

Text: 1 Cor. 15:1-11

Title: "Delivering the Gospel of Easter"

Time: 3/10/2024

Place: NBBC

Introduction – The tradition of the Easter egg in our country goes back to the Lutherans of 17th century Germantown, PA. Evidently, pre-Christian Tuetonic myth included a story about a goddess of spring and fertility named *Eostra*, from which the label *Easter* comes. According to one story, the goddess had turned a wounded bird into a hare that would deliver colored eggs to children each year.

When the German tribes were converted to Roman Catholicism, the tradition of egg delivery was boosted by the fast of Lent, which produced a lot of extra eggs for Easter. The Lutherans of Germantown continued the egg delivery tradition in celebration of the resurrection of Christ. They thought the breaking of the egg's shell was symbolical of Christ's emergence from the tomb. They encouraged their children to build nests and put out hats for the delivery of eggs on Easter morning, and these came to be our Easter baskets today.

In the late nineteenth century, the Russian jeweler Carl Faberge delivered beautiful Easter eggs each year to the Russian czar, who gave them as presents to his wife and mother. Fifty such eggs were produced, 42 of which have survived to this present day. Nine of the 42 are owned by one of the richest men in Russia, the oil baron Victor Vekselberg, who paid around 100 million dollars for his collection.

As we trace Easter all the way back to the New Testament, we do not find a holiday involving egg delivery. But we do find something very valuable that needs to be delivered to others. It is called *the gospel* (vv. 1-3). The gospel is a delivery that is more valuable than even Faberge's eggs, and yet it is entirely free. Paul explains that value when he says that the delivery of the gospel is the means by which a sinner is saved (v. 2).

Our message this Easter morning is on “Delivering the Gospel of Easter,” and I want us to be encouraged in that duty in three ways together.

I. Deliver the gospel of Easter as we have received it (vv. 3-4).

Illustration: One of the Easter eggs that Czar Nicholas II gave to his wife in 1898 is called “Lilies of the Valley.” It was crafted in an Art Nouveau style with enamel, gold, diamonds, and pearls. An imperial crown is on the top of the egg, which contains a pearl button. When that is twisted, portraits of the czar and his two daughters elevate out of the top of the egg.

Now I want you to imagine the czar getting that egg from Faberge and deciding that he liked the pearls best, so he removed those from off the egg and only gave the pearls to his wife. He would never think of doing that, because he would know that he would completely ruin the value of the gift. Instead, he would be very careful that the egg was not modified in any way whatsoever before being delivered as a gift to his wife.

Application: Paul speaks of delivering the gospel to people with that kind of care. He says, “I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received” (v. 3). He had received from Christ the gospel that saves sinners as the power of God, and it was his job to deliver it unadulterated to sinners who needed to be saved. He emphasizes three parts to the gospel message, in the absence of which that gospel loses its saving power:

1. Our sins – We cannot deliver the gospel unmarred to people without telling them about our sins. Many who claim to be gospel preachers today will never say the word *sin*. The gospel is not a message that saves good people from poverty or poor self-esteem or the injustice of society. The gospel is a message that saves a sinner from his sins. It begins with “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). Sin and its wages are why we need the gospel. Failure to mention that need will bring failure to deliver

the gospel untarnished by our modifications. Any gospel altered so as to not include the truth about sin cannot save the sinner.

2. Christ died for our sins – We cannot deliver the gospel unmarred to people without telling them that Christ died for our sins. He is the only way to forgiveness of our sins because He is God's anointed Son sent to die as a vicarious atonement for us. He died experiencing God's judgment on our sin in our place so that we could be reconciled to God again. The gospel is about God's love in Christ, but also God's righteousness in judging our sin by judging Christ. That death was brutal and bloody, for our holy God hates our sin, which is wicked and destructive. Christ died both because God hates sin and because He loves sinners.

3. Christ was buried and He arose again the third day – We cannot deliver the gospel unmarred to people without telling them that Christ arose from the dead in His body that was buried in the tomb for three days. Notice that in verse 2 Paul was concerned that this Christian local church was in danger of losing their handle on the gospel, and according to verse 12 and the rest of this chapter, it was at this point especially where the trouble lay. The gift of eternal life is a supernatural miracle, and it is based on the historical supernatural miracle of the resurrection. If there is no miracle of resurrection, there is no miracle of eternal life.

Illustration: Not all Lutherans today believe what the German-town Lutherans of the 1700's did. I heard a message in my aunt's Lutheran church many years ago in which the pastor denied the historic reality of the bodily resurrection of Christ and instead spoke of the spirit of resurrection that is a part of this spring time of renewal. That is the false gospel of Eostra of the Teutonic tribes, not the true gospel of Christianity's Easter.

We must guard our hearts against our own unbelief when we share the gospel. We must not be ashamed of the supernatural miracle that is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. Only God can help a sinner believe that truth, for salvation is a work of God. We do harm, not good, when we try

to put the gospel into terms and ideas that an unbeliever would find acceptable. We must deliver the gospel of Easter as we have received it.

II. Deliver the gospel of Easter with confidence (vv. 3-8a).

Illustration: One thing every gift of a Faberge egg carried with it was confidence in the quality of its craftsmanship. You do not have to blush with embarrassment over the gift of something pricelessly valuable like that. To give such a gift while apologizing for it is to dishonor the gift.

Application: Paul never blushed with a lack of confidence when he delivered the gospel to sinners in need of salvation. We know he prayed for boldness, and the Lord answered that prayer (Eph. 6:19-20). In addition, Paul mentions here three sources of confidence he had in the message he was called to deliver:

1. The Scriptures (vv. 3-4) – The Bible gave Paul confidence as he shared the gospel. We certainly see that in the book of Romans, where Paul begins by saying, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (1:16). That New Testament book quotes the Old Testament Scriptures more than any other. It tells how the gospel saved Abraham and David. Paul was a bold gospel preacher because Paul had studied His Bible and had become convinced from it of the veracity and importance of the gospel message he was called to deliver. Do we have that confidence because we have spent time in the Scriptures?

2. History (vv. 5-7) – Paul expresses his confidence in the gospel, especially that part being questioned in Corinth – the bodily resurrection of Christ, with the phrase, “and he [the risen Christ] was seen by.” He is recounting the eyewitness accounts of the history of resurrection events.

These sightings are very difficult to account for unless we accept the fact that they were sightings of the resurrected Christ. Paul’s list is not exhaustive, but it is conclusive. Peter is mentioned; the Twelve are mentioned as a single entity – a reference to the apos-

toloc authority of the twelve chosen by the Lord as the first leaders of His church (note that Matthias had to replace Judas to keep the number 12 - Acts 1:21-26); a group of 500 is mentioned, some of whom were young at the time and were still alive as Paul wrote some 25 years later; James, the brother of the Lord and pastor of the Jerusalem church, is mentioned, who would have had in common with Paul that he did not believe in Christ until after the resurrection had happened; and then the rest of the apostles are mentioned, which I think is a reference to the 120 disciples who were told by Christ to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, that they might receive power to be witnesses in Acts 1:1-15. They were charter members of the very first church.

How do we account historically for the fact that all these people believed that they had seen the risen Christ? How did it happen that the apostles were changed from scattered and terrified refugees of Calvary to those who boldly stood in Jerusalem to call those who crucified their Lord to repentance? How can Paul write what he does here? The only way to make sense of this history is to conclude that they believed, were changed, and wrote this way because they had in fact seen the risen Christ.

3. Personal testimony - (v. 8). Paul was able to deliver the gospel with confidence because he could say, "He was seen by me." It is impossible to deliver a gospel that you yourself have not yet received. Paul put it this way elsewhere: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). We must be reconciled before we can have a ministry of reconciliation.

Perhaps the reason you have no confidence to share the gospel with a lost sinner is that you have not yet really experienced that salvation yourself. The most natural response to being truly born again is to want to tell someone else about what Christ has done for you. The Lord gave us the ordinance of baptism for that. If you are unwilling to be baptized or even to share the gospel with someone in need, you should ask yourself, have I really been saved by the gospel?

III. Deliver the gospel of Easter with God's grace (vv. 8b-11).

Illustration: When Paul described his calling to be an apostle "as one born out of due time," he used an ugly word that refers to the tragedy of a premature birth, a miscarriage, or an abortion.

Application: His point is that the other apostles all had time to live with and believe on the Lord Jesus for three years prior to seeing Him as the resurrected Lord. Their faith in the resurrection was brought to full-term slowly (see John 20:8-10).

By way of contrast, Paul met the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus as he was attempting to execute the orders he had to further persecute the Christians he found there. For Paul, there was no pregnancy prior to apostolic birth. It was a sudden, violent, and in some respects premature and unnatural event.

What made it that was what he was before he was saved by Christ—"I persecuted the church of God." In another passage Paul calls himself the chief of sinners as he remembers this part of his life prior to meeting Christ as his Savior (1 Tim. 1:14-16, "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.").

So how does one who mercilessly persecuted the church preach the gospel? How does the chief of sinners tell someone else how to be saved from sin?

Only by the grace of God. *Grace* is the word that refers to God's generosity. It just so happens that the God of heaven has an enormously generous heart. Our God is a God of grace. God's grace is His willingness to give us freely what we need when we need it. Ultimately, to do so and still be a just God, He had to sacrifice His own Son as the first part of that generosity to us (Rom. 8:32).

That was our greatest need. Like any other form of generosity, we benefit from His gifts when we simply receive them by faith.

I want us to appreciate three things about the generous grace of God in our lives as believers:

1. God's grace makes us who we are (v. 10a). Sin made us what we were, but we are no longer that. Who we are now we are by the grace of God given freely to us, especially in the work of His Son. He took our sin and gave us His righteousness. This is who we are, the righteous, and it was God's grace that made it so.

2. God's grace makes us do what we do in light of who we are (v. 10b). Paul says that he labored more for the gospel than any of his apostolic predecessors, and then he says, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." This is the grace of God given freely to us in the person of His Spirit, who equips and empowers us to labor diligently. We need only receive this gracious gift.

Unlike Paul, I have not labored more diligently than others, but I have labored for the Lord. But I am ashamed to have to admit that very rarely after doing my duty for the Lord have I remembered to say, "Yet not I." Perhaps you need to work on that too. It is God's grace that empowers us to do what He has called us to do, and He must receive all the glory that is rightfully His.

3. God's grace produces the results of who we are and what we do (v. 11). Corinthian unbelievers believed because God's grace made Paul and the other apostles who they were and empowered them to do what they did. That same grace is offered freely to you and to me. People will believe because the grace of God is mighty to save.

Illustration: Serving the Lord in gospel ministry by the grace of God is a little like a child asking his father for some money so that he can buy him a birthday gift. That is how gospel ministry has to work. We need the gift of God's grace so that we can give back to Him. His grace makes us righteous; His grace makes us minister the gospel; and His grace gives the increase we seek as

we deliver the gospel to others. When that increase comes, it is all to the glory of His grace alone.

Conclusion: So this is how best to deliver the gospel of Easter. We must deliver it as we have received it. We must be confident it is true. And we must depend heavily on the grace of God.

When gospel ministry works this way through our lives, we may have the joy one day of saying to someone what Paul could say to the Corinthians, “So we preached, and so you believed!” There truly is no greater joy.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching