

Resurrection Sunday 2024: *The Power of the Resurrection*  
Philippians 3:7-11

Today the Church universal gathers in every tribe, tongue and nation to celebrate the empty tomb and the joy of our Lord's resurrection. The Empty Tomb is the hinge of history. Everything about our hope rests upon this historical fact: Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

Now, as many of you know, speaking of Christ crucified and resurrected is my FAVORITE subject, and over the past 16 years I have taught on this subject from many different perspectives. We have marched through every verse of Luke's gospel and John's gospel; I have taught on the Mark and Matthew's accounts of the resurrection as well; we have examined the overwhelming evidence for the resurrection on several occasions; we have approached the resurrection story through the perspective of various people such as Mary, Peter, John, the travelers on the road to Emmaus, and so on. On this particular Easter morning, however, I would have us examine the POWER of Christ's resurrection. Assuming that Christ has risen indeed, what does it mean? How does the power of Christ's resurrection inform our lives now?

Our first and primary text will be found in the third chapter of Philippians, but we will read quite a bit of what Paul has to say on this subject throughout his letters. To get us started, let us stand together and read Philippians 3:7-11:

7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

There is far more to say about the power of the resurrection than I can cover in one setting, so I will only address four of the most immediate and encouraging applications that we find so beautifully presented in scripture: 1) The Power of Life from Death; 2) The Power of Emancipation; 3) The Power of Significance; and 4) The Power of Belonging.

### **I. The Power of Life from Death**

In our text that we just read, Paul confesses that the most important thing to him...above everything else in his life, is knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection. That may seem like a bit much for some of us. For most of us, religion has its place, but we would much rather have a million dollars or a spouse or better health or any number of things more than we long to "know Christ and the power of His resurrection." So why is Paul so passionate about knowing Christ and the power of His resurrection? Well, first of all, Paul understands that before knowing Christ, he was a spiritually dead person. We'll look at what Paul says about that in a minute, but first...we need an illustration.

For those of you who regularly endure my preaching, you might recall that I am a constant gardener...which is not to be confused with a Master Gardener. I am not a Master Gardener in the least...but I am a *constant* gardener, which means I'm constantly planting something in my yard in hopes of growing something that I can eat. Of my more frustrating

attempts in this regard, I would point you to the three cherry trees that currently reside on the northeast end of our yard (show pic of trees). For the better part of 16 years I have sought to harvest cherries, and year after year the schizophrenic season called “Spring in Kansas” tortures me with uncertainty. In so many instances, it gets too warm too early, the blossoms pop out, only to be burned off by an untimely frost...or the weather grows cold and the bees do not arrive to pollinate the blossoms before they expire. Last year, among my three trees, I think I harvested 12 cherries! This year will likely be less.

Now, as miserable as my cherry harvest has been, my neighbors will tell you that from the middle of March through the end of June, I can be found examining each and every tiny branch and bud of those cherry trees at least once, if not twice a day. I’m fascinated by the whole process of watching those trees come to life, blossom, and bear fruit, and it never gets old for me.

You see, all winter long, those trees appear to be dead. For months on end there is no sign of life and absolutely no chance that those trees will grow a leaf, not to mention a cherry. But as spring arrives, I am fascinated with the appearance of new life in what once looked dead.

Church, I hope you can see how God has arranged for the drama of death and resurrection to be played out before our very eyes in the natural world. As is often the case, what we can observe in the natural points to much deeper truths in the spiritual.

In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul writes, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.” Paul understands that the corruption of sin in each human soul leads us to be, by default, spiritually dead people. In other words, without the power of resurrection, we are in a perpetual winter of the soul. Though our bodies have life, our spirits are virtually dead. There is no sign of spiritual vitality in the natural state, no hope of eternal fruit, and like a tree in winter, there is little we can do to amend our condition. So is the case with all sinful human beings: we are incapable of making ourselves become spiritually alive. We don’t have the power to bring life out of death. We need resurrection power! And that is what God provided for spiritually dead people through Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. Paul goes on: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him—by grace you have been saved...”

The power of the resurrection makes spiritually dead people come to life! This is what salvation means: life from death. And Paul makes it redundantly clear: we have been saved by God’s unmerited grace, not by our works. Let us look now to our second subheading.

## **II. The Power of Emancipation**

Another way that Paul speaks about the power of Christ's resurrection is through the language of slavery and emancipation. Paul weaves the picture of life from death into the metaphor of emancipation in Romans 6 where we read: We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death he died he died to sin; once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Part of my experience as a pastor is walking with people who struggle with addictions. Every family is affected by addiction in some way. I'm sure just about every person here knows that is true, and I suspect that many, many souls here today are still struggling with some form of addiction. Addiction is, with very few exceptions, a form of self-imposed slavery. I say "self-imposed" because most of our addictions begin with an act of the will. We "give ourselves over" to our desire for something or someone. We actually "obey" the desire, and the desire soon enslaves us. As Paul writes in Romans 6:16, "...if you present yourself to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness."

Sadly, once we are slaves of sin, we are not capable of freeing ourselves. Anyone who has ever tried to break an addiction through white-knuckled effort will tell you it is futile. Such is why the opening creed of any AA meeting begins with admitting that "I am powerless over my addiction." To be set free from the slavery of sin...from the slavery of addiction...from the slavery of our anger...from the slavery of our past...from the slavery of our resentment and unforgiveness...we need resurrection power! The power of Christ's resurrection sets people free from the slavery of sin through the unmerited grace of God's love and forgiveness. As Jesus states in John 8:34: Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son has set you free, you will be free indeed."

Only the Son of God can truly set us free from the tyranny of sin, and He accomplished our freedom through His death and resurrection. When Christ arose from the grave, He conquered the power of sin and death. When we humble ourselves and call upon Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, He give us Himself through the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit applies the resurrection power of Christ into our bodies, our minds, and our spirits. Only the resurrection power of Christ can truly set a person free.

Now...the freedom of which the Bible speaks is not a freedom from all authority, or the freedom to do whatever we want with no regard for others. Here's a truth that we must accept. We're all going to serve something or someone. Human beings are not self-sufficient creatures. We need food, we need shelter, we need community, we need significance, we need to make a dollar, we need to count for something greater than ourselves. All of these needs mean that we will "obey" something or someone in order to have those needs met. Paul makes it clear in Romans 6: human beings will either be slaves of sin, or we will be servants of righteousness. Beginning in vs. 20 Paul writes: For when you were slaves of sin, you were "free" in regards to righteousness. But what fruit

were you getting at that time from the things which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As Bob Dylan famously observed: “We all gotta serve somebody.” By the power of Christ’s resurrection, we are emancipated from serving sin and set free to be those who serve God. Freedom is serving the LORD who loves you, the LORD who provides for you, the LORD who forgives you...freedom is in serving the One who left heaven, took on flesh, and served us! Jesus emphatically invites us all to FOLLOW HIM...because if we aren’t following Jesus, we’re following Somebody or Something else that will inevitably enslave us.

Church, be thankful for the emancipating power of the resurrection, amen? If the Son has set us free, we are free indeed! Let us look now to our third subheading.

### **III. The Power of Significance**

One of the most fascinating books in the Bible is the book of Ecclesiastes. It is a book written from the perspective of a king who had everything a man’s heart could desire. The writer literally admits that he fed his every appetite for pleasure. He ate the best food, had countless wives and concubines, built buildings, planted gardens, gave himself over to all kinds of important projects. But in the end, having exhausted his every desire for pleasure and significance, he writes, “I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after the wind.”

There lies within the heart of every human soul the desire for significance. It’s why we get so caught up with celebrities. We admire and aspire to be like those people who have significance...those we consider to be successful, beautiful, talented, brilliant, and influential. When we’re young, we’re drawn to the Taylor Swifts and the Patrick Mahomes of the world. When we get a bit older, we’re drawn to those in our own field of study who have excelled, or perhaps authors, leaders, even politicians who have inspired us in our lives. As we get even older, we learn that even the very best of human leaders, thinkers, artists, and so on are fallible, broken people who disappoint us. And eventually, if we live long enough, we might very well come to the same conclusions of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes: “It’s all a striving after the wind.”

The pressure to be significant...to be special...to be unique...to be self-determining and even self-promoting has never been so great in our culture as it is now. The most damning thing you could say to a young person today is that he or she is ordinary, average, or even “normal!” Truth be told, not many of us older people would care much to hear those adjectives either! We are human beings, and we long for significance. The question we all face then is obvious: what is it about our lives that will endure? What is it about any human life that is truly significant?

To answer that question, we should consider the most significant human being who has ever lived: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was raised in poverty. He never wrote a book, never held an office, never led an army...He never even created a single video of Himself! Jesus never

traveled more than 100 miles from His hometown. He never married, never had children, never owned His own home, and when He died, His only possessions were the clothes on His back. And He died an inglorious death. He was accused, arrested, tried, pronounced innocent but then flogged and crucified while people taunted Him and spat in His face.

Even so, our lives are dated to His life. All of history is ordered according to His life. There are more books written, more works of art painted, more structures dedicated, more humanitarian efforts initiated, more dollars donated in the name of Jesus than in the name of any other human being who walked the face of the earth. Jesus is, far and away, the most significant person who has ever lived. Why?

Because everything Jesus did was for the glory of His Father and the salvation of human souls. Jesus did nothing for Himself...He was utterly selfless.

And here's what Jesus said in John 15: Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

According to the most significant, influential person who has ever walked the face of the earth, our pathway to significance is to abide in Him. Failure to abide in Him is to bear no fruit...it is to contribute nothing that will have eternal, lasting value. Now...that's either the most arrogant thing anyone has ever said in human history...or it's true.

As we look upon human history, as we consider the genesis of science, the printing press, universities, hospitals, and countless other realities that have blessed the world, we find behind all of these significant contributions men and women who abided in Christ. The record is astounding. Jesus was not arrogant...He was accurate.

So how are billions of people to abide in Christ? Through the power of the resurrection! Because Christ died and rose again, He has made Himself available to every human soul regardless of tribe, tongue, culture, or geography. Through the presence and power of His Holy Spirit, all men, women and children have access to abide in the Risen Son of God who promises to empower us with significance. Our significance is first and foremost given to us as those who belong to Him. But our significance extends to those things we do in His name for God's glory. By virtue of the resurrection power of Christ flowing through our spirits, we are capable of bearing much fruit (unlike my cherry trees!). We are actually those whose lives will count for eternity, regardless of how many days we are given...regardless of how difficult our lives might become.

I witnessed a young couple in their 20's give testimony to this truth earlier this week. My dear friends, Lauren and Lane, had to bury their firstborn...their 11-month-old daughter, Macy Grace. Macy Grace was a miracle. She was diagnosed with a horrible condition *in vitro* that gave her less than a 1% chance of life. She has barely any lung development on the right side and none at

all that they could see on the left. Her organs were outside of her abdomen...it was not good. Upon discovering their daughter's condition, the medical team suggested they might want to consider terminating the pregnancy, but Lauren and Lane had a different calling upon their life. They trusted God. The resurrection power of Christ directed their steps, and they committed to giving young Macy an opportunity to live, come what may. I was with them the day that Macy was born. The newborn infant was immediately taken into a surgery that she should not have survived, but by the grace of God and the remarkable gifts of the medical team, she did survive. Day after day, procedure after procedure, young Macy Grace survived, and she became known. Over the course of 11 months Macy grew to understand that she had a mom and a dad who loved her dearly. She saw the love of Jesus in the eyes of her adoring parents every day of her short life. She was happy, smiley, sassy, and beautiful (show pic of Macy Grace). As providence would have it, however, Macy Grace went to be with her Father in heaven just over a week ago. The pain of her passing was and remains beyond anything most of us could possibly imagine. But I sat in our sanctuary last Monday and watched this young couple declare the goodness of God to those who grieved beside them, and it was compelling. Their testimony was significant. Their tears were influential because it wasn't about them. Lane and Lauren's lives, their faith, their parenting, and their precious Macy Grace led people to see the infinite value of life. They reminded us all that life...all of it...is a gift, and because of the resurrection power of Jesus, Macy's life goes on...as will our own.

As I age, I tend to forget a great many things...but I will never forget Macy Grace. I will never forget the testimony of two grieving parents who glorified God in the midst of their brokenness. I don't forget significance...and these are the things that count for eternal significance.

Let us quickly conclude now with our fourth subheading.

#### **IV. The Power of Belonging**

In addition to our need for significance, the human soul is desperate to belong. We are, by nature, communal creatures. Human beings do not thrive in isolation, and yet we are living in an age of isolation. Ironically, social media has not helped our isolation; it has, in fact, increased our isolation. Loneliness is a huge problem and a chronic source of depression for people everywhere in the world, but particularly in the West. Walk through any airport and you will see hundreds of people occupying the same geography while at the same time completely isolated in their devices. It is an accurate picture of what we experience in our workplaces, our schools, and even social environments. Our deep need for belonging can be distracted with entertainment, information, and other indulgences for only so long before we wake up to the reality that we feel utterly alone.

We all need a people...a place to belong...a place where we feel safe to be us...a place where we feel loved and accepted. For some of us, we find this need met in our families, though many of our families are not as great as we present them on Instagram. Wherever human beings live in close proximity, we have conflict, and sometimes that conflict makes it hard to feel safe at home. Some of us seek out our belonging in friend groups, but friends are fickle, and truth be

told, most of us do not feel safe to let our guard down around our friend groups. We manage our image to accommodate the spoken or unspoken assumptions of our friends, which leaves us feeling even more unknown and more alone than ever. Some of us seek out belonging in our work, in our social clubs, in our volunteer work, and some of us have simply given up on belonging and we try to convince ourselves that we are better off alone. When we look at Paul's thoughts here in Philippians 3, Paul talks about his former life before Christ, and we hear the way he previously sought to construct his sense of belonging. Paul writes:

If anyone else thinks he has reason for 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; as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...not that I have already obtained this, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own.

Paul has discovered the deepest sense of belonging that a human soul can experience. For Paul, the power of the resurrection is ultimately the proclamation of adoption. Through His death and resurrection, Christ makes us His own. In Romans 8 Paul writes:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God...for you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Church, the power of the resurrection reconciles us first to God, and then to one another. Because of the forgiveness of sins and the power of the Holy Spirit, those who are in Christ BELONG to the Body of Christ. We are children of God...we BELONG in His family. We are the Bride of Christ...we BELONG to the Bridegroom. The New Testament is full of the language of belonging, all of which is accomplished through the power of the resurrection! Because of the power of the resurrection, our belonging is eternal. Our belonging is no longer limited to DNA, legal status, language, custom, country, skin color, or favorite football team! God has made a way for us to fully, safely, honestly, unconditionally belong in our forever family...it is the family of the Redeemed...and that is good news indeed!

OK, I've gone longer than I was supposed to, but please know...there is so much more. We didn't even touch upon the power of discernment, the power to love our enemies, the power to be light in the midst of darkness, the power to bring about justice, and countless other applications that we find in scripture. Church, we will spend the rest of our lives...and all of eternity...learning the significance and impact of Christ's resurrection power. May we, like Paul, come to a place where we can truly say that the deepest longing of our hearts is that we may know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

If you are here today and you don't know Christ at all, but you would like to...if you find yourself deeply longing for the eternal life, for significance, for belonging, for freedom...then I invite you to pray with me. Jesus loves you more than you will ever know. He has risen, and He is near. Call upon His name, repenting of your sin, placing your confidence in Him...and I promise you...the power of His resurrection will change everything! That's my story and the story of so many here and throughout the world. There is power in His name. Let us pray.