

Resurrection Power 3-27-05

1 Corinthians 15:12-23 (NIV)

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

End scene from *The Passion* by Mel Gibson

He is alive!

It is upon this belief that Jesus was victorious over death, that the entire Christian faith depends. It is because of this pivotal importance that the reality of that is questioned, attacked, and belittled, especially in the last 100 years. If it is not true, our passage for today tells us our faith is futile. We may as well close the doors and say good-bye to one another. There is no reason for us to meet. Every Bible believing preacher is a liar, if Jesus was not raised. If that is the case, they are not only preaching a lie, but also encouraging you to base your life on a lie. If there is no resurrection, there is no solution to sin. There is no way to remove the inevitable guilt that weighs down the human heart. And because the way of Christ calls us to death of self, because it forfeits worldly pleasure now for eternal pleasure with God, if there is no resurrection, then we are to be pitied.

The arguments against resurrection change over the years. As each opposing theory is debunked, new ones are created. They all begin with the same premise, miracles do not happen. The same researchers and scientists will tell us that in every other field of research and experimentation, we must be very careful not to approach our field with foregone conclusions. Yet, those very same doctors of science will begin examining the resurrection with the foregone conclusion that there is no God and therefore miracles do not happen. Then they proceed to search for alternate explanations. Rather than accept the account of eyewitnesses and the proof of amazingly transformed lives, they would rather try to search for a convenient alternative explanation 2000 years after the fact.

I do not think that makes a lot of sense. If I read an account of Plato's death written by his followers, I do not sit down and try to figure out why they lied and what really happened. Granted, his death was not so amazing and challenging to my way of life. And isn't that really the crux of the matter? The account of the disciples challenges us to examine what we live for and base our life upon. If I want to live for worldly pleasure, just please myself and be my own master, then I do not want the resurrection to be real. I would rather it was made up by some weak-minded people who needed a crutch. I would rather believe they made the whole thing up. Then I am under no compulsion to change my behavior. I can keep doing what I want, be my own master, and not worry about the consequences.

However, I believe those disciples told us the truth. It is not because I need a crutch or that I fear death. It is because the Holy Spirit of God convicted me of my need to be right with God. It is a conviction that is contrary to my natural desires. Jesus claimed that it is only through Him that we can be right with God. (John 14:6)

"Ha!" you say. "Exclusivity! How intolerant!" Well, examine every other major religion and you will find that they each claim to be the only way to God. The difference is that their founders are in the grave. They never claimed resurrection. And if the founders of those religions are in the grave, what hope do I have that their message is God's message?

Last year when I debated a number of religious leaders in our community, I was shocked to hear them unanimously declare that they did not believe in atonement. Atonement is the Biblical concept that someone's payment could cover my debt, or specifically that Jesus could die for me. I did not realize how out of date I was. They threw away 2000 years of church doctrine that declares Jesus died in our place for our sins. They imagine that all the generations that went before us were deceived and they, through their great learning, have reached the enlightened understanding that it was all a big mistake. The covering of skins that God provided for Adam and Eve, the promise to crush the head of the serpent, the blood covenant with Abraham, all just for those ancient ignorant people and with no further application. The Passover in Egypt, the Temple sacrifices, centuries of prophetic promise, are all without any lasting meaning for us today.

What a sad conclusion they have reached! To them, there is no payment for our sins, no victory over death and hell, no hope for eternity. That would make Jesus a liar as well, for He said, "I came to give my life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28) If there is no atonement, what in the world was Jesus talking about. Of course, they would say the disciples added that to Jesus sayings. However, Jesus also said He would rise again, (Matthew 20:18-19) but if He did not, I say again, He was a liar. Oh, well, the disciples must have added that too. Scoffers claim that Jesus just was an enlightened man, but if you believe His followers distorted His message, He was not enlightened enough to pick the right men and teach them clearly. It does not add up.

Commented [notes1]: ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁸ "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" Matthew 20:18-19 (NIV)

There are problems with selective editing of the Gospel story. It is too easy to pick and choose what we are willing to accept based on our foregone conclusions and personal desires. The biggest problem with that kind of editing is that Jesus walked out of the grave! How do I know? Well, it is first and foremost a work God did in my heart. I have no incentive to believe. In fact, I knew it would cost me to follow, but I also saw what it would cost me not to believe.

I do have logical reasons to believe as well. Rome crucified Jesus because He was a political threat. They guarded the tomb with soldiers that were each trained to hold a square meter of ground. Those soldiers could have been executed for letting a prisoner escape. Somehow, Jesus walked out of the grave. Matthew's account says that on seeing the angel that rolled away the stone, those warriors passed out. (Matthew 28:4) The disciples were cowering, hiding in fear for their lives. (John 20:19) Then suddenly they are preaching in public. (Acts 2:6) Something incredible had to have happened! They were thrown in prison because they were preaching and healing and telling the people that it was because they witnessed the resurrected Jesus.

They no longer cared about threats and prison. (Acts 4:19-20) Angels helped them break out of jail. (Acts 5:19-20) They declared that they had conversations with the man Jesus, who was crucified, raised from the dead, and who they saw ascend into heaven. (Acts 10:41)

The power of the risen Jesus was overflowing from the Apostle Peter to the extent that people from the surrounding regions brought their sick and laid them on the streets so that his shadow would heal them. (Acts 5:15) How do you explain that? If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then these men were liars. Why would healing power flow through liars to such an amazing extent?

Imagine for a moment if I told all of you, "Hey, let's start a new religion. It's all a sham, but if we all keep the secret, maybe it will sweep the world and we'll become important." Therefore, we make up some story and it starts to take off. You might think, "Maybe this will work. I'll play along." Then we start being thrown in jail. Next, one of our leaders is executed. Then it is open season on all of us. That kind of persecution was what happened to the fledgling church Jesus started. You would say, "Oh well, it was fun while it lasted, but I'm not going to die for it." However, that is not how the early church responded. They gave their lives. They faced lions in the arena. They were burned alive, refusing to recant. They were tortured and crucified, refusing to deny their story. Why? They had seen the risen Lord. How could you deny what you knew to be truth, knowing it would affect your eternity? Once you knew it was true, everything He said suddenly took on eternal significance. There was no going back. Once they saw the resurrected Lord, everything was different. Rising from the dead meant that even if they were killed, they would live again.

Commented [notes4]: ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. Matthew 28:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" John 20:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Acts 2:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Acts 4:19-20 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." Acts 5:19-20 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. Acts 10:41 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Acts 5:15 (NIV)

In our Scripture passage there was a word that my spell checker did not like, "firstfruits". Paul wrote that Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead. When the Jews harvested their grain, the first ripe grain was harvested and given to the Lord. It was given in faith that the rest of the grain would ripen in its time and be harvested. Jesus was the first to be resurrected from the dead. Paul was saying that our resurrection would certainly follow. He was raised, and that is why we know that we will be raised as well. Just as through one man, Adam, we all inherited a sinful nature, so through Christ we can all inherit eternal life.

However, resurrection is not just about that day in which our mortal bodies are swallowed up by immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:53-54) That is a wonderful thing. It comforts us when we have lost a loved one. It encourages us that death is not the end, and that this life is full of eternal purpose. That is not all that it is about. Resurrection is about every day. It is about life in these mortal bodies having the power of resurrection right now.

This is how the Apostle Paul expressed it Ephesians 1:18-21 (NIV)¹⁸ *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.*

Paul was praying that we would have God's help to see that as believers we have access to an incomparably great power. He goes on to describe that the power is like mighty strength of God exerted in the resurrection of Christ. What kind of power took the three day dead battered body of Jesus right through His grave clothes? What kind of power breathed life into every dead cell and lifted Him to His feet? That is life-giving power!

Paul is telling us that this power is supposed to be a part of the life of every believer, but we need to have the eyes of our heart enlightened to see that it is ours. When we see things without an enlightened heart, we see discouragement, defeat, and inability. The negative overwhelms us. We see no rhyme or reason to things.

When we look through the eyes of an enlightened heart, we see the wonderful work of God in us and in our brothers and sisters. We see God at work changing the world around us, intervening in the darkness and bringing hope to the hopeless. We see evil and dark things being turned around to move people toward God. Even more exciting is the fact that we see we can play a part in all the goodness of God. We see resurrection life flowing through our words and actions. We see it taking captive thoughts that once tended toward evil and now making them obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5) We see it changing our responses, spreading the life of Christ to those we interact with.

Commented [notes11]: ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."
1 Corinthians 15:53-54 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.
2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

Resurrection power puts just the right words in our mouth when go to encourage that needy person. It puts hope and joy in our heart even when we face the inevitable hardships in life. It guides us into a life that is actively participating with our Creator to touch our world and enrich our lives.

Resurrection power gives love for the unlovely, joy that is deep and lasting, peace that is beyond all explanation, and patience for those who have not yet seen the power is there for them. It gives us a kind word in response to insult, gentleness when our world is harsh, the power to be faithful when tempted, and self-control when we would rather return to our selfish ways. Yes, I am speaking about the fruits of the Spirit because resurrection power is the Spirit of God empowering our lives to express the goodness of God. (Galatians 5:22-23)

This resurrection power is in every believer. That is because we are in Christ and He is in us. The difference between those who act on it and those who do not is seeing it with eyes of faith and acting in faith. Some people do see it and get excited about it. Others just cannot accept the fact that it is real and available to them, so they go on doing the best they can, when this wealth of power is right there waiting to be applied. It is like having power hooked up to your house but not switching on the main breaker.

Easter is looking back to the most incredible event in human history, but if we do not apply it to our life today; we have not switched on the main breaker. If you are just waiting for the future application, you have missed what it can mean to you today. Allow the eyes of your heart to be enlightened, so that you can see this incomparably great power for us who believe. This power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted when He raised up Jesus from the dead.

Let me share one last verse that sums up what I would love you to take home and apply to your life. *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.* Romans 8:11 (NIV) Life! Really living! Living as God meant for you to live. The Spirit of God can live in you to enable you to live in resurrection power. Will you open the eyes of your heart and step out into that life in faith? Throw the main breaker! Live in the power of resurrection by the Spirit of the Living God.

Commented [notes13]: ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)