



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION FOR WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 13-19

SERIES TITLE: WE BELIEVE

MESSAGE TITLE: THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION:

This week we begin a new series entitled, “We Believe”. We are living in a culture in which we are bombarded by numerous voices communicating a variety of ‘truths’ which they want us to believe. We read something eerily similar in Romans 12:1 where Paul is warning the Christians in Rome not to be conformed to this world or molded into believing what they want us to believe. Instead, he commands them to be transformed by the renewing of their mind. In this series we want to remind you of what we, Church at Viera, believe. Our belief is grounded in the truth of God’s word. Over the course of this series, we will discuss what Church at Viera believes on different topics that are relevant to our culture today.

Before Your Small Group Meeting:

- Watch Pastor Mark’s Message
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-6

DISCUSSION

1. What jumped out at you the most from Pastor Mark’s message this weekend?
2. What does it look like in your life for the gospel to be of first importance?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-6. What are the key aspects of the gospel according to this passage? Generally speaking, why do you think the cross of Christ is mentioned more than the tomb of Christ?
4. Pastor Mark shared the Gospel in four words; Jesus in my place. How do those four words affect you on a daily basis?

5. Pastor Mark shared 4 steps to sharing the Gospel: First, build a caring friendship. Second, Ask thought provoking questions. Third, tell my conversion story. Finally, share the gospel. Which of these steps are the easiest for you and which one is the hardest? Why?

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Spend time praying for those in your life you need to share the gospel with and then pray for the opportunity to boldly proclaim it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15: 1-6

1. Despite most recent translations, Paul does not speak of reminding his friends of *the gospel* he had preached, for his verb (*gnōrizō*) means ‘make known’ (cf. Moffatt, ‘I would have you know’). The word is itself a gentle rebuke; some Corinthians were evidently far from appreciating what the gospel meant. Yet they had *received* it (the aorist points to a decisive act), and they took their *stand* on it (cf. 2 Cor. 1:24). Clearly they recognized that it is fundamental, even if they did not understand it fully.

2. *By this gospel* is rather ‘through which’ (*dia*), the preposition drawing attention to the gospel as the means Christ uses to bring about salvation. *You are saved* is present continuous, ‘you are being saved’. There is a sense in which salvation is once for all (as in ‘received’, v. 1), and another sense in which it is progressive (cf. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15). We do not exhaust the meaning of salvation by our experience when we first believe. Salvation goes on from strength to strength and from glory to glory. The word order is unusual: ‘by what word I preached the gospel to you if you hold fast’, and this poses some problems. Two main solutions have been suggested, (a) The construction is conditional, with the ‘if’ clause coming late in order to give emphasis to what precedes. The meaning would then be: ‘if you hold fast with what terms I preached the gospel to you’. This is not a very natural Greek construction (though far from impossible); also against it is the fact that it makes Paul demand that they hold fast, not only to the gospel, but to the actual words in which he presented it (cf. Moffatt, ‘provided you adhere to my statement of it’). (b) We could connect ‘by what word I preached to you’ with ‘I make known’ (v. 1). This would give the sense, ‘I make known to you ... in what terms I preached ...’ The difficulty with this is the following ‘if you hold (it) fast’, for Paul is not telling them something ‘if they hold it fast’. He is telling them whatever their attitude. Perhaps ‘if you hold fast’ is a kind of parenthesis, or it may attach to ‘you are being saved’ (as Goodspeed, RSV, etc.). Or the conditional may be seen as fulfilled, ‘if you hold fast (as you do)’. The construction is difficult, but the second solution is to be preferred. *Otherwise*, Paul goes on, *you*

have believed in vain, where the last word, *eikē*, may be understood as ‘without due consideration, in a haphazard manner’ (BAGD). If people profess to believe the gospel, but have not given due consideration to what that implies and what it demands, they do not really trust Christ. Their belief is groundless and empty. They lack saving faith.

3. The derivative nature of the gospel is stressed. Paul did not originate the message he gave them. He simply *passed on* what he had *received* (for these verbs see notes on 11:23). This is the accepted language for the handing on of tradition. What follows is a very early summary of the church’s traditional teaching. Paul is not giving us some views he has worked out for himself; he is passing on what had been told him. This is the *kērygma*, the proclamation, the gospel preached by the early church. Paul sees it as *of first importance*. Without this message we do not have the essential Christian position. The first point in it is that *Christ died for our sins*. That is to say, his death was an atoning death. The cross is at the heart of the gospel. *According to the Scriptures* shows that this was no afterthought. The saving death of Christ was foretold long before in sacred Scripture. It was not death as such, but Christ’s death as a saving event that the Scripture foretold and the church proclaimed. Paul does not say what scriptural passages he has in mind, but they will be such as Isaiah 53.

4. In such a brief statement it is a little surprising to find this reference to Christ’s burial (cf. the Apostles’ Creed). The early church was in no doubt about the reality of the death of Jesus, and the fact of burial is evidence of this (it is mentioned in all four Gospels). While Paul does not explicitly mention the empty tomb, these words are the necessary prelude to it and seem to imply it. From the burial Paul moves to the resurrection on the third day and the burial has implications for this, too; ‘if he was buried, the resurrection must have been the reanimation of a corpse’ (Barrett). *He was raised* (*egēgertai*) is passive, which puts stress (as usually in the New Testament) on the activity of the Father in raising the Son (cf. v. 15). And it is perfect, which points to the permanent state; it ‘sets forth with the utmost possible emphasis the abiding results of the event’ (*Prolegomena*, p. 137). Christ continues in the character of the risen Lord. The perfect tense is used in this way six more times in this chapter (vv. 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20), and once only in all the rest of the New Testament. It is likely that *according to the Scriptures* is to be taken with *was raised*, rather than with *on the third day* (so, for example, Metzger, *JTS*, n.s., viii, 1957, pp. 118–123). There is little Old Testament evidence for a rising on the third day (though some suggest Hos. 6:2, or Jonah 1:17), but Isaiah 53:10–12 may fairly be held to prophesy the resurrection (it speaks of activity after death; cf. the use of Ps. 16:10 in early preaching).

5–7. Paul gives a list of the resurrection appearances. It is not an exhaustive list, and we may speculate, for example, on the reason for the omission of all the appearances to the women. The apostle begins with an appearance to *Peter*. Actually he says ‘Cephas’, the Aramaic name, but NIV alters this to the Greek name (which Paul uses nowhere except in Gal. 2:7f.). This appearance is mentioned again only in Luke 24:34 (cf. Mark 16:7). We may conjecture that the Lord, in his mercy, was concerned to give assurance of forgiveness to that servant of his who had three times denied him. *The Twelve* (here only in Paul) is clearly a general term, for Judas was not there, and, if the reference is to the appearance on the evening of Easter Day (Luke 24:36ff.; John 20:19ff.), Thomas was absent also. The appearance to *more than five hundred of the brothers* is mentioned here only (unless, as is probable, it is that referred to in Matt. 28:16ff.). It is obviously important, for on no other occasion could such a large number of people testify to the fact of the resurrection. Paul’s insistence that most of them were still alive shows the confidence with which he could appeal to their testimony. They could be interrogated and the facts elicited. Notice the beautiful way he refers to those who have died. Death, which is an antagonist no-one can withstand and which was viewed

with horror by most people in the ancient world, has become for the Christian nothing more than sleep (see further, *TNTC* on 1 Thess. 4:13f.).

The second name given in this list is *James* (linked with Cephas again in Gal. 1:18f.). It is not certain which James is meant, but most agree that it is James the Lord's brother. It is not unlikely that it was this appearance that led to his conversion and through him to that of the other brothers. They did not believe in Jesus during his ministry (John 7:5), but as early as Acts 1:14 we find them among the believers. What else accounts for the sudden change? *All the apostles* puts emphasis on *all* (BDF 275 (5)); not one was missing. This may refer to an appearance like that in John 20:26ff., but more probably points to the appearance at the time of the ascension (Acts 1:1ff.). This muster of witnesses indicates the importance Paul attached to the resurrection of Jesus. He is about to show its consequences for Christian faith, and he lays the foundation by showing how well based is belief in it. He does not give a complete list of witnesses, but he gives enough to show that the fact is extremely well attested. So reliable is the evidence that it must be accepted, and Paul can go on from there.

8. The apostle puts his vision on the road to Damascus on the same level as the other resurrection appearances. He sees himself as the last in the line of those who have seen the Lord. He calls himself *one abnormally born* (*to ektrōmati*, 'the abortion', 'the miscarriage'). This strong and unexpected term has been interpreted in more ways than one. Some point to the fact that the Twelve had been with Jesus for years, whereas Paul was born into the apostolic band suddenly, without the period of gestation that might have been expected. The emphasis then would be on the abnormality of the process. Others point out that the word is 'an offensive word' (Héring), and see it as a term of abuse (cf. BAGD). Paul was not a handsome man (2 Cor. 10:10), and critics may have combined an insult to his personal appearance with a criticism of his doctrine of free grace, by saying that, 'so far from being born again, Paul was an abortion' (Barclay). This is supported by the fact that Paul goes on to refer to his unworthiness. *To me also* comes last in the Greek with a certain emphasis. Even to Paul, the abortion, Christ appeared.¹

¹ Morris, L. (1985). [*1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 7, pp. 197–200). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.