

## The Power of the Gospel

## 12

# The Power of the Resurrection

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Paul writes to the Corinthians with the express purpose of reminding them of the Gospel he had preached to them, “which [they] had received and on which [they had] taken their stand” (**verse 1**). That Gospel, in its essence, had three elements:

- ➔ The death of Christ
- ➔ The burial of Christ
- ➔ The resurrection of Christ

The core of the Gospel message is the fact that Jesus died, was buried and was raised back to life. This is not just an historical fact, a mere footnote in first century history. Neither is it simply a part of systematic theology, an item to be learned in a catechism. The death, burial and resurrection of Christ is an eternal reality which has a powerful impact on your daily life. It is something you embrace by faith and on which you take your stand.

Notice what Paul says to the Corinthian Christians.

“By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain” (**verse 2**).

This Gospel is not something you simply *learn* about; it is something you *hold firmly to*. He goes as far as saying that if you don't hold firmly to it, you run the risk of having “believed in vain.” Whether Paul is talking here about one's eternal salvation is not certain. But what is clear is this: If the Gospel is not established in your life as a daily, living reality, then your “believing” has been a pointless exercise – on a *daily* level if not on an eternal level. For it is by faith that we take hold of that for which Christ took hold of us.

## Read 1 Corinthians 15:17

Paul pins the whole reality of your salvation on this one fact – not just that Jesus *died* for your sins, but that he was also raised back to life. The resurrection of Christ is a vital component of your salvation.

## Read Romans 4:25

Every true believer in Christ knows that Jesus died for our sins. This, after all, is the bedrock of the whole Gospel message. But what few appreciate is that the resurrection of Christ has just as much to with your salvation as does the crucifixion of Christ. Many Christians consider the resurrection of Christ as something that God did just for the sake of Jesus, so that he would not be left in the grave. Now while this is partly true, the resurrection was something far more than this. It is the eternal proof that the salvation wrought on the Cross is complete. It is the incontrovertible evidence that you are now justified before God.

The resurrection of Christ meant that the Cross of Christ worked! Christ's resurrection sealed the atonement\* of the Cross. It was a declaration that the work of salvation was complete for all time.

### Read Romans 1:4

Jesus was "declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead." The empty grave is God's seal of approval upon his Son and upon the Gospel itself. The resurrection of Christ means three things for you:

- Your sins have been wiped out forever
- Your old life has been left buried in the grave
- A new life in the Spirit has been opened up to you

The resurrection is the completion of the Cross. It is the seal of victory, the declaration that the good news of the Gospel is now open to all.

## A Living Hope

### Read 1 Peter 1:3

When we take a hold of God's salvation by faith, we are "born again" by God's Spirit. We are just like a newborn baby. But what is this "living hope" that Peter is speaking about? And why does he use the word "living" to describe this hope?

*The Message* renders **1 Peter 1:3** this way:

"What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him...Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven – and *the future starts now!*"

Yes, it is true that you have a hope of a future spent with God throughout all the vast aeons of eternity. But much more than that, the wonder of the Gospel is that "the future starts now!" It is not just a future hope; it is a *living* hope. So what exactly is this "living hope"?

Let's take a page from the life of a natural baby. A baby has a "living hope" when it is born into the world. It is the expectation that the baby will grow into a healthy adult. God has the same expectation for your life.

\* Atonement means the purging or wiping away of sin through the act of a sacrifice acceptable to God (see **Romans 3:25**; **Hebrews 2:17**; **1 John 2:1-2**; **4:10**).

**Read Romans 8:29**

A newborn baby has the family likeness. When you were born of the Spirit, you were given the likeness of your heavenly Father.

**Read Ephesians 4:24**

Even though a baby is born in its parents' likeness, a baby still has to grow up in that likeness. A baby may look like its parents, but it cannot yet walk, talk and act like its parents. This "living hope" is a growing experience.

**Read 2 Corinthians 3:18**

We've seen so far that we each have been born into a "living hope" – the hope of becoming just like Christ. But why does Peter say that God has "given us new birth into a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*"?

Let's recap what we know already about the resurrection of Jesus:

- ➡ We know that Jesus was raised for his own sake – God had no intention of abandoning his Son in the grave (read **Acts 2:25-28,31**).
- ➡ We know that the resurrection of Christ was God's seal of approval upon the Gospel – the proof that the sacrifice of Jesus was accepted by God once for all.

But what does the resurrection of Jesus mean for you personally? Why would Peter proclaim that it is "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" that you have been given "new birth into living hope"?

**Read 2 Timothy 2:11**

The Bible clearly portrays the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ as the flip-side of the same Gospel coin. Time and time again, Paul declares that if we *died* with Christ we will also *live* with him (read **Romans 6:4-5**). This double-

## The New Birth

The Bible describes the starting point of the Christian life as a "new birth."

**Read John 3:3,6**

A baby cannot be born by itself. Its mother must bring it to birth. In the same way, you cannot just enter God's family by anything you try to do. You are born by God's own Spirit into his family.

This "new birth" experience is described in **Colossians 1:13** as a "translation" (KJV) from one authority (Satan's) to another authority (God's). There is only one way this transfer could take place:

**➡ Death**

Satan would not allow you out of his dominion. The "dominion of darkness" does not issue passports. There was only one way for you to escape Satan's authority, and that was for you *to die*. When Christ died for you, God counted his death as your death. Your name was erased from the registry of Satan's dominion.

But just as there is only one way out of Satan's dominion, so there is also only one way into God's kingdom:

**➡ Birth****Read 1 John 5:1**

The moment you believe in Jesus, you are *born* into God's kingdom. God registers your name on the citizenship registry of heaven. You are now a child of God!

**Read John 1:12-13**

motif of being *dead to sin* through Christ and also being *alive to God* through Christ runs right through the Gospel message.

**Read Romans 6:10-11**

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

**Read Galatians 2:19**

**Read 1 Peter 2:24**

The importance of the resurrection of Christ resounds strongly through the Gospel. In fact, if you read the book of Acts, you will note an interesting thing. The first century Christians preached far more often about the resurrection of Jesus than they did about his crucifixion.

<b><i>Christ's Crucifixion</i></b>	<b><i>Christ's Resurrection</i></b>
☞	☞ Acts 1:22
☞ Acts 2:23,36	☞ Acts 2:24,31-32
☞ Acts 3:15	☞ Acts 3:15
☞ Acts 4:10	☞ Acts 4:10
☞	☞ Acts 4:33
☞ Acts 5:30	☞ Acts 5:30
☞ Acts 10:39	☞ Acts 10:40
☞ Acts 13:29	☞ Acts 13:30-37
☞	☞ Acts 17:18
☞	☞ Acts 17:31-32

This highlights one of the most important things you need to understand about the Gospel. Your salvation is not based solely on the *crucifixion* of Jesus. It is also based on the *resurrection* of Jesus. It is the crucifixion of Christ and the resurrection of Christ *together* that make up the total Gospel message.

In fact, so closely tied are these two aspects of God's plan of salvation, when we talk about the resurrection, we are automatically including the crucifixion. And when we speak of the Cross, we are referring to the *totality* of Christ's death, burial, resurrection and ascension. The Cross is a finished work *because* the tomb is empty. The Cross is once-for-all *because* Christ is now seated at the right hand of his Father.

*The Message* phrases **Romans 6:6-8** in this way:

“Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the Cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life – no longer at sin's every beck and call. What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection.”

**Read Colossians 3:1-3**

## The Picture of Baptism

Baptism is an incredible picture of the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection as it relates to you personally. Over the last few lessons, we've read portions of **Romans 6** a number of times. This time, read the following passage right through and note Paul's clear reference to how baptism is connected to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

### Read Romans 6:1-11

What is baptism really all about? Why would God ask us to be immersed in water\*? Is it merely a ceremonial initiation into the Christian life – just something you're "supposed" to do? Or does it mean something far, far more?

The act of being fully immersed in water is a declaration by the believer of his or her faith in the finished work of the Cross. Note how Paul uses the picture of baptism to illustrate to the Roman Christians the reality that they are now "dead to sin" and "alive to God." He says, "...don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

When you are baptized, you are participating in an active illustration of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. You are enacting your participation in the reality of what happened for you at the Cross.

As *The Message* renders **Romans 6:4**:

"That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus."

\* There are two main traditions in the Christian Church today regarding baptism in water. One tradition holds that the sprinkling of water is what is meant by the Bible's reference to baptism. This tradition draws strongly on Old Testament symbology, particularly the sprinkling of blood upon the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant and scriptures such as **1 Peter 1:2**. The other tradition holds that a believer must be totally immersed in water. It is our belief at the Online Bible College that full immersion in water depicts most fully the picture of a Christian's identification with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, as indicated by scriptures such as **Romans 6:3-4**, and by the Greek word "baptizo," which actually means "to immerse."

## Identification with Christ

The Gospel works on the principle of *identification*. This identification is two-way.

Firstly, Christ identified totally with you in your humanity (**Hebrews 4:15**) – the ultimate expression of which was his death upon the Cross (**Hebrews 2:9,14**).

Secondly, you now identify totally with Christ in his life. God does this by linking you with Christ, not just in his death, but also in his resurrection.

As we have already seen in previous lessons, this two-way identification is expressed in four atonement events:

- ➔ Christ died for me – I died in Christ
- ➔ Christ was buried for me – I was buried in Christ
- ➔ Christ was raised for me – I was raised in Christ
- ➔ Christ ascended for me – I ascended in Christ

For a complete description of this dual identification in a single verse, read Paul's statement of faith in **Galatians 2:20**.

## ***Baptized into his death***

The starting point of Christian baptism is the fact that you died in Christ 2000 years ago. Baptism is not to *make* you dead to sin; it is because you are *already* dead to sin.

The act of baptism is, in its essence, a spiritual funeral service. A funeral service is not designed to kill a person off. We bury a person because they are already dead. In the same way, through baptism, we bury the old person you were outside of Christ. Since the old you is dead, we don't want it hanging around any more. We want to bury it for good.

## ***Baptized into his resurrection***

### **Read 1 Peter 3:21-22**

Notice how Peter links your baptism with the reality of Christ's resurrection. Baptism "saves you," he says, "by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead." Through baptism, you identify not just with the death of Christ, but also with the resurrection of Christ. When you rise up out of the waters of baptism, you are declaring that your life is now linked to Christ in his resurrection.

Dead, buried and raised in Christ – all of this is pictured in baptism! The life God has planned for you to live is one that is empowered by the resurrection of Christ. But before we can look at this resurrection-energized life, an important point must be made.

It is *impossible* to live in the resurrection life of Christ if you have not first had a revelation that you *died* in Christ. Your identification with Christ in his resurrection is dependent upon your identification with Christ in his death. If you are still trying to crucify your old self, the reality of the resurrection can never be outworked in your life. Both are received by faith. You died in Christ so that you can now live in him!

## **Beyond Comparison**

### **Read Ephesians 1:17-21**

Paul here prays his famous prayer, that you may have "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" and that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." But he then goes on in **verses 18-19** to say why he wants you to have the eyes of your heart enlightened:

"...in order that you may know...his *incomparably great power* for us who believe."

It takes revelation from God for us to fully grasp the power that is made available to us as Christians because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Note that Paul says this power is "incomparably" great. What does "incomparably" mean? Put simply, it means "without comparison." There is nothing that you

can possibly compare God's power to that would justly show it in its true light.

In order to understand the depth of the meaning behind Paul's description of this "incomparably" great power harnessed in the Christian life, we need to take a glimpse at Paul's use of Greek wording in this scripture. The Greek word translated "incomparably" means "to throw beyond, to exceed, to surpass."<sup>1</sup> As Brook Foss Wescott explains:

"The word ["might"] refers to strength regarded as abundantly effective in relation to an end to be gained or dominion to be exercised."<sup>2</sup>

What Paul is saying is that there is no force or power that can even approach comparing with the power that has been made available to you, as a Christian, because of God's participation in your life. Now to get all of this into perspective, think for a moment of the most powerful thing you have ever witnessed. Have you ever experienced an earthquake, with buildings leveled and streets torn up? Have you observed a hurricane, which has torn the roofs off houses, or a tornado that has plowed a course through a town, or a tsunami that has grounded ships hundreds of yards upland? Have you ever witnessed a nuclear explosion, its fierce shockwave knocking down city blocks and its mushroom cloud dwarfing a city?

Yet the Bible declares that none of these can even remotely compare with the power God has made available "for us who believe." Each of these expressions of power pale into insignificance when lined up against the power of the Christian life, for the power God has made available to you is "incomparably great" – it is *beyond comparison*.

In **Ephesians 6:10**, where Paul encourages the believer to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power," he uses exactly the same Greek words for "mighty power" as in **Ephesians 1:19**. Even under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Paul struggles to overcome the limits of human language in order to describe the awesome strength and power that is at your disposal, stringing together as many Greek words as he can with the meaning of "might," "power" or "strength."

Take a look at a few other scriptures where Paul attempts to describe the nature of the power God has made available to you.

### Read Ephesians 3:20

Here Paul describes the power of God as "immeasurably" great. What does "immeasurably" mean? It means "beyond the capacity to measure."

Most people are familiar with the bathroom scales. We get on to see how much we weigh, and the scales work because they were designed to measure our weight. According to the scales, our weight is measurable. But if, perchance, our weight was "off the scales" it would literally be immeasurable!

That is how Paul is describing God's power in the Christian life. It is immeasurable! It is "off the scales." It is totally beyond any other power that we have encountered in our experience upon the earth.

But note that **Ephesians 3:20** is not some abstract description of God's power in its totality. He is not talking about God's power in the creation of the universe, as awesome as this was. No, Paul is describing a power "that is at work *within us*." It is, once again, the power "made available to us who believe" that is "*immeasurably* more than all we ask or imagine."

### Read 2 Corinthians 4:7

Here again, Paul attempts to describe God's power available to you using superlative\* language. This time he uses the expression "all-surpassing" power. The word "all-surpassing" is fairly easy to understand: it means that God's power surpasses any other power in its greatness and in its effectiveness.

But note again where this power is operating. It is found "in jars of clay" (NIV) or "in earthen vessels" (KJV). This "all-surpassing power" is not describing God's power in the creation of the universe, but his power exercised in the day-to-day Christian life.

And look at what Paul goes on to say. God's whole purpose in the Gospel is to show that "this all-surpassing power is *from God and not from us*."

### Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-9

You see, the whole reason God has chosen the way of faith is that it is based on reliance upon God. We draw on his strength to live the Christian life, not our own. And when you compare your puny power to the incredible power released in the resurrection of Christ, which would you choose?

### Read 2 Corinthians 12:9

Do you think you're weak and incapable of living the Christian life? Good. That means you're a candidate for God's "incomparably great" and "all-surpassing" power, which is able to do "immeasurably more" than you would ever be able to do in your own strength. God's grace – his favor and power – is sufficient for you to live the Christian life. The way of law was incapable of taking your weakness into account (see **Romans 8:3**). The way of the Spirit, however, has not only taken your weakness into account; its power is actually made perfect in your weakness. For when you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you are totally incapable of living up to the standards God has set for your life, there is only one way left: total reliance upon the power of God.

## A Revelation of the Resurrection

### Read again Ephesians 1:19-20

But after establishing that God's power made available to you is "incomparably great," Paul does an unusual thing. He actually goes on to compare that power

\* Superlative language uses words which describe an extreme or highest degree. The words "incomparably," "immeasurably" and "all-surpassing" are all superlative descriptions. In modern day language, superlative expressions would include "over the top," "totally awesome," "extreme to the *n*th degree," and the like. Can you think of some modern superlative phrases which would describe God's awesome power made available to you?



with something! He says:

“That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead...”

Incredible! Paul is saying that there is only one thing in the whole universe which can compare with the power God has placed into your life – and that is the resurrection of Christ!

All English translations of the Bible struggle to translate into English what Paul himself is struggling to describe in Greek. But the NIV translation has captured something of the superlative energy behind Paul’s words. According to the New International Version, God’s “mighty strength” was “exerted in Christ” during the resurrection. What does this word “exerted” mean?

When you exert yourself, you push yourself to the limit. Imagine an olympic weight-lifter, attempting to break a world record in what is called the “clean and jerk.” He squats in front of the dumbbells, his hands gripping the bar. He breathes slowly, focusing his mind and body on that one moment when he lifts the weight to his chest, then over his head. Why does he spend so much time “psyching” himself up for the lift? Because he knows that 100% of his effort must be focused right down to the instant of time he lifts the weight. He must *totally* exert himself. Even 95% of his effort will not be enough. It must be a 100% exertion for him to lift the weight.

What is so amazing about the resurrection is that the Bible declares it to be a total exertion of God’s power. God didn’t look down from heaven and say, “Well, the resurrection of my Son looks like a 30% effort.” No, *everything* went into the raising of Jesus from the dead. God held nothing back.

This is exactly how God now works in your life. What is the power that he has made available to you like? Well, it’s incomparable when it comes to any resources you may have yourself, but it is *exactly* like the power God exerted when he raised his Son from the dead. God does not measure out miserly portions of his power to you. His power is 100% totally available to you. And when he works in your life, he *exerts* his full power, just like he did when he raised Christ back to life.

Think about any problem that you may be facing at this time. Is it a big problem or a small one? Does it seem insurmountable or do you think that you may be able to handle it? Well, the way the Christian life works is that anything you think you can handle, you will usually end up trying to handle yourself. That’s what usually happens, isn’t it? It is only when we confess our weakness before the Lord that his “incomparably great” power is released to work in our lives. That’s why God says, “my power is made perfect in weakness” (**2 Corinthians 12:9**).

Think about it this way. Whenever we face a problem or difficulty, we automatically “scale” the problem, subconsciously measuring it against our personal resources of wisdom and power. In fact, that’s how we usually define a “small” or “big” problem – it’s defined against the scale of our own meager resources. God’s

power, however, is immeasurable. It is “off the scale.” Even those problems you call “big” are only big when compared to your own power. It is against your scale, not against God’s scale, that they are called big. But when God’s power is released into your life, the problem is suddenly scaled downwards drastically. For God totally exerts his power *every single time* he brings it to bear on your life.

## The Dynamic of the Resurrection

### Read Romans 8:9-11

What an astounding description of the Christian life! This is the line of Paul’s reasoning:

- If the Spirit of God lives in you, you are controlled not by the flesh but by the Spirit.
- If anyone does not have the Spirit of God, they do not belong to Christ.
- Therefore every true believer in Christ is expected to be controlled by the Spirit.

Having established this fact, so that no Christian can give any excuse, Paul goes on to describe the fact that “your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.” What now makes the difference, says Paul, is the fact that God’s Spirit – the *same* Spirit who raised Christ from the dead – is now living in you!

Take a moment to let this fact sink in. The same Spirit – precisely the same One who broke the hold of death over Christ Jesus – now resides in your life. What difference do think this is going to make? How do you think this is going to impact your life? Well, Paul tells us that this same Spirit will do exactly the same work – he will bring life out of death! He will break the bond of “sin and death” and release the empowering of God’s life.

### Read Romans 8:2

The Spirit of the Resurrection has been sent into your life. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is now energizing the dynamic of Christian growth for you. How he does this is the subject of our next lesson, but let’s establish here once and for all that this is God’s plan and design for your life. From the beginning of time, the Bible says, God purposed that you be “holy and blameless in his sight” (**Ephesians 1:4**), but he didn’t just present this impossible standard before you for you to try (and ultimately fail) to keep. No, through the Gospel, God engineered a way for you to keep his holy standard, not in your own power, but in his. This way is called “the new way of the Spirit” (**Romans 7:6**).

The Holy Spirit who has been sent into your life is called the “Spirit of holiness” in **Romans 1:4** and here he is called “the law of the Spirit of life,” the One who “sets [you] free from the law of sin and death.”

Paul says very specifically in **Romans 1:11** that the same Spirit who raised Christ

from the dead “will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

*The Message* so eloquently captures Paul’s meaning with these words:

“It stands to reason, doesn’t it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he’ll do exactly the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ’s!”

<sup>1</sup> Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), p.523.

<sup>2</sup> Brook Foss Westcott, *St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, quoted by Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), pp.523-524.