

Easter Sunday 2024: Resurrection Power

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Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] Let's pray for the Spirit of God to help us. Heavenly Father, we praise you today because we know indeed Christ is risen.

And yet, Father, we know that there is more that we can always know. And so today, we just want to pray that prayer in Ephesians 1, that you would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we might know you better, that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we might know all the riches, all the spiritual blessings that you have poured out on us.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Do you want to change? Perhaps today you're a neo-Christian, you've heard the gospel, you've accepted Christ, maybe you got baptized last week.

But sometimes, perhaps even often, you catch yourself speaking or behaving in the same way as your pre-Christian self.

And you long for change, to put off the habits of your old way of life and put on a new and better way of living. Or perhaps you're a not-so-neochristian.

[1 : 20] On the so-called obvious sins, you feel like you're doing pretty good. You don't swear or steal or get drunk. But you've become aware that you can sometimes be a little too irritable or a little too judgmental.

Or you realize that you're beginning to turn to online shopping or Netflix too often for comfort rather than God. And you know that's not right.

You want to change. But is it possible? After all, there is nothing worse than trying to do something you know you will fail at.

And no wonder the preacher John Stott once said, I don't know about you, my friends, but I need more than forgiveness in the past. I need power in the present.

I want to ask the question, Is God really able to change human nature? Is it possible for selfish people to be made unselfish?

[2 : 25] Is it possible for immoral people to be given self-control? Is it possible for cruel people to be made kind and sour people to be sweetened?

Wouldn't it be marvelous if that were possible? It would be marvelous, wouldn't it? But such power sounds idealistic.

A piece of fiction even. Does such power to effect such a change even exist? Well, this morning I want you to know the answer is yes.

And the answer is yes because of Easter. Without Easter, no such power is available. But because of Easter, such power is accessible.

You see, I don't think we normally put Easter and power together, do we? What are we more likely to associate with Easter? My guess is that we think about hope.

[3 : 33] And that is absolutely right. Come with me to verse 18 of our passage today. And there you will see that Paul prays we will come to experience for ourselves this certain, confident, concrete hope.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you. After all, a lack of hope is a dreadful thing.

When a person doesn't have hope, it means he cannot imagine any sort of bright future. A student feels hopeless when she thinks she will never pass the exam no matter how many hours she studies.

A prisoner feels hopeless when he realises the cell he's in is where he will be for the rest of his life. And for many people, they cannot face up to death because death seems to end every possible future.

Even the brightest ones. Death seems to push us to a life without hope. But Easter tells us that God has called us to a future that lies beyond death.

[4 : 52] According to the Bible, Easter means that death has just become a boarding gate to another destination. To a perfected life in a perfected world.

A life with no more pain or tears. And if we trust in Christ, we have guaranteed passage. So, absolutely, Easter is about hope.

And I think we also usually associate Easter with assurance. And again, that's absolutely right. Notice that's what Paul prays we will also come to know in verse 18.

He prays we will know the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. Now, notice the way Paul says it.

Here, he's not talking about what we will inherit. He's talking about what God will inherit. As his people, we are his possession that he looks forward to enjoying forever in the new creation.

[6 : 06] We are his inheritance that he treasures. Imagine that you've just spent a huge amount to buy something. Maybe some rare collector's item or a piece of artwork.

Maybe even a fancy car. Now, having spent so much on it, you wouldn't just toss it into the trash or let toddlers play with it, would you?

You would take care of it with all your heart. And God has bought his people with the precious blood of his only son and Easter is the sure and certain proof payment has been made.

In the resurrection, God has stamped paid in full and this belongs to me on your life and my life.

And he intends to protect, preserve and cherish what belongs to him for all eternity. Easter also gives us assurance.

[7 : 18] But now, Paul doesn't stop there because look at verse 19. He also prays, we will know God's incomparably great power for us who believe.

Again, notice what Paul is not praying. He's not praying at this point that we would have power. He's not praying that God will give us more power.

Rather, he is praying that Christians will know the power that is at work in their lives already. He's really praying that we will come to know and understand and experience that because Christ is risen from the dead, we don't just have hope, we don't just have assurance, we also have power to change.

We have resurrection power. And that will have been especially encouraging for the Ephesian Christians within it. You see, they live in a place obsessed with power.

For example, there's a story of a wrestler in Ephesus wearing some kind of magical amulet on his ankle to ensure he kept winning. And the Christians in Ephesus could so easily have felt powerless given that they don't wear magical amulets or have spoken charms like they are non-Christian neighbours.

[8 : 53] But now, Paul wants them to understand what Easter has achieved for them. And that's what he wants us to know as well.

And so this morning we'll be exploring this theme and I want to show us three things from this passage about resurrection power. Firstly, resurrection power is a genuine reality.

Resurrection power is a genuine reality. You see, how do we know that this resurrection power is not a figment of our imagination?

How do we know that it's really real and really strong and not something we made up? Well, look again at verse 19.

that power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead. And so Paul says, let's go back to the story of Jesus.

[9 : 58] And here is the reality. On Good Friday, Jesus was completely, entirely, wholly, utterly dead. From top to bottom.

God shoved a spear through his body and he didn't move. Water and blood gushed from his side, confirming from a medical point of view there was no more life in him.

As we learned on Good Friday, he had been completely rejected and despised. The Jews mocked him, get off the cross, and he seemed powerless to do so.

And that picture of powerlessness is completed at his death. What can be more powerless than a complete corpse? And everyone in the ancient world knew that.

Sometimes it is tempting to think that people back then are maybe less clever or less scientific than us. But of course, they know just as well as we do what death is.

[11 : 09] They know just as well as we do that death is a one-way street. No one has an answer to it. No one can escape it. Once it comes, everyone knew, whether they lived in the first or the 21st century, that that's it.

So, when Jesus died, the disciples were not saying, oh, that's part of the game plan. He'll be back in a few days. There wasn't some grand conspiracy to say, oh, let's make people believe that Jesus will come to life again.

No. They were confused and broken hearted. Jesus was someone they thought was not supposed to die. They thought he would come triumphant, but he ended up crucified.

And so, at this point, they did what they naturally do for all dead people. They tried to give Jesus a proper burial, seal him in a tomb, and as would be common practice, they probably expected to come back years later, open the tomb, take the bones, and put it into what is called an ossuary, which is like a box for bones.

So just like we keep ashes today, they kept bones. But that never happened. Because what happened?

[12 : 45] On that first Easter Sunday, there had been a huge, immovable tombstone. But now it's been moved away. On that first Easter Sunday, there had been some intimidating Roman soldiers posted at that very tomb.

But now they are nowhere to be found. But most importantly, on that first Easter Sunday, there had been a lifeless, motionless body in that very tomb.

But now that tomb is completely empty. And the only explanation that makes good historical sense, as we've just seen on the video, is this.

God has raised Jesus bodily from the dead. That sense of powerlessness and death on Good Friday, it has all been reversed.

Whoever you think is the most powerful figure in history, Alexander the Great, Emperor Constantine, Genghis Khan, none of them had the power to do this.

[13 : 53] in Acts chapter 2 verse 24, when Peter is describing this event in a sermon to the crowds, he said this, but God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Now, if we stop to think about it, we usually say the reverse of what Peter said, don't we? We say it's impossible for any of us to overcome death.

That's the impossibility. But Peter reverses it. He says it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Imagine that. That is the resurrection power at work here. It is so powerful, it is impossible for Jesus to remain dead.

So can you grasp the magnitude of this resurrection power? Let me try to convey the sense of it in another way. A month or so ago, I read a feature in the New York Times about nuclear weapons.

[15 : 17] They imagine what happens if a nuclear warhead, which is probably just a little bit bigger than my laptop. What happens if it's launched? When it explodes, an instantaneous white flash envelopes the sky for miles, briefly blinding everyone who sees it.

A raw equal to 10,000 tons of TNT quakes the ground below. A massive fireball immediately gathers with temperatures hotter than the surface of the sun.

Anything flammable, wood, plastics, even small animals, will burst into flames immediately. The firestorm consumes so much oxygen, you will suffocate even if sheltering in your home.

The sound will rumble on at supersonic speeds, and a thick mushroom cloud will rise into the air for miles. Reading all that, I was struck dumb.

I even had to stop reading the article for a while. But here's the thing, even that kind of power cannot compare with this resurrection power.

[16 : 44] Nuclear power can only affect things in this physical world. But this resurrection power transcends that. It affects things beyond the physical world.

For not only does this power raise Christ from the dead, verse 20, it has seated Christ at the right hand in the heavenly realms.

It has exalted him to the special position of honor and privilege. It is a way of saying Christ is sharing in the Father's throne.

And it is, verse 21, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in this present age, but also in the one to come.

Jesus reigns supreme, not just over every single human, but even over every other supernatural power you can think of. Easter establishes Jesus as the one above absolutely everything.

[17 : 53] That's how earth-shattering this power is. And we know it is not historical fiction, but a genuine reality, because there is no body in the tomb.

Christ is risen. So that's the first thing Paul wants to point out. But here is his big point for today.

You see, you might say, oh, okay, okay, I get it. This power is out of this world. It's one of a kind. But that was 2,000 years ago.

This is 2024. What does this matter for today? Well, Paul says that incredible, incomparable resurrection power that I've just described, well, that resurrection power is a present reality at work in us.

And that's the second thing we want to say today. That resurrection power is a present reality at work in us. You see, that resurrection power that God unleashed in raising Jesus wasn't just limited to Jesus.

- [19 : 20] No, it is also for us who believe. That's what verse 19 says. That great power and mighty strength that meant it was impossible for death to keep a hold on Jesus.
- It's the same power at work in you today. If you trust in Jesus, isn't that incredible?
- And that is precisely why Paul goes on to give us Ephesians 2, verse 1 to 10. I'm sure this is a familiar chapter for many of you, but let's place it in its wider context.
- You see, why does Paul go on to tell us chapter 2? Well, it's his way of saying, do you remember that pattern of death to life to exhortation that we just saw in the story of Christ?
- Well, that very same pattern of death to life to exhortation is also your very story too if you are a Christian.
- [20 : 40] Put it another way, that resurrection power that was at work in Christ, well, that very same resurrection power is at work in you too.
- Let me show you how. Let's talk, first of all, about the fact that you and I were dead, Ephesians 2 verse 1 to 3.
- Remember how on Good Friday Jesus was completely, totally, absolutely dead? There's no doubt about it. Well, that's what it was like spiritually for you and I too.
- You and I may be physically alive, but our spiritual condition mirrored Jesus' physical condition on the cross. Dead.
- Not just sick, not just injured, not even just terribly injured, dead. There's no doubt about it.
- [21 : 43] Verse 1, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. And just as Jesus' death wasn't accidental, neither was ours.
- Rather, this death came about because we decided to show God the middle finger, and in fact, we were wheeling foot soldiers of the chief hater and rebel against God, Satan.
- Look at verse 2. We followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, that's Satan, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.
- And you might say, hang on, hang on, Paul, what are you talking about? I'm not a Satan worshipper. But, verse 3, because we live for our own cravings, our own desires, ourselves, we were basically doing what Satan does.
- We are telling God he cannot rule our lives. And so the result, verse 3 again, is simply that we were by nature deserving of wrath.
- [23 : 01] Now, I don't know if that's how you naturally view yourself outside of Christ, as spiritually did. but in order to appreciate the true gravity of God's resurrection power at work in us, we need to understand the gravity of our prior situation.
- Let's put it this way, that nuclear warhead that I just talked about just now. Well, imagine if you live within a hundred metres of where it hit.
- Your chances of survival are zero percent. That's what our chances of survival are, spiritually speaking, outside of Christ.
- That's the sobering truth. if today you are outside of Christ, the Bible pulls no punches. It says you are in incredible danger because you've got a one-way ticket to losing everything.
- But remember, Paul doesn't tell us Ephesians 2 verse 1 to 3 to depress us. No, he says this so that we will appreciate that just as Christ was really dead, but God's power could raise him to life.
- [24 : 28] We were really dead and yet his power can also raise us to life. It's the same pattern. And so in verses 4 and 5, Paul shows us the turning point.
- But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved.

We were dead, but now we're made alive. That's the significance of Easter. Not just that Jesus is risen, but with him, so are we.

Let's be clear what God is not doing. He's not just giving us a booster shot as if he's just topping up our life energy. You might not have seen this story, but there was actually someone in Germany who got 217 COVID-19 vaccination jabs.

I have no idea how he managed to pull that off. But if someone has died, even 217 COVID-19 booster shots isn't going to rescue him.

[25 : 49] And God wasn't just lending a helping hand. Later today, if you walk along the street and you see an elderly beggar who has fallen down, you can help him get up.

But if you come across a dead body later on, you can't lend any helping hand to him. It's no use. what you need is not just good intentions.

You need power. And God has that power at his fingertips and he used it to raise you up.

He used it to make you alive. And just as God didn't stop at raising Christ from the dead, but exalted him in the heavenly realms, did you notice?

That's what has happened to you and I too. Verse 6, And God raises up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

[27 : 00] And do you remember where Christ is seated? At God's right hand, far above all rulers and authorities. that is where we are.

In Christ, we have a heavenly status and that means we have access to heavenly power. That is the picture Paul is painting for us.

And my friends, Paul is not just talking about something in the future. He's talking about right now. we are in this hall on earth, but we can enjoy something of the life of heaven even now.

We can enjoy something of the power of heaven even now because we are seated with Christ right now. stop to ponder that for a second.

Isn't that overwhelming? This is what Easter has done for you and I. But why?

[28 : 14] What is God's motivation in doing all this? Verse 5 tells us it is by grace you have been saved. Verse 7 echoes that God wanted to show the incomparable riches of his grace expressing his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

You see, God didn't channel all this resurrection power unto us because we had good looks or a charming personality or an exemplary attitude.

And that is good news because if that was the basis, what happens when we lose our good looks? What happens if our personality and attitude changes for the worse as is possible over time?

If that was the basis, then the moment we lose those things, we lose what we have in Christ. But thank God that is not the basis.

God chose to set his love on us even when we were on team Satan, busy thinking only about ourselves and giving him the middle finger.

[29 : 32] That is grace. You know, we said that there is a parallel between Christ and us. He died. We died. But there is also a difference.

We die because we thoroughly deserve it. But when Christ died, he took on something he didn't deserve.

And in fact, the very reason we can be made alive is because he chose to take on our punishment of death. And that's how we know God's grace and mercy is not just theory.

because the living Christ chose to go to the grave to make you and I come alive. He didn't just do it out of a grudging obligation.

He didn't even just do it to keep us out of hell. He did it. Verse 7, so that he can shower the riches of his unmerited favour on you and I for all eternity.

[30 : 43] That's the reason God has directed his resurrection power to you and I. You and I are made alive in Christ and seated with him so that God's love can pour out on you like a never ending waterfall.

That in itself is such great news already but there is one more thing to say about this resurrection power. Thirdly, this resurrection power is a present reality at work for us and through us.

You see, here is the good news that we've seen so far. We have God's resurrection power at work in us, enabling us to be with him and praise him and to live for him.

God's resurrection power is not just at work in us but also outside of us for us.

Look back at Ephesians 1 verse 21 to 22. Christ is seated far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

[32 : 05] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church. did you catch that?

We know already that these verses are telling us that Jesus is the king of kings, he's the lord over everything. Everything is placed under his feet as the new and perfect Adam. But look at the end of verse 22.

Who will Jesus use his power for? Who is going to benefit from his reign? It is the church.

The ruler of the universe is for us. Christ will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And so, no matter what decisions are made in the human corridors of power, no matter how many people might gather to protest and oppose his people, no matter what the economic situation is, no matter what, Easter tells us that Christ is working as the king of kings so that we, the church, will not collapse but be presented on that last day as a bride, holy and blameless in his sight.

And so God's resurrection power is a present reality at work for us. but not only that, it is also a present reality at work through us.

[33 : 48] Because Paul doesn't just tell us verse 22 but also verse 23. He tells us that Christ is not just the head, but we are his body.

And so that means we are presently connected with Christ. And if we are connected with Christ, that means we are connected with his plan.

We are connected with his purposes. The body does what the head tells it to do. And what is God's purpose for us?

Well, jump down with me to Ephesians chapter 2 verse 10, which was just outside our Bible reading today. For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

You see, we have been made alive to do what God loves to do, to spread goodness. I like how the New Testament scholar, Timothy Gombis, puts it.

[34 : 54] He says, God loves to display his grace by transforming people from an existence in death to an existence of doing good works and walking in the way of life.

life. Just as God designed humanity to be bodies animated by the breath of God, so now we are bodies enjoying God's life-giving presence and transforming power.

And that is why Ephesians 1 verse 23 describes the church as being the fullness of God that fills everything in every way.

Now, that is a bit of an enigmatic phrase, but let me try to unpack the basic idea which I learned from a friend of mine. You see, what has always been God's intention for human beings?

Back in Genesis 1 verse 28, he commanded Adam and Eve, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Fill it with people made in the image of God who will reflect the goodness of God.

[36 : 05] Later on in Genesis 12, he tells Abraham his intention. I plan to multiply your offspring so that you will bring blessing to the whole earth.

You will fill the earth with blessing. But the problem is, the opposite frequently happens. In Genesis 6, during Noah's time, we're told that the earth is filled with violence and corruption.

In Isaiah 2, verse 8, the land is filled with idols. And yet, in places like Psalm 72, for example, which is a psalm about the Messiah, we hear this cry, may the earth be filled with his glory.

So we know that that is still God's intention. And that brings us to Ephesians 1, verse 23. We know that the Messiah is here.

Everything is under his feet. And his resurrection power is available to us now. But for what purposes?

[37 : 18] It is the same. So that the whole earth may be filled with his glory. It is so that his glorious fullness fills everything through the people of God who are filled by his spirit with his resurrection power.

His resurrection power is meant to be at work presently through us so that we can be a changed people, full of goodness, giving glory to him, and bringing others to do the same.

So my brothers and sisters, do you wonder if we can change? Do you wonder if we can change not just ourselves, but the world?

By ourselves, we can't. We are nothing less than dead. We are weak creatures. And when we try to find the strength to change ourselves, when we try by ourselves to do something strong for God, it wouldn't work.

God says that is a surefire strategy for failure. But here is what we can do instead. We should run to God and ask him to grant us his spirit to enable us to understand and take hold and absorb and grip tightly the strong things God has done.

[38 : 57] And that is what Paul prays for in chapter 1 verse 17, isn't it? These efficient Christians do already know Jesus. They are living for him. That is clear in verse 15.

But Paul prays, I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

And that is how we can have power to change, by pursuing ever more deeply and passionately the God of Easter, the God who grants us resurrection power, the God whose resurrection power is at work in us right now.

As the children's song puts it, little ones to him belong, we are weak, but he is strong.

And even as adults, we remain the little ones. We are weak, he is strong. So pray hard to know this power.

[40 : 18] Pray as you read the Bible, you will know this power. Pray as you go about your day that you will experience this power. Pray that as you talk with others, you will be filled with the knowledge of this power.

Pray in the midst of trials and weaknesses, you will believe that God has given this power to you. Pray that you will know Easter not just to be something that happened 2,000 years ago, but something that can be a reality all the days of your life.

Let's pray for this now. Father, we thank you for this glorious truth that you have not just called us to know the hope that you have given us, not just to know the fact that we are your inheritance, but also to know this incomparably great power that is at work for us who believe.

Thank you that though we were dead in our transgressions and sins, you have made us alive with Christ and even seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. Father, help us just to come to terms with just how magnificent that is.

Perhaps we don't quite grasp it yet. And in light of that, help us to live for you as your handiwork to do the good works you have prepared us to do. And we continue to pray, we keep asking that the spirit of wisdom and revelation will help us to keep knowing you more and more.

[42 : 00] We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.