

Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Epiphany

Pastor Mike Schuessler

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:3

“For what I received I passed onto you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”

Paul says that Jesus died “according to the Scriptures.” We echo this when we confess our faith using the words of the Nicene creed on page 7 in the bulletin: On the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures.” What exactly does that mean? The four Gospel books - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - all tell us that Jesus die to pay for our sins and came back to life. That’s what the creed is referring to. However, that’s not what Paul is talking about. Paul’s letter to the Christians in Corinth was one of the first books of the New Testament to be written. At that time, the four Gospel books did not yet exist. So what does he mean?

Paul is making references to the Scripture that he knew, which was the Old Testament. Perhaps he was thinking of Bible verses such as Genesis 3, Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53. Each of these foretell the death of Jesus. In Isaiah we read:

“He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

“And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering...after the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied.”

As Paul says, “Christ dies for our sins according to the Scriptures.” But, there was a problem! Some people were suggesting that dead people don’t come back to life. Indeed,

Greek philosophers at the time suggested that the soul was actually imprisoned in the earthly body. At death, the soul was set free. They thought it would be terrible if bodies came back to life. The Corinthians were tempted to create their own hybrid Christianity. Perhaps Jesus had paid for their sins, but his body never came back to life.

Paul points out that the teachings of Christianity come as a complete package. You can’t pick and choose only those things that you want. “If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raise either. And if Christ has not been raised then your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” If Jesus did not come back to life then there is no way to know if his sacrifice was acceptable to God. And the testimony of his disciples cannot be trusted, for they all claimed to have seen him, even Thomas.

Yet Christ has been raised form the dead. He appeared to Peter, and to the Twelve (Matthias in place of Judas Iscariot) and to more than five hundred people at the same time. And he appeared to Paul. Jesus has been raised and our sins have been forgiven.

Today some want to claim Jesus as their Savior yet doubt that Jesus did miracles. The Good Shepherd who could lay down his life for the sheep who had gone astray is the same One who could turn water into wine, give sight to the blind, and call forth his dead friend Lazarus from the tomb. It is he who had authority to take his life back up again so that we may live with him forever.

Today some want to claim that Jesus could do miracles, but his death and resurrection was not enough to take away our sins. Yet he who said, “Father forgive them” also said, “It is finished.” Now we work together as partners in the Gospel to pass on to others what we first received, the good news that “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.” Amen.