

Easter 2002 Power to Live

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending your one and only Son, Jesus, as the perfect sacrificial lamb. Thank You for being willing to go through the pain of having Him die in our place. But especially this morning we want to thank You for raising Him to Life. Thank You for taking the sting out of death! Thank You that on the day of Firstfruits Jesus became the Firstfruits from among the dead; that we may know that we will in the same way be raised to Life eternal. We thank You that right now, as the Apostle Paul said, the power that raised Him from the dead is at work in us, transforming us in newness of life. You sent your Son as a lamb but raised Him as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Victor. In the same way, help us to live in victorious boldness, as we look forward to the day when You will change these lowly bodies and make them like Your glorious body according to the power with which You will subdue all things unto Yourself. To You alone be the honor and glory both now and forever! AMEN!

The eternal God, Maker of heaven and earth, sent Him in Whom all the fullness of God dwells, to be a man who was a willing sin offering in our place. There was nothing we could offer to cover our sins, no way to be made right with God. Not only were we born with a sin nature that we inherited from Adam, but also we willingly choose sin that separated us from a holy and good God. So God provided Himself the offering, the Lamb of God, to make a way for us to be made right with Him. That lamb, Jesus, was brutally murdered by the Roman government at the insistence of Jewish religious leaders.

I want to quote to you the beginning of a song, to quickly paint the picture of what led up to this momentous turning point for all mankind. "All the earth had trembled; the sun had hid its face. All the men that walked with Him turned and ran away. They crucified our Savior and they laid Him in a tomb. The life that once brought love and hope slipped away that afternoon. Satan gleamed with pleasure, that day at Calvary, for He thought He had won a mighty victory. And like Him all of the demons of Hell began to cheer, but little did they know that their end was drawing near." Three days later, 1,972 years ago, the man, Jesus of Nazareth, walked out of His tomb. He was the Lamb of God who was slain, but He was raised the Victor over death, the Lion of Judah.

If there are any genuine skeptics here this morning, who doubt Jesus truly rose from the dead, let me loan you a book called "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel an award winning investigative journalist. He examined the evidence and interviewed the experts to try to understand why his wife's life changed after she believed in Jesus. Was there really a man, Jesus Christ, who, as God incarnate, conquered death? The answer has everything to do with whether or not there is any hope or purpose in life.

At least ten times the New Testament declares that God raised Jesus from the dead. A brutalized human corpse with a pierced heart lay in that cold tomb with Roman soldiers keeping guard. But the power of God brought Him back to life! In not quite the same kind of existence as He had before His murder, He walked out of that grave, through the stone, in a flesh and bone body. An angel later rolled the stone away so the disciples could see He had vacated His tomb.

Imagine the power to animate a bloodless body, a body that previously functioned on blood, now operating supernaturally. What amazing life giving power! Jesus of Nazareth's victory over death is a fact of history. The lives of his 11 cowering disciples were transformed into heroic messengers of that truth, even to a martyr's death for 10 of them. Those sacrificial lives would never have resulted from a hoax. Something occurred that filled these men with a fire and the power to live life fearlessly. They saw the resurrected Lord!

Now I'd like you to take a look at the scripture passage on the front of the bulletin or turn in your Bible to Ephesians 1:18-21. The very power that raised Jesus and set Him above all is at work in you and me. Listen to:

Ephesians 1:18-21(NIV) I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

That incomparably great power that is for us is the same resurrection power that raised Jesus! The NIV use of the word 'like' is unfortunate. The KJV is the better translation here – 'according to'. It is according to that same power that raised Jesus that we live in Jesus. That is not only for the day we are raised from our graves, but right now in this life. When we come to Christ repentant, we are supposed to die by association with Him on the cross, be buried with Him, and be raised with Him.

Romans 6:4-8 (NIV)⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

That is right now! The power that raised Him, the resurrected life, the righteousness of God in Jesus, is to be ours, now, if we will live in it!

Romans 8:11 (NIV)¹¹ *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

Life – resurrected life, the life of Jesus, is in your mortal body. That is that body sitting in the pew listening to this sermon (or reading this on the www). Is your life full of the resurrected life of Jesus? This is no mere suppression of your bad qualities, it is the very life of Christ enabling you to obey the Holy Spirit, to desire and act on His desires. It is a transformation of the heart.

Easter gives us more than just the promise that we will one day be raised to new life. That is certain. Jesus rose on the day of the Feast of Firstfruits and He is said to be the firstfruits from among the dead. At the Feast of Firstfruits the farmer would offer his first ripe grain. It meant he trusted God would bring the rest of the harvest. He had been waiting all year to have new grain, but when it finally begins to ripen, by faith, he offers it to God. Jesus was the first to rise from among the dead, but that is a picture promise that we will also rise, like the farmer had faith the rest of his crop would ripen.

Not only does the resurrection of Christ assure our resurrection, it also gives us the assurance that Jesus' sacrifice was acceptable to God. That acceptance opens up the gate of heaven to us. We can come into communion with God because our sins were dealt with. The sin that separated us from God is paid for in full. God accepted Jesus' death in my place, in your place, as a just payment for our sins. Then Jesus gives us His righteousness! I can ask God for any good thing and it is mine. I live without guilt and the fear of punishment. I still regret when I sin and seek to never go that route again, because I want to respond in gratitude to what Jesus suffered in my place. But I know I am forgiven. As the Apostle John said, when I do sin, I have a representative before God, Jesus. So I live a life free of condemnation. What a relief! I have no fear of death, for I will be raised to life, and I do not have to fear facing God's justice. If either of these two wonderful truths of the resurrection were missing there would still be a sting in death. I will have a new body like His glorious body, and I will face God and instead of sin on my account, I have the righteousness of Jesus.

But the third wonderful truth that comes out of the resurrection of Jesus is that right now God's power that raised Him is at work in all who believe. That power is working in me to turn me from sin patterns and toward walking in the Spirit. I am increasingly enabled to yield to that Life – the resurrected life of Jesus. I can continue to be critical and unloving, putting myself first before God, or I can die to myself and let His new life reign in me. I can be like the old me or increasingly like Jesus, a new creation.

"Billy Graham once told of meeting Konrad Adenauer, the mayor of Cologne who was imprisoned by Hitler for opposing the Nazi regime and who later became the highly regarded chancellor of West Germany from 1949 to 1963. Adenauer looked Graham in the eyes and asked, 'Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ

from the dead?' Graham said, 'Of course I do.' To which Adenauer replied: 'Mr. Graham, outside of the resurrection of Jesus, I do not know of any other hope for this world.'" From *The Case for Faith* by Lee Stroebel

He was right. Without the resurrection of Jesus there is no hope for those he saw executed in Nazi camps. Without the resurrection of Jesus there is no hope for those living in the society he governed. Only transformed lives by that power that raised Christ can truly have an eternally positive affect on a city or a nation. That is how the early church conquered the Roman Empire. They lived their faith. When people saw Christians, they saw people radically committed to loving God and their neighbor. The constant testimony of those transformed lives won over the hearts of that Empire. They were not conformed to the world but transformed by that power that raised Jesus! We need resurrected life reigning in us if there is to be hope for Wayside Chapel. We need resurrected life reigning in us if there is to be hope for Sedona. Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead? Then there is hope for you and me and Wayside and this city! I agree with Adenauer, without the resurrection there is no hope for this world!

This morning will you take a moment to consider how much of your life each day is resurrected life, and how much is unproductive patterns left over from your old life? If you have surrendered your heart to Jesus, I would ask you if you are daily yielding to that resurrected power or walking in your own power?
2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)⁵ *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?*

We get so busy with living that we don't take the time to examine where we are spiritually. We settle into patterns and let the patterns direct us when the Spirit of God is waiting to guide and direct our daily lives, to transform us. I'm convicted! I am convicted because I see too few lives being really transformed – different enough for the world to take notice. I want to be more like Jesus by yielding to the life in me, so I can inspire you to let that power cause you to be a living witness of a transformed life. If those around us are not being changed it is because we are not letting ourselves be changed. That is not a guilt trip, just a reality check. It doesn't happen overnight but it should be happening in time.

Eph 2:4-5 (NIV)⁴ *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,*
⁵ *made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...*

God's great love for us made a way for us to share the resurrected life of Jesus. We knew it when we first came to Him. The question is are we living in the power of it now? Are we letting that power work in us today – or going our own way? Wouldn't it be wonderful this Easter morning if you surrendered again to the resurrected life of Jesus – not just while you are in this building – but in your daily life? He rose to be your new Life. Will you let Him be that in you continually?

Col 3:1 (NIV)¹ *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*

As we said earlier, if you have repented of your rebellion against God then you died with Him and have been raised with Him. That power is available to you! Here in this letter to Colossae, Paul tells them that because they were raised with Christ they need to act on that power by setting their desires in line with the heavenly Father's desires. That is the example Jesus set for us, always preferring the Father's desires. How do you set your desires in line with His? It's by that resurrection power at work in you. You can refuse temptation! You can love God with all your heart! You can love your neighbor as yourself by the power of God at work with in you! Every born again believer knows deep down when he or she is not accessing that power and instead falling back into the old patterns of the self life. What Jesus asks of us, He gives us the enabling power to do, but we must be willing.

Christ died for your eternal Life but He also died so that He could send you the Promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit. Are you claiming the first half and not living in the other half? "I want heaven but I want to be my own boss here, thank you." If you are saying that, it is said to your own detriment. There will be a hunger that nothing else can satisfy. Come home. Usually we use that expression toward those who have never trusted Jesus as the One that makes them right with God. It certainly fits there, but let me give you something to consider. The Prodigal was his Father's son, an heir. Come home to a submission again to your heavenly Father, to the power of God that will guide you. Are you feeling like everything is like husks, empty and unsatisfying? That is because once you have tasted sweet fellowship with your heavenly Father nothing else can satisfy. Come home. Lay down your petty grievances and your right to your own way, and come home this Easter. Let the power that raised Jesus have His way in you again.

Easter speaks to us of the promise of eternity, of forgiveness of sins, and of new life right now. If you've tasted it you know nothing else will satisfy, but complete surrender to His Lordship in your daily life. We avoid it, make excuses to not go that direction, refuse to cross a boundary of surrendering our heart. I've watched myself and others come right to the threshold. We let go for a moment and then take it right back over. It is not out of control to surrender to Jesus, it is finally coming into the control of the One who knows how best to direct our lives.

If you are from a New Age background I have a word for you this morning. Jesus is Lord. That means He is Master. There are not seven ascended masters, or none of them is the Master. Jesus is the Master and His victory over death, witnessed by hundreds, proved it. He is Master of masters, which is what His name Lord of lords means. He is not calling you to be some great one. His message is to humble yourself and recognize you need Him. He is the only One that can make you right with God. Receive Him as your only Master, not self, not secret wisdom, but the one and only Son of God. What kind of a God would make salvation too hard a concept for a simple child? Jesus just says, "Come to Me."

Whether you have never placed yourself in His hands, or if you need to get back to living in the power of His resurrected life, come home this Easter morning! What a perfect day to do it. This is the Day we celebrate His conquering death for you to live eternally. But it is also for you to live each day in this world by His resurrected power. Come home! Let Him reign in you!