

Introduction

Don't stop short! A senior in high school was pondering what to do with her life. She loved children, believed teaching is the noblest profession, and thoroughly enjoyed it, she said to her father. **"So don't stop short,"** he replied, **"Major in education and become a teacher."** A young man was waffling about whether or not to marry his girlfriend. She was the best person he'd ever met, he loved her, and he'd hate to lose her, he told his best friend. **"Then don't stop short,"** his best friend answered, **"Propose to her."** Those anecdotes illustrate what it means to stop short. The facts before us dictate what the next logical and good sense step in our circumstance should be. But we don't take it.

Stopping short is almost always a regrettable and sometimes even a disastrous thing. So, it's urgent that we don't stop short – especially with regard to Jesus and His resurrection. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

An Early Creed

Let's start with the first part of verse 3, 3a, **"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received."** Paul, who founded the church at Corinth, had taught the Christians there many things, one of the most significant of which he's about to repeat. The words he uses here, **"delivered"** and **"received"**, are revealing. They're technical terms that first century rabbis used to indicate the passing along of holy tradition. What they reveal is that verses 3b-7 are a creed. A creed is a brief, authoritative, and formal statement of a principle, belief, or truth. That's precisely what verses 3b-7 are. They're a creed that Jesus' disciples wrote and disseminated several years after He died. A disciple or disciples then taught it to Paul after his conversion, who in turn taught it to the Corinthian Christians after theirs.

This creed has two parts. The first part is verses 3b-4. It teaches three things. First, Jesus died on the cross for our sins as the Old

Testament prophesied He would. Second, He was buried in an individual tomb, not a mass grave. And third, three days later, He rose from the dead as the Old Testament prophesied He would. The second part of the creed is verses 5-7. It refers to the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. They are listed in logical not chronological priority. He appeared to Peter, "the Twelve" (the original disciples minus Judas), 500 disciples at once, James, and all the Apostles (His closest disciples). I would add a footnote here. The Gospels make clear this is only a partial list. The resurrected Jesus appeared to more than those listed.

The Resurrection Is a Matter of Knowledge

That then is what verses 3-7 are about and I can't impress upon you enough their importance to us. They teach us a vital truth. The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of knowledge.

Almost no secular people grasp that. I once asked an attorney what he thought about the resurrection of Jesus. He answered that he didn't think anything about it and explained why. It's just a Christian belief that can't be proven one way or the other. So why think about it. Sadly, many if not most Christians agree. I once heard a pastor vigorously proclaim to the "amen's" of his congregation: **"I can't know that Jesus rose from the dead but I can certainly believe it and do."**

Those two individuals represent what almost everyone thinks about the resurrection of Jesus. Yes, there are facts that allow us to take a leap of faith and believe He rose from the dead. But there aren't facts that allow us to know He did.

How many of you learned about Hannibal crossing the Alps on elephants in 218 BC to defeat the Roman armies in Italy? I learned that in high school and can tell you this. That he did so was presented as a matter of knowledge not belief. Go to Wikipedia or any other source of information. Hannibal crossing the Alps is presented as an historical fact. But go to those same sources about the resurrection of Jesus. It's presented as a Christian belief. We can know, it's assumed, that

Hannibal crossed the Alps. But we can't know that Jesus rose from the dead. We can only take a leap of faith and believe it.

But that isn't so. Listen carefully to what I'm going to say. The resurrection of Jesus is a matter of knowledge not just belief. We can know that He rose from the dead as certainly as we can know that Hannibal crossed the Alps.

Do the Math

Anyone who does the math in fact will know that. So, let's do just a bit of that math now, limiting it to the text we read.

First, consider what I said about this creed in verses 3b-7. It was written several years after Jesus died. He died around 29 or 30 AD. Even the most liberal scholars date the creed at 50 AD, 20 years later. But other more objective scholars date it at 32 to 38 AD, only 2 to 8 years later. That's a critical fact. It's commonly argued that the resurrection of Jesus is nothing more than a legend, an historicized story that's Christians developed over the years. But that's impossible. A brilliant scholar, Dr. William Lane Craig, explains it well. Legends take well over a generation to develop and grow. If the resurrection of Jesus were a legend, the earliest it could have appeared was in the 2nd century AD. But as this creed and other evidence show, it appeared almost a century before, shortly after the event at issue. Whatever His resurrection is, it certainly isn't a legend.

Now consider what verses 4-8 claim. People saw Jesus alive after He had died. It's true that no one witnessed His resurrection itself. No one was inside the tomb when the Holy Spirit raised Him. But according to verses 4-8, many people saw Him alive after He died. These are eyewitnesses who walked, talked, and even ate with Him after He died. Now Paul's decisive comment in verse 6 about those eyewitnesses, "**most of whom remain until now.**" That means most of them are still alive. Do you get his point? Jesus rose from the dead. If you don't believe me, ask them. They'll confirm, by their own firsthand knowledge, that He did.

That kind of statement in a genuine and verifiable letter is powerful evidence of the resurrection.

Finally, consider two of the people who claimed they saw Jesus alive after He died. One, in verse 7, was James His brother. The other, in verse 8, was Paul himself. We know about James that he doubted Jesus' divine person and mission when He died, and that he was hostile toward him. We know about Paul that he hated Jesus and tried to eradicate His followers from the face of the earth. Those are well-established historical facts. They are also well-established historical facts that both men became devoted followers and worshippers of Him after He died, also that they willingly died for claiming He had risen. There is only one plausible explanation of those facts. James and Paul saw Jesus alive after He died.

What I've just done is only part of the math. There's much more evidence for the resurrection of Jesus if I had the time to share it. But that's enough to make the point. That He rose from the dead is as verifiable as that Hannibal crossed the Alps. His resurrection isn't just a matter of belief. It's a matter of knowledge as well. What Lee Strobel writes about that is no exaggeration, **"I couldn't think of any more thoroughly attested event in ancient history."**

Let me ask you a question in that regard. Do you know or at least believe, based on the evidence, that Jesus rose from the dead?

Don't Stop Short

Well, don't stop short if you do. Suppose you're on a jury and hear enough evidence that you're convinced of the defendant's guilt. It wouldn't make sense for you to stop short. You'd take the next step that the facts dictate you should take. You'd convict him. It's the same with Jesus. Hopefully you now know or at least believe He rose from the dead. It doesn't make sense for you to stop short if you do. So don't. Take the next step instead that the facts dictate you should take.

Acts 2:32 and 36 help us figure out what that step is. These verses

are part of Peter's first sermon after Pentecost. He declares: **"This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel *know for certain* that God has made Him both Lord and Christ."** Notice the words there **"know for certain."** The resurrection of Jesus proves something beyond any shadow of a doubt. He is Lord of everyone and everything that exists.

That helps us figure out what the next logical and good sense step is. It's to surrender ourselves to that Lordship of His. That's what the facts of His resurrection dictate we should do.

There isn't anything abstract or vague about what that means. It means that we let Him run our lives. We value and pursue what He wants and wills over what we want and will. Most simply put, we make and carry out the decision to learn and do all that He says.

Dr. Graham Scroggie preached about the Lordship of Jesus at a huge convention in Keswick, England. After the service was over, he noticed a young woman sitting alone and approached her. She blurted out as he did: **"Dr. Scroggie, your message was so compelling, but I'm afraid to make Jesus my Lord. I'm afraid of what He'll ask me to do."**

Dr. Scroggie responded by turning his Bible to the story of Peter's vision in Acts 10. Three times the Lord commanded Peter to **"Kill and eat"** unclean animals. Three times, Peter said, **"No, Lord."** Dr. Scroggie tenderly explained to the young woman that it's possible to say **"No"** and it's possible to say **"Lord"**, but it's not possible to say **"No, Lord."**

He then gave her his Bible and a pen and instructed her to think about it and decide – to cross out the word **"No"** in the text if she would make Him Lord or the word **"Lord"** if she wouldn't. After leaving her alone and praying for her, Dr. Scroggie eventually came back. He found when he did that she had crossed out the word **"No"** and was saying softly over and over again, **"He is Lord. He is Lord. He is Lord."**

That's what it means to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus. It means to make and carry out the decision to learn and do all that He says. It means to say to Him always and absolutely, **"Yes, Lord."**

Experience the Risen Lord

Something incredibly person and life changing happens when we do. We experience the risen Lord. That is where the evidence of His resurrection ultimately leads us. It shows that He's alive and screams out for us to enter into a personal relationship with Him. I talk all the time about having a familiar friendship, an ongoing conversational relationship, with Jesus. Well, that's exactly what we get when we surrender to Him. When we surrender to the risen Lord, we experience the risen Lord, which in turn makes our life abundant and our joy full.

That isn't just nice talk. It's a fact of life that's verified by the testimonies of millions – like a brilliant and widely known writer, philosopher, and professor named J.P. Moreland. In 1968, Moreland was a cynical chemistry major at the University of Missouri. But an acquaintance of his challenged him one day to examine the claims of Jesus with an open mind, which he did. Listen as he explains the result: **“ There was more than enough evidence for me to believe it. So I took a step of faith in the same direction the evidence was pointing, by receiving Jesus as my forgiver and *leader*, and I began to relate to Him – to the resurrected Christ – in a very real and ongoing way. In three decades, I've had hundreds of specific answers to prayer, I've had things happen that simply cannot be explained by natural explanations, and I have experienced a changed life beyond anything I could have imagined.”**

J.P. Moreland knows it by firsthand experience and so do many of us. When we surrender to the risen Lord, we experience the risen Lord. And when we do, our life becomes abundant and our joy full.

Conclusion

I close with a personal question. Do you know or at least believe that Jesus rose from the dead? If you don't, objectively pursue the evidence and you will. If you do, don't stop short. Take the next logical and good sense step instead. Surrender to and experience Jesus!