

# Sermon Text for June 17, 2018

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## *Raised To Life*

*Malachi 4:1-6*

*I Corinthians 15:20-28*

When it comes to raising children, there are certain values, certain ethics we want our children to possess as they enter into adulthood. After all, one of the most important jobs father's and mother's have in this day and age is to ensure the moral compass of future generations is pointed to True North. And since repetition is the key to knowledge, we work — often tirelessly and without thanks — repeating again and again the virtues we extol above all others. Values such as:

“Once you have *obtained* your frozen Go-gurt, make sure to *close* the freezer door.”

“Whenever you walk out of a room, make sure all the lights go out too.”

“Vegetables are the key to unlocking all the joys of dessert.”

"Punching your sister is always a bad idea, no matter how badly she may deserve it."

“After you’ve finished using the potty, make sure to wipe. Not just wipe but also flush. Not just wipe and flush but also wash your hands.”

“Screaming at the top of your lungs is only acceptable if someone is trying to stab OR kidnap you or one of your sisters.”

“Don’t pick your nose and eat it (at least not in public).”

Sometimes I feel that if I could just get a few of these basic principles to take root in the hearts of my children, they would emerge from my home as capable adults, ready to meet the challenges of the world head on and with great aplomb.

If you weren't already aware, today is Father's Day. On this auspicious occasion, I have a question to ask those of you who are fathers: What do your children value? What your children deem most important and worth pursuing in this life will be heavily influenced by the things you hold most dear.

For those younger men who are not quite there yet, I have a question for you as well: What do you value? I ask because what you value most will shape the course, not only of your own life, but also the lives of all who follow after you.

The Apostle Paul, who spent his life killing Christians until he became one, knew this to be true which is why he constantly admonished his "children in the faith" as if they were his own. Often correcting, sometimes rebuking, always teaching. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul addresses these children again clarifying what is of first importance.

In case you have forgotten, the last time I preached we talked about 1 Corinthians then too. Corinth was a church that had lost its way and had forgotten the foundational principles that had made it flourish. Now, in an effort to “get this train back on the tracks” Paul wrote this letter. After spending the first fourteen chapters addressing several acute problems within the congregation, Paul heads toward a more chronic illnesses of the church and in chapter 15 Paul puts it all on the line.

Read with me starting with verse one:

*15 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

Before we go any further, I think it's important that we ask ourselves “What is this gospel Paul mentions?” Depending on your definition of this foundational truth, your life will look markedly different. If your gospel is weak, then all kinds of accommodations can be made for all kinds of sin. When we cheapen the cost of the cross, when we interpret grace as an unconditional pardon for all, when mercy becomes more about kindness and less about a king taking off His crown, when loving others means seeing them lost in sin yet looking the other way, we run the risk of diluting the potency of this powerful message which was delivered by the Spirit through the Bible's many authors.

However, if our gospel is Christ crucified, risen, and coming again, we instinctively understand that our lives are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Therefore, it is up to us, empowered by the Spirit, to glorify God with the bodies, the temples He has entrusted to us. (1 Corinthians 6) Throughout this letter Paul has sought to consistently raise the bar, and we do ourselves great harm the more we seek to lower it.

The gospel changes everything life it touches. One cannot approach the throne of grace and leave unchanged. We either take up our crosses and follow Jesus or we leave them behind and forge our own path. We can't have it both ways.

Let's continue to verse 3:

*3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,*

I would like to pause for a moment to address a question you're probably asking yourself right now. What "scriptures" is Paul referencing here? One particular commentary suggested there was a good chance that two gospels may have already been in circulation at the writing of this letter. If this was the case, it would mean that Paul was already canonizing new letters as extensions of the Law and the Prophets. This is not something one does lightly or without great cost...

Not only that, Paul was an expert on the Hebrew Scriptures which consisted of the Law and the Prophets having been trained in the finest schools under the best instructors. Now that Jesus had appeared to him, however, it was as if he had received an updated set of prescription lenses, and everything suddenly became clear (sorry if you're not a glasses wearer...that probably went right over your head). Paul understood that the Old Testament scriptures — every book, every chapter — was "whispering" the name Jesus.

Let's continue:

*3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom*

*are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*

To me, these verses sound a bit rehearsed. Almost as if, Paul was quoting someone or something else here. The truth is that this is one of a handful of phrases scholars believe to be our earliest creeds (simple confessions of faith). From its inception, the church was eager to define what it believed and why. Even before it officially began the church was under attack from powerful forces who wished to divide and destroy God's kingdom on earth before it had the opportunity to grow. The appearance of creeds like this one in verses 3-7 are similar to those in other Pauline letters. Another common creed of this type is one we typically use on Communion Sundays. Again four chapters earlier, Paul offers us another example.

Here he writes:

*23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

These creeds helped to distill complex doctrines of the faith, as well as cut down false doctrines that sought to grow up alongside the truth much like the thorns in Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed. (Matthew 13) And Paul repeatedly employs these creeds to bring his reader's attention back to the things that matter most.

And in verses 3-7 what is it that Paul deems most important? Simple. That Christ died for our sins. He was buried and raised again to life. He appeared to over 500 eye witnesses (who, apparently, still lived at the time this letter was written).

That's it...

Notice this gospel Paul preached is not about how much Jesus loves us...though that is part of it. This gospel is not about living our best lives now...though it is the only way we can. This gospel is not about feeding the hungry, advocating for the

oppressed, or sheltering orphans and widows. This gospel is not about boarder walls, black lives matter, pro-life, or #metoo...

This gospel is about a man who really died and really came back to life.

I find it interesting that Paul singles out James the brother of Jesus. The pastor and communicator Andy Stanley points out that James' belief in Jesus as his Messiah is one of the greatest evidences we have for the resurrection of Jesus Christ because, and I quote: "What would it take for your brother to convince you that He was the Son of God?" Let that sink in for a moment...

Sadly, unlike James, Paul missed the boat and he knew it. He was late to the party. While God Himself was walking the earth, Paul wanted nothing to do with Him. Not only that, after Jesus had already come and gone, Paul attempted to erase the memory of Jesus' existence.

In verses 8-11 he says this:

*8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*

Though this confession is heartbreaking to hear, it does offer us hope. Hopefully, we can all find some comfort in the fact that the New Testament is written almost entirely by skeptics turned believers. What more compelling testimony can there be?

Despite testimonies like this, the church was easily distracted...a quality that has not improved over time. It seems that regardless of the mountain of evidence to the contrary, some were teaching that there was no resurrection. Paul is quick to close the door on this going as far as to say, if Jesus is not actually alive...throw the whole thing out. Without a living Savior, the Christian faith worse than worthless.

Let's continue on to verse 12:

*12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

The hardest part of this passage for me is the verse where Paul says that if Christ has not been raised...we are still in our sins. If that does not make your blood run cold, I'm not sure what will. If Jesus did not return to life, I imagine it would be because His sacrifice was not sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God. Furthermore, His failure to quench the wrath of God would mean that there is no hope for anyone else, because, if all-powerful God could not pay His own price, how could we?

The simple answer is that without Jesus, we are without hope.

Thank God that is not the case.

I have attempted, however feebly, to instill in my children a sense of awe concerning the Christian tradition. I think we do our children a disservice when we make the mysteries of God mundane. Christianity is full of paradoxes. For instance, the love of God is empty when we separate it from the wrath of God. If God does not destroy sin AND sinners, then what need do we have for His love to save us? Here's another, our freedom in Christ means we become His slaves. If Jesus is not our master, then sin and death is. Which master sounds worse to you?

Finally, we often talk about the free gift of eternal life. Are we surprised then that it costs us our temporal lives?

I hope not. I hope that we value the life to come more than we do our comfort in the life that is. Otherwise our children, my children will fall into the trap of what Professor/Podcaster Michael Horton calls "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism".

When Kristin rejoined the workforce and I became the stay-at-home dad/homeschool educator, one of my first decisions was that we (yes we) were going to memorize the Apostle's Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Once those were mastered and locked within the vaults of our minds, I turned to the Psalms. I am hoping that at some point we will dive into the Catechisms.

I do this, not so that I can stand in front of you all a tout my accomplishments as a dad...okay...maybe just a little. BUT the major reason why is because I believe these traditions are important enough to be passed down to my many daughters.

Reading and Math are essential, I get that, but, more than that, I want them to be able to stand on their own two feet when it comes to faith. The sad truth today is that most high school students who claim to be Christians will abandon their faith by their sophomore year in college. If that doesn't scare you a little bit, then you should probably wake up and take a look at the state of the church. Look around the room. How many 20 somethings do you see? If you classify as a millennial and you showed up this morning, pat yourself on the back, you're a statistical anomaly!

It is no accident you are here though. Someone raised you to be here, and somehow — by the grace of God — it stuck.

I am sure there are many in this room, including me, who would love to hear the story about how God was able to keep your attention, and who He used to get it in the first place...

Why is this the case? Why is an entire generation walking away from so great a salvation? My guess (and I am not alone in this) is that we have lost sight of that which is of first importance. "The death and resurrection of Jesus was..." as Pastor Adriel Sanchez describes it "...a public event, with public people in a public location. Nothing could have been more public."

Somehow we have taken this public message and confined it within the walls of our private sanctuaries.

But this message is so much bigger than a building. It's bigger than denomination, political affiliation, or sexual orientation. It's truer than the best science. It's more inventive than the best fiction.

It is life. It gives life. And here's why:

*20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*

At long last, we have come to the heart of it. Just as by man came death, by man has come also the resurrection of the dead. This is the hope of every believer. That when the kingdom of God comes, we will be counted among His friends and not His enemies.

The truth is that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Not dying, dead. The ending was already written. Our destruction already assured. But God the Father, being rich in mercy, did the unthinkable. He killed His own Son so that we might live. And while that is a grim portrait to paint on Father's Day, you have to understand that Jesus and the Father are one and the same God. God turned the whole heat and fury of His wrath, not on us, but on Himself...for our sake...

So how do we align ourselves with this God, this King who would die for His subjects? By hanging our hope not on who we are, what we are worth, or what we have done.

Rather we pin our hopes on the resurrection of Jesus.

We are no longer objects of wrath but citizens of a kingdom. We are subjects of a gracious, merciful, loving King who will one day rule over all with perfect authority.



Paul knew this day was coming which is why he worked so hard to prepare the church to meet it head on. Paul's goal should also be our own: Not only that we believe Jesus was raised to life, but, by believing this, we too will be raised to life.

And by sharing this truth with our children — both in Strasburg, PA and as far as Naples, Italy — it is our hope that they will also be raised to life.

Let's pray.

22 Our Lord, come!

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

24 My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen. - 1 Corinthians 16:22-24