

The Power of the Resurrection

Ephesians 1:18-21

What a dreadful site it was. It was devastating and tragic to watch the terrible fire at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris this week. Heartbreaking in sadness for so many people. Such an historic building, upwards of a thousand years old. Such irreplaceable and beautiful architecture which, for a time, was feared to be totally and completely destroyed. And the video of the tall spire collapsing was just devastating. Such a sense of history, literally going up in flames.

The statues and the artwork were priceless, many of them damaged or lost along with so many other treasures. And then there was the spiritual emphasis, particularly the loss of the relics. Roman Catholics believe that the crown of thorns Jesus wore at his crucifixion was in that cathedral, having been purchased by King Louis IX in the 13th century. That relic was saved from the fire.

I couldn't help thinking that the destruction of the cathedral was a fitting commentary on religious life in France. The cathedral, once the centerpiece of the city and the nation, had itself become an historical relic. Religious faith, Christian faith, once dominant in France is all but gone, humanly speaking. France, along with much of western Europe, can best be described as post-Christian. It is a secular country, Their Christian heritage has been far more damaged than the cathedral was itself. In broad terms, maybe 10% of the population in France attend church, though 80% might be labelled nominally Roman Catholic. Nominally, in name only. Not in actual faith. Again, the burned out shell of Notre Dame is an accurate picture of the spiritual heart and soul of the nation.

To bring that commentary closer to home, France and all of

western Europe provide us a picture of where our own country is heading as well, with the increasing irrelevance of true, biblical Christian faith upon the people of the United States. As a nation, as a culture, we are rapidly becoming post-Christian as well. And only the power of God can turn that around! That is the power I want to focus on this morning. It is the power of the resurrection.

Easter Sunday is also an accurate symbol of the decline of the religious state of our country and culture, for the Easter bunny and candy in the Easter basket are far more familiar figures in the minds of many people today than the resurrected Jesus. This celebration of the resurrection which we call Easter continues, tied to the passover feast in our calendars, but it continues without the spiritual significance it once had for many people. For example, what used to be called Easter break in school schedules is now called spring break.

In general, most people just don't care about spiritual things. The reality of the resurrection of Jesus just doesn't hit home for a lot of people. It's not relevant to their lives. But I want to make the effort this morning to make that emphasis in a meaningful way. And although we emphasize the centrality of the resurrection every Sunday when we gather together to worship on the first day of every week, I want to focus our attention this particular week we call Easter on the significance of that resurrection.

Specifically, the power of the resurrection.

I should note that the resurrection of Jesus is given preeminence in the Bible, it holds a central place in the gospel itself. Historically, the resurrection is identified as one of the five fundamentals of the Christian faith. Without the resurrection, there is no true faith. And as Paul puts it, there is no forgiveness of sins.

1 Cor. 15:14 “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty...17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”

In a real sense, the resurrection represents the whole gospel. It is the focal point of the gospel, the central event in history that defines the gospel. It is the gospel.

1 Cor. 15:1 “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

Jesus rose from the dead! That is our faith. And there is extensive historical eyewitness accounts to verify the reality of it.

Mat. 28:1 “Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. 5 But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

This morning, as we take a break from our study of Deuteronomy, I want to focus on that resurrection, but not so

much on the historical reality of it, but its power. I will take for as my starting point the historical reality. I will assume it, for now, or perhaps simply declare it to you, as the truth which God has revealed in his word. To use the words of the Apostles’ Creed, “the third day he rose again from the dead.”

Our focus this morning is the the book of Ephesians, chapter 2. And it is a little hard to read and analyze because it is a prayer. Paul is praying for the people of Ephesus, people he knows well and considers very dear.

v.15 “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.”

Note what he prays for. “The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,” according to verse 17. Enlightened understanding of the gospel, of salvation, according to verse 18, so that the people would know “the hope of His calling.” In other words, Paul is praying that they would know and understand the glory of their own salvation, including their inheritance in heaven. That they would know that they have eternal life. It’s a great prayer.

It’s my prayer for you. And my desire as I preach. That you might know that you have eternal life, the gift of salvation offered to you by faith in Jesus Christ. And if you would believe in him, the promise of the Bible is that you will have eternal life.

If you believe, particularly in the resurrection. If you believe in the power of God to raise Jesus from the dead. And clearly I am proclaiming to you, that God has that power!

I. GOD HAS THE POWER TO RAISE JESUS FROM THE DEAD.

Verse 19 refers to “to the working of His mighty power.” That means supernatural power. Miraculous power. Power that you and I don’t have, but God does. And by that mighty power, God raised Jesus from the dead.

When the church was being established on the day of Pentecost, this was the conclusion of the sermon that Peter preached.

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”

It requires faith, faith to believe that what God says is true. Faith to believe that God has all power, that he is omnipotent. That God has the supernatural power necessary to perform miracles. And make no mistake about it, the resurrection is a miracle.

A. The miracle of the resurrection.

There are a lot of miracles that surround and define Jesus’ earthly life. Things like the virgin birth, that his mother, Mary, conceived him in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. No man was involved. No intercourse. No human act of begetting. Surely that was a miracle, one never again to be repeated.

Jesus performed miracles throughout his earthly life, to validate himself and attest to his divine authority. But never is that super natural power more on display than in the resurrection.

Jesus died. A real death. A physical death. His body became a corpse, even as his human soul continued to live. And then, on the first day of the week, he was raised from the dead. Human body and human soul again reunited. That’s the miracle.

Before I go on, let me emphasize that although the resurrection is the focal point of the display of God’s supernatural power, the resurrection is not an isolated event. The resurrection didn’t happen by itself. And the display of the miracle of the resurrection wasn’t completed until ascended to the right hand of his father in heaven. So the power of the resurrection brings about,

B. The completion of the ascension.

Again, the resurrection gets the focused attention, but all that Jesus does should be seen as one inseparable and continuous work. His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. None of those things can be rightly understood apart from all the others. In a sense, its just one event, comprised of many parts. His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

And what is the ascension?

v.20b “[God] seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”

He ascended into heaven, again from the Apostles’ Creed. In the flesh, with his body, after 40 days of appearances to his disciples and many other people in order to give evidence of his resurrection, he left the earth and joined his father in heaven. And he sits, in authority, at the position of authority, the right hand.

We read about it in,

Acts 1:9 “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

I stress this because sometimes we don't think about it enough, or realize all the implications of it. Jesus still has a body. And yet he is present with his father. And he rules the world as king, now, from the place of kingly authority, the right hand of God the father, “in the heavenly places” according to verse 20. And nothing is more powerful than him, no one has more authority.

v.21

And that is for your encouragement. Remember, this is a prayer. Paul is praying that you would really and truly understand the the extent of this great power of God. Ultimately, it is the power to raise the man Jesus from the dead. And it is for us a declaration of great praise,

Ps. 110:1 The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

The encouragement of all of this is quite clear in the words of Romans 8.

Rom. 8:31 “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes

intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

And answer is nothing. Absolutely nothing. Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ, because Jesus was raised from the dead and was seated at the right hand of god.

Rom. 8:38 “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

All of that because God has the power to raise Jesus from the dead.

But that's not the extent of Paul's prayer. The point of all this is not simply so that you can understand or believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. There is also the promise of the gospel here, that,

II. GOD HAS THE POWER TO RAISE CHRISTIANS FROM THE DEAD.

Not just Jesus is raised from the dead, but also you and I who believe! You see, this power of God at work in Jesus' resurrection is the same power at work in our salvation. So Paul prays that we would know,

v.19 “...what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.”

The power here is focused on Christians, those who believe. And what is that power, the exceeding greatness of that power? Well, it is the same power God used to raise Jesus from the dead. So it is the power to raise us from the dead as well!

Look at,
v.18

So what is the hope of your calling? Calling refers to the work of God to save you. And the hope of that calling is nothing less than eternal life. In other words, you who believe, you will be raised from the dead as well. And you will be given an inheritance. Namely, a place in heaven. Paul describes it as, “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

We have an inheritance! We will be raised from the dead in order to receive that inheritance in the new heavens and new earth.

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

So that is your hope, you who believe. You have an inheritance reserved in heaven, and you will be raised from the dead in order to receive it! And going back to Paul’s prayer, he is praying that you will have the confidence and assurance of just that!

A. The final resurrection is a sure and certain hope.

Here’s what Paul writes again in,

1 Cor. 15:13 “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do

not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”

But, of course, there is a resurrection!

1 Cor. 15:20 “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”

Now, it is true, the unbelievers as well as believers will be resurrected.

John 5:28 “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

We’re not focusing on the resurrection of unbelievers, raised in order to be condemned. But I don’t want to ignore that reality either. That judgment is sure and certain too. Which brings me to my final point, which is to emphasize what it is that God has saved us from. We are saved from death. We are saved from condemnation. We are saved from the wrath and justice of God which our sins have earned. And so I don’t want you to think this morning only about the final resurrection, which is really the second resurrection. I also want you to think about the first

resurrection. Namely the resurrection from death to life in terms of salvation. And...

B. The first resurrection is a glorious reality.

Your salvation is your first resurrection. And so the power of the resurrection is not simply the power to raise your dead corpse out of the grave at the end of the age, as glorious as that will be. But the power of the resurrection is the power to raise your soul from the dead and make you alive. The Bible calls that being born again. The word we use to describe it is regeneration.

And so the greatest power of God is this power to make us alive, we who believe! And that's what Paul prays for in verse 19, that the people would know THAT power.

v.18-19

Turn with me to Ephesians 2, where this first resurrection is so clearly described,

Eph. 2:1 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins... 4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Do you see how glorious that is? You who believe in Jesus, you have already been raised from the dead. You are alive! Together with Christ. You are already raised up with him. And you are already sitting with him in the heavenly places. Not physically, certainly, but spiritually!

The power of the resurrection is the power of God to make someone alive, who was previously dead in sins. So, do you know that power? It is the power of God to save you. And it is

the power of God at work in your life when you believe. So as I preach the gospel to you, I preach it as plainly as I can.

Rom. 10:8 "But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

So confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord! And believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. And God will raise you from the dead, too! As you have opportunity, proclaim that message to others as well.

Rev. 20:6 "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

That's us. That's right now. The second death, the final judgment, has no power over us, who believe in Jesus. As I preach, I pray that you would know the exceeding greatness of that power in your life. The power of God which causes you to be born again, for God has the power to raise Christians from the dead.

And the resurrection of Jesus is the proof that you and I will be raised from the dead as well.

1 Cor. 15:50 "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit

incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”