

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION (*Easter Message*)

By Doug Goins

This morning we are celebrating the power and glory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For many people, however, Easter Sunday morning brings a major crisis of faith. Easter confronts them with the essential question: Is the Christian religion natural or is it supernatural? Some people avoid the question even while attending annual Easter celebrations. The following poem suggests the possibility of such superficiality. The first two stanzas say,

*On the third day
we eat brunch
wear bright dresses
munch on jelly beans
and marshmallow bunnies*

*On the third day
we sing hymns
and go to church
if we can find a parking spot.*

It is possible for Easter to be nothing more than that. But to those of us who are alive in Christ, we confess the third stanza of the poem with gratitude and praise:

*And on the third day
this God of ours
recovers from death
in a way that changes everything. (1)*

In 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul explains his biblical conviction that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead does in fact change everything. Easter puts human history in perspective. The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings to Paul's present, personal experience creativity, vitality, and a confident hope for the future. Paul knows he will be raised from death to live eternally. The supernatural power and brilliant glory of God is consistently displayed through the Easter perspective of the past, present, and future.

Paul's powerful confession of faith in 2 Corinthians 4:3-15 explains why people cannot see the supernatural truth revealed in the Easter story. Eugene Peterson paraphrases it as follows:

If our Message is obscure to anyone, it's not because we're holding back in any way. No, it's because these other people are looking or going the wrong way and refuse to give it serious attention. All they have eyes for is the fashionable god of darkness. They think he can give them what they want, and that they won't have to bother believing a Truth they can't see. They're stone-blind to the dayspring brightness of the Message that shines with Christ, who gives us the best picture of God we'll ever get.

Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.

If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. As it is, there's not much chance of that. You know for yourselves that we're not much to look at. We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we've been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. What they did to Jesus, they do to us--trial and torture, mockery and murder; what Jesus did among them, he does in us--he lives! Our lives are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us. While we're going through the worst, you're getting in on the best!

We're not keeping this quiet, not on your life. Just like the psalmist wrote, "I believed it, so I said it," we say what we believe. And what we believe is that the One who raised up the Master Jesus will just as certainly raise us up with you, alive. Every detail works to your advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, and more and more praise! (2)

That incomparable power of God and the brightness of his glory was displayed in the resurrection. The apostle Matthew's account of the resurrection emphasizes both dynamics. Although Jesus had already been raised from the dead, God's power was still evident in the violent earthquake and in the boulder being rolled away from the tomb. The brilliance of his glory shines through in the blinding, dazzling white of God's angelic messenger (Matthew 28:1-8).

Paul knew the story of Jesus' resurrection even before he became a Christian, just as many people today know the story. While still an enemy of the gospel he was personally confronted by the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. In addition to Luke's account of Paul's conversion in the New Testament book of Acts, Paul himself tells his own story two other places in Acts. Both times Paul emphasizes the power of God that knocked him to the ground and the brilliance of his glory reflected in Jesus Christ: "...a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me" (Acts 26:13).

Creation, resurrection and conversion

Paul ties three events together: his own spiritual transformation, the creation of the world when God spoke light into being, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. All three are past events, objective and historical displays of God's power and his glory. In 2 Corinthians 4:4b-6, Paul calls us to see

...the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give us the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

The Easter message that the apostle Paul and the early church preached declares that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Lord of life. He died a voluntary death and suffered crucifixion as the Savior of the world. He bore our sins in his body on the cross, but he died as a victorious Savior. In his voluntary death, he won the victory over sin, death and hell, and was raised to the newness of resurrection life on Easter morning. The New Testament always links his absolute sovereignty as Lord of life to that event. The resurrection endorsed, proclaimed and demonstrated the victory that Jesus won at the cross. He died as our Savior, but he now lives as our Lord.

Paul surrendered his life to Jesus as Savior and Lord on the road to Damascus. For the first time Paul could see clearly God's glory and power as it was reflected in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He also understood that the same glorious, creative power that spoke the world into existence and replaced darkness with light was in fact the explosive power and glory of resurrection that brought Jesus out of the grave. God transformed Paul's life, and gave him a new perspective and dynamic for living.

My concern this morning is very personal. We sang in worship this morning:

*Come and see the beauty of the Lord;
Come and know the wonder of his grace.
Come and see how much He cares for you;
Gaze at the compassion in His face. (3)*

My question is: Have you seen the glory of God in the face of Christ? Has God driven back the darkness of sin and unbelief in your life?

A songwriter in the last century wrote:

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light.
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy days be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
ill traveling days are done." (4)*

Have you seen the glory of God in the face of Christ?

Resurrection life as our present experience

In the next section of the passage, Paul explains what it means to walk in Jesus, "the light of life." The New Testament teaches that if we experience salvation from our sins through Jesus Christ then we have been given a new birth and a supernatural power to live. Paul explains that the very resurrection life of Christ is expressed through us as Christians. The amazing creativity and vitality of resurrection life can be our present, personal experience of God's power and glory. Paul describes it as a treasure inside of us (2 Corinthians 4:7-11):

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Paul understands that the real treasure is the resurrection life of Jesus Christ within him. He is merely a vessel that carries it. Is there a more beautiful description of the Christian life than "we have this treasure in earthen vessels"? Paul's life was lived under tremendous pressure. His clay pot was subjected to the strain of affliction, perplexing confusion, persecution, catastrophe, and constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake. Paul understood that what filled him up and resisted the external pressures of life was the surpassing greatness of the power of God inside of him. The power that spoke the world into being is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, and spiritually transformed Paul's life when he met Jesus on the Damascus road.

The following excerpts are a wonderful description of resurrection power, both as it was displayed on Easter morning and as it can be displayed in the lives of people who respond to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Ray Stedman writes in *Body Life*:

We must understand that resurrection power is like no other power on earth. It is unique, and has no possible rival. For one thing, it is the kind of power that operates in the midst of death. It works when everything around it is dull, dead and barren. It works best in the midst of a cemetery, for

that is where it was first demonstrated. When Jesus Christ was resurrected he came out from among the dead. Therefore, if you learn to live by resurrection power you can be alive and vital when everything and everyone around you is dead and lifeless.

Resurrection power is also irresistible. It cannot be thwarted or turned aside. It takes absolutely no account of any obstacles thrown in its path, except to use them for further opportunities to advance its cause. When Jesus came bursting from the grave, he paid not the slightest attention to the obstacles man had placed in his way. There was a large stone in front of his tomb; he passed through it. He himself was wrapped in yard after yard of linen cloth; he left the graveclothes undisturbed behind him. There were Roman guards in front of his tomb; he ignored them. He took not the slightest notice of the decrees of Caesar, or the orders of Pilate or the fulminations of the Jewish priests.

Furthermore, resurrection power makes no noise. Other kinds of power that we know usually make some kind of sound: they pound, pulsate, throb, hum, buzz, explode, or roar. But resurrection power is quite silent. Without any display or ostentation it quietly accomplishes its purpose though there is nothing audible or visible to mark it. When a Christian is living by resurrection power he does not advertise it or seek to dazzle others by its display. His effect upon others is quiet and unobserved at first, but soon there are evident changes that mark the inevitable effect of resurrection power at work: the return of life, vitality, excitement and joy to an individual or situation. (5)

How did the apostle Paul evidence resurrection power in his own life? We read that in spite of his afflictions he was not crushed. He never despaired in spite of perplexity and confusion. Although people abandoned him, he knew he was not forsaken by God. And even though he was struck down, he was not destroyed. He said the life of Jesus was made public, or "manifest," in his own body by the way he lived. There is a tone of celebration in verses 7-11. Even though life had knocked Paul down at times, it never knocked him out. His life demonstrated creativity and vitality because he experienced God's power and glory in his life. If we are God's "resurrection" people like Paul, we are a lot tougher than we usually think. It is encouraging to know that we can cope with great pressures because we have the power of the resurrection within us.

During my years as a pastor at PBC I have seen many who are "in Christ" endure realistically and triumphantly with calamity, sorrow, tragedy, illness, death--losses of every sort. With time and patience, and with the Holy Spirit ministering encouragement personally and through brothers and sisters in the Lord they have bounced back with renewed faith and confidence. Are you experiencing that same resurrection power of Jesus Christ in your life?

Our confident hope of resurrection from death

In verses 12-15, Paul turns to the future and offers the confident hope of his own resurrection from death. It is the time when we look forward to hearing God's creative and commanding voice call us to eternal life. At that point we will finally know the completeness of his power and glory. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:12-15:

So death works in us, but life in you. But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore also we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

At the end of chapter 4 Paul begins a discussion of death and the hope we have in the resurrection of those who die as Christians. For Paul, the present experience of resurrection life is not enough. He writes in his first letter to Corinth, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). Paul's unconquerable faith is spelled out against the backdrop of his belief that the same God whose Spirit renewed him daily was the one who raised Jesus on Easter morning. To the church in Thessalonica he writes, "For if we believe

that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1 Thess 4:14). One of the most important implications of Easter Sunday morning is that if we are in relationship to Christ, we no longer have to be afraid of death.

Apart from Jesus Christ, the fear of death is universal. The comedy of Woody Allen speaks to his obsession with it. In an *Esquire* magazine interview, Allen is quoted as saying, "It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens."(6) Most of the article shows that he is filled with dread. He says, "The fundamental thing behind all motivation and all activity is the constant struggle against annihilation and death. It's absolutely stupefying in it's terror and it renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless."(7)

The Easter message proclaims that Jesus rescues his followers from the horror of death. We will not only survive death, but we will be raised from it. We will be given new bodies like Jesus' resurrection body, bodies with new and undreamed of powers. We will have no more afflictions, perplexity, persecution, catastrophe, and no more "being delivered over to death." Revelation 21 is a promise of eternal life in a beautiful glimpse of heaven. The apostle John writes, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be *any* death; there shall no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3, 4).

*And on the third day
this God of ours
recovers from death
in a way that changes everything.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead does, in fact, change everything--the past, the present, and the future. Easter affects our understanding of the past--of salvation history at work in the creation of the universe, at work on Easter morning, and at work in our own conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. The resurrection brings to our present, personal experience the amazing creativity and vitality of resurrection life. And Jesus' resurrection gives us confident hope for the future. We will be raised from death ourselves to live eternally. The supernatural power and the brilliant glory of God is consistently displayed in the Easter perspective on our past, present and future.

You can experience the resurrection life of Jesus--as *your Savior and Lord*

Paul's concern at the end of verse 15 is that God's saving grace in Jesus Christ is spread to more and more people. I ask again: Have you seen the glory of God in the face of Christ? Has God driven back the darkness of sin and unbelief from your heart? Are you experiencing the resurrection power of Christ in your life? Has Jesus rescued you from bondage to the fear of death?

If your answers this morning are no, do you perhaps realize that you are spiritually blind, and that you are living in the darkness of sinful rebellion against God? Is your life dull, dead, and barren? Are you in bondage to the fear of death?

The good news of the Easter message is that Jesus can open your eyes to spiritual reality. He can forgive your sinful rebellion, dissipate your fear of what happens after you die, and he can give you life to the fullest right now. All you need to do is turn to him as Savior and Lord. Romans 10:9-10 explains that "...if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness [being made right with God], and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

What better way to celebrate Easter than to accept the new life Jesus offers today? Trust him as your Savior, surrender your will to him as Lord. Then you will know the thrill, the joy, and the security of the resurrected Christ Jesus living inside of you.

Later in this letter, Paul writes with a sense of heightened seriousness and urgency, "And working together *with Him* [Jesus], we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain--for He says, [God speaking through Isaiah] 'AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.'" Paul adds, "behold, now is 'THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,' behold, now is the 'DAY OF SALVATION...'" (2 Corinthian 6:1-2).

If you have never asked Jesus Christ to come into your life, I want to invite you to open your heart to him and accept the salvation he offers. Jesus says to you, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev 3:20). Please respond to his gracious invitation.

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NOTES:

(1) Chown, Tim 3/26/00

(2) *The Message: New Testament*. © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO. P. 441, 442 (paperback edition).

(3) *Come and See the Beauty of the Lord*, © 1991, We Mobile Music/BMI, Arr. UBP. CCLI #44292.

(4) *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*, Horatius Bonar & John B. Dykes.

(5) Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life*, © 1973 G/L Publications, Regal Books Division, Glendale, CA. Pp. 64, 65. Revised edition © 1995, Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI. Pp. 91, 92.

(6) McCann, Graham. *Woody Allen, New Yorker*. Policy Press, New York: 1990, p. 43.

(7) *Ibid*, p. 83.

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2 Cor 4:6-15

9th Message

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