

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 *Passion for the Gospel* May 5, 2019

Picture the news headline for Wednesday, April 10, 1912. The luxury ship Titanic began her maiden voyage. On board was a Christian pastor, John Harper. The night before the Titanic sank Harper was seeking to lead a young man to faith in Christ. On April 14 at 11.30 pm the 'unsinkable' Titanic hit an iceberg. She sank. A survivor later wrote a tract, *I was Harper's Last Convert*.

If you'd been there that night, you'd have seen families torn apart. Husbands said goodbye to their wives and children as they put them in lifeboats. John Harper kissed his six-year-old daughter Nina goodbye before arranging her safety in a lifeboat. Tragically, there weren't enough lifeboats for everyone. People were freezing to death in the cold water. But God was at work. John Harper wasn't afraid to die. He knew that he'd soon come face to face with his Maker. Meanwhile, he wanted people to know his Lord and Saviour. With death awaiting him, Harper yelled to a man in the darkness, "Are you saved?" "No," replied the man. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and ye shall be saved!" Harper screamed as he struggled in the dark, cold water. The men drifted apart into the darkness. Later, the current brought them back together again. Weak, exhausted, and freezing cold, a dying Harper yelled once more, "Are you saved?" "No!" came the same answer. And again, Harper called out, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and ye shall be saved." And with that, Harper slipped down into his watery grave. That man, whom John Harper sought to win to Christ, was later rescued. Because of Harper, he dedicated his life to the Lord Jesus. He lived to tell people that he was *Harper's Last Convert*. Thinking about the Titanic, many things come to mind. Could the disaster have been avoided? What if the owner hadn't wanted to surprise America by arriving a night early? What if the Captain hadn't cut the corner on a dangerous area of ocean? What if the lookout's binoculars hadn't been missing from the crow's nest? But, it's far better to ask, *what if John Harper hadn't been on board, traveling to America?* How many people would have died not knowing that they could be saved for all eternity? For, what was uppermost in John Harper's mind as he literally froze to death? The power of the gospel. It was the same gospel that Paul and Silas gave to the Philippian jailer from their prison cell (Acts 16:31), "**Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.**" Paul and Silas were passionate for the gospel: the good news about Jesus. Paul told the Christians in Corinth, "**Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel... For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**" (1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:2) Read through 1 Corinthians and you will see his passion for the gospel. Furthermore, you'll see the application of the gospel truths to daily life. Most of us care deeply about something. We're passionate for some cause, either worthy or unworthy. There are many worthy causes. For example, concern for the poor and needy. But far too often our concern is for the symptoms of society gone wrong. That's like taking an aspirin to relieve a headache. Aspirin doesn't deal with the cause of the headache. It merely masks the pain, somewhat like a Band-Aid. In life we must not take a Band-Aid approach. We cannot simply cover up the problems of the world. We must go to the root cause – sin. Paul almost invariably begins his letters with the gospel. The good news of Jesus is of supreme importance. For the gospel is not a Band-Aid. The word of God deals with the central issues of life. Listen to Hebrews 4:12, **For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.** Near the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul returns to the gospel. 15:1, **Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel.** Remember that he's writing to believers, even though Corinth wasn't a perfect church. And, like them, we too need to hear the gospel over and over again. As Paul says in 15:2, **By this gospel you are saved.** The gospel is truly Paul's focus. It was important for the Corinthians. So too, it's vitally important for us. Only the gospel can really deal with the problems in our sin-sick world. For the gospel doesn't deal with the symptoms of a sick society. It deals with the root causes of the symptoms, sin. So, with good reason, Paul is passionate about the gospel. Note the beginning of 15:3. Paul writes, **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance.** It wasn't just the first thing he communicated, it was *the* most important item on his mind.

1. The gospel is Christ for us — 5:3, 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.**

Paul gives us a three line summary of the gospel.

Christ died for our sins. (Paul is Christ-centred.)

He was buried.

He was raised on the third day.

The gospel fulfils the Old Testament promise. Paul emphasises this: *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures... he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.* The Old Testament belongs to the gospel as it bears witness to the Christ, the Messiah. Briefly, consider these three statements. **First, Christ died for our sins.** Remember Isaiah's prophecy concerning Christ in chapter 53. Listen again to 53:4-6, *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows... he was pierced for our transgressions... We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Isaiah's prophecy and 1 Corinthians 15:3 is the language of substitutionary atonement. In other words, Christ died in our place on the cross. He paid the penalty for sin that was ours. He bore God's wrath against sin, wrath that we deserve. Isaiah 53:5, *he was pierced for our transgressions.* In Hebrews 9:28; 10:10 we read, *Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* There it is, Christ died for us. The Lord Jesus is Christ for us and with us. **Second,** (15:4a) *he was buried.* The death of Jesus on the cross is a fact. Some people dispute the death of Christ. But the evidence at the cross is beyond dispute. For example, Jesus *gave up his spirit* (John 19:30) and died. Soldiers came to break the legs of Jesus and the two criminals crucified with Him. John 19:33, *But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.* A soldier *pierced his side with a spear bringing a sudden flow of blood and water* (John 19:34). Without question, Jesus died on the cross. There are also references to the death of Jesus from ancient sources outside of the Bible. It is foolishness, bordering on arrogance, to say that Jesus didn't die on the cross. The cross, a symbol of Christ's death, is now at the centre of history. We read the Old Testament with the cross in view. The cross casts a shadow forward into the New Testament era in which we live.

Third, he was raised on the third day. Raised by the Father, Christ continues to exist as our living Lord. The Old Testament says little about the resurrection. But the apostle Peter refers to Psalm 16, on the day of Pentecost. David, in Psalm 16, speaks of his assurance of eternal life, and of the future resurrection of Christ. 16:10, *You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.* The implications for Christians here are huge. Dale Ralph Davis writes, *If God's favoured One will not see decay, if He triumphs over death, then of course all Messiah's people can have assurance of victory in the face of death. And that victory even reaches to our flesh, for God will not abandon us to Sheol [the grave] but will bring us along with Jesus in resurrection.* Thus, we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.* Believers are enthusiastic about the Gospel. How is it with you? Are you passionate for the gospel? You can put many things before it. Perhaps for you it's the environment, or third world hunger, peace, your favourite charity, or your family and so on. It may even be some religious cause. But caring for the environment and even charitable acts don't make you a Christian. All of these things may be the fruit of the gospel for you. But it's faith in Christ—His death and resurrection—that makes you a Christian. Along with Paul, a Christian says 'Christ died for my sins. He was raised from the dead for my salvation.' Good works are important, but they follow from faith. They can never be the cause of your faith or your salvation.

2. The gospel brings you salvation — 15:1, 2, *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.* Paul preached. The Corinthians received the gospel and believed. Again we see the centrality of the gospel. Paul says, *I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you which you received and on which you have taken your stand.* In many ways the Corinthians were foolish. And so Paul encouraged them to return to the gospel that he'd preached. In essence, that's what the reformation of the church was about. Reformation occurs when we return to the authoritative word of God. We can expect the gospel to be effective. It *is* the word of God. But God requires that the gospel be told. Romans 10:13, 14, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone*

preaching to them? You and I have the responsibility to share our faith. ‘But,’ you ask, ‘how can the gospel save me?’ Good question! Words cannot save you. Even faith cannot save you into a right relationship with God. What saves you is the One to whom the gospel points: the Lord Jesus. Faith is merely your outstretched hand ready to receive Him as your Lord and Saviour. But you have another question. ‘From what does Christ save me?’ And I am so glad that you are here to consider that question. For the answer is also important. On the cross Jesus bore God’s wrath against sin—your sin and mine. John 3:36 sums up our need for Christ. ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*** It’s tempting to say that God hates sin but loves the sinner. Now that’s a nice sentiment, but it’s not entirely biblical. Listen to Psalm 5:4-6, ***You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.*** Then, where is our hope? For we cannot save ourselves. We need a mediator who will plead with God for us. Christ is our Mediator. Hebrews 9:24, ***Christ... entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.*** Listen to 1 John 4:9, 10, ***God sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*** The words, *atoning sacrifice* speak of Christ turning aside God’s wrath. Yet He did more than that. He became sin for us. On our behalf He bore God’s wrath against sin. We read in 1 Peter 2:24, ***He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*** And that’s what we read earlier, in Isaiah 53:4, ***Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...***

Not everyone can a missionary, a preacher or an evangelist. You might feel apprehensive about sharing your faith. But we are called to give an account of our faith. You may be surprised with how well you can answer people’s questions. For you know more about the gospel than your unbelieving friends. But what if you can’t give a ready answer. Tell your friends that you’ll find the answer and come back to them.

3. The gospel is personal. 15:5-8, ***He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*** In Corinthians, the list of Jesus’ resurrection appearances isn’t exhaustive. The Lord also appeared to Mary and many other women. Yet the list is extensive. Belief in the resurrection is well founded. Paul emphasises that the Lord appeared to him personally. For us, it’s different. We don’t see bright lights and hear voices in the way that Paul did (Acts 9). But everyone who believes in Christ has a personal relationship with Him. It’s not enough to say that your family or friends know the Lord. The Saviour needs to be real for you. God has no grandchildren, no nieces or nephews. He only has children who know Him through Jesus. Each one of us must know Christ personally. Then we can truly say ‘Christ died and rose from the dead for my sins.’ Passion for the gospel comes from conviction—knowing that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ. By the gospel you are saved and you own the gospel personally. One night a family went to see the Jesus film. A young boy had been touched by its message. His father asked him what part he’d liked best. He replied, “The part where Jesus died on the cross.” The he then added, ‘I’m glad that Jesus died on the cross.’ “Oh,” said his father, wondering what the boy had in mind. “Why is that so?” The boy continued, “I’m glad He died, because Jesus died for you daddy. And he died for mummy. But I’m glad, because He died for me.” I hope that his words are yours, that you can say ‘I’m glad that Jesus died for me.’ John Harper’s convert was rescued from the icy waters of the Atlantic. Harper’s passion for the gospel resulted in his salvation. He came to have faith in the person and work of Christ. We need rescuing from the fires of hell. And it was the dying God-man, Jesus, who came to rescue us from our sins. He died that we might live. He rose again so that we might be saved. Think of the Titanic as a metaphor for life. We think that life is indestructible, unsinkable. We’re invincible. That is, until we hit the icebergs of failure, trouble, sickness, grief and approaching death. What will stop your ship from sinking? There is only one answer – the Lord Jesus Christ.

‘Are you saved? No? ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.’

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...he was buried,... he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Let there be a passion for the lost amongst us, that our cry to our community will ever be, Are you saved? Amen

