**THE GOSPEL OF RESURRECTION**

**1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

**Key Verse: 15:3-4**

Good morning! I hope everyone is fine in Christ Jesus during this challenging time. My message on 1 Corinthians chapter 15 was supposed to be delivered in the beautiful Spruce Lake Retreat center in Pennsylvania, but unfortunately I am delivering this message online in my house in New Jersey because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last several weeks to months, so many people are suffering and dying in America and the world. Like all other schools, my university also switched all instruction to online instruction and the campus is now almost empty.

What is happening today seems unreal. It is like a part of a science fiction movie showing horrible and catastrophic disasters. The world we are facing today looks like the world after Thanos snapped his finger in the movie “Avengers”. We don’t know how long this pandemic will last and how many people would be killed by the coronavirus. But we must believe that everything is under God’s control and we must pray for his mercy on us and our neighbors in the US and the global community.

The book of first Corinthians is Apostle Paul’s letter sent to the Church of Corinth during Paul's stay in Ephesus approximately in AD 55. The city of Corinth was one of the dominant commercial centers of the Mediterranean world. Just like any other Greek cities, people in Corinth were interested in Greek philosophy and placed a high premium on wisdom. However, like any large commercial city, Corinth was a center for open and unbridled immorality. Corinth contained at least 12 temples. One of the most infamous was the temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, whose worshipers practiced religious prostitution. In a setting like this it is no wonder that the Corinthian church was plagued with numerous problems. Immorality had afflicted the Corinthian assembly almost from the beginning. The Corinthian church was immature and unspiritual although the church was gifted in many ways. Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthian church to instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness, correcting erroneous practices such as divisions, immorality, litigation in pagan courts and abuse of the Lord’s Supper.

In chapter 15, Apostle Paul draws Corinthian believers’ attention to Jesus’ resurrection. Let’s read verses 1 and 2. “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.”

After talking about various issues among Corinthian believers, Paul wanted to remind them of the gospel. Why did Paul need to remind brothers and sisters in the Corinthian church of the gospel? It is because we are all forgetful. Although we study the Bible and come to worship service every week, it is hard for us to keep God’s words in mind and heart due to our sinful nature to love the world rather than God’s words. We are easily distracted from the gospel due to various problems around us. However, many more problems arise when we forget about the gospel and focus on the problem itself. When we are swamped with many problems and troubles, the best solution is always going back to the gospel. The gospel leads us to salvation when we hold firmly to the gospel. Here, an important word is “firmly”. We must have absolute faith in Jesus and firmly believe that Jesus is our savior. About a month ago, I happened to watch Nik Wallenda on TV walking on a steel cable over Masaya Volcano, an active volcano in Nicaragua. At first, I thought this man was one of daredevils who want to make a lot of money through his daredevil show. While watching him crossing over the volcano, I realized he was a sincere and devoted Christian. He was praying to God and praising God before, during and after crossing over the volcano called “Mouth of Hell”. I also noticed that Nik Wallenda was holding a long balancing pole firmly, because it would be impossible to keep a good balance on a cable without it. I realized that the balance pole that enabled him to cross over the volcano is like the gospel that enables us to cross over the death. When Nik was crossing over the active volcano with boiling magma and toxic gases, the active volcano could swallow him anytime if he lost his balance. But the balancing pole helped him balance and made him finish crossing over the volcano. Likewise, we must hold the gospel firmly just like a balancing pole, to cross over the death and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Then what is the gospel? There are many important events and words from God written in the Bible. We may not remember or understand everything in the Bible. However, there is essential and most important truth that all Christians must understand and remember. Let’s read verses 3 and 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”. The essence of the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead. Why did Jesus Christ die on the cross? It was to save us from our sins. Nowadays, we all suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic, just as we all suffer from sins. As missionary William Shin mentioned in his message last Sunday, there are many similarities between sins and the coronavirus. First, it spreads very easily and can contaminate the whole world population. All humans are contaminated with the sin virus since Adam was infected. Second, the coronavirus and sins are deadly and powerful, while humans are helpless. There are also differences between the coronavirus and sins. Coronavirus cannot kill everyone. The global death rate due to the coronavirus is on average 3%, but sins kill everyone. The fatality rate from sins is 100%. We will all die someday no matter who we are because of sin. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Although there is currently no vaccine to the coronavirus, we have a perfect cure for the sin virus, which is Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins. On the cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Jesus’ forgiveness is more powerful than the power of sin and death.

It is also important to understand that Jesus died on the cross and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Jesus was not a random person who suddenly appeared and claimed that he was the Messiah. All that Jesus did in this world was to fulfill God’s prophecy in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 prophesied Jesus’s suffering and death on the cross; “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus said to the Pharisees and teachers of the law, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 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.”

Jesus is the promised Messiah sent by God and there is no other savior. In Acts chapter 4, Peter who was filled with the Holy Spirit testified before the Sanhedrin, “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is “‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Remember Peter was filled with fear when Jesus was arrested and had trials before the high priest in John Chapter 18. He denied Jesus three times even before a servant girl. However, in Acts chapter 4, Apostle Peter boldly testified without fear that God raised Jesus from the dead before many religious leaders including the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law as well as the high priest. What changed him completely? It was because Peter personally met the resurrected Jesus. According to John’s gospel, four days after Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, he appeared to his disciples including Peter. Jesus showed them his hands and side. A week later, Jesus appeared to his disciples again. This time, Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Jesus once again appeared to Peter and other disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus served his disciples with breakfast and gave Peter a clear mission to feed his sheep. According to Acts chapter 1, Jesus presented himself to his disciples and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus appeared to not only his twelve disciples but also to many others. Let’s read verses 5 to 8. “and that he 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.” To prove a case, usually a minimum of two witnesses are required. Regarding the case of Jesus’ resurrection, there were hundreds of witnesses. Verse 6 states, “After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time.” Jesus made his resurrection not secret but public, so that more people could witness his resurrection. Jesus celebrated his resurrection with many believers because Jesus’ resurrection will also be our resurrection later. Lastly, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Apostle Paul. In verse 8, Paul said that last of all the resurrected Jesus appeared to him also, as to one abnormally born. Paul described himself as one abnormally born because he persecuted believers before he met and accepted Jesus.

 In Acts 9, Saul was breathing out murderous threats against Jesus’ disciples. He asked the high priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus to take believers as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. When Saul fell to the ground, he heard a voice to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul asked, “Who are you?” and Jesus replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” The light of resurrected Jesus made Saul blind, but it made his spiritual eyes open. Although Saul was notorious for his persecution on believers, Jesus chose him as an instrument to proclaim his name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

Let’s read verses 9 to 11. “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve 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 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. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.”

Although apostle Paul was a most important servant of God who preached the gospel to many gentiles and established many churches, he kept his humbleness because he always remembered his sin of persecution against the church of God. At the same time, Paul remembered the grace of God that was with him. Although we are all undeserving sinners before God, we have been called to be Jesus’ disciples and received the mission to preach the gospel on campus. We are saved not by our hard work but by the grace of God.

Before I was called by God during my freshman year in college, I used to be an absolute atheist. Not only I was an atheist but also I hated churches and persecuted Christians because I thought Christians were all hypocrites. I even wanted to abolish all Christian churches if possible. So there was no reason for God to save a church-hater like me. However, God was working to save me through his son, Jesus while I was a sinner. To understand the mystery how God saved a sinner like me, I need to talk about my father. My father passed away when I was 16 years old because of a cancer. When he was diagnosed of a cancer it was already too late for any medical treatment. So he had to go to a Christian prayer center where all kinds of hopeless patients with terminal illness gathered just like Bethesda in the Bible. Although my father was also an atheist, there was no choice for him. His only hope was God’s miracle. However, the miracle didn’t happen for him. My father eventually passed away in a few months. I am not sure if he had a chance to accept Jesus there. After my father died, I was very disappointed that God didn’t do anything for my father, so I became even more against God and churches. My father’s death was especially shocking to my mother who had hard time to accept his death. After my father’s death, my mother visited many fortune tellers out of anguish and fear. One fortune teller told her that the spirit of Jesus came into her household and one of her sons will become a believer. At that time, my mother who had three sons didn’t think it would be me because she knew how much I was against Christianity. My mother told me this story only a few days before my marriage 16 years ago. After hearing that, I was finally able to understand how a stubborn atheist like me could become a believer and a missionary. It was because of the work of Holy Spirit that saved me from sin. When my father passed away, it was one of the darkest time in my life, but at the same time, God started a great thing to save me. Now, many people in this world are hopelessly walking through a very dark and long tunnel because of the COVID-19 pandemic. People are dying or losing their loved ones. The world has already lost more than 60,000 people globally. In the US, over 7,000 people have lost their lives already and many more will die. Tens of millions of people have lost jobs. It is hopeless everywhere. However, when we don’t give up but keep walking towards the other side of tunnel, we will eventually see a ray of light coming through from the end of the tunnel. On that day, we will experience the joy of resurrection. We will celebrate the great victory in Jesus and praise God. We need to pray especially for health care workers in NYC. From the KakaoTalk messages, I learned that NY UBF has almost 40 health care workers. During World War I and II, soldiers fought their human enemies such as Nazi, but during this apparent World War III, health care workers are fighting our non-human enemies, the coronavirus just like soldiers at the front line in a battlefield. May God protect them and give them your strength. May God give all of us the firm faith of resurrection in Jesus Christ. Let’s read the key verse 15:3-4 together. “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”.