explanation that satisfied me. That does not mean it's not possible, you understand. It might be possible. There are many things about which I am ignorant, and I'm sure that it's still so after all these years of studying the Bible. I know that because through the years I have learned a lot of things and realized I was ignorant on many points after I had become a Christian. So the apostle may be saying by which you are being saved individually, each one of you, growing in grace, or it may be by which you Corinthians are being saved; that is, the body is gaining accretions to its number as the gospel is being preached and the church, as individuals find Christ, is growing.

Now, that may be the meaning. We can pass by that, and you can think about it and make up your own mind. Then he adds something that is a problem to many people: if you hold fast. That would seem to suggest that we can be saved, and it would be possible for us to not hold fast and thus to lose our salvation. There are many people who believe that you can be a Christian and you can lose your salvation. That kind of theology is -- usually goes under the name of Arminianism from James Arminius, the Dutch theologian who was an opponent at one time of Calvinistic theology or the theology of Paul.

At any rate, it's possible, as you read the text, to understand it in that way, by which you are saved if you hold fast. That word which is preached to you -- which I preached to you -- unless you believe in vain. So to believe in vain, according to Arminian teaching would be that you believed but you didn't hold fast and so you lost the salvation that had you. Many people really believe that that is true and you will notice -- and you will come in contact with people who say I had that experience. I was converted and then I slipped. I was backsliding. I lost my salvation. I went away from the Lord, and I've been saved again. I have run across people who say they have been saved many times. I've heard testimonies to that effect. I remember years ago in a Bible conference in Ohio had a time in which everybody gave the testimony. A man stood up and said, "I thank God I've been saved. I've been saved many times." And he went on to describe earnestly and sincerely his Christian experience. He had been saved and lost, and saved and lost, and saved and lost. That kind of theology leads to that type of testimony.

But now, there's another way in which we may understand this believing in vain; and I think this is the way that the apostle would understand it. What is it to believe in vain, then? Well, it's to believe in a resurrection that did not take place. In that case, you would be believing in vain; in other words, believing without cause, without proper cause in the physical resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the historical

resurrection. If, for example, you believed that Christ had been raised from the dead but he hadn't been raised from the dead, then you would have believed in vain. That's the point that the apostle is making because he's anxious to establish, as best he can, the fact that our Lord has truly been raised from the dead. So if you hold fast that word which I preached to you unless you have believed in without proper cause.

Now, it's perfectly all right to exhort Christians to hold fast. That's proper you can find the apostle doing that in other places. We have the confidence from other passages of Scripture that the Holy Spirit is the one who keeps us and enables us to hold fast to the truth that has been propounded to us. So we believe that it's important for us to be exhorted to hold fast. As a matter of fact, the admonition itself, the exhortation itself is one of the means by which the Holy Spirit does cause us to hold fast; respond to those admonitions. That's one of the reasons for the admonitions in the word of God. They are means by which God keeps us. I don't have time to talk further about that, but that's one of the things that I'm sure, if you read the Scriptures, you'll realize is the proper use of admonition.

Now, having spoken, then, of what may be called the saving power, the great events are discussed in verses 3 and 4: “For I delivered to you first of all that which also I received.” Isn't that interesting? Paul received his gospel by revelation, he tells us in Galatians. He met the Lord on the Damascus road. There the truth was revealed to him by our Lord himself, the risen Christ. But at the same time, the apostle met others after he had come to know Christ and further details were given him concerning the gospel.

So it could be said that Paul's gospel came to him by revelation and by tradition. Notice what he says. He says, “I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.” These were things that came to Paul from his discussions with others. So in putting it all together, we can say that the essence of the gospel came to Paul when he

met the risen Christ and our Lord identified himself to Paul and brought him to the place where he entered into the Christian faith in his experiences in Acts. But further meeting with the church and the leaders, the apostles brought the details of the gospel more home to the apostle.

Now, we look now at the -- what can be called the four parts of these matters which came to him. And they can be called the great events. I call them that way. First of all, Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. What does it mean when the apostle says, "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures"? Well, I'm sure you realize that it must have something to do the fact that our Lord is the sacrifice for sins. He died for our sins. And probably in the light of the other things that Paul says in other places means he died as a substitute for us. That's made plain elsewhere. The word that is used here is a word that means something like for our benefit. But in order for it to be for our benefit he must die in our place and he dies in our place, he bears the judgment that is due us. And he bears it all, doesn't he? past, present, and future? If it's true that Christ has born the judgment for us past, present, and future, is it possible for us to experience judgment in the future? Is it possible? Can heaven judge us for our sins if Christ has died for them? Is it possible? No, it's not possible. It's not possible for us to be judged for sins that Christ has paid the penalty for, unless it's possible for an individual to be judged twice for the same sins.

Judged in my substitute and then judged again? Double jeopardy we call that in law, don't we?

Well, now if that's true when it says Christ died for all or Christ died for our sins, who are the *our* and who are the *all*? They must be those who have escaped judgment. Isn't that true? Isn't it? Come on, it must be true. He has truly paid the debt for all, but there are people who are going to hell, are there not? They must not be included in the all because if they were included in the all they could say Christ died for my sins. Substitution, you see, if it's true biblical substitution, demands a special atonement. That's

what Paul teaches elsewhere. It's very difficult for people to grasp that fact, but once it's gasped what a transformation it makes in the life of believers to realize how marvelous it is for God to single out his special love for the saints of God. What a guarantee and what a substantial support for our whole life, is the knowledge that my future is settled now and forever. Nothing can be more wonderful than that. Nothing. Facing all the experiences of life, we know we're going to be ultimately in the Lord's presence. The time is coming when we are going to leave the land of the dying for the land of the living. That's a great help when the experiences of life, which are so deep, come to us.

He died for our sins. Now, the full sense of that, I don't know, in this sense that what he has in the background as the figure that may lie in his mind because he says Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. I suggest to you that he probably was thinking about the truth of Isaiah chapter 52, verse 13 through chapter 53, verse 12, that great passage concerning the servant of Jehovah in which the servant of Jehovah talks about the satisfaction of our sins by our substitute. One text that immediately comes to my mind -- I'm sure it must come to the minds of some of you -- is chapter 53 of the book of Isaiah in verse 6. Listen to what the prophet says speaking about the servant of Jehovah and what he's going to do: "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Now, I'm not sure that that's the text that he has in mind. He did say in chapter 5, didn't he, Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. And so, when he says Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us, he may have had that in mind because that's a beautiful figure of what Christ does, the Passover, the sacrifice on the day of the Passover; the lamb. Christ died for our sins like the Passover made it possible for the children of Israel to pass through judgment into freedom; so Christ has died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.

So what it teaches, of course, is the satisfaction of the claims of God against us by the substitution of the lamb and the lamb of God which is the payment of the penalty that is ours, Number one.

Number 2: verse 4, and that he was buried. Why does he lay a little stress on burying? Christ died, and Christ was buried. Well, because this is the kind of necessary stage confirming the things that are transpiring here. The fact that he was buried shows he really died and also the fact that he was buried and then when we talk about resurrection, indicates that the resurrection is a reanimation; that is, the giving of new life. So he was buried confirms the finality of the death and the reality of the resurrection. It was a resurrection. He had been dead and had been buried. His body had been placed in the grave.

Then we read, thirdly, he rose again. That's a great expression in the Greek text. It says he has been raised. The perfect tense which suggests not only the event of the resurrection, but he has been raised and the results of that event continue to the present day. He's alive. He has been raised. Isn't it interesting he adds the third day. That seems strange. He has been raised the third day.

Well, that seems to point just to the past. But what he means by the tense is he has been raised, yes, on the third day but the results of it are continuous to the present day, as the other things Paul says make very plain. So he has been raised. Now, the very fact that he says has been raised indicates that the Father takes the initiative in the resurrection of Christ. He has been raised. He is the object of this. My text says he rose again. Now that could be said. He's the Eternal Son. But stress rests upon the fact as a mediator, it's the Father who raises the Son in response to the work that has been done. He has been raised.

Now, mind you, when he says he has been raised, he's talking about the bodily resurrection. He's not talking about his Spirit living again -- although, of course, our Lord's Spirit does live and lives through this experience -- but he's talking primarily about

the body. James Denney, the great Scottish theologian said, "If we cannot talk about the bodily resurrection, we should not talk about the resurrection at all." So the things that we do on Easter, you know celebrating the Spirit of Christ is alive today, is thoroughly out of harmony with the Bible. The Bible speaks of a bodily resurrection and our Lord has a body, glorified body. We are going to have a body, and our resurrection will mean that our spirit will rejoin a glorified body. It won't look like this. You can say hallelujah if you like. It's getting worse as the years go by. I've tried to fix my mirror, but it won't help. You can look in it but still the evidence is there. I used to have hair. It's hard to find now. I never used to take a mirror out and look at the back of my head. I confess: I do now. I wonder where the hair is now. It's kind of interesting, you know, to see it leave and then say, "Uh Oh. It's left over there now. There's nothing here. It's like Troy on channel 8. He's losing his hair too. He's great comfort, isn't he? Rose again.

Now, I want you to think about something for a moment. When you think about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, what does the church generally think about when they think about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, I'm going to suggest to you that the church, as a whole, professors -- all those that who profess Christ, when they talk about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, I suggest to you that the great emphasis of the liberal church is on our Lord's treatment of individuals; is what they would call love, his gentle spirit, his teaching -- that is, his teaching with regard to various things as parables, his metaphors, all of that kind of thing. What do the apostle stress? I think you will find this to be true if you read the New Testament, read the apostles, what they stress is not the course of his life -- his day-by-day life. What they stress are the redemptive facts. In fact, they stress the end of his life, not the course of his life. They stress the end of his life. He died. He was buried. He was raised from the dead. He is coming again. Those things are certainly important. We don't deny that. But you -- if you read the apostles, you will see that they do not have lengthy treatments of what Jesus Christ said or did or taught; what they talk about is what he did in his atoning work. That's the important

thing for them. That is evident right here. I didn't make that up. Those who have studied Paul's teaching lay stress upon that: his emphasis is on the end of his life, not the course of our Lord's ministry. It's on the proof and disproof of his death, his resurrection.

There are many theories that men have sought to support, with reference to the resurrection, but the apostles stress the fact that he was raised from the dead bodily. They do. The gospel writers do discuss some of the theories that may have been raised by people. For example, the Jewish theory that is mentioned in Matthew chapter 28, you remember when the Roman -- the sentinels were brought and asked the question: what happened? They could only say someone stole him away while we slept. They were guarding the body. Now, can you imagine anyone defending themselves that way? Someone came and stole the body away while we were sleeping.

Now, in Roman law, if one of the sentinels fell asleep, this one was to be executed. But they were not executed. Their theory was that someone came in and stole him away while we slept. What's the support for your theory? We were sleeping. If any theory could have less to stand in its support than that, I would like to know what it is. Someone stole him away. What were you doing? How do you know? We were sleeping. That's the Jewish theory.

Then there were some who had another theory. Actually, what happened was that the people who went to the tomb went to the wrong tomb. Peter? John? Well, I could understand that. They might have gone to the wrong tomb. They weren't too close at the end. The ladies, however, did. And the ladies went to the right tomb. They had sat over and watched our Lord being buried. But what shows me that theory is so ridiculous is that the angel said, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” They weren't mistaken, those angels. The tomb was empty. So the idea -- one of our great New Testament professors propounded that theory: that they went to the wrong tomb. Isn't that interesting?

Then there is the swoon theory. Our Lord really swooned and then came forth from the grave. He was, of course, weak and emaciated having swooned and been in the grave for a long time. But he came forth and -- do you think a person who had come forth weak and emaciated, from being two or three days in a tomb, would inspire the men who had followed him to such an extent that they could actually believe that he had conquered death and was alive by supernatural power? If someone staggered out of the grave, do you think that would be an illustration of the one who speaks as the one who lives forever? I don't think so. That theory is weak. Allan McRae, Professor and President of Faith Seminary used to say, "You know I like that old tragic story of the murder of a beautiful theory by a gang of you ugly facts." What we're having here is something like that. Our Lord and the others were not imposters. He truly rose from the grave.

What is it that finally brings us to the conviction that our Lord rose from the dead? Is it historical evidence? No, we don't have sufficient historical evidence to prove that. We have reasons to believe, but we don't have absolute proof. No one actually saw the transformation of our Lord's human body into the glorified body, no one. I was reading Charles Haddon Spurgeon's Morning and Evening this morning, I believe -- if it wasn't, it was yesterday -- and in it he had a quotation from one of the Erskine brothers, one of the Scottish Presbyterians, a great family that had a lot to do with the preservation of the gospel in Scotland a couple of centuries ago. And one of them -- I don't remember whether it was Ralph or the other, his brother -- said, "There are times when he will put it beyond all doubt that he's talking about ever lasting love -- I have loved you with an everlasting love -- there are times when he, God, will put it beyond all dispute in the souls of his people. The final analysis, it is the work of the Holy Spirit and in the heart of his people to bring them to conviction concerning the truth of Holy Scripture. We know that, from the word of God.

Paul says in this very epistle chapter 2, verse 1 through verse 5 something just exactly like that. He says, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus

Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” It's God in his mighty power who brings conviction of the truthfulness of the word of God and the truthfulness of such incidents in our Lord's life as his atoning work, his bodily resurrection, his second coming, his presence at the right hand of the Father.

If you have a faith in the truth of the word of God, it is something that God has given to you. Deep down within your heart, it comes from God. The reason Paul wanted it to be that way --that things might ultimately reside in God -- is because the experience of most of us is, if we rely upon human reasoning we will say, “Aah, that sounds very good. I like that.” And then someone will come along with something that we hadn't thought of and prove that what we were trusting in was not true. Well, yeah -- that's it, I guess; and then this will go on and on and on, and we'll never have the assurance that really comes from knowing the truth of God. God gives that. Salvation is of the Lord in that way, too.

Now Paul says was seen. Actually, it means something like appeared. And he was seen by Cephas and by the twelve. The evidences of the appearances are the remaining words of this section. I'm not going to talk much about that because I think it's very plain. The evidence outside of the Old Testament follows. Before it was Christ died according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised again according to the Scriptures. And he was seen. Scriptural truth lies back of it. But this, of course, is historical, and he appeared to others.

It's interesting that Paul says he appeared to the twelve -- actually he appeared to the eleven. Is that an in error? No. The term the twelve is the term used for the body of the apostles -- the original apostles. Judas, however, you remember, had been dismissed.

And so consequently, it was to the eleven but they were the twelve and then ultimately one joined them to make the twelve, as you know.

And then to the Apostle Paul, last of all, one might ask why did not Paul mention the women? Wellm the reason for that is not that the women, in my opinion, were unreliable. It was, simply, that in Jewish law a woman did not qualify as a legal witness. Our Lord -- it almost seems as if we he was trying to show that that's a human kind of thing because who is the first person to whom our Lord appears? It's to one of the women; Mary Magdalene, isn't it? And furthermore, who is the one through whom the apostles learn about the resurrection? It's through a woman; through Mary. So the woman and the women but the woman was the proclaimer of the resurrection.

If I have any evangelical feminists in the audience, you ought to like that. I like it, too, as a matter of fact. I think that brings a smile to my face. It's true, not a legal witness, but a real witness. Our Lord chose Mary as his witness to the apostles and made her, in effect, the first evangelist of the resurrection.

One last thing, Paul describes himself here. “Last of all -- verse 8 -- then last of all he was seen by me also as by one borne out of new time -- I'm sorry, out of due time.” Now, some have said that what this means is that the apostle means is brought to the knowledge of the Lord before the Jewish nation as a whole would be brought to him in the future.

That's an interesting observation, but I don't think that's really what Paul is talking about. He says one born out of due time -- one born out of due time -- and the word that he uses is the Greek word *ektroma* -- which comes from a verb *ektutrosko* which means to miscarry. It refers to an untimely birth, a miscarriage or even an abortion; so he appeared to me, the abortion. The word refers to something horrible, something freakish, as a matter of fact. Why? Why would Paul use words like this? It appeared to me as a miscarriage, as an abortion.

Well, in the first place, of course, he didn't have the experience of the other apostles who accompanied with our Lord over a period of time. It was almost as if they had a long period of gestation before their birth, but not to Paul. He was a persecutor of the church, and suddenly he passes from persecuting the church to a leading follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. So his birth was freakish or horrible.

But it's possible to understand it in something -- in another way. The word “Paul” means little. So it may be a reference to his physical characteristics, the little one. We know that the Corinthians made fun of Paul -- some of them. Listen to what they say. His letters, they say, are weighty and powerful but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible. And so it may be that he speaks of himself as coming to our Lord in an untimely birth, as a miscarriage, or even an abortion. He may have taken the words that they were using with reference to them and use them of himself, and many commentators feel that that's what he does mean. He takes that word from his enemies' mouths and uses it of himself, acknowledging he is the least of the apostles “but by the grace of God, he's been able to labor more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they so we preach and so you believed.” Least of the apostles? Well, that's Paul's idea. It's not our idea. We think of him as a great apostle. And notice how he concludes, therefore whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believe.

There is a harmony in the apostolic band they together agreed on these great facts of the gospel. And notice, too, that these great facts of the gospel are the things that we are to proclaim today. He died as an atoning sacrifice. He was buried. He was raised and was seen. He is the living Lord Jesus Christ through whom if sins are forgiven, they must be forgiven. The appeal of the cross is complete, total, and final. May God help us all to respond to it.

Let's bow in prayer.

“Easter Before Christmas? Why Not?” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words which we could never fully and completely expound. We thank Thee for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, our mighty Lord who has implanted within our hearts the trust in him that means life eternal.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.