

“The Resurrection and the Life in Jesus”

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” But before resurrection - rising again - can happen, there must first be death.

And there is no doubt that Jesus really died. His friends were there and they saw it.

⁴⁸ And when all the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw what had happened, they went home in deep sorrow. ⁴⁹ But Jesus’ friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching. (Luke 23)

⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27)

³¹ It was the day of preparation, and the Jewish leaders didn’t want the bodies hanging there the next day, which was the Sabbath (and a very special Sabbath, because it was the Passover). So they asked Pilate to hasten their deaths by ordering that their legs be broken. Then their bodies could be taken down. ³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus. ³³ But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn’t break his legs. ³⁴ One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. ³⁵ (This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also can believe.) (John 19)

⁴² This all happened on Friday, the day of preparation, ^[i] the day before the Sabbath. As evening approached,

⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea took a risk and went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body ... ⁴⁴ Pilate couldn’t believe that Jesus was already dead, so he called for the Roman officer and asked if he had died yet. ⁴⁵ The officer confirmed that Jesus was dead, so Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. ⁴⁶ Joseph bought a long sheet of linen cloth. Then he took Jesus’ body down from the cross, wrapped it in the cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone in front of the entrance. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where Jesus’ body was laid. (Mark 15)

His friends saw him die on the cross - they saw the blood and water flow from his pierced side; the Roman soldiers confirmed that he really was dead; Joseph handled his dead body; the women saw it being laid in the tomb; a guard was posted to protect it. There is no doubt that Jesus really died.

But nor is there any doubt that his friends, who had seen all this as eye witnesses, came to believe that this man, to whom they had been so close in his earthly life, had really risen from the dead.

First, there was the empty tomb.

⁸ The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel’s message. (Matthew 28)

³ Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. ⁴ They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷ while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. ⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— ⁹ for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. ¹⁰ Then they went home. (John 20)

Then, there were the encounters with the risen Lord.

When the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognised Jesus at last, ³² They said to each other, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?” ³³ And within the

hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, ³⁴ who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter."

³⁵ Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. ³⁶ And just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ³⁷ But the whole group was startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost!

³⁸ "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why are your hearts filled with doubt? ³⁹ Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do." ⁴⁰ As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet.

⁴¹ Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he ate it as they watched. (Luke 24)

They knew this man - the disciples met him and ate with him and lived with him and touched him in the flesh - and they were practical, questioning men and women - and they saw him die - and then they were utterly convinced that they had met him again when he rose from the dead. Jesus' resurrection was REAL to these people.

They were so convinced of it that they gave the rest of their lives to testifying to it.

They saw their testimony to his resurrection as their primary calling. When they wanted to choose a replacement for Judas, they restricted their search to "the men who were with us the entire time we were travelling with the Lord Jesus ... Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection." (Acts 1.21-22)

Peter testified to it on the day of Pentecost, saying: "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this." (Acts 2.32).

Later (Acts 4), "While Peter and John were speaking to the people, they were confronted by the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and some of the Sadducees. These leaders were very disturbed that Peter and John were teaching the people that through Jesus there is a resurrection of the dead." And they "were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures." They were perplexed, and "commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus." But Peter and John replied, "We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard."

"The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

Paul hadn't known Jesus in the flesh as a human, but this man - renowned for his great learning - for questioning and challenging and caring passionately about the truth - became utterly convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead.

We know that he was convinced by the witness of those who had known him before his death and seen him before his ascension, because he said, "... they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people." (Acts 13.29-31)

But of course he was convinced also by his own experience of the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. We know that Paul was utterly transformed by this encounter, and like the disciples he spent the rest of his life testifying to it. He told the Christians in Corinth: "I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said." (1 Corinthians 15.3-4)

John had known Jesus as his human friend, and we can feel his awe and his excitement as he describes this Jesus - this man he saw and heard and touched in the flesh - as the Lord of life - The Life through whom all things were made from before all time. This same man Jesus!

1 John 1.1-3 "We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

He's a practical man, John, a fisherman who became one of Jesus' closest friends - a man who Jesus as another man - another human - and something happens that makes him describe this man he knew as "the Word of Life". He says:

John 1.1-3 "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him."

This is the beginning of our faith. This is where it all starts. The man Jesus "was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 1.4).

Christ is risen - an astonishing truth!

“The Resurrection and the Life in You”

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” An astonishing truth! What does it mean for us today?

Jesus himself told us what it means. He told us that it’s through his death and resurrection that God pours out his Holy Spirit on all people (Joel 2.28).

When Jesus was comforting his disciples at the Last Supper he said, “it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” (John 16.7)

People sometimes ask me if I believe in the Virgin birth. What I say is that I don’t doubt that God could have brought about Jesus’ conception in that way, but for me it’s not a crucial part of my faith and I can’t say that the answer would be of more than intellectual curiosity. *How* he did it doesn’t matter to me. What really matters, the thing that truly astonishes me, is the fact that he did it - the fact of the Incarnation - the fact that, however he did it, God became human. Scripture tells us that “At the beginning God expressed himself. That personal expression, that word” (John 1.1) is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” (Hebrews 1.3) In the man Jesus, we see the exact representation of God’s being. In the man Jesus, God was truly present among us: *Immanuel* - God with us.

Or, at least, through Jesus’ birth, God was present with a particular group of people at a particular time. But somehow, through Jesus’ death and resurrection, he became present to all people at all times. Because we need to understand that the Holy Spirit is not a substitute for Christ’s presence. He is, rather, the means by which Christ’s presence with us is secured. Jesus said, “In a little while you won’t see me anymore. But a little while after that, *you will see me again.*” (John 16.16) By the power of God’s Holy Spirit, it is Christ himself - the resurrected, living Lord Jesus - the radiance of God’s glory - who lives within us.

Somehow, by his death and resurrection, Jesus made it possible for *Immanuel* to be true for each of us forever. Nothing will ever be able to separate us from Christ because he lives in us. (Romans 8)

Because Jesus lives in us, the same mighty power that raised him from the dead is at work in us. The incredible greatness of this power is available to us today (Ephesians 1.19-20).

But if we want to experience the mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead, then we will first need to experience death.

That’s why Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!” (Philippians 3.10-11 2)

Yes, of course in one sense Paul means this literally. He wrote, ¹²But tell me this—since we preach that Christ rose from the dead, why are some of you saying there will be no resurrection of the dead? ¹³For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless ... and you are still guilty of your sins ... ²⁰But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.” (1 Corinthians 15.12-20)

Jesus himself said that the Lord “is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.” (Luke 20.38) Jesus promised, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.” (John 11.25-26) And then - in case we should be in any doubt about the truth of his words - the very next thing he did was to call a dead man back to life. So, yes, Paul means literally that when Christ lives in us, the same mighty power by which he was resurrected will also raise us when we die.

But Paul is also talking about the power of Christ that is available to us in this life.

If it is true that through Jesus' resurrection he can now be present - Immanuel - in every one of us who accepts him as Lord - then that is news as huge as the news of the Incarnation. The Lord God of all Creation is still on earth today, because he is living in us.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. He cannot look upon sin (Habakkuk 1.13) but through Jesus' death and resurrection he has removed it from us.

Heaven and earth are full of his glory. And now Jesus - the radiance of his glory - is *in us*.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." What does that mean for us today?

It means that through the power of Jesus in us, we can overcome suffering.

He sends us, just as he himself was sent, into the world's suffering, so that by his power in us we can overcome all that Satan has intended for destruction and God can use it for his good purposes - bring new life from it.

Death and sin and suffering had no power over Jesus. All authority in heaven and earth are his. And when we repent of our sins, accept his authority and invite him to live in us, they have no power over us either. They don't go away - we still have to go through them - but they are defeated. We can overcome them because we take the power of the living Lord Jesus into them.

Through the power of Jesus in us, we can overcome circumstances that restrict and bind us.

Jesus was nailed to the cross. He could not move. But he could and did continue to do God's work. He *finished* God's work while he was nailed to the cross.

And when our actions are restricted by sickness or old age or other circumstances, we can still continue to do God's work, too. There's a lovely saying that what Autumn loses in flowers it more than makes up for in fruit, and we can see that in the lives and ministries of so many older Christians.

Many of us feel, at one time or another, that we are trapped or restricted or bound by circumstances beyond our control. And the reality is sometimes that we cannot change those circumstances.

But we can overcome them - we can continue to do God's work in them - because we take the power of the living Lord Jesus into them.

Through the power of Jesus in us, we can overcome injustice.

Jesus was completely obedient to God. He kept his eyes on God - *his* truth - *his* calling - in the face of physical and verbal attack beyond our comprehension; in the face of untruths and injustice and mockery. He cared only about *God's* approval of him.

And because we have the power of the living Lord Jesus at work in us, we can do the same.

Romans 6.4 "For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives."

There are times, of course, when we doubt his power: times when our circumstances are so hard and go on for so very, very long that our gaze is dragged away from our living Lord and becomes fixed on all the rubbish - forgetting that he gives us the power to overcome it. And it takes courage to keep going. *Dare* we keep hoping - *dare* we keep trusting in Christ, whatever our circumstances and however long they persist?

A love that can pour itself out even unto death is something we can trust for all eternity.

1 Peter 1.3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".