

The Imperfect Church
The One Church
1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Introduction

In the classic movie, *City Slickers*, Billy Crystal plays a man who is going through a midlife crisis. His marriage is lifeless, his career is empty, and he simply isn't happy. So he and some buddies, all in the same life stage, go on a cattle drive to 'find their smiles.' There, they meet Curly, an old leathery cowboy, who teaches Crystal's character that life is about 'one thing.' In this climactic scene, Curley offers to tell these men the secret to life. He holds up one finger. In typical sarcastic fashion, Crystal says, "The secret of life is your finger?" No, it's one thing.

Throughout the movie, Crystal tries to figure out what that one thing is for him, since it is different for everybody. It turns out well, he finds his smile as he figures out the one thing that his life is about.

One thing...it may sound odd to think, but we agree with Curly's assessment of life. It really is only about one thing. Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher, said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing."

What we don't agree with is that a person's 'one thing' is left up to us to figure out, or that it's different for everyone. Thankfully, we don't have to search our entire lives or go through these life crises...we already know what that one thing is. The Bible clearly tells us.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul lays out what that one thing is, and what it means for us now. As we continue through 1 Corinthians, we are going to spend the next few weeks in chapter 15, the penultimate chapter of the letter, looking at this one thing and the difference it makes in our lives. Today we are simply going to define what it is.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 - Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. ² It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom

are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. ⁹ For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

¹⁰ But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace. ¹¹ So it makes no difference whether I preach or they preach, for we all preach the same message you have already believed.

TS - So here is this Good News (gospel). It is the one thing. Notice how the Bible puts it... 'most important.' It is top priority. It doesn't say 'what was one of the most important things...' It says it is the one and only most important thing.

And why is the most important thing? 15:2 - "It is this Good News that saves you..." He will say this same thing in Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes..." Salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, the faith of Christianity...all of it comes from and is centered around this one thing.

This is the one thing to devote our lives to. To center our lives on. To live our lives for. The Good News that Jesus died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day, is the centerpiece of our life and faith. Let's break that down phrase by phrase so we can be sure we fully grasp the most important thing in our lives.

1. JESUS DIED

Now, that is a pretty obvious statement. He died. Well, of course he did. I've said it before...the stats on death are shockingly consistent. About 1 out of every 1 people die, hovering right at 100% every year. Now, everyone knows that Jesus existed. No reputable scholars in any field deny this truth or state otherwise. You don't even have to crack open a bible to read about Jesus. There are other historical sources (Jewish historian Josephus) that write about Jesus. So, if he lived, then of course he died.

But what is interesting here in 1 Corinthians 15 are the two phrases that appear after this statement that Jesus died. 'For our sins' and 'just as the Scriptures said.'

“For our sins” - what does this mean? The Bible issues this condemnation on all of humanity in [Romans 3:10-18,23](#) - ¹⁰As the Scriptures say,

“No one is righteous—
not even one.

¹¹ No one is truly wise;
no one is seeking God.

¹² All have turned away;
all have become useless.

No one does good,
not a single one.”

¹³ “Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave.
Their tongues are filled with lies.”

“Snake venom drips from their lips.”

¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “They rush to commit murder.

¹⁶ Destruction and misery always follow them.

¹⁷ They don’t know where to find peace.”

¹⁸ “They have no fear of God at all.”

²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.

God has settled the matter for us, in various ways, all across the spectrum, we are sinners. So...Why did Jesus die for our sins? Think of it this way - God is a law keeper. We are law breakers. Our record of law breaking declares us guilty as charged. Now the Judge has to do something about that.

Or maybe this way - God is holy. He is so pure, so perfect, that impurity or imperfection cannot exist in his presence. Well...uh oh. We are in deep weeds then! We are imperfect. We make mistakes. We say things we shouldn’t, think things we shouldn’t, do things we shouldn’t. While we label those things are “mistakes” or “mis-ordered priorities,” the bible continually refers to that concept as ‘sin.’ And of the 15 different words the NT uses to describe and define the concept of sin, the primary word in the NT for ‘sin’ is a word that means ‘to miss the mark.’ It’s a shooting word...there is a target and we missed it. The target for a relationship with God is perfection. Well, we missed it. We can’t argue this point...we know it’s true.

So now we need to do something for our sins. Back in the OT, the Israelites did a lot of things ‘for their sins.’ Read Leviticus sometime and watch the intricate sacrificial system develop. Bulls, goats, lambs, doves, pigeons. For generations, God’s people were meticulous about sacrificing animals for their sins to be forgiven. But it wasn’t enough. It’s never enough. Why? Because we keep on sinning!

So God stepped in and offered the ultimate sacrifice. Not some ritualistic sacrifice performed by a priest at an annual event like the Day of Atonement. This sacrifice was once for all.

1 Peter 3:18 - **18 Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God.**

So now this thing called 'sin' that stood in the way between us and God, that we were powerless to fix, has now been removed. Jesus takes us safely home to God.

TS - but none of this happened by accident. That's where the next phrase comes in...

"Just as the Scriptures said..." - when Paul writes this phrase, he is referring to the OT. Centuries before Jesus lived, the writers of the OT looked forward to his coming and predicted, with amazing accuracy, what Jesus would be like and what he would accomplish.

Micah 5:2—born in Bethlehem
 Is. 7:14—born of a virgin
 Is. 9:1—ministry in Galilee
 Is. 53:45—miracles he would perform
 Zechariah 11:12-13—betrayed for 30 pieces of silver
 Psalm 22:8—mocked by his enemies
 Psalm 69:21—he would cry out for thirst
 Zechariah 12:10—pierced side
 Psalm 22:16—hands and feet pierced

TS—All told there are 475 prophecies in the OT about Jesus. And 100% of them were accurately, completely fulfilled. From the very beginning of his relationship with people, God was planning on offering His Son for the forgiveness of sins. Through the intricacies of all of human history, God was weaving together his plan to save sinners like us.

Romans 5:6 - **6 When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.**

2. JESUS WAS BURIED

Now, given what we've just talked about, this seems pretty irrelevant. Of course he was buried, he died. But here is why Paul is sure to include this phrase in the one thing...

Within just a few years of Jesus' death and resurrection, conspiracy theorists were coming up with all sorts of theories as to what 'really' happened to Jesus, because they didn't want him to have actually risen from the dead (that would validate all he said and did).

Some claimed Jesus didn't really die on the cross, just passed out (Swoon Theory). Muslims are taught this theory still today. And since he just passed out, Jesus really isn't God in the flesh. Instead, he faked his death, escaped from the tomb alive to go live in secrecy.

Others believe Jesus didn't really die, but not that he faked his death, instead that he miraculously survived the crucifixion and ran off to France/Italy with Mary Magdalene and had children, becoming the Merovingian line of kings (made popular by The DaVinci Code).

A smaller group known as the Gnostics believed Jesus never died because he never really lived. He was just a 'spiritual apparition' not a real person.

TS—Yet, the NT writers are all quite certain that Jesus died. And when matched up against evidence (and common sense) these arguments crumble. Let's look at these arguments -

--The Gnostics. Give me a break. The historians of Jesus' day wrote about the historical figure of Jesus. He was not and could not have been a ghost. He ate, drank, slept, cried, people touched him. And since he was an actual person, there is no way he could survive the events surrounding the crucifixion. Which takes us to the next argument.

--He passed out and faked his own death, emerging from the tomb on his own. Come on! He was beaten up by elite Roman soldiers, flogged (horrific whipping), head pierced with thorns, nails in wrists and feet, spear run through his side into his heart to confirm death.

No way he survived. The Romans were experts in death, perfecting the art of killing. This is an elite group of Roman executioners who oversaw this process. They did not make mistakes. In fact, in flogging alone, 2/3 who were flogged never made it to crucifixion because they died before they got there. Either from blood loss or their intestines would fall out their back when they stood up from their beating.

So Jesus did not just pass out, then somehow recover in an airtight tomb for 3 days, then was strong enough to roll away the stone sealing the tomb and

slip past the Roman guards outside the tomb. And what I find so interesting is that those who claim Jesus faked his death and then ran off with Mary and allowed people to claim divinity to him based on the resurrection, are the same ones who are happy to say that Jesus was a good, moral teacher. Friends, good, moral teachers don't do stuff like that!

TS - so all that to state clearly, make no mistake about it, Jesus died for our sins and was buried. Which makes the next statement so remarkable:

3. JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Now this is where it gets really important. Without this point, Jesus is just another dead religious leader. Without this point, Jesus lived a cool life, taught some great stuff, did some neat things, but at the end of the day, he's dead. There is nothing special about him. But here is what happened:

Matthew 28:1-10 - Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

² Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. ³ His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

⁵ Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. ⁷ And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you."

⁸ The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. ⁹ And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there."

Notice that this is not a weak, recovering Jesus. This is a victorious Jesus who is awe-inspiring. They came and worshiped him. You don't worship someone who is weak, frail, and trying to stay alive after a beating. You worship someone who is triumphant.

TS—So Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and he rose on the third day. But there is one more thing you need to know...

4. JESUS APPEARED

1 Corinthians 15:5-8 - ⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.

Now why would Paul include this information? Because it proves that everything we talked about so far is true! Think about this for a minute...eyewitness testimony is the most powerful kind of testimony in a court of law. Paul gives us a list of at least 515 eyewitnesses. Let's put that in perspective this way -

If we were to bring all 515 in for an interview and give them each 15 minutes to share their account of what happened, maybe ask a question or two, just 15 minutes...that would take 5 days, 8 hours, 30 minutes. That means if we started interviewing today at noon, we would go 24/7 until Friday at 8:30pm.

Here, Paul is challenging his audience. He says many of them are still alive - go talk to them! Get the scoop from them first hand.

TS - All of these things prove that what Paul is saying about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is true. Yet as good as this evidence is, I think there is an even greater argument for the truth of the gospel...it's power to change people's lives.

5. JESUS TRANSFORMS

Notice how Paul ends this section...v. 10 - ¹⁰ But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace.

"not without results." Not only is it the Gospel that has the power to save, the Gospel has the power to transform. In fact, this is how you know if you have embraced the Gospel...you are not what you used to be.

In this list of eyewitnesses, he mentions several names, but let's look at two for sake of time.

--James - this is the brother of Jesus (a NT book written by him). Look at how James first viewed Jesus:

John 7:1-5 - After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. ² But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, ³ and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! ⁴ You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" ⁵ For even his brothers didn't believe in him.

But somewhere between John 7 and the end of John, James changes his tune. He became a leader in the first century church, penning a NT letter. What happened? Paul tells us. He encountered the resurrected Jesus.

I have a brother who is 3.5 years older than me. If he claimed to be the Messiah, I'd laugh and tell him how dumb he is and move on. But if I witnessed him be murdered and then he shows up at my house having risen from the dead...sold! I'm a believer!

--Paul himself. We get a good amount of Paul's background in the NT book of Acts. Jewish religious leader, Pharisee, trained under top Jewish teacher. Viewed this new movement called Christianity as a cult that needed to be eradicated. And set out to do just that. He zealously imprisoned and oversaw the execution of Christians.

But...In Acts 9, he is on his way to the city of Damascus to arrest and imprison more Christians when the resurrected Jesus appears to him in a blinding light, knocks him of his horse and blinds him for a few days. That'll get your attention. And Paul changes his tune as well. So Paul writes this little letter to the church in Corinth, telling them of this 'most important' thing of the gospel. And he assures them...I think this is the most important thing because I know it's true. I saw it with my own eyes.

This is why the one thing is so important. It changes people. It changed the destinies of 12 simple men who gave up everything to follow Jesus. It changed the outlook of Paul, who saw the church as a threat, to seeing it as the hope of the world.

The one thing changes everything. And it will change you if you let it. This is the core theological truth of the Church. This really is the most important thing. This is the message with which the church began and it is the message with which it will continue.

Believe/Repent/Confess/Baptize