

The Power of His Resurrection

Philippians 3:7-11
Easter 2017

With Study Questions

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Introduction

Death is the great equalizer. It has no respect for intellect, beauty, riches or talent. It is a universal curse. So many rooms I've entered where it lingers, the titanic silencer. It refuses to hear your arguments. Whether one is on the left or the right, Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Socialist, Communist, Nihilist, Atheist, death is a cloud that comes, a wave that cannot be halted. The Apostle Paul called it **"The last enemy"** (1 **Corinthians 15:26**).

Today we discuss the Resurrection *anastasis* (to come back to life after having once died). It is quite unique to Christ and the faith which bears His holy name. It is not a reincarnation. It is not a living on in someone's memory. It is not a mere philosophy or system of politics or ethics. The Christian's comfort in the room of death is not one of words. It is the presence of Christ Himself as the one who has vanquished what we could never conquer.

The incomprehensible victory of the resurrection is so astonishing that even the close followers of Jesus seemed to fail to grasp His mission. When Jesus **"began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, be killed and be raised the third day"** (Matthew 16:21), Peter didn't get it. He objected! Jesus explained to him, in a not-so-enjoyable conversation I suspect, that he wasn't **"mindful of the things of God"**.

But Jesus would not be dissuaded. He was **“betrayed”** (Matthew 26:23, **“deserted”** (Matthew 26:31) and **“denied”** (Matthew 26:34) by those with whom He was closest. Yet He set His face like **“flint”** toward Jerusalem (Isaiah 50:7; Luke 9:51). He went through the mockery of an illegal **“trial”** (Mark 14:55-64). The tide of public opinion turned against Him (Matthew 27:22). They **“spit”** on Him, **“blindfolded”** Him, **“beat”** Him and **“struck them with their hands.”** It was close and very personal (Mark 14:65). Even the betrayal came with a **“kiss”** (Matthew 26:48).

He was then crucified between **“two thieves”** during which He was **“blasphemed”** (Matthew 27:38, 39). On that cross He **“bore the sins”** of the world (1 Peter 2:24), the **“iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:6). The Apostles’ Creed teaches that Jesus **“descended into hell”** which some find a confusing phrase. But it should be obvious.

That Jesus descended into hell not be read as if He were merely visiting a dreadful place as some sort of uncomfortable tourist. I agree with Witsius holding the position that Jesus descended into Hell when he **“wrestled with the dreadful agonies.”** Jesus descended into Hell by taking upon Himself the Hell deserved by sinners.

Then on the third day Jesus accomplished the unprecedented and unparalleled. **“He rose again”** (1 Corinthians 15:4) and was seen by hundreds of people, some believers, some not (Matthew 28:4; 1 Corinthians 15:5). The room of death, sorrow and sadness now becomes a room of hope and peace. Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah anticipates God fulfilling this glorious promise:

He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken.⁹ And it will be said in that day: “Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation (Isaiah 25:8, 9).

And the Apostle Paul reflects on this promise having been fulfilled:

...through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

The abolition of eternal death in the hope of the resurrection brought counter-intuitive words to the Apostle's heart, that for him to live was Christ and **"to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21)**. This was no sinful, morbid desire for death, but a rejoicing in the knowledge that the faithful are taken from **"calamity"** and enter **"peace" (Isaiah 57:1, 2)**.

Reactions to the Resurrection

The resurrection is, no doubt, the most significant event in human history. The implications of it extend into eternity. It is the heart of the Good News, the Gospel. Yet it is often viewed with a sort of passivity, an indifference. To some it is even an inconvenience, requiring a violent snuffing out. This was as true when it happened as it is to this day.

Just Friday I read a quote from Robert Nicholson, of the Philos Project (an organization with missionary efforts in the Middle East), addressing Christianity's "prospects of surviving in its birthplace". Nicholson stated:

Believing that a man named Jesus Christ was crucified and rose again for the sins of the world is still one of the most dangerous things one can do in many parts of the world.

The Scriptures teach us that instead of the resurrection being the source of light, hope and peace to the clergy in Jerusalem, it was a problem to be addressed and dismissed. They consulted together and bribed the guards with a large sum of money to lie about the disciples stealing His body (Matthew 28:12, 13). To this day there are various explanations given for what happened. Passover plots are numerous.

For some, they prefer to believe that a recently crucified Jesus managed to push over a two-ton boulder, over-powered a complement of trained Roman soldiers then convinced hundreds of people that He had risen from the dead.

For forty days (Acts 1:3), the powerful Roman Empire and devious religious culture had ample opportunity to address the issue. Yet those powers faded into insignificance while Jesus, as one poet put it, who never wrote a book, held an office, went to college, visited a big city, traveled more than two hundred miles from where He was born and had no

credentials except Himself, is the central figure of the human race. The very date by which we live is based upon His life and death.

Again, the efforts to turn a blind eye to the resurrection are numerous. Yet I would like to complete our lesson this morning with a brief analysis of how the Apostle Paul responded, his testimony, a testimony which culminates with his desire to know **“the power of His (Christ’s) resurrection”** and attain, himself, **“to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10, 11).**

Prior to the passage we opened with, Paul presented his own religious and ethical pedigree. His Jewish ethnicity, his ceremonial obedience and obedience to the law, as he read it, would have placed him above all. Or to put it his way, **“if anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so” (Philippians 3:4).**

But as one who seeking to know the power of the resurrection and attain to that resurrection Himself, he writes:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ (Philippians 3:7).

Counted Loss for Christ

Appreciate the irony here. The very things we think are so impressive to God are the things that he **“counted loss for Christ.”** Prior to his encounter with Christ, he must have thought, “Surely I will stand before God! My performance exceeds that of my fellow man, even my fellow religious man!” Such a disposition most assuredly reveals that the true Christ is not included in this man’s religious pursuits.

When a sinner (no matter how righteous he may seem in his own eyes, or compared to others) has his eyes opened to Christ, his own righteousness begins to be revealed as the **“filthy rag” (Isaiah 64:6)** that it is. When the light of Christ shines in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6) all other lights lose their splendor.

Paul’s resume’ in verses four through six contained a list of things, some good, some misguided. It doesn’t really matter. His point is that there was nothing that hindered his own redemption, his own pursuit of the power of the resurrection more than having a misplaced regard for his own power and his own righteousness. *Good*, it has been said, is the greatest enemy to *best*.

He expounds:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).

As Rubbish

In case someone wanted to limit what Paul viewed as warring against his own redemption, he now extends his list to *“all” pas* things. The *“excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus”* has no worthy competitors. His *“suffering the loss of all things”* was not bittersweet for Paul, but blissful. He was like the man who found a treasure hidden in a field *“and for the joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).*

Notice that the *“all that he has”* portion of this parable is not begrudgingly given for the field. It is a joyful transaction. Paul’s disposition toward those things he suffered to lose was not one of reluctance. He counted them as *“rubbish” skybala* (refuse, dung, garbage—that which is to be thrown out). It has been compared to sailors, realizing the inevitability of shipwreck, throw everything overboard that they may arrive safely at home.

Paul did not hate his Hebrew heritage any more than when Jesus is telling those who desire to follow Him must actually *“hate his father and mother” (Luke 14:26)*. It is more of a recognition that certain things simply don’t belong in certain places. The peace, comfort and redemption of my soul does not belong to anything I have done and can do. It does not belong to anyone I know save Christ alone.

Paul did not divest himself of good works or his love for his fellow Israelite. Quite the contrary. He worked all the more and loved all the more. What he cast off was a mistaken confidence in those works to be approved before God and attain to the resurrection.

Our works become like rice in a coconut. Native tribes used to catch monkeys by hollowing out a coconut and filling with the rice. Monkeys would reach in to grab the rice. The hole in the coconut was biggest enough for an open hand to enter, but not big enough for a fist to exit. If

they wouldn't open their hand and release the rice, they could not navigate in the branches away from captors. The Apostle was no foolish monkey.

Paul's hand would not be found trapped in a coconut of human endeavors. But Paul would...

...be found in Him (Christ), not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:9).

Found in Him

We see here two kinds of righteousness. One belongs to man. It is my work. And I should make every effort to walk in that righteousness. But for those who would seek to know the power of Christ's resurrection and attain to that resurrection, that righteousness must be jettisoned. You do not want to enter the Holy of Holies wearing that righteousness.

There is another righteousness. One, as Luther put it, that is an alien. A solid definition of alien is that it differs in nature or character typically to the point of incompatibility. This righteousness is one which is through faith in Christ. It is a righteousness which **"is from God."** And you can only pick one.

The righteousness from my own goodness and the righteousness which is from God, through faith in Christ, do not hold hands in the sanctum sanctorum (the Holy of Holies-the presence of God Himself). In that room, they oppose each other. Jesus went to the cross alone. His closest, hardest working companions, scattered. He was in the tomb alone. He rose again alone. And our faith is in Him alone.

It's been said that the righteousness of faith **"comes forth from God, and does not belong to the individual."**¹ Would you have your own righteousness, or that righteousness which comes by faith in the obedience of Christ?

...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10-11).

¹ Calvin, J. (1998). Philippians (electronic ed., Php 3:9). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

The Power of His Resurrection

Paul completes his thought with what had become his great desire. In dismissing any hope in his own power, his confidence was in the power of the resurrection; a power over that last enemy, death. In what appears to be a paradoxical statement, one which Christ continually taught, Paul realized that in order to gain true life, he must **“lose his life” (Luke 9:24)** for Christ’s sake.

Here we read of Paul’s example of taking up his cross and following Christ, as it were, to His death. The proper and reasonable response to those who would know the power of the resurrection is to follow Christ in His sufferings, being conformed to His death. In our lives, there is to be a sort of recapitulation of the life of Christ.

In a manner which is unredemptive (it doesn’t save us or merit the salvation of anyone else) we are called to suffer with Christ (Romans 8:17), we are to regard ourselves as crucified with Him (Romans 6:6), having died with Him (Romans 6:8; 2 Timothy 2:11), buried with Him (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12), raised with Him (Colossians 2:12; 3:1), made joint-heirs with Him, glorified with Him (Romans 8:17), enthroned with Him (Colossians 3:1; Revelation 20:4) and reigning with Him (2 Timothy 2:12).

The power of the resurrection means the expiation (removal of guilt and penalty) and destruction of sin, freedom from condemnation, victory over death, attainment of righteousness and the hope of a blessed immortality.

Over and over Jesus taught that whoever desires to save his life shall lose it (Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25). This is the reasonable response to the resurrection. Simply put, it changes what makes us tick. But this must be added: The jettison or repudiation of the things of this world in pursuit of the power of the resurrection does not mean not caring about, or loving those in, this world-as if the call to follow Christ produces a less caring and loving person.

I daresay that the person who obeyed Jesus’ call to hate his mother and father in following Him, would find a parent who was loved more wonderfully than they had ever been. Because it would be a loved defined and produced by God.

That being said, the power of the resurrection assures us of our justification (being declared righteous before God). The power that raised

Jesus from literal death is the power that raises sinful men from spiritual death (Ephesians 1:19, 20) and shall raise their bodies from literal death hereafter and for all eternity (Romans 8:11). This was the Apostle's response to the resurrection. May it be ours as well.

Questions for Study

1. How is death the great equalizer (page 2)?
2. What does it mean that Jesus descended into hell (page 3)?
3. Discuss the comfort of the resurrection (pages 3, 4).
4. How have people reacted to the resurrection, both in Scripture and to this very day (page 4)?
5. How did the Apostle Paul view his own righteousness in light of the righteousness that comes from Christ (pages 5, 6)?
6. Does counting all things as rubbish mean we should treat all things as trash? Explain (page 6).
7. What are the two kinds of righteousness? In which do you trust and why (page 7)?
8. What does it mean to be conformed to Christ's death (page 8)?
9. What does the power of the resurrection mean (page 8)?