

Resurrection Power!

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Date: 24 April 2011

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[0 : 00] Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. Amen. That you may know the surpassing greatness of his power, which he exercised when he raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Some of you may know that Sharon and I recently moved, like last week. We sold our home near Camby and King Ed, where we had lived for 11 years, and bought a newly built townhouse near the intersection of 33rd and Main.

Since our children are now out of the house and are into their own places, it seemed like it was time to downsize. Our new home is only three blocks from Queen Elizabeth Park, around which I have walked for years.

And our new home is only one block away from a very large cemetery. When we first started looking at the property, I thought two things.

One, the cemetery has significant implications for the kind of further development that can be done in that part of the city. And two, what an appropriate place for a preacher of the gospel to live, near a cemetery.

[1 : 39] For the gospel emerges from a cemetery. He is risen, was first spoken out of a cemetery. At the heart of the Christian faith is Easter.

And Easter happened in a cemetery. Indeed, cemetery is the only place resurrection can happen. Resurrection power works best in graveyards.

Now, as I've taken my morning walks over the past few days through the cemetery, I found myself wishing I were up on my physics. For I found myself asking the question again, how much power was needed for the Easter event?

How much power was needed for the Easter miracle? How much power was needed to resurrect Jesus of Nazareth? Or, more properly, what kind of power was exercised on Easter morning?

I know the kind of power it takes to carry loaded boxes and furniture up and down two flights of stairs. I know the kind of power that is needed to lift multi-ton rockets into space.

[2 : 58] I know the kind of power it takes to blast away cancer cells. How much power is involved in raising Jesus of Nazareth?

What kind of power was exercised on Easter morning? The answer, of course, is determined by asking another question.

What actually happened on Easter? What took place in Jerusalem's cemetery? Clearly, something objective happened.

It was not simply a subjective experience in the hearts and minds of Jesus' first disciples. It was an event outside of and apart from their mental and emotional state.

The women who went to the tomb on Easter morning were not expecting Easter. They had gone to anoint the body of their dear friend. The dead body of their dear friend.

[3 : 59] They expected to find a corpse. When the angel said, He is not here, He is risen, the women were dumbfounded. And when they ran to tell the good news to the men, they immediately said it was utter nonsense.

What happened in the cemetery was more than disciples wishing so hard their friend had not died that they convinced themselves he was alive.

It was more than wanting Jesus' cause to go on in spite of the crucifixion. It was more than what people are calling the biology of hope.

Something happened. Something objective. Something real. One of the books that I'm reading right now, at least when I can find some time to read, is by Paul Williams.

He's professor of Indian and Tibetan philosophy and co-director of the Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol in England. He's also a very popular broadcaster.

[5 : 03] In his book, *The Unexpected Way*, Dr. Williams shows how after 20 years of teaching and preaching Tibetan Buddhism, he astonished his colleagues and family and friends by joining the Roman Catholic Church.

Why? He says, because it all comes down to what happened on Easter. After wrestling intellectually with all of the issues involved in resurrection, Williams says that either it happened as the record described it or nothing at all happened.

And he concludes that it happened and now is choosing to follow Jesus on another path.

Something objective happened that day.

Something unnatural. Resurrection is not the natural outcome of a natural process. Dead bodies do not by nature resurrect. Which is why, using the analogy of butterflies emerging from a cocoon to explain Easter is profoundly misleading.

Butterflies emerge from cocoons as the natural outcome of a natural process. Spring flowers emerge from the ground as a natural outcome of a natural process.

[6 : 25] What happened on Easter goes beyond the natural. It was not mere resuscitation. Jesus raising Lazarus after Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days.

That is resuscitation. Bringing Lazarus back to the life that he enjoyed before he died. Nor is it reanimation. God had not simply pumped high levels of energy into the decaying cells of Jesus' decomposing body.

Something more sophisticated was happening that day. You see, although it was the same Jesus who stood outside the empty tomb, there was something very, very different about him.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples later on Easter evening in the upper room, they were startled and frightened, not only because they did not expect him to show up, but because there was something different about him.

That's why Jesus has to say to them, See my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see. I'm not a ghost. A ghost does not have flesh and blood as you see I have.

[7 : 35] It was the same Jesus with flesh and blood, yet flesh and blood that could somehow move through closed doors, that was no longer limited by our space-time continuum.

Was it a reconfiguration of the atomic structure of Jesus' flesh and bones? Or is he even asking the question that way, revealing that I'm still thinking in naturalistic terms?

What startled the disciple Peter was when he looked into the empty tomb, he saw the linen wrappings, which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had wrapped around Jesus' dead body.

He saw them lying on the stone. And the curious thing is, they were not unwound. They were not unwrapped. It was as though Jesus simply evaporated out of the wrappings.

Peter further noticed that the cloth, which had been around Jesus' head and face, was not lying with the other grave clothes, but was lying off by itself at the head of the stone, as though someone, having no more use of it, wrapped it up and tidily laid it aside.

[8 : 45] What happened? Something objective. But what? As the authors of the New Testament continued to wrestle with it all, they finally settled on the only thing that comes close to explaining Easter.

They settled on the fact that Jesus' resurrection is a brand new creation. The only event in history that parallels Easter is the act of the beginning of history when God made the world.

James S. Stewart, the great Scottish theologian, puts it best. When Christ left the grave, it was not merely an announcement that there is a hereafter and a life beyond. It was the shattering of history by a creative act of God Almighty.

It was a cosmic event. God was doing something comparable only with what God had done in the first creation. This was the beginning of a new era for the universe, the decisive turning point for the human race.

Which means that the power that raised Jesus is akin to the power that brought the universe into being. The only comparison to resurrection power is the power that created the world out of nothing.

[10 : 06] Immeasurable power. And the amazing news of Easter is that that power is now available to those who believe.

More than that. This power is now at work in those who believe. Listen again to the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in the first century city of Ephesus.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Him so that, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened,

you may know what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of the strength of His might which He put to work when He raised Christ from the dead. Whatever the power exercised in raising Jesus of Nazareth is, it is now at work in those who believe. The Apostle Paul seems to be looking for just the right word to convey to us the meaning of this power because He works with a number of power terms.

He uses the term *dunamis* from which we get the word dynamite. It emphasizes God's raw ability to do what He wants to accomplish. He uses the word *energia* which comes into our language with the word energy.

[11 : 40] It emphasizes God's action in *dunamis* to accomplish what He wants to. Paul uses the word *kratos* which comes into the English language in the stem. *Krasi* in words like democracy and bureaucracy and it emphasizes God's authority to exercise *dunamis* and *energia*.

And Paul uses another word which has no English connections and it emphasizes God's attribute of power, the inherent strength of God's being. All of that is what is meant by resurrection power and all of it is made available to those who put their trust in the resurrected Jesus.

It's power beyond measure. It's power that cannot be exhausted. It's power that never burns out.

The kingdom of God, Paul said to the Corinthians, does not consist in words but in power.

Resurrection power. Now, three practical questions come to my mind this Easter. First, where is this power experienced?

In what sphere of life? Second, what does this power do? What is it given to us to do? And third, how can I experience it?

[13 : 01] What must I do to live my life in this power? Question one, where is the power experienced? Question two, what does the power do?

And question three, how can I experience it? First, where is this resurrection power experienced? Trace this theme through Paul's letter beyond his prayer in the first chapter of Ephesians and we find that the sphere of this power is the inner person.

In the third chapter of his letter, Paul prays, I pray that according to the riches of his glory, God may grant that you be strengthened with power in your inner being through his spirit.

Now, think of the battles that you have to fight day in and day out. Where do you need power? In your hands? Sometimes. In your arms?

Sometimes. In the muscles of your body? Sometimes. But do not most of the battles require power deep, deep inside you?

[14 : 11] Do not most of the battles require energy at the very center of your personhood? To be strengthened with power in the inner person, says Paul.

One biblical scholar says that this term inner person may include or at least affects what the New Testament calls heart, mind, will, and spirit. It is the deep seat of the personality.

Wonderful news. The God of Easter puts the power that raised Jesus from the dead at the very core of our being.

How? Through the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. When we believe in the resurrected Jesus, he places his very life, his spirit within us.

And because we have the spirit within us who is the embodiment of God's power, we have this power at the core of our being. Which brings us to the second question.

[15 : 15] What does this resurrection power do? What is it given to us to do? Trace this theme beyond what Paul says in the letter to the Ephesians and you discover that the purpose of this power is to enable us to be able to live the newness of the kingdom of God.

We are given resurrection power to live the radical newness of the life to which Jesus calls us. The life of the age to come right here in this present age.

In particular, the New Testament says that we are given this resurrection power so that we can endure, forgive, and overcome.

We are given this immeasurable power so that we can endure. We have to follow Jesus between the times, between his death and resurrection, and his coming again to make all things new.

So Paul says to those in Colossi, I pray that you may be strengthened with all power according to God's might for the attaining of all endurance and patience. That's what we need between the times, endurance and patience.

[16 : 25] Now, although these two virtues are very related, in the Greek language there is a distinction. Endurance relates more to handling difficult situations.

Patience relates more to handling difficult people. I can tell you know a few. The word endurance is used in relationship to adverse circumstances.

The word patience is used in relation to adverse people. Resurrection power in the inner person makes for endurance which no situation can defeat and for patience which no person can defeat. That is the kind of power we need, is it not? strength to lift automobiles or walk across coals or bend steel bars. We need strength to cope with circumstances that are not going our way and to deal with people who tax us emotionally and mentally.

That is what resurrection power does. It gives us endurance and patience. I like how William Barclay puts it. this is the quality of heart and mind which enables us to so bear with people that their unpleasantness and cruelty will never drive us to bitterness, that their unteachableness will never drive us to despair, that their folly will never drive us to irritation, and that their unloveliness will never alter our love for them.

[18:05] That is the power we need and that is what resurrection power is put at the inner of our being to do. And to do so in such a way that we do it all with joy.

Paul says that God strengthened you with all power for attaining all endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks. The Stoics of Paul's day taught the virtues of endurance and patience, but their pupils endured with long faces and weary hearts.

Paul's speaking of a different kind of endurance and patience because what Paul is speaking of is this endurance and patience, unlike the Stoics, is not the result of dogged determinism, rather it is the result of the heart being massaged by power.

Oh, to so live, not the power to razzle-dazzle with spiritual tricks, but the power to function with joy in less than ideal circumstances with less than ideal people.

Power to endure. And we are given this immeasurable power in order to do the work of forgiveness, the hard work of forgiveness.

[19:27] I say hard work because as far as I'm concerned, this is the hardest thing Jesus Christ has ever called us to do. And he makes it harder by saying that we are to forgive others as he's forgiven us.

That is not an easy thing to do. The deeper the hurt, the more poisonous the hate, the harder this is to do. But we have to do it because you know well that anger and bitterness slowly but surely kills us.

Resurrection power is given to us to do what we must do when we know we cannot do it. Our world is being torn asunder because people will not forgive.

The strife in Libya and Yemen and Syria and northern Ireland is due to decades and centuries of unresolved bitterness. How much strife in our families is due to unresolved bitterness?

Only forgiveness heals the bitterness and brings the shalom of God. And God makes the power by which he raised Jesus from the dead available to us to do this hard work.

[20:39] I've shared with some of you that a number of years ago a colleague of mine deeply wounded me. He betrayed me. I tried to reconcile with no progress.

I felt I needed an apology from him. But he would not apologize. He saw no reason to apologize. One day while I was jogging at the Y, I cried out to the Lord about this.

I didn't want this wound in my soul. I didn't want this creeping bitterness anymore. If he would only apologize, I cried out to the Lord. And I heard in my soul, your freedom, Daryl, does not come from his apology.

He may never apologize. He may die before he apologizes. Your freedom comes from forgiving him. It's been 20 years that he's still not apologized.

Some will say that's not fair to just forgive him. Right? And it doesn't seem fair. But is it fair, asked Lewis Smeets, to live with a videotape whirling in your mind, slapping your soul day after day?

[21:57] Is that fair? The only thing that turns off the videotape is forgiveness. Peace comes to our soul and we forgive.

And the resurrected Lord gives us the power to do for others what he's done for us. Power to endure, power to forgive, and power to overcome.

Now we're talking about where we live. For what keeps us from living fully human lives? Other people's mistreatment of us? Not really.

Lack of money? Not really. Lack of time? No. people. What keeps us from living fully human lives is all the baggage we ourselves carry in ourselves.

It's all those forms of bondage that we keep hanging on to. Our fears, our compulsive behaviors, our addictions, our twisted drives. Oh, what hope comes from Jerusalem Cemetery.

[23 : 06] Easter declares it doesn't have to be that way. Easter declares there is power to change. The resurrected Jesus can overcome addiction. Jesus can overcome our compulsive behaviors.

Which brings us to the third question. How can I appropriate this resurrection power? What do I need to do to live in this power?

I submit to you that the do is outlined for us in the first three steps of the twelve step program? Step one, we admitted that we were powerless over alcohol or drugs or whatever.

We admitted we were powerless and that our lives had become unmanageable. The first step to experiencing resurrection power is to admit I have a problem and I'm no match for it.

Jesus says, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs and only theirs is the kingdom. The first step to resisting temptation is to admit that I'm strong enough, not strong enough to resist.

[24 : 18] The first step to overcoming compulsive behavior is to admit that I can't control it. I will not win until I admit I cannot win.

That is not to say that I cannot do anything. It's just to say I cannot do what needs to be done. We admitted we were powerless and our lives were unmanageable.

Step two, we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. The second step of experiencing resurrection power is to recognize that although I am weak, there is someone who is strong, someone who raises the dead.

What is stronger than his power? What temptation is stronger than the power that created the world? He calls us to face the temptation, the behavior and the fear, to face it face on and then to ask, is this something which is beyond the power of the risen Christ?

Is this something his power cannot handle? We came to believe in a power that could restore us to sanity. Then step three, we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.

[25 : 35] This is the step that finally releases resurrection power. Here, risen Jesus, here I am. I can't do it myself.

I let go and I place myself in your hands for you to exercise your power. It's the hardest step of all because this step involves death.

death. This step involves dying to needing to be in control. This step involves dying to trying to make life work on my own.

This step means dying to being one's own Lord. Dying. Which brings us back to where we began. To the cemetery. Easter only happens in cemeteries. No death. No resurrection. No dying.

[26 : 40] No rising. No dying to the old life. No rising to the new life. Resurrection power works best in graveyards.

It is released when we die to the illusion that we make our life work on our own. So where are you this Easter?

Where are you with the risen Jesus? Have you died enough to want his resurrection power?

The problems and challenges we face are very real. But so is the power. And so I pray for you and for me what Paul prayed for the Ephesians.

God of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of glory, enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we may know what is the surpassing greatness of your power toward us who believe.

[27 : 45] The power you put to work when you raise Christ from the dead and put him above every other power.