

RESURRECTION POWER

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Scripture: Mark 16: 1-8

Well church, Resurrection Sunday! We've been waiting for some time. And all of you have, in some form or the other, gone through these 40 days, opening yourself up to the Lord, inviting His work in you, inviting Him to do things that normally we're not so aware of through the rest of the year. I pray that it has been a really good season for you, that there's been a spiritual upheaval in your lives that have now settled down into a wonderful disciplined manner of following after Him, listening to Him, being obedient to Him, and even overcoming those things that maybe till now, have been stumbling blocks. But today is Resurrection Sunday, so let's look at the gospel of Mark, and then look at the accounts in the other gospels.

Mark 16: 1-8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" Looking up, they say that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'" They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

I read through all of these accounts and there is a little bit of brevity around the fringes of these narratives. It started for me just when I was looking at the songs that we were singing: Christ the Lord has risen today, hallelujah. Every time I sing the song, I am reminded of a time when I heard this song being announced, and the one who was announcing the song said, "Let us all rise and sing together: Christ the Lord has risen today, ha ha ha ha ha le luiah." Every time I see that song, all I can think about is the ha ha ha. And yet, it is glorious to be able to laugh in the face of death, laugh in the face of Satan and say, "You didn't win; Jesus was triumphant." Ha ha ha le luiah is fine today as we say it or sing it.

I also have favorite lines, or moments in all these narratives; lines that have stuck with me over the years. And they bring a smile to my face when I think about them. One of my favorite lines is the one that says, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" When I think about it, putting these passages together – in one passage, there's an angel sitting there, recorded by one of the gospel writers. The other one records two angels and one says, "You seek Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He is not here. He has risen and has gone ahead to Galilee. Go and tell the other disciples, and Peter." That's what one angel said. But I wonder whether the other angel thought, "Man! That's giving information. God has given me a very profound statement to make, while the other one says, "This I say: Why seek ye the living among the dead?" I wonder whether he enjoyed speaking those words to the ladies when they went in – Why seek ye the living among the dead?

Then, I love the part where Mary is there, and Jesus speaks to her. But she doesn't recognize Him. She thinks He is the gardener. She says, "Sir, please, if you have taken Him away..." and then Jesus says, "Mary!" and it clicks. Suddenly hearing His voice call her name! And I always think, "Oh my

goodness! How lovely when Jesus calls us by our names. He's so personal that the moment He calls us, we look at Him and say, "Rabboni, or Teacher, or Lord, or Savior. He calls us with such in love in those words. And that's the way He must have called Mary too. I can just picture Mary – suddenly looking up, eyes suddenly realizing "Gosh! This is Jesus. This is my Jesus."

Then there's another moment when Jesus visits the disciples in the room, and they're all fearful of the Jews. Even after hearing all the accounts that He is not in the tomb, they are still shut in that room, fearful. And Jesus enters, and then He talks to them. In fact, He reproaches them because they didn't believe. Then, after talking a little bit, He says, "Do you have anything to eat?" I thought: What a statement! I wonder whether it caught them by surprise. Here they were, talking of resurrection and thinking that He'd been crucified and all of that, and then Jesus says something so earthy. "Do you have something to eat, by the way? I'd like to partake."

Then in John's gospel. Forgive me for taking time over this, but we won't look at these narratives post-Easter, and I want to bring them to your attention – just the vividness of the gospel writers as they bring these things into their writing so that it will be there for us 2000 years later. John writes in his gospel that Mary came and told him that the tomb was empty. And then he writes, "Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, ran and as they ran, the other disciple ran faster." I thought: This is nice. He's also saying that, "We were running as fast as we can, but I made it there earlier." But then, I see the Holy Spirit who would have inspired him, almost levelling it out just a little bit, because then he adds that he stopped, but the other disciple Peter, ran past him into the tomb. Peter had a little bit more initiative; he wasn't going to stop there. He was going to go into the tomb and check it out.

All of these beautiful vignettes that are part of the Resurrection story. Then finally, we see Jesus when He meets the disciples, He breathes over them and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. Then He commissions them. He says, "Just as the Father has sent Me, go." What a moment that would have been! Yet, in the midst of all of these, we still see that there is unbelief, there is doubt.

But apart from loving these moments, I also love the different lessons that are strewn across these passages.

- The one that has teaching – that we need to be able to understand His Word. Knowing His Word is not enough, sharing it is not enough, but to be able to understand it and apply it in the times is important, which the disciples on the road to Emmaus were taught.
- To be able to hear His voice when He speaks to us. When He said, "Mary!" she recognized it. To think – when He calls my name, do I recognize it? Or do I just ignore it and pass on?
- Unbelief – maybe looking for some kind of physical evidence. The tomb is empty, but where is Jesus? Like Thomas, unless I put my fingers in His hands and fingers in His feet, I'm not going to believe. Give me physical evidence. I don't want all this conjecture about Him. They must have been thinking that maybe He's a spirit of some kind, or a ghost. Remember when they were crossing the sea, Jesus came walking on the water to them and they were frightened saying, "It's a ghost. It's an apparition!" And Jesus shouted out, "Hang on! It's Me."

So, there's this unbelief that has settled in that takes away from faith. It says, "I want to have hard evidence for me to really believe."

- The theme of extreme love and devotion. We see Mary, Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna – all these ladies coming as soon as the sun has risen, coming to anoint the body of Jesus. Then I love this. They are walking along the way, they're on the way and they're saying, "I wonder who's going to roll the stone away." What really got me was that they didn't stop, saying, "Let's go find somebody." They had something to do which they felt they needed to do, and they headed there.

Sometimes, we wait. We have all kinds of excuses – I'll wait till I have all my ducks in a row, I'll wait till I finish my education, I'll wait till I pay my loans, and so on. And yet, the ladies just said: Hey, we've got to do this. Let's go. Who will roll the stone away? Don't know, but this is what we've got to do. We've got to go and do this." And it got done.

- Being able to know scripture, because when we don't apply the scripture that we know in our heads, then we go in the opposite direction, as those disciples found. They couldn't take all that they know of the Old Testament, all that Jesus had said, all that had transpired in the last day, and put it together. They couldn't, and so they were walking away.
- Then the unbelief and hardness of heart, where the disciples missed a moment to rejoice and look forward with anticipation to a risen Lord, until Jesus appeared to them and He reproaches them, chastises them for their unbelief.

The resurrection is so important, and yet, over the years, so many people have tried to disprove it. I was reading about a person called Gilbert West, I think 18th or 19th century, who decided that he was going to spend time and find all the evidence he could to disprove the resurrection. Midway through that, Jesus met him, or he met Jesus. Through all the evidence that he got, it only pointed to a risen Christ. He ended up writing a book called 'Observation of the History and Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.' Turned completely around!

General Lew Wallace, talking to a person called Englewood, about the rise in the number of people who were Christians. "We've got to do something to disprove it. We've got to pull the rug out from under them. Why don't you write something on the resurrection and why it's not true?" And Lew Wallace started writing, and halfway through, all the evidence pointed to Jesus, and he recognized Jesus as the risen Christ. He ended up writing the book – Ben-Hur.

Frank Morrison, a journalist, a researcher, a lawyer – again, same thing. Started collecting evidence and then realized that all the evidence pointed to a risen Christ. He ended up writing the book, "Who moved the Stone?" All of them – people who tried to disprove the resurrection. Josh McDowell – Evidence that Demands a Verdict – he started by trying to disprove the resurrection and ended up writing reams about how the resurrection has been proved.

All these people were led to a stronger faith because they found that there was so much proof about the risen Christ. It made me think about you and me, and how deeply we believe the resurrection. Not just: Oh yeah! Jesus rose from the dead, but believe it to a fact that if somebody came to you and said, "Hey, what if people just stole the body> that could happen, right? The disciples could have just stolen His body...." Would you be able to say, "No! Scripture says that the scribes and Pharisees went back to Pilate and said: He said that He would rise again after three days. So put a guard. So Pilate put a guard in front of the tomb. You would have to tiptoe around those guards to get to the tomb. Furthermore, you would have to move that stone without letting the guards know you were there; a huge stone that weight a ton. Not possible!

What if people come to you and say – Jesus just fainted on the cross and then they took His body down. If He fainted and they put Him in the grave, and He came to, how could He have come out? Remember that there were about 100 pounds of spice that was put on His body, wrapped around in cloth with aloe. Aloe is like a gum; it binds. It would have been impossible for Jesus to even move had He come to. And even if He could have come up, remember the state that He was in – crucified, crown of thorns, bleeding – to be able to walk out in that weakened state would have been impossible. Then all the talk about 500 people seeing Jesus; maybe they were just hallucinating. It's a fact that no two people can hallucinate the same thing together. You can't. Five hundred people? Impossible.

So, do you believe in the resurrection? Do you believe it beyond a shadow of a doubt in your own heart, and own it? The reason that I'm pressing in here – I know that you're all here and saying, "Resurrection Sunday!" But yet, if the resurrection is true in your life, then it must be foundational for the things that you believe. Do you make the resurrection the foundation to your life? Can you stand on it and live life through the knowledge that Jesus rose from the dead? Is the resurrection the foundation? Paul keeps on saying, "If the resurrection is not true...." and he gives six points. As men, we are most to be pitied if it is not true. Why? Because it is foundational for our lives as Jesus' disciples.

Let me ask you again: Is it foundational to your life? Or are you just standing as if there is a bridge in front in front of you? You say, "This bridge is very strong, I'm sure it can take my weight, I'm sure I can get across." Yet, you stay on this side. Believing, yes, but not trusting completely – that's not being foundational. To put that into context, you've never crossed over into the new life that Paul talks about in Romans 6 which, he says, happens in your baptism. Let's leave the physical act of baptism aside and ask the question: What happens? What does it indicate? What is it symbolic of? It is symbolic of you crossing a bridge, moving from the old life to a new life, going under and coming out into a new life.

Let me ask you – Are you living that new life? Or, having accepted Jesus, you're still sitting there? You haven't really crossed over this resurrection part. You haven't experienced the new life that is talked about. If that's where you are, then your belief in the resurrection hasn't started to inform your behavior and your life. So you look at relationships and your attitude and family and work and ethics and morality and our idea of truth, and it's still the same. You say, "I believe Jesus died for me. I've accepted Jesus as my Savior. I'm saved and I'm going to heaven. Why bother with all this about the resurrection or any of those other areas? I've done what I need to do. I've accepted Jesus into my heart." The reason why it is important is because you are still there; you haven't crossed over from death to life, from the old life into the new life that comes after resurrection.

Beloved, you and I are called to be Christians and to live a life that is very different from the rest of the world. Why? Because that is God's plan – to make known the salvation plan to others. You and I, we showcase this plan of God to a world that hasn't heard of it. And how do we do it? We do it through a transformed life. People look at us and say, "My goodness! I remember when this person was such an irritable person, such a negative person. It was terrible to be around him. But now, what a change!" Or, "This person was so angry. She would always bite my head off. Suddenly she's the sweetest person." Change that has happened, that draws the attention of the world to ask – Why and how has that change happened? I'll tell you how – through the resurrection power.

Romans 8:11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is indwelling you and me and will give life to this mortal body; this mortal body that is sitting on this side and saying, "I've accepted Jesus, but I'm not walking in resurrection life. why? Because I haven't allowed that power that raised Jesus from the dead to work in my life and to produce new life in me." The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you.

What happens then? He will give life to your mortal bodies. This new life is possible because of the power in us. By now, if you're living in that same place, you have found out that it is extremely difficult to change, that you have given up on trying to change and live a new life. Every Sunday is Resurrection Sunday. That's why, even through Lent, Sundays are not considered. It's a Resurrection Sunday. And Resurrection Sunday means we celebrate the power of the resurrection.

So we come together. The writer of Hebrews says, “Not forsaking the gathering of the saints.” Why? We come together and we receive more and more as we celebrate the resurrection, and we go out again to live the kind of life that will draw men and women to Him, and that they will understand this plan of salvation that will take them from a world that is taking them away from God to a world that will take them into the very presence of God. Resurrection power! And we celebrate it every time we come together on a Sunday. That is why it is so important, because every Sunday reminds us that there is a power, an incredible power that is working in me that allows me to live the victorious Christian life; that I don’t have to sit on the other side, saying that I have to strive and strive to change this habit. No! I’m just going to walk across this bridge of distrust and unbelief, and say, “I trust the resurrection power. I’m going to give free reign on this side. Lord, move in me so I see change.”

So I ask you, beloved: Are you struggling with a bad attitude? Resurrection power. Are you struggling with an uncontrollable tongue? Let resurrection power take control. Are you struggling with uncontrollable rage or anger? Let resurrection power help change that. Are you struggling with the desire to hurt yourself? Let that resurrection power bring protection to you who are made in the very image of God. Are you feeling a low self-worth, low self-esteem? Let His resurrection power remind you of who you are and to whom you belong. Do you have a dubious sense of morality? Let that resurrection power come in. “I am the way, the truth and the life.” let truth take place in your life. Do you have a penchant towards lust and lustful thoughts? Let the purity of that resurrection power take control. Is there an inability to walk as a disciple of Jesus? Let resurrection power take charge. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is in your heart and in mine, just waiting to be released to take charge and to allow us to enjoy the power and the presence of a new life, a new allegiance to God.

You probably don’t know the name Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, but during his day, he was a powerful man, a Russian communist leader. He took part in the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, was editor of the Soviet newspaper Pravda, and was a full member of the Politburo. His works on economics and political science are still read today. There’s a story told about a journey he took from Moscow to Kiev in 1930 to address a huge assembly on the subject of atheism. Addressing the crowd, he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity, hurling insults, argument and proof against it. An hour later, he was finished. He looked out at what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men’s faith. “Are there any questions?” Bukharin demanded. Deafening silence filled the auditorium. Then one man approached the platform and mounted the lectern, standing near the communist leader. He surveyed the crowd first to the left, then to the right. Finally, he shouted the ancient greeting known well in the Russian Orthodox Church: “CHRIST IS RISEN!” En masse, the crowd arose as one, and the response came crashing like the sound of thunder: “HE IS RISEN INDEED!” And I say to you, beloved, on this day: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed.

And it’s in that risen power, beloved, that we will go forth. Let’s come to His table in a moment and celebrate with Him during this wonderful moment that has changed and transformed us from being ones who couldn’t enjoy victory, to being ones now who will enjoy victory after victory in the resurrection power of Jesus.

Amen.