

Faith in the resurrection

Verse 1. 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.

Verse 2. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

Verse 3. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

Verse 4. that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Verse 5. and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

Verse 6. 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.

Verse 7. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,

Verse 8. and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Verse 9. 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.

Verse 10. 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.

Verse 11. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

I prayed and prayed about what to make my Easter message this year, but I still chose today's words because I thought that how the Apostle Paul met the resurrected Jesus Christ would be the closest experience for us. The Apostle Paul met Jesus Christ after His ascension.

Verses 1-7 are the first testimony of Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians was written around AD 59 and it is a very significant Bible because it contains the earliest recorded testimony of the resurrection in the Bible. Acts 2:15 records that 120 women and disciples gathered to wait for the descent of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of the resurrected Jesus, but Corinthians records that the number of witnesses to Jesus' resurrection was over 500.

Example: The statute of limitations means the year in which the time period for the police to investigate a criminal. In Japan, the statute of limitations for murder offenders was 25 years, but it was abolished in 2010. Especially, there was news that the statute of limitations for the arson and murder case of Sophia University student had been removed and the investigation was continuing. As I watched the news with pain in my heart and I thought to myself, "What

is the point of this case if only one witness can testify against the accused? With this thought in mind, I was surprised to read in today's text that there are more than 500 witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus 2,000 years ago. This record of more than 500 witnesses, of which even just one is enough, speaks of the unquestionable truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul uses the conjunction "and, after that, then" to indicate that the testimony of Jesus' resurrection is not a fiction, but a correct testimony by chronological order. Through this we can understand and believe that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical fact and was a historical miracle. Now let us consider how this historical event, the resurrection of Jesus, relates to us personally.

Verses 8-9 are testimonies about Saul, the individual who met the resurrected Jesus.

Saul at the time was persecuting Christians who believed in the resurrection of Jesus and had a dramatic encounter with the resurrected Jesus Christ just as he was on his way to Damascus (Acts 9). Saul met Jesus after He had already ascended to heaven after His resurrection. Jesus had ascended to heaven, but He appeared to the human world. This mystery is described in **Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** Jesus Christ that Saul met, we too can meet. Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Every Christian for about 2,000 years has met the resurrected Jesus Christ in this way. "Yoko, I think I haven't met the resurrected Jesus Christ yet. And I am not sure that I really met Jesus or not." If there are brothers and sisters who are thinking like that, please pray to meet the resurrected Jesus Christ today. You may have a wonderful dream tonight that Jesus Christ is coming on the clouds. Even if you don't, God will give you the chance to meet Jesus Christ through the Gospels and the entire Bible.

By the way, how can we prove whether we have met Jesus Christ or not? It can be proven by the fact that our lives have been changed.

Verse 10 Saul's life changed 180 degrees when he met the resurrected Jesus.

Saul, who had been persecuting Christians, met the risen Jesus and became the Apostle Paul, proclaiming His resurrection. After that, the Apostle Paul turned from Judaism to following Jesus. Because of this, Paul was resented and hunted as a great traitor by the Jewish religious leaders who had been his sides until now (Acts 9:23). Even though he did not know when he would be killed, the Apostle Paul bravely preached the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For this, he was imprisoned with Silas in the city of Thyatira (Acts 16:23). He also preached the gospel of the resurrected Jesus Christ before the Epicurean and Stoic Greek philosophers (Acts 17:18), and he entered the mission of Jerusalem ready to die (Acts 21:13), but then he appealed to the Roman emperor Cesar and went to Rome, where he also preached the He went to Rome and preached the gospel there as well. **Acts 28:31 "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the**

Lord Jesus Christ." and Paul's evangelism is described. The Apostle Paul's entire life was devoted to preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Wherever he went, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was preached, and those who heard the gospel repented of their sins and were saved. This way of life may seem crazy from the outside. Acts 24:5 even complains, "Paul is like a plague disease." So the life of a person who met Jesus Christ changes like Paul's.

How about us? Have we met the Resurrected Jesus really? How can we be sure of that? We can find out by looking at whether or not our lives have been changed. Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law." A life that truly encounters the resurrected Jesus Christ produces many such fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul says to us believers after his own testimony, look at **verse 11: "Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed."** The apostle Paul says that he, others, and even the Corinthians believed in the resurrected Jesus Christ. This is how it is with us, and this is why we have faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Please pray that we may reaffirm our faith in the resurrection on this joyful Easter Day.

So, what kind of blessings could we receive because Jesus has resurrected from the death?

First, Jesus became the High Priest. Hebrews 4:14, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus to the faith we profess." Through His resurrection, Jesus became the High Priest who atones for our sins. Through Jesus, our sins are forgiven. You see, human beings have sinned and have been at enmity with a holy God. Romans 2:5 says that we have accumulated God's wrath without repentance. We were all under judgment for our sins, but Jesus Christ has risen and become our High Priest to atone for our sins before God in our place.

Next, as High Priest, Jesus understands and intercedes for all our weaknesses, hardships, and sufferings. Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin." Jesus was in human form, like us, and He suffered and died the most terrible crucifixion in the world. Jesus has deep compassion for our weakness and sin. That is why we can pray confidently to God every day. See Hebrews 4:16. "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Thanks to Jesus Christ's resurrection and becoming our High Priest, we can boldly pray to God. This is the grace of Jesus' resurrection.

Also, Jesus became the King of Kings and sits at the right hand of God. And He has made us sit with Him. Ephesians 2:5-6 "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved (5). And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (6)." With the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus became

King of Kings and sits at the right hand of God. By this our souls, which were dead, have been resurrected with Jesus Christ. And now we are sitting together with Jesus Christ at the side of God's throne. The unimaginable has been made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we have learned all along in Romans, we who were sinners have become God's children, princes and princesses.

And through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will also be resurrected.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will be changed – (51) in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." When we know from the Bible about the resurrection in the Gospels, Mary didn't realize resurrected Jesus and was crying in front of the empty tomb of Jesus. And also, the two disciples returning to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus even though they had talked with him for a long time. That's because Jesus was completely transformed into a glorified body unlike the one, He had before He was born. We know from the Bible, how Jesus was not in and out of the wall to meet the disciples who were frightened by His death on the cross. This shows us how we too are completely changed. It is not on the level of a better personality and less wrinkles of our skins. We change in a completely different and glorious way like Jesus.

What was interesting about the testimony of Totto, who wrote "Heaven Is For Real," was the story of meeting his paternal grandfather, a young man in his 30s, whom he had never met before, and who was very kind to him. He testified that although he had never met him before, he immediately recognized him as his grandfather. We too will eventually be completely transformed at the second coming of Jesus Christ! Over the past years, Mrs. Rie's father, Mr. Sanehiro Kanamaru, Mr. Tsutomu Tada, and Daniel whose Ms. Greta's nephew have gone to heaven now. Their family, their friends and we also miss them now, but we can have hope that we will see them again because we have faith in the resurrection. It is not in a wrinkled or suffering state either. We will meet in a youthful, beautiful, holy, and glorious state. We are looking forward to it. Because we have resurrection faith, we are filled with hope and joy in every situation.

1 Corinthians 15:57-58 "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (57). Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (58)." This means that our lives have been triumphantly won by Jesus Christ! Life is really full of trials. The Bible does not teach that if we believe in Jesus, there will be no suffering or trials in our lives! But even in the midst of sufferings, we are victorious. Whether we are divorced, abused by our parents or somebody, betrayed by somebody, suffering from an accident or illness, or unable to find a job, we are victors in all our sufferings. And our way of life is to encourage God's work, believing that nothing is wasted and everything is profitable.

Encouraging God's work is to love the Lord Jesus Christ and to love our neighbors. It is to practice the love of Christ in church service, evangelism, family caregiving, raising children, and to those in need. When we do some ministry for God, we may experience unexpected misunderstandings, and we may even find that what we have done has been in vain. But nothing in our lives is wasted. Saul's life as a persecutor of Christians was a sin that was not forgiven because he was hostile to Jesus Christ, but this sinful past was not in vain. He became the apostle Paul and preached the gospel to the whole world. Simon's past was a great failure, as he denied Jesus three times. However, he did not waste any of it and became Peter, the leader of the church who held the key to heaven. I believe that through the grace of the resurrected Jesus Christ, not even a single thing in our lives will be in vain, but everything will be beneficial and good ([Roman8:28](#)).

Let's pray together. Beloved Heavenly Father! We thank you that Jesus' resurrection has given us the hope of resurrection too. And we thank you that we believe that nothing in our lives will be in vain. Help us, Holy Spirit, to continue to encourage us to love God and love our neighbors. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.