

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1307 – February 17, 2013 – 1 Corinthians 15:4-11
The Evidences Of The Gospel

Last time we looked at the gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ, this time we will look at the historical evidences of the gospel, the burial and the appearances of Christ. These are not the gospel but they are historical evidences of the truth of the gospel. As I said last time Christianity is rooted in history. All through the Bible the truth of the Bible hinges on whether or not the events it describes actually took place. For example, if the human race did not fall in the one man Adam when he ate of the forbidden fruit then there is no fall of man into sin. And if there is no fall of man into sin in the one man Adam then there is no salvation in the one man Jesus Christ. It's logically interrelated. And this is why there has been such a debate over the historicity of early Genesis in the last 60 years. Fundamentally, what is at stake is not just a few little stories but the entire nature of God, of man, of nature, of sin and of salvation. A compromise on the historicity of early Genesis catapults all the way through the Gospels and the entire Bible. We cannot pick and choose what we like. We are in no position to do so. We either accept it all or we accept none of it. We don't have a rubber Bible that you can twist anyway you want. The Bible is an integrated whole where every truth penetrates every other truth. It stands or falls as a single document.

And we are standing upon the integrity of Scripture because of the integrity of God as the necessary presupposition of even stating a proposition. And the Scriptures tell us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and God sent forth His Son in the fullness of time and that He "died for our sins according to the Scriptures 4and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." And since we've already looked at the death and the resurrection then we are going to look briefly at the historical evidences of the gospel, namely the burial and the appearances, particularly the

appearances because even His closest followers didn't understand the Scriptures that said He must rise again.

But first let's start with the burial that we see in verse 4, **and that He was buried.** The tomb Jesus was buried in was that of a rich man who was a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret believer. His name was Joseph of Arimathea. And there are two tombs that are the leading contenders for the actual tomb Jesus was buried in; the most popular is the tomb discovered in 325BC in one of the earliest formal archaeological excavations. It's just outside the walls of Jerusalem and there was a church built over it. Western Christians call it the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; Eastern Christians call it the Church of the Resurrection. The church was built in the 4th century AD so to visit the tomb you have to enter into a church. Housing sacred sites inside a structure was a common way of protecting sacred sites from weather and erosion and people that might damage the site. So if you go to Israel you'll enter a lot of churches and other structures that cover the actual point of interest. You may not like that, I don't like that because I don't feel like I'm in a natural setting, I feel like I'm in a church and it's overly ornate and I come out wondering what I was there to see, the church or the point of interest. But that's the way it is and there probably wouldn't be anything there to visit unless they had covered them with these structures. Now the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is actually claimed to be both the site of Christ's crucifixion and His burial. The argument is that the area was outside the city walls of Jerusalem in the 1st century which is necessary and both the cross and the tomb were nearby and there was a quarry nearby as well as a garden and several other tombs and so it meets all the Scriptural requirements and people said this must be it and they constructed a path leading to it known as the Via Dolorosa, the Way of the Cross, which many people walk today. Now when you come into the church it's usually packed and you walk up the steps and when you get to the top you come into a room and on one side of the room is a glass box covering the rock that is said to be Golgotha, the location of Christ's crucifixion alongside the two thieves. Then you come down to the ground level and walk through the church to a small structure inside the church that protects the empty tomb and you stand in line and then go in for a few seconds and there is a little cloth there that says *Xristos Aneste*, Christ is Risen. And indeed He is. But it's a very abstract experience for most people because of the fact you are inside this church with all this ornamentation.

Now other people argue that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is not the actual site but it's the Garden Tomb. The Garden Tomb, also outside the city walls of Jerusalem, was close to an elevated place they say is Golgotha; it was near a cistern that evidences the site had been quarried, the large cistern could water a garden and there were other tombs around it. It was discovered by a British General Charles Gordon in the 1870's. Gordon said that in studying the contours of Jerusalem he noticed this strange rock that looked like a skull and so he said that must be "the place of the skull" and he added many other interesting arguments. You can read about all of this in a very interesting book *The Weekend that Changed the World: The Mystery of Jerusalem's Empty Tomb* by Peter Walker. It's an enjoyable and fascinating read. Now if you go to the Garden Tomb you will first take a look at the hill that looks like a skull. It's actually changed due to erosion from the time of Charles Gordon quite substantially, but you can at least get an idea of what he was looking at. Then you can go over and this is much more pleasant than being in a church because you are in a garden outdoors and see the tomb. Part of the wall fell down so they repaired it but you can walk into this tomb and look to your right and it's all barred off but they say this finished loculus is the tomb where Christ's body was laid. Outside you can see the slot where the stone was laid. These stones were shaped like a thick pancake and they rolled along this designated slot to seal the tomb. The tombs were actually caves and the stone would roll in front of the door in a slot and when you see it this way you realize that it would take several men to remove the stone since you have to put your hands up against the face of the rock and push it from a very awkward position. So the tombs were quite secure but they could be opened.

Now I don't know which tomb He was buried in if either of them. They both argue that they meet the requirements of the text but there are many other tombs in the area. I tried to find one in 2008 when we were there that is less well known called Conder's tomb which is not far from the Garden Tomb but we couldn't get to it. In any case, most Roman Catholics adhere to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and most Protestants enjoy visiting the Garden Tomb. Nobody knows for sure but what is known is that "Christ died for our sins and was buried" and therefore outside the city walls of Jerusalem, near a quarry and a garden along a main road there was a tomb that for three days housed the body of the Lord Jesus.

Now this is where things get interesting because His body was in the tomb for three days but where was Jesus Christ for those three days? Because remember what He said on the cross to the thief next to Him who believed? Today you will be with Me in paradise. So where was Christ after He died? He was in paradise. He was not in the tomb, His body was in the tomb but He was in paradise on that day. His body was in the tomb for part of Friday, all of Saturday and part of Sunday. In Jewish thought any part of a day is counted as a full day, this is the standard fare - Friday crucifixion, Sunday resurrection. No problem. But if He's in heaven with His Father during this time in what form is He with His Father? What does it mean to say He was with the Father in spirit only? I think He was given some kind of temporary body until the resurrection and I'm thinking of the transfiguration where you had Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus and they all appear in some kind of a body. It wasn't their resurrection body because the Jews are not to be raised until the Second Coming of Christ; Christ is the first resurrected from the dead. But before His resurrection He appeared with Moses and Elijah at the Mt of Transfiguration so there seems to be some kind of a temporary body. And I think that when Christ died He was given a temporary body something like what He was given at the transfiguration while His body that was scheduled for resurrection was still in the tomb.

Now everyone that was around knew His body was in the tomb, they saw the tomb, they saw how his body was laid in the tomb but then it turned out on the third day the heavy stone was removed and His body was not in the tomb. We're talking about the 11 appearances now. There are 11 appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrection body. And I'm going to walk you through all of them. You can break them into three categories; the five appearances on the day of resurrection; the five appearances during the 40 days that followed and the one appearance later on. Paul doesn't mention all eleven appearances here, he mentions six appearances. His point is not to list all the appearances, but the six that he does list are in the proper overall sequence. What's the proper sequence?

The 11 Appearances		
On the Day of Resurrection	During 40 Days After	Much Later
1) Mary Magdalene	6) The disciples	11) Paul on Damascus

	(Thomas present)	Road
Ascension?	7) Seven Disciples at Lake of Galilee	
2) The other women	8) More than 500 brethren	
3) Peter	9) James the half-brother of Jesus	
4) Two men on road to Emmaus	10) The apostles	
5) The Twelve (Thomas absent)	Ascension	

First to Mary Magdalene, second, to the other women, third, to the two on the road to Emmaus, fourth, to Peter, fifth, to ten apostles and some others - those are the five appearances on the day of the resurrection. Eight days later he appeared sixth, to the disciples with Thomas (and convinced him), seventh, to seven disciples at the Lake of Galilee (the large catch of fish, third appearance to disciples), eighth, the appearance to more than 500 brethren, ninth, the appearance to James the half-brother of Jesus (who did not believe until after the resurrection) and tenth, to the apostles at the final ascension, those are the five appearances during the forty days after. Then eleventh, to Paul on the Road to Damascus, the one and only appearance after the forty day period.ⁱ

Now let's look at them and learn some lessons, then we'll come back and learn our text. After the normal Sabbath which was Saturday, that night the women went to buy the spices. Early the next morning, which was the third day, the women came to the tomb. When they got there the stone was rolled away and when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. They were perplexed about this and this is where you start seeing doubt creep into the story. It's not just doubting Thomas. Poor Thomas gets a bad wrap but hardly anyone believed. There were two angels that appeared in the tomb and they told them that Christ was risen and reminded them that Jesus had taught that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. Then they left the tomb and reported all these things to the twelve. Now as they told the twelve about the tomb and what the angels said were the twelve believing? No, these words seemed to them as nonsense and they did not believe them. That's

when Peter got up and he ran to the tomb and John got up and ran after him and they ran together but John got there first because he was younger and he could outrun Peter and when he got there he stooped and looked in and just saw the linen wrappings but he didn't go in. Then Simon Peter arrived and he went barging in and he saw the linen wrappings and the face cloth all wrapped up nice and placed by itself, which shows you the body was not stolen, thieves don't take the time to roll up little cloths and set them neatly aside. Then John came in and when he saw he believed. It's the first report of anyone who believed and pretty much the last one. And do you know why John believed? Because He understood the Scriptures. The rest of them did not yet understand the Scriptures. See, people say, well, the resurrection is what convinced them to believe. Seeing is believing Nonsense. That's completely wrong. Believing is what enables us to see. This principle goes back to the rich guy in the gospels who was in sheol burning and he said to Abraham, send back Lazarus to my father's house and warn my five brothers so they won't come to this place of torment. But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." But he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent! But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.' The point of that story is that the Scriptures are the authority and if we believe the Scriptures then we can interpret the evidence correctly but if we don't accept the Scriptures then we won't be persuaded even if someone rose from the dead right in front of our eyeballs. Seeing is not believing; believing is what gives you the ability to see. Now the twelve had heard the OT Scriptures, they had heard Christ expound those Scriptures, they had heard Christ predict His own death and resurrection and yet when the women came telling them the tomb was empty, those same disciples were not believing the Scriptures. John believed. He understood, when he looked in the tomb, boom, he believed because he accepted the Scriptures. The others didn't believe the Scriptures. But there is Peter standing looking into the tomb, the others followed too. When they all got there Jesus wasn't there so they left. Mary Magdalene was the only one left and she was crying and then she turned and now we have the first appearance, she saw Jesus but she didn't recognize Him and she said, where is my Lord, they laid Him here but they have taken His body away. And she thought it was the gardener and people think she didn't recognize Him because He looked so different in the resurrection body. But it has nothing to do with that. She didn't recognize Him because she wasn't believing the

Scriptures. She didn't believe in His resurrection. She said they must have moved His body somewhere else. Wrong answer. He was standing right in front of her face. Then the Lord Jesus is very gracious and revealed Himself to her. This is the first appearance. Then he tells her something very interesting. He says, do not touch me or do not cling to Me, commentators debate which is the best reading. Was He saying do not restrain Me, do not stop Me because I have something to do right now? Or was He saying, do not touch Me, do not brush against Me at all because He had not yet had any contact with a sinful human and he had to ascend to heaven now and make a presentation before the Father. As he says, for I ascend to My Father and Your Father, My God and Your God. It's an interesting discussion because that night He's going to appear again and then He says touch Me and see that it is I. But at that time to Mary He says do not touch Me for I ascend to My Father. Now L.S. Chafer held to two ascensions. We usually just think of one ascension; the one that occurred forty days after the resurrection from the Mt of Olives. But Chafer pointed out this appearance to Mary Magdalene where He said do not touch Me for I ascend to the Father and that therefore there were at least two ascensions and maybe more; the ascension on the day of his resurrection where He made a presentation in heaven before His Father and then He returned to earth and made other appearances until His final appearance and ascension from the Mt of Olives. Chafer said it's even possible that during the forty days He was not on earth the whole time but He was in heaven and He was going back and forth making appearances on earth during the forty days. We don't really know; what we know is that there are only ten appearances in those forty days and so it sounds as if He spent most of His time in heaven and only made occasional appearances on earth. In any case, He appeared to Mary Magdalene first and told her not to touch Him but to go and tell the disciples that He would go before them into Galilee, then He disappears, apparently going to His Father in heaven. Then, appearance two, as she goes to report to the disciples she catches back up with the other women and makes an appearance to them all saying essentially the same thing. Third, on the same day you have the two men on the road to Emmaus and another man starts walking with them and on this occasion it reports that He appeared in a different form. He looked different and the two men were talking about what had happened in Jerusalem and Jesus said to them, what are you talking about and they said, where have you been, haven't you heard what happened in Jerusalem? And it shows you how public the information was, everyone in Jerusalem knew about Jesus

and the crucifixion. So they explain and they said, He was delivered up and crucified at the hands of the Romans and now it is the third day and there were women who went to his tomb and reported that it was empty and that the disciples went to the tomb but didn't see Him and we were hoping that He was the one to redeem Israel. And Jesus rebuked them and said, O foolish men, slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Is not the Christ to suffer and enter into glory? And beginning with Moses and the Prophets he explained Himself from the Scriptures. And they went into the village and broke bread together and in the breaking of the bread He opened their eyes to see Him and they knew Him and then He disappeared. The resurrection body of Christ does interesting things, we don't know if those things are abilities of the resurrection body or if they are miracles of God related to His deity, but Christ could appear and disappear. And the two men said, wasn't our heart burning within us as we heard Him open up the Scriptures! Jesus Christ was a master exegete. And so they departed that hour and went to Jerusalem and reported these things to the twelve and they also reported that He had appeared to Peter, so He had evidently already appeared to Peter. Fifth, as they were all gathered He appeared in the room, Thomas being absent, and they were afraid and they did not believe and He said, see My hands and My feet, that it is I; handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as I have and for joy they still could not believe and so He asked for something to eat and they gave Him a piece of fish and He ate it before them. The point is Jesus is doing everything He can to convince them to believe, to believe the Scriptures that taught resurrection so they can see Him, so they can understand. So those are the five appearances on the day of the resurrection. There are no more appearances that we know of until a week later on the next Sunday.

The next Sunday they were all gathered in a room and the doors were shut and we have the sixth appearance. He appeared in the midst of them and Thomas was there this time and He said, reach here your finger and see My hands and touch My side and see that it is I. Most people don't understand the Thomas appearance. What amazed Thomas was that Jesus was in the same body that He was in on the cross, see, most people want to make a total disconnect but the resurrection body is not a total disconnect. To be sure, there are differences but the same body that was in the manger was the same body that was on the cross and was the same body that appeared in that room and Jesus said, because you have seen you have believed, but blessed is

he who does not see and believes. That is, because they believed on the basis of Scripture, God's authority in the word of God. Then seventh, we have the appearance on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. Seven of the disciples were fishing and they had caught nothing and Jesus appeared on the shore and told them to cast their nets on the other side. When they did they had such a load of fish they could not pull it in. When Peter recognized who he was he dove into the water and swam ahead of the boat. They broke bread and ate on the shores of Galilee. Then eighth, He appeared at some point to more than 500 of the brethren and the only text that records this is 1 Cor 15 where it says **He appeared to more than five hundred of the brethren at one time**, and most people assume it means "at one place," but it does not say at one place but **at one time**. And possibly you are already seeing the solution to a very difficult problem, how can every eye see Jesus Christ at the Second Coming. And yet perhaps the solution is right here. He appeared to more than five hundred at one time but the five hundred were at different locations. And we don't know how He did this but that it's possible that He did do this and again, we don't know if this is an ability of the resurrection body or if it is a function of His deity, but He may very well have appeared to more than five hundred simultaneously but the five hundred were in different places. Then we have the ninth appearance to James, his half-brother who was not a believer before the resurrection. So if you ever get upset about your family members not believing, don't blame yourself. Jesus lived with James for most of his life, along with his other brothers and sisters and they didn't believe until after the resurrection. Finally tenth, He appears to His apostles at the last day, the day of His ascension from the Mt of Olives and this is Acts 1 and He departed and was exalted at the right hand of the Father and poured forth the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Now the last appearance, the eleventh and final appearance was several years later to Paul on the road to Damascus. But the main point of all these appearances that I wanted to draw out was that most of them saw but did not believe. Seeing is not believing but believing the Scriptures is what allows you to see. If you are waiting for God to show you something before you believe you may be waiting forever. But if you believe the Scriptures now you are going to see things you never dreamed you would see. The Scriptures are completely accurate, they are truth, they are authoritative, they explain to you how to see and what you are seeing. That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." You believe and I believe on the

basis of God's authority in the Scriptures, not on what we see. And what is in Scripture is more certain than anything you have ever seen. But if you reject the Scriptures you'll be just like these disciples who were slow to believe all that the Scriptures said and therefore they could not believe the resurrection. The Scriptures say, "they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead."

So when we come to the six appearances of 1 Cor 15 we see that he did not include all the appearances, but the one's he did include are in the proper sequence. You see the appearance in verse 5 **to Cephas**, who is Peter, was his fourth appearance on the day of the resurrection, the appearance to **the twelve** was the fifth, also on the day of the resurrection when Thomas was absent. Peter may also have been present and Judas was dead so truly only nine or ten but **the twelve** was a technical expression. The appearance in verse 6 to **more than five hundred brethren at one time** was the eighth and occurred sometime during the forty days that followed, the appearance in verse 7 **to James**, the half-brother of Jesus was the ninth, it also occurred sometime during the forty days, **then to all the apostles** refers to the tenth appearance which is the day of His ascension from the Mt of Olives, and then, verse 8, **and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also**, refers to His eleventh and last appearance which was to Paul on the Damascus Road. So the sequence of appearances is maintained but some appearances are not mentioned. Of course these are enough to show evidence of the resurrection.

Now the appearance to Paul, said to be **last of all** because Christ has never appeared to anyone since He appeared to Paul. No one in the history of the world has seen the risen Christ since Paul. And this is enough to say there have been no apostles since Paul because to be an apostle one must see the risen Lord (1 Cor 9:1). And there is no apostolic succession, the authority of the apostles could not be transferred to anyone else, it had to be given exclusively by the risen Christ. And therefore the popes of Rome are not in an unbroken chain of apostolic succession since Peter, the chain was broken with Paul. Paul was the last. And so Paul says, **and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also**. The expression **as to one untimely born** is used by Aristotle of a miscarriage or abortion wherein the baby is born too early. The point of course is not to say Paul saw Christ earlier than anyone else but at another time than was typical. Paul saw the

risen Christ at a strange time compared to everyone else. Everyone else saw Him either on the day of His resurrection or the forty days that followed. But Paul saw Him a few years later when he was on the Damascus Road.

He then says **I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.** Paul wrote the handbook on how to persecute the church of God. He was an avid student of Judaism, he was a student of the great rabban Gamaliel and at the top of his class. But in Acts 6 he debated Stephen and Stephen beat him real bad. Stephen was a powerful exegete of the Scriptures and this made Paul mad. Paul was the type of guy that if he couldn't outsmart you he'd just have you killed and so that's what he did in Acts 7. And then in Acts 8 he ravaged the Church in Jerusalem forcing the disciples out of Jerusalem which actually furthered the aims of Christ to expand the Church. And then in Acts 9 is when he was on the road to Damascus still breathing threats, even murder against Christians but on the road he became a Christian when the Lord appeared to him. And so Paul did not consider himself **fit to be an apostle** and the **least of the apostles.** And yet he was an apostle nonetheless.

But, verse 10, But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. There are two phases of God's grace here; first, God's grace that made Paul a Christian. Where Paul begins, **But by the grace of God I am what I am** refers to God's saving grace in phase one of salvation, justification. Paul was justified on the road to Damascus when he believed the message of the risen Christ. And second, God's grace that enabled Paul to live the Christian life. Where Paul says, **and His grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.** This grace refers to God's saving grace in phase two of salvation, sanctification, and as Paul took the gospel out to the Gentiles God's grace was with him, enabling Him to be bold and courageous with the gospel.

Verse 11, **Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.** What the apostles preached and what they believed and we believe is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Alright, so today we have looked primarily at the two historic evidences of the death and resurrection. The historical evidence of the death is the burial and we looked at the two

tombs people think He may have been laid in, but more importantly we looked at the historical evidences of the resurrection which are His appearances. He had eleven appearances; five were on the day of His resurrection, five were in the forty days following his resurrection and one was after the forty days to Paul. Therefore we have close and reliable historical evidences for believing the resurrection. This resurrection body is the same body that died on the cross with some differences. He appeared and disappeared, went through walls, appeared to more than five hundred believers at one time who may have been in different places, and if this is so it explains how everyone can see Him at His second coming. That concludes the Scriptural proof, next time the logical proof.

ⁱ A.T. Robinson, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 242.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2013

fa