

Easter Sunday: The Power to Change Your Life

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[0 : 00] Happy Easter, my friends. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. So we're wrapping up our journey through the events of Holy Week this morning.

We started with Palm Sunday and coming alive to Jesus' life, which was above and beyond human understanding. On Good Friday, we didn't look down in fear, as you remember, or in defeat, but we held our heads high to focus on the cross and how we can come alive to the sacrifice that Jesus made.

And today, we celebrate. Jesus is alive. And through his resurrection, we have the opportunity to come alive to his power.

Come alive to his power to change our lives, transform each one of us into a new creation. Our sermon this morning is titled, Easter Sunday, The Power to Change Your Life.

So you may be thinking this morning, go with me on this, I don't know if I have the power to change. I don't know if I have the power to change my attitude or my outlook on life, to continue on in this marriage, to break this addiction, to forgive the person who has hurt me.

[1 : 21] Or to love my enemies. I don't know if I can muster what it takes to live the life that Jesus is calling me to live. I don't know if I have the power to change my life.

Maybe you can hear yourself in there somewhere. Well, the good news today is, you're right. You don't have the power to change.

You're right on all counts in that. You don't have the power to become a new creation. You don't have the power to live the life that Jesus is calling you to live on your own.

And that is why, my brothers and sisters, you need, I need, a Savior. That is the good news of Easter. So whether you've received and believe in this truth in your life, or you haven't yet reached that point, we all need to hear this and be reminded of it.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to live in the flesh among us, to show us how to live. And then he took all our sins on himself and died for them on a cross.

[2 : 35] He defeated the power that sin and death had over us by rising from the dead three days later. Because of Jesus' resurrection, every person who's received Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior can, through God's strength, live a victorious and abundant life according to God's will.

Believe me? That, my friends, is what Easter is all about. The end. No. So let's unpack it.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, a man who actually persecuted Christians, I was reading through Acts again, and you'll learn why I was reading through Acts next week. But Paul persecuted, Saul persecuted Christians.

And then he experienced, as most of us would remember, a radical change in his life. A radical change in the course and direction that he had chosen. Because he came to recognize that his life depended on Jesus Christ.

Depended on the power of Christ's resurrection. So listen to what he said in Philippians 3, verse 10. And I'll give you little warnings. If you have a particular translation, I'll let you know which translations I'm speaking from for different verses, because I like the wording of some of these differently.

[3 : 58] So Philippians 3, verse 10, the NIV. I want to know Christ, Paul says. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection. And so that was the goal of Paul's life, we can recognize.

He wanted to know Jesus. He wanted to know the power of his resurrection in his everyday life. That's how Paul lived. Paul recognized that his ability to get through every day was dependent on Jesus.

Dependent on the power of Christ living through him. And Paul so badly wanted that for his friends as well. Listen to how he prayed for his friends in the church of Ephesus.

Ephesians 1, verses 19 and 20. And this is the New Living Translation. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe in him.

This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

[5 : 06] So think about this. The same power, we sing about this, we talk about it. Do we believe it? Let's soak in this for a moment. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead now gives him the authority to rule over the universe is available to you and me.

And if I just stopped there, you'd go, oh, this sounds a little crazy. But I'm going to continue. The Greek word for power, I love this, is the word *dunamis*.

Where we get the English word, any guesses? *Dunamis*. Boom. There it is. There it is.

To have the power of the resurrection in your life is to have an explosive power. Do we live our lives like that? Hmm.

I don't know that I always do. The Apostle Paul said, I want to know it. So give me a piece of that. It was the way he always spoke.

[6 : 13] It's my goal in life, Paul thought, to know the power of his resurrection. And he prayed that we, all of us to this day, would know it as well. And so the good news of Easter is that Jesus Christ not only died for your sins and offers you forgiveness today, but that same power that raised him from the dead almost 2,000 years ago is available to change your life right now.

Does that feel all right? So what is resurrection power? Just try and look at the heading. Don't cheat and look ahead. So what is resurrection power?

Well, first of all, it's the power to cancel out your past, present, and future sins. Maybe you can relate to this. I can. So many people walk through life today carrying around the weight and burden of their past.

Their failures, their past mistakes, their past sins, their past poor choices. And it can be easy to become overwhelmed with regret of the past.

And so when I say cancel out your past, I'm not talking about denying it or pretending it never happened. Cancel, in this case, means to eliminate, to remove, to delete.

[7 : 41] Have you ever gotten halfway through a project and thought, oh man, I wish I could start this over because this is not the way I had planned for it to go. I've done that.

That's why I don't do a lot of home improvement projects because I get so far and then I go, oh, and then I go to Home Depot. I forgot this and this. I need to fix this thing that I thought I was fixing another way.

But a lot of people feel that way about life. I just wish I could start over. I've made so many mistakes and there's so many failures and problems and bad decisions that I've made that I just wish I could hit the delete button and start over.

Control-Alt-Delete. Start at the beginning. When I was a kid, I loved an Etch-A-Sketch. Does everyone know what an Etch-A-Sketch is? Yeah. Because you could do something.

You could make a mistake and just shake it and erase it and start over. It was a great tool. A great toy. But some people just can't seem to let go of their past.

[8 : 48] And so as a result of that, if you can't let go of your past, how do you get control over your present or begin to even think about your future if you're stuck in the past?

People live in a constant state of regret or guilt, continually second-guessing themselves because they are tortured by, almost literally, painful memories.

Can you relate to that? You hesitate to start something new because you remember how it went poorly in the past. It can be hard. And maybe you can relate to that.

I've done that myself at times. You try something and you recognize you failed in the past, so you're afraid to try it again. But God says that is unnecessary.

You don't have to walk around with this heavy load of guilt or old hurts or painful memories because I love you. Jesus died for you.

[9 : 50] And my grace is sufficient for you. Listen for a moment to what happened as the result of the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

Paul said in Colossians 2, verses 13 and 14, New Living Translation again, You were dead because of your sins and because of your sinful nature was not yet cut away.

Then God made you alive with Christ for he forgave all your sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

The verse says he forgave all our sins. Let's have a basic theological lesson for a second. What is sin? Well, we may have some idea.

I've shared this in the past. I've given you some thoughts. But sin is actually a term that originated in the Greek words that are used for archery or spear throwing.

[10:58] Did you know that? Lots of no head shakes. Whew, yes. Learning something new. It relates to, this shouldn't be a shock, missing the target.

That's where the terminology comes from. But sin doesn't mean to just shoot and miss the target with our lives. It means to turn our backs and shoot in every other direction except for the target. Does that make sense? We completely ignore the true target of pleasing God in our lives. and we aim for things that ultimately don't save us.

They don't even ultimately satisfy us. In fact, they actually make us feel more miserable quite often and empty. Have you ever tried something that you thought, oh, this will make me feel better?

And it does for a while, but then you feel lost again. You feel sad again. You feel empty again. Sometimes that's how people get into addictions because you hit that button of satisfaction and it's not enough.

[12:07] So next time, I need another drink or I need another something else that is a greater stimulus because it wasn't enough. It was never meant to satisfy.

But here's the good news. God offers complete forgiveness. forgiveness. He says that he cancelled every record of charges against sin and he forgives them all.

The words that God uses in the Bible to describe how he forgives us are words like blot out, wipe away, wash away, cancel.

So that means that not only are our sins forgiven, they are forgotten. Scripture tells us that God removes our sin and puts it as far away as what is from what?

The east is from the west. You ever tried to get from east to west? Keep going. So that doesn't mean that Jesus doesn't know our sins, right?

[13:13] He knows them all too well. It doesn't mean though that he came to rub them in. That's not why Jesus came to remind, oh yeah, you forgot that one?

I didn't. So watch it. He came to rub them out. He didn't come to condemn you. He came to change you by saving you from your sin.

John told us in John 3, 17, and this is the ESV, so another translation flip. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The Bible says that because of the sacrifice of Jesus, his death and his resurrection, that if we surrender to the lordship of Christ in our lives, now that's a key point, God will take all of the messes and sins and regrets and wipe them clean.

And that is open to us when we trust Jesus, when we trust him alone to be our savior. But it gets even better than that.

[14:31] Jeremiah 31, verse 34 in the ESV says, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

Imagine how hard it is for God to intentionally forget something. That's what he's doing. That has to be one of the most amazing verses in the whole Bible, except for John 3, 16 maybe.

God who made the world and everything in it chooses to forget your wrongs, chooses to forget your mistakes and your past failures and your sins.

And when you come to him and confess your sins and ask him to forgive you, repent of what you've done. And as I've said many times, repent doesn't mean, oh, I won't do it again for now.

Repent literally means to do differently after. So we sin, we repent, we receive God's forgiveness, and we go a different direction. He cancels the weight of your past.

[15:40] Does your past weigh on you sometimes? For those of you who are here today who have received Christ at some point in your past, but are limping through your life under the burden of sin, the same thing applies to you.

When you come back to him, when you confess your sin and ask him to forgive you, he will receive you. He forgives you. He wipes the slate clean.

That amazing godly etch-a-sketch. And he cancels those sins off your record. Your debt is paid in full. So how can God do this?

What is the basis of this forgiveness? Romans 8, verse 1, in the ESV, says there is therefore no condemnation.

Do you ever feel condemnation from people you know, people you're related to, people you're married to, people you work with? God has no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [16:53] Jesus. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, one of the last things he said from the cross was, it is finished.

In the Greek, those three words are actually one word. And it literally means paid in full. Canceled. God says that's what Jesus did on the cross. He paid for every sin you've ever committed. He stamps paid in full across each one.

And that's why there's now no condemnation for you. Because in Christ he canceled our past sins and failures and mistakes.

So what is, I love it when I hear an amen periodically. Don't be shy. It's amen Sunday. What is resurrection power? Now don't look ahead.

[17:52] It's like a teacher saying, okay, here's the worksheet, but don't look ahead. Yeah, nice try. What is resurrection power? Well, it's the power to give you a new identity.

Well, what does that mean? We can all recognize, especially in society, that your identity is something that defines you, right? That's a basic definition of it.

But in our culture at times, people may tend to identify with, now I'm proud to be Scottish and Irish, so I identify with that to some extent, which is okay, but people will identify with their race, or their religious beliefs, or their political affiliation, or their sexual orientation, or their gender.

People identify with all sorts of different things, different qualities. Sure, there are qualities that make us up. We may find our identity in our hobbies, or our occupation.

Sometimes we wear that suit of clothes, right? We wear those clothes of this is my identity in this set of circumstances. So our identities can become very focused on what we do or what we've done.

[19:04] Our successes and our failures can even set our identity. And even more than that, what others have done to us. have you ever felt that?

That you are defined by how other people have treated you. But the resurrection brought with it a power to change all of that. To restore our identities back to the way God always intended them to be.

Because Jesus conquered sin and death. We don't have to be defined by our sinful failures. We don't have to be defined by our past mistakes, or even what others think about us anymore.

Do you spend a lot of time in your life worrying about what other people think? Sometimes I do. But you don't have to feel that way.

Our identities can now be shaped by God's success in conquering our sinful failures. And in his ability to give us a new life. Reset on your identity.

[20:10] God when it comes to God and putting our faith in Jesus Christ alone as our personal savior and receiving his gift of salvation, God describes us in amazing ways.

And maybe you remember some of these from scripture. Friend, blessed, loved, new creation, saint, disciple.

This is one of my favorites in John 1 verse 12. But to all who did receive him and believed in his name, he gave the right to become what?

Children of God. I am a child of God. You are a child of God.

Out of his grace, he has adopted us into his family. And he says, call me father, why don't you? Because that's your new identity.

[21:13] You are his, and he is yours. You may be thinking, but, okay, Pastor Kent, yeah, that's nice, I know it's scriptural, but how do I know that's true?

Well, 2 Corinthians 1 verse 22, New Living Translation. And he has identified us as his own how? By placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

I love this language, as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised you. So God said, okay, I gave you Jesus, now I'm going to give you the next installment, the next payment on what I have promised to you, and that is the Spirit.

So what this means is that you can let go of any image of yourself that is not from God. Does that feel freeing? You can stop accepting what others have said about you.

You can actually not care in a godly, gracious sort of way. You can not care about how other people have labeled you, how you've labeled yourself.

[22 : 24] Do you have a tape that plays in your head that's something, I have a tape that plays in my head that was defined in probably elementary school, junior high, worst kinds of experiences that any human being would have to go through, elementary, junior high, not that great, always.

But there are tapes that play that give me a different identity than the one that I know is to be true. And I'm 55 years old, and the tape still plays, sometimes. That's an old tape, I think it's an 8-track. So what this means is that you're not defined by what others have told you that you are. You can stop accepting what others have said about you and to you.

You heard me talk about, in our prayer this morning, about Satan's lies that he hisses to us. Does he lie to you about who you are? All the time. All the time.

You can stop accepting what other people have said about you, how others have labeled you, how you've labeled yourself, and how others have defined or limited you.

[23 : 31] We're not limited by anything. We shouldn't be. Because when you're a child of God, you're not defined by your feelings. Well, I don't feel like myself today, but that's okay.

But you're not defined by that. You're not defined by the opinions of other people. Is that a shock? You're not defined by your circumstances.

You're not defined by your successes and failures, by the car you drive, the money you make, the house you own. Are those things relevant to God? Absolutely not.

You are defined by God and God alone. And he identifies you as his own. That's how he identifies you.

Do you care how God thinks of you, how God sees you? The thing is, if you don't know who you are, if you aren't anchored in an identity that comes from God, you're vulnerable to other people telling you who you are.

[24 : 34] But here's the truth. You are only who God says you are. No one else gets to have a say in the matter.

If you take nothing away this morning than that, only God can tell you who you are. Because of the power of the resurrection, you are now identified with Christ.

You have the power of the Holy Spirit within you. He has given you a new identity. So again, don't cheat.

What is resurrection power? Well, it's the power to fill you with strength to face the challenges of each day. So here's one of the most powerful truths you've ever heard about Jesus.

us. We're not only saved by his death, sometimes we stop there, we're also saved by his life. That means that a risen Jesus lives inside of us through the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 41] Thank you. That's good news, very good news. His divinity inhabits your humanity. Is that mind-blowing?

It's kind of mind-blowing. That means that you can face each day, if you choose to, face each day in the strength of a risen Savior. Regardless of what happens to you, what difficulties you may face, whatever curveball life will throw at you, you have the power to stand in confidence and face it. Galatians 2 verse 20 in the ESV says, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, Paul said, but Christ who lives in me.

Think of the prospect of having a risen Jesus living out his life through your life. Possibilities are endless. So here's something I've learned more and more about life as I get older.

It is unpredictable. One minute you feel like you're cruising along, all is well, everything is good, everything is going fine, and then you fall off a ladder, or you slice your hand open.

[27 : 00] The next moment, from going, everything is going great, to you're in a crisis. Does that happen to you? Life is full of stress.

This is the, I'll just end the sermon here. Life is full of stress. It is full of heartache and disappointment, disappointment, and setbacks, and trials, and tragedies.

How in the world can we face these twists and turns, these roadblocks, or even these life-altering dead ends? It's only the power of a risen Christ in our lives, sustaining us through his Holy Spirit, sometimes carrying us.

Have you ever felt God carrying you with his grace and his power? Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8-11 in the ESV. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

This isn't facts, friends. This isn't just a great verse. This is truth. So that means the Holy Spirit of God, the one who was involved in creation, the one who came upon the disciples at Pentecost like a mighty wind, the one who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, has been given to you for your daily life.

[28 : 35] Do we live like we have that kind of power in us? Do we live with that kind of confidence? that is a great promise. The Bible tells us that we are more than conquerors.

One of my aunts quotes this passage to me a lot. We're more than conquerors through him who loves us. And that nothing, no kind of hardship or danger will be able to separate you from the love of Jesus.

Romans 8, 38, and 39. I've ended this. I love this passage. For I'm sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So how can that be? How can it be? Well, it's because we have a resurrected Savior. He still operates in resurrection power.

Jesus wasn't raised, went to heaven, and then just disengaged. He promises to fill you with that same power to give you strength to face the challenges of each day.

[29 : 56] So what does the resurrection of Jesus mean to you today? As you think about your ham dinner that's waiting for you at home. Well, for some people, it's just an ancient event.

But if we say we believe in Jesus, that means we believe that he's alive. That's a critical next step. Do you truly believe that this morning?

That Jesus Christ is alive? Many of you are desperate to make a change in your life. And because Jesus is alive, he gives you the power to change.

If you ask him, Jesus will give you the power to get started. That can be the hardest part sometimes. He'll give you the power to keep going. He will sustain you.

But here's the truth. We started with this. You can't do it alone. You can't do it on your own strength. You don't have the power to do it.

[31 : 01] That's a bummer, right? But you can't do it on your own. And guess what? You were never meant to. You were created to depend on Jesus.

That was always the plan. So maybe you're hearing that this morning and you feel like you can't let go of your past failures and mistakes.

My friends, Jesus Christ offers you forgiveness. forgiveness. Not just this morning. This isn't an Easter Sunday special offer from Jesus. I'm going to forgive your sins today, but tomorrow you're on your own.

Every day, in every moment. He promises to cancel your sins. He promises to wipe your record clean.

He offers you the opportunity to start over and over and over and over and over and over if you need to. Maybe your identity is wrapped up in, even choked by what you've done or what's been done to you.

[32 : 07] And I hope not. But God offers you the opportunity to have that new identity, reclaim that identity. He wants to bring you into his family and give you a new title, one that includes the words accepted and forgiven and loved child of God.

So maybe some of you feel powerless over the challenges that you're facing right now. What if you had the power of the Holy Spirit in your life who could give you peace and strength and the power to face those challenges head on, the power to change your situation?

The resurrection means that no situation is too hopeless. No problem is too big for Jesus. Because guess what?

He is still in the resurrection business. And he still has the power to change your life. He is risen. Amen.