

The Power of His Resurrection

Philippians 3:7-11

Easter 2019

Part One

With Study Questions

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But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:7-11).

Introduction

There are things we don't commonly enjoy talking about. Death is not, generally speaking, an agreeable topic for cocktail parties. There is nothing light about it. Yet in order for the resurrection to be significant, it very much requires broaching the topic of death.

Death is the great equalizer. It has no respect for intellect, beauty, riches or talent. It is a universal curse. So many rooms I've entered where it lingers, the titanic silencer. It refuses to hear your arguments. Whether one is on the left or the right, Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Socialist, Communist, Nihilist, Atheist, death is a cloud that comes, a wave that cannot be halted. The Apostle Paul called it "**The last enemy**" (1 **Corinthians 15:26**).

Many of us have painfully lost loved ones. We want to see them again. We want to look them in the eyes and hold them. We are material beings and we miss the enjoyment of that which is tactile, palpable, touchable. I daresay that a desire to be reunited with lost loved ones can play a strong, at least, psychological role in our perseverance in the faith.

The Bliss of Heaven

I recall traversing a chapter in my own life where the pain of losing a loved one became quite a spiritual epiphany for me. At the risk of sounding irreverent, I have always found myself mentally and emotionally lacking when it came to the anticipated joy of seeing Christ upon entering glory.

We are told that the supreme bliss of heaven is not the real estate but the company. And there is no greater company than Jesus! There are numerous passages which would express this to be true (Psalm 17:15; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Job 19:25-27; Matthew 5:8). In the Apostle Paul's almost ambivalent presentation of whether it is better for him to be alive or dead, he is not unclear that to be "**with Christ**" is "**far better**" (**Philippians 1:23**).

And here is where my potential, though certainly unintended, irreverence may enter. I have a difficult time getting my arms around such a high level of delight associated with encountering a middle-eastern man

who lived two thousand years ago. One might call upon John's description of the glorified Christ in the first chapter of Revelation to combat such short-sightedness on my part (hair like white wool, eyes like a flame of fire, voice like many waters, countenance like the sun, etc.).

But for me, it was when I recognized that there was someone who I wanted to see so badly (because of an enjoyable albeit somewhat short relationship) that it hurt, that I began to appreciate the joy of that "**far better**" of which Paul wrote. Unlike my (for lack of a better term) human relationship, Christ knew me from eternity past (Romans 8:29). He knows every awful thing about me, voluntarily entering into this world and my pains and temptations (Hebrews 4:15).

Unlike my human relationship, He loved me though I pit my heart and mind against Him and was by nature His enemy (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:3). His love for me carried no ulterior motive. He came to love me and serve me with His very life and death (Matthew 20:28). In an act for which there is no appropriate analogy (at least in terms of depth), He died for me and carried my sins upon His own body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).

It has been said that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. To whatever extent our eyes are opened when we leave this world; when we are no longer looking through a "**mirror dimly**" but "**face to face**" (1 Corinthians 13:12), we can rest assured, that the happiness-the gladness of heart-we will have when we encounter the ones that we loved and missed the most, as enjoyable as it will be in the reuniting, will pale in comparison to being united with Christ. This may not be something we feel. But it is something we can know.

The Resurrection

Today we discuss the Resurrection *anastasis* (to come back to life after having once died). It is quite unique to Christ and the faith which bears His holy name. It is not a reincarnation. It is not a living on in someone's memory. It is not a mere philosophy or system of politics or ethics. The Christian's comfort in the room of death is not one of words. It is the

presence of Christ Himself as the one who has vanquished what we could never conquer.

The incomprehensible victory of the resurrection is so astonishing that even the close followers of Jesus seemed to fail to grasp His mission. When Jesus **“began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer, be killed and be raised the third day”** (Matthew 16:21), Peter didn’t get it. He objected! Jesus explained to him, in a not-so-enjoyable conversation I suspect, that he wasn’t **“mindful of the things of God”** (Matthew 16:23).

But Jesus would not be dissuaded. He was **“betrayed”** (Matthew 26:23, **“deserted”** (Matthew 26:31) and **“denied”** (Matthew 26:34) by those with whom He was closest. Yet He set His face like **“flint”** toward Jerusalem (Isaiah 50:7; Luke 9:51). He went through the mockery of an illegal **“trial”** (Mark 14:55-64). The drift of civic, social and spiritual judgment turned against Him (Matthew 27:22). They **“spit”** on Him, **“blindfolded”** Him, **“beat”** Him and **“struck them with their hands.”** It was close and very personal (Mark 14:65). Even the betrayal came with a **“kiss”** (Matthew 26:48).

He was then crucified between **“two thieves”** during which He was **“blasphemed”** (Matthew 27:38, 39). On that cross He **“bore the sins”** of the world (1 Peter 2:24), the **“iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:6). The Apostles’ Creed teaches that Jesus **“descended into hell”** which some find a confusing phrase with various interpretations.

I would submit that it is at least theologically acceptable to understand that Jesus descending into hell was not were merely His visiting a dreadful place as some sort of uncomfortable tourist. I agree with Witsius who held the position that Jesus descended into Hell when he **“wrestled with the dreadful agonies.”** Jesus descended into Hell by taking upon Himself the Hell deserved by sinners.

Then on the third day Jesus accomplished the unprecedented and unparalleled. **“He rose again”** (1 Corinthians 15:4) and was seen by hundreds of people, some believers, some not (Matthew 28:4; 1 Corinthians 15:5). The room of death, sorrow and sadness now becomes a room of hope and peace. Hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah anticipates God fulfilling this glorious promise:

He will swallow up death forever, And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken.⁹ And it will be said in that day: "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation (Isaiah 25:8, 9).

And the Apostle Paul reflects on this promise having been fulfilled:

...through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

The abolition of eternal death in the hope of the resurrection brought counter-intuitive words to the Apostle's heart, that for him to live was Christ and **"to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21)**. This was no sinful, morbid desire for death, but a rejoicing in the knowledge that the faithful are taken from **"calamity"** and enter **"peace"** (Isaiah 57:1, 2).

Reactions to the Resurrection

So how is one to respond to the resurrection? The resurrection is, no doubt, the most significant event in human history. The implications of it extend into eternity. It is the heart of the Good News, the Gospel. Yet it is often viewed with a sort of passivity, an indifference. To some it is even an inconvenience, requiring a violent snuffing out. This was as true when it happened as it is to this day.

I recently came upon a quote from Robert Nicholson, of the *Philos Project* (an organization with missionary efforts in the Middle East),

addressing Christianity's "prospects of surviving in its birthplace". Nicholson stated:

Believing that a man named Jesus Christ was crucified and rose again for the sins of the world is still one of the most dangerous things one can do in many parts of the world.

The Scriptures teach us that instead of the resurrection being the source of light, hope and peace to the clergy in Jerusalem, it was a problem to be addressed and dismissed. They consulted together and bribed the guards with a large sum of money to lie about the disciples stealing His body (Matthew 28:12, 13). To this day there are various explanations given for what happened. Passover plots are numerous.

For some, they prefer to believe that a recently crucified Jesus managed to push over a two-ton boulder, over-powered a complement of trained Roman soldiers then convince hundreds of people that He had risen from the dead.

For forty days (Acts 1:3), the powerful Roman Empire and devious religious culture had ample opportunity to address the issue. Yet those powers faded into insignificance while Jesus, as one poet put it, who never wrote a book, held an office, went to college, visited a big city, traveled more than two hundred miles from where He was born and had no credentials except Himself, is the central figure of the human race. The very date by which we live is based upon His life and death.

The efforts to turn a blind eye to the resurrection are numerous. Yet I would like to pursue the completion of this lesson next Lord's Day with a brief analysis of how the Apostle Paul responded, his testimony, a testimony which culminates with his desire to know **"the power of His (Christ's) resurrection"** and attain, himself, **"to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10, 11)**. The joy of seeing our departed loved ones and the superior joy of unvarnished fellowship with Christ Himself is contingent upon a God-given, grace-filled response to the resurrection. We will address this further in our next meeting.

Questions for Study

1. How is death the great equalizer?
2. What does it mean that Jesus descended into hell?
3. Discuss the comfort of the resurrection.
4. How have people reacted to the resurrection, both in Scripture and to this very day?