

Introduction

I'd like to begin by asking you a question. What do advertisements on the one hand and obituaries on the other have in common. The answer is that they address two of the five fundamental questions that every sane human being asks and wants answered. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 and let's identify those two questions and correctly answer them.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

Paul writes about "**the gospel**" in verse 1. That term refers to the good news about who Jesus is and what He did.

Verse 3 mentions one thing He did. He "**died for our sins according to the Scriptures,**" that is, as the Old Testament prophesied He would. Notice the phrase, "**for our sins.**" It reveals the unique nature of Jesus' death. It was substitutionary as I explained in our Maundy Thursday service. That means that He stood in for us on the cross. He took into Himself all of our sins and paid the penalty for them that we should have paid so that we wouldn't have to.

Verse 4 mentions a second thing Jesus did. He "**was raised on the third day,**" again "**according to the Scriptures.**"

Note the opening clause of verse 4. Jesus was buried. Paul says that to emphasize that He was really and truly dead. He was what we call a corpse or cadaver from 3:00 p.m. on Friday to sunrise on Sunday. His body was decaying just as everyone else's does who dies.

But something astonishing happened on Sunday. The Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead. That was, as verses 5-8 make clear, an historical resurrection. Those verses record all the people, over 500 of them, who witnessed Him alive after He died. Paul's point is that Jesus rose from the dead in time and space – in history.

Many people, including professing Christians, deny that He did. Scholar and Jesus seminar leader Marcus Borg, for instance, said this: "**As a child, I took it for granted that Easter meant that Jesus**

literally rose from the dead. I now see Easter very differently. Whether Easter involved something remarkable happening to the physical body of Jesus is irrelevant." He then denied that something remarkable happened to it – denied that He rose from the dead.

It's ironic that Borg, in this issue at least, was actually smarter as a child than he is as an adult. I say that because Jesus' resurrection is a matter of knowledge not just belief. As Lee Strobel correctly observes, there isn't "**any more thoroughly attested event in ancient history.**" We can be confident that He was just as really and truly alive on Sunday as He was really and truly dead on Friday and Saturday. That's Paul's very point in fact in verses 4-11.

Those then are two things that Jesus did and that Paul focuses on in our text. He died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead.

And they are, as verse 3 says it, "**of first importance.**" His death and resurrection, in other words, with His birth and ascension, are the most significant events in human history. They impact humanity and you and me more profoundly than any other events ever have or will.

That impact, in verse 2, is that they "**save**" us. To be saved means three things, two of which I'd like to explain.

The Good Life

First, it means to have the good life. Aristotle coined that term in his acclaimed work, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and our own current culture has heartily embraced it. Google the words "**the good life**" and you'll see what I mean. I referred to two fundamental questions earlier. As the Google search shows, one of those is this. What is the good life?

Analyze some of the advertisements you've seen or heard. You'll realize if you do that they're addressing the good life question. One advertising company articulates that fact in its name, *The Life is Good Company*. Anyway, we all know how advertising answers the question. The good life is good looks, much money, unrestrained sex, great food (Whoppers), luxurious cars, widescreen TV's, and even Light Beer, LG

products, and Coca Cola. That is how advertising and our culture define the good life, as sensual enjoyment of the present moment.

But who are they kidding? Hopefully, it isn't you and me. We know that the good life isn't sensual enjoyment of the present moment. Well, what is it then? Yahoo Answers posted this question, "**What is your definition of the good life?**" One person replied, "**Being satisfied and happy with where you are in life. That a freezer full of chocolate ice cream.**" She isn't far from the truth, except I'd make it chocolate pecan ice cream. The good life, according to the Bible, is one that's pervaded with peace and joy, come what may. We're contented and happy in good times and bad.

Richard Halverson tells about a Christian he met in South America. All he owned was the few possessions that filled the knapsack on his back. Yet, he was, to quote Halverson, "**one of the most joyful people I've ever met.**" A life that's pervasively and habitually at peace and joyful, come what may. That is the good life.

The Good Person

To be saved means a second thing. It's to be a good person. That is the subject fundamental question that people ask. What is a good person? Advertisements address the first question, "**What is the good life?**" But it's obituaries and eulogies that address the second.

Two brothers led miserable lives. They were self-consumed persons who used and abused others to get ahead. After one of them died, the other told the minister he'd donate a large sum of money to his church if he said his dead brother was a saint at the funeral. So, he did, declaring this in the eulogy, "**He (the dead man) was a liar, bully, cheat, and thief. But compared to his brother, he was a saint.**"

Obituaries and eulogies do express what people think a good person is. But notice they don't do so in the same terms that advertising defines the good life. John Ortberg explains it this way in his book *Who Is This Man?* He writes: "**Obituaries rarely say things like 'She had a fine**

figure, and a thick head of hair, and wonderfully white teeth.’ He drove fast cars and dated fast women.’ ‘He earned hundreds of thousands of dollars in his spare time at home.’” Even the secular world knows those things aren’t what makes people good.

So, what does? The Bible’s answer is **“love.”** The good person is one who is pervaded with love. Love means willing and pursuing the benefit of who or what is loved. It does so sacrificially, to its own detriment. It puts the security, satisfaction, and status of others over its own. Anyone who habitually loves that way is a good person.

The Bible gives us a detailed picture of such a person. He blesses those who insult or humiliate him. He’s glad when others outshine him. He does favors that put him out. He roots for his competitors. He cares about the welfare of those who sue him. He seeks to listen more than to speak. He receives criticism with gratitude and joy. He forgives those who aren’t sorry for the wrong they did him. He protects reputations not destroys them. And on it goes.

You get the idea. The good person is one routinely loves God and others that way - in the ordinary relations of ordinary life.

The “How” of the Good Life and Good Person

We now know what the good life and the good person are, which raises a third fundamental question. How do we get the good life and become the good person? The answer is **“through Jesus.”**

Jesus wasn’t the first or only person to be raised from the dead. The Bible records eight other people who also were. But there’s something different about Him. The other eight died again. He didn’t. I say that to say this. He is a real and living person, as much so as you and I are.

Consequently, we can engage Him and Paul tells us how in verses 1 and 2 of our text. We must **“stand in”** and **“hold fast to”** the gospel of Jesus. Those two actions, standing in and holding fast to, suggest making something fundamental. In this case, that something is actually a

Someone, the real and living person, Jesus. We make Him fundamental.

We do that in a specific and even observable way. We apprentice ourselves to Him. We make the decision to be with Him in order to become like Him and to do all that He says. We then arrange all of our affairs around carrying out that decision.

When we engage Him that way, He engages us in return so that we come to have what Thomas a Kempis called “**a familiar friendship**” with Him. And that familiar friendship is quietly but powerfully transforming. It continually and increasingly creates His character and life within us. More specifically, it continually and increasingly creates within us the foundational conditions of the good life, peace and joy, and the foundational condition of the good person – love.

I speak from experience as a friend of His. 20 years ago, if my wife criticized me, I’d get angry and either defend myself or criticize her right back. But today, if she criticizes me, I receive what she says with thoughtfulness and consideration. That little sampling illustrates this. Like many of you, I have a noticeably better life and am a noticeably better person now than I was twenty years ago and even two years ago. Why? It’s for one reason and one alone - my friendship with Jesus.

Hopefully that’s your experience as well. But if it isn’t, the good news of Easter is that it can be.

Conclusion

Gloria Mraz cross-stitched this plaque for me. I placed it in the most observable spot in my office so that everyone who comes in will see it. It records the most compelling sentence I’ve ever read. I’ve said it a hundred times before, but it bears repeating in closing: “**The condition of person and life sought for by human beings through the ages is attained in a quietly transforming friendship with Jesus.**” Become a friend of His. You’ll have the good life and be a good person if you do!