

Knowing the Power of Christ's Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Hope you've been enjoying your weekend, particularly with this wonderful weather. Well, I'm going to begin today with an observation which I believe to be true and which applies to all of us. And that is, I think we're all drawn to power.

If we had a choice, we'd rather have more power than less. Agree? Well, let me give you a few examples if you're not convinced.

Say you had a cabinet to assemble. Would you rather have this screwdriver? Or would you have this power tool? Yes, power tool.

Or, if let's say you're going on a road trip around Australia, would you prefer this fancy camper van with all its powerful gadgets and mod cons?

Or would you rather this Soviet-era camper van? A few months ago, our trusty 20-year-old, maybe more, 25-year-old oven finally had its day.

[1 : 03] For months, we persisted with it. The power was sort of like, you know, 180 degrees. It wasn't quite 180 degrees or 160 degrees. And so we finally bought a new oven.

And the day finally came when we installed it, or someone did. And we tried it out for the first time. Ah, such power.

Just today, we had a picnic down at Blackburn. And you know what? The puff pastry could literally puff. And for a long time, we were making sausage rolls, and there were no puff-up pastries.

No, when it comes to power and capability, more is always better than less, isn't it? Which is how I think we look at our spiritual life as well. Just think for a moment, if you're a Christian, why did you become a Christian?

And I think, in part, we're drawn to the promise of spiritual power. To help us live well, to be successful, to do the right thing, to make a difference in life, to be a force for good, and to have the power to overcome struggles in life.

[2 : 19] And we love the promises, don't we, of power that comes in the Bible, that we find in the Bible. For example, many of us hold on to the promise of the Holy Spirit's power.

In fact, many in churches look earnestly for signs of it, whether it's spiritual gifts or miracles in our lives. And so, this is the power that I want to reflect on today.

And in particular, I want to look at Paul's words in verse 10 of chapter 3, which we read. And it says, And being Easter Sunday today, it's the perfect time to do this, isn't it?

As we reflect on the implications of Christ's resurrection. And here's a tantalizing prospect, isn't it? This verse, that somehow Christ's resurrection isn't merely a historic event which we celebrate each year, like VE Day or Anzac Day, but it's a daily reality that we can appropriate for ourselves. It's all rather appealing, isn't it? Put up your hands if anyone would like some of this resurrection power for your life. Anyone? Yeah.

[3 : 36] Yes, please, of course. Imagine the difference that it would make in our lives. Well, before we get to that, though, notice we want to read in Paul in chapter 3, and notice how he arrives at this point of his understanding.

And it's after a lengthy process of trying everything else without avail. So, in verse 1, Paul writes, Though I myself have reasons to put confidence in the flesh.

I have more. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

In regard to the law, a Pharisee. As for zeal, persecuting the church. As for righteousness based on the law, faultless. So, just look at all the things that Paul thought he had on his side.

First, his heritage as a Jew, part of God's chosen people. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, from the pure tribe of Benjamin. And his parents had done all the right things by the law, circumcising him on the eighth day.

[5 : 07] And ever since that day, he's been keeping the law, becoming a Pharisee, showing great zeal, faultless in being righteous. Now, most of these things wouldn't mean much to us, because if you're not a Jew.

But we all have our own method, don't we? Of trying to gain power and influence in life. We desire such power because it gives us control, does it not?

To do the things we want to do in life. To be successful. To be happy. Respected and valued. For some of us, it's about lifestyle. You know, fitness, meditation, diet.

For others, it's about relationships. Networking. Having the right kind of friends. Being married. For yet others, it's about achievements.

If you're young, it's at school, it's about getting good grades. Or doing well in sport. And later on, being in the right university course. Or having the right career or job.

[6 : 09] And in a sense, you can lump all of this into what Paul calls confidence in the flesh. The flesh, you see, is anything that relates to our own human power.

Our efforts. Our hard work. To get where we want. But Paul has come to realize its futility. If you're still young, you may feel like you have the power in you to conquer anything.

They tell you, don't they, that if you work hard enough, you can achieve anything you want in life. But the truth is, it may impress others. But it doesn't pass muster with God.

And that's because God sees our heart. And he knows deep down how flawed and sinful we are. No, Paul realizes the answer lies in Christ alone.

And so he goes on to say, But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

[7 : 18] I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in Him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

These so-called gains that Paul had has turned out to be dead ends. Instead, only Christ truly works. That's why Paul considers knowing Christ as Lord to be of surpassing worth.

Nothing else measures up. Everything else in comparison is garbage. And Paul gladly suffers them as losses in order to gain Christ.

And how does he gain Christ? Well, Paul says that the first step is to be found in Him. That is to put our faith in Jesus. And only then will he be right before God.

He's no longer trusting in his own fleshly achievements, but Christ's perfect life and death, which he owns, he appropriates to win a right standing before God.

[8 : 25] And that is what it takes for all of us too. Pleading Christ's death as the just penalty for our sin, so that we can be forgiven before God.

And so if that's you today and you have not yet claimed that, then please do that. There is no halfway house, you see. No each way bed where you go, oh, I have a bit of faith in Jesus, but then have a bit of confidence in my own fleshly achievements as well.

No, either you're wholly dependent on Christ, and therefore right before God, or you don't have Christ, and therefore you're not right before God.

It's either or. That's why it's all garbage to Paul. They are worthless to him, because only Christ truly works. Now I know many of you have already done that, and so now Paul offers this tantalizing prospect, which I talked about in verse 10, of knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.

Once we are found to be in Christ, then we know him, and yes, we have the opportunity to know the power of Christ's resurrection.

[9 : 40] I wonder whether you've ever considered what all that means. That somehow being in Christ, being a Christian, gives you access to this power, this power of Christ's resurrected life.

That's truly amazing, isn't it? Because Christ's resurrection is the greatest miracle in history, is it not? God raising Jesus from the dead.

And somehow that great power that did that is available to you and I as Christians. And it's available to us now. Not in years to come, or not when we die and go to heaven, but today.

The spirit-filled, resurrection-powered life of a Christian is available for us today. Now of course, when I say that, I think most people immediately think of ditching the screwdriver and working with the power tools as far as the Christian life is concerned.

You might think that's what it looks like. Somehow you have this super power boost to your spiritual life. So, if you are struggling with sin, for example, then suddenly you have the power not to be tempted anymore, not to succumb to temptation.

[10:55] Or if you're plagued by fear or disappointment, then suddenly you've got just that mental strength every time that happens to be able to shake it off. I saw this picture of a t-shirt on the website.

We sort of feel a bit like that, isn't it? That underneath we've got this t-shirt and then somehow we just rip our outer shirt and we've got this superpower that Jesus gives us to live our Christian life. But I think that most of us probably realize that's not true, is it? Our own experience as Christians tells us that we struggle, don't we? From time to time.

And, you know, that we try as we might, we don't seem to have this extra power to overcome sin or to do what we want, we think God wants us to do.

And so, we invariably become discouraged, don't we? We think, where is this power that we've been promised? Well, I've been a bit sneaky up to now because when I read out verse 10 earlier, what I omitted, didn't I, was the second half of that verse, which is now on the screen.

[12:02] And here's what it says. Verse 10, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of His resurrection. And then what else does it say? And participation in His sufferings.

Becoming like Him in His death. And so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. And when we read that second half, it changes the perspective of that verse entirely, doesn't it?

Because what Paul says is that this resurrection power goes hand in hand with participation in Christ's suffering. It's not that kind of raw superhuman power that we desire, that somehow makes all our difficulties and suffering go away.

Instead, it's the power that we know as we willingly identify with Christ's suffering. It's the power of God at work in us as we endure hardship for Christ.

And I suppose it's easy to overlook this because when we see the empty tomb and even look at that slide, see that bright light coming from that tomb? That's the picture we have, don't we?

[13:15] Of God's amazing power, that glorious power that somehow reverses the power of death over humanity. And rightly so. That's an amazing power.

But we forget that this power is only displayed because there is death in the first place. It's only upon Christ's death and not before that God summons this power to be at work.

And so if this is how it was for Jesus, then how much more for us? After all, Jesus already had been teaching us this or his disciples this in his own ministry.

So for example, in Matthew 16, verse 24, which is on the slide, he says, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross. That is, die to themselves and follow me.

And Paul, in his own words, in 2 Corinthians 12, verse 9, says that God's strength is made perfect in weakness. And so he will boast all the more gladly about his weakness so that Christ's power may rest on me.

[14:22] There's no suggestion here, of course, that we're to go out of our way to look for suffering and be a martyr of ourselves, make a martyr of ourselves.

Rather, both Jesus and Paul are saying that we simply need to be willing to lay down our lives for God and be subject to his will in all things. And so the question, I guess, for us as Christians is, do we decide to have more of God's power in our lives?

And if the answer is yes, do we consider that trials and sufferings are very much part of experiencing and knowing that power?

So, for example, what is our attitude when we face trials in life? Do we resent it? Do we get angry with God for it? Do we get frustrated that God doesn't seem to enable our dreams and plans, give us the power to achieve them?

Well, brothers and sisters in Christ, God's resurrection power doesn't work in that way, does it? Because rather than giving you the power to do what you want, to avoid suffering and pain, God's power works as we are going through suffering and pain.

[15:44] His power is seen in joy and peace that He gives us as we patiently endure hardship. Remember what Paul says, His strength is made perfect in our weakness, not in our strength.

So, when we resist temptation, when we do good rather than repay evil for evil, when we are gracious rather than revengeful, when we are prayerful rather than despondent in the face of injustice, that's when the power of Christ's resurrection is at work in us.

We may not feel it, but that is when God is working His power in us to make us more Christ-like. It's in the valleys of life, it's when our burdens are heaviest that we actually receive and experience this power of Christ's resurrection.

And so, the question I put to you again is, are we willing to embrace this way of living? To see God's purpose in life's suffering, not as punishment necessarily, even though we might have done it, done things to deserve it, but rather as opportunities to know more deeply this power that is Christ's resurrection.

Now, Paul doesn't end there, of course, but he goes on to verses 12 and 14. For even as Christ's death wasn't the end for him, so it isn't for us.

[17:13] And while Christ's resurrection power may be forged in us through the fiery torches of death and suffering, what lies beyond is the sure hope of God's glory that Jesus experienced and we too will as well.

So, this is the prize that Paul has asked that he fix his eyes on as he speaks of in the last three verses of our passage, to forget what is behind and strain toward this prize.

Not that I've already obtained all this or I've already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

So, what is this thing that Paul is forgetting or the thing that he admits he hasn't yet obtained? Well, I think it's his personal knowledge of Christ's resurrection power. Paul, you know, of all people, knows intimately what it is to suffer for Christ and so he knows intimately this resurrection power. He knows first hand the depth of God's love for him through thick and thin, the peace and joy that comes from serving God. the comfort of seeing God at work in his life.

[18:40] Paul says he knows all of this and yet he hasn't quite reached there yet, has he? He forgets he's putting everything behind him, forgetting what's behind and straining forward for that day of glory.

And yet, even as he does, he realizes that he hasn't reached his final destination yet. Now, it's been a while now since our family has gone for a driving holiday.

COVID and all those kind of things come in the way. But often, as the driver and planner of the journey, I'm uniquely placed to know just how far more we are from our destination.

On the other hand, the passengers in my car don't. And often, they only have the view of the outside window to go by. And when field after field, sheep after sheep, cattle after cattle, nothing else quite changes, you invariably get tired of it, don't you?

And so, the unavoidable question comes, are we there yet? Well, life can feel like that sometimes, isn't it? Especially when we go through one constant struggle after another, when the challenges flow from one week into another.

[19:58] And we see that globally, don't we, as well? You know, we've just finished one crisis only to have another crisis. The pandemic is over, then we had the flood, and then before that we had the bushfires.

It seems to just go on one after another, doesn't it? The scandals as well seem to go on one after another, not just in Australia, but overseas as well. Yes, as Christians, we may have experienced God's strength along the way, but it can still feel overwhelming at times, can't it?

Is this what we're to expect of the normal Christian life? Is it so unrelenting? And so often we get tempted, don't we, to ask God the same question, are we there yet?

And yet, Paul's example and encouragement for us is to keep striving and straining forward, not to keep looking at the rear view mirror and bemoan the long road of suffering and adversity we've already traveled, but instead to keep our eyes on the prize of glory that awaits us in heaven.

At Easter, we see the glory of the empty tomb, but we need to remember that it was the culmination of Christ's own road of suffering. Jesus had to endure to the very end, and so must we.

[21:21] But also, just as surely as Christ was raised from the dead, so too will the same glory await us if we place our faith firmly in Jesus right to the end, placing our confidence not in ourselves, but in him and to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

Friends, we're still in this participate in his sufferings phase of our Christian life, but one day, a day is coming when our faith and perseverance will pay off, and this resurrection power that we have now in part, we will experience fully forever when we see Jesus face to face.

Let's pray. Father, may we relinquish all confidence that we have in the flesh and cling by faith to the righteousness that is in Christ Jesus.

May we embrace our participation in Christ's suffering so that we may know the power of his resurrection. and may we not keep score of the amount of adversity we've already experienced, but look forward to the coming day of glory when we finally receive in full what we only now experience in part.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.