

The Way of the Cross To Resurrection Power

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch

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Throughout each of the Sundays of Lent we have looked at the Cross upon which Jesus Christ died. We have looked at the amazing blessings and benefits we receive because of what Jesus did for us upon that Cross. We have seen that the cross shapes our identity. It defines who we are. The cross reveals two powerful things. There is something so seriously wrong with me that it requires the death of the Son of God to deal with me. There is something so incredibly valuable about me that the Son of God would give his life for me. This morning we look beyond the Cross at the empty tomb and see the even greater blessings and benefits that are ours because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact to believe and a reality to experience. In order to fully experience the power of the Resurrection both are required. One without the other is incomplete. Some people believe that the Resurrection is a fact—it happened 2,000 years ago. But they have never experienced its power. Others believe that the Resurrection is merely a spiritual experience, but not a fact. If you believe one without the other, you miss something.

People with inquiring minds like to look at the historical evidence for the Resurrection. The Apostle Paul made it clear in his letter to the Corinthians that anyone who wants to investigate the facts will find that the Resurrection is true. He told the Corinthians that over 500 people saw the Resurrected Jesus. He told anyone who doubted the Resurrection to go talk to an eyewitness. All the writers of the New Testament made it clear. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical fact. Jesus rose bodily from the

dead and ascended into heaven never to die again. Some people accept this fact of the Resurrection, but they have no profound experience of its power in their lives.

On the other hand there are persons who do not believe the fact of the Resurrection, but believe it only has spiritual significance. Several years ago I talked to a pastor friend of mine who was struggling with what to preach on Easter. I said: "Well, I'm thinking about preaching on the Resurrection." He replied: "I don't believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead. I believe that something happened that changed the disciples' lives but we have no clue what really happened. But I don't think Jesus really rose from the dead." There are many persons who believe that what matters is that the spirit of Jesus lived on in his followers even though he did not physically rise from the dead. The teachings and purposes of Jesus live on even though he is dead. This is similar to what Muslims believe about Mohammed. His teachings and purposes live on in his followers, even though he is dead.

How sad. What a tremendous loss if we do not believe that the Resurrection is an historical fact. If Jesus is not alive, then he is only an example. All we can do is follow his teachings. We cannot follow him or know him or talk to him. He is not a real force or presence in our lives. He is merely a good example to follow.

The persons who wrote the New Testament clearly believed both. The resurrection of Jesus Christ really happened and they experienced the reality of its power in their lives. To the Apostle Paul this is the most important thing in life. His highest goal is to know Jesus Christ. In verse seven of our scripture reading, Paul says he considers everything else in his life as rubbish compared to the "surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus Christ."

In verse 11 Paul tells us he wants three things in life. First he says: "I want to know Christ." You cannot know a dead man. You can know about a dead man. But you cannot

know a dead man. Paul believes Jesus was raised from the dead and is alive, and we can know him. We can experience a relationship with him.

How do we get to know Christ? How do we experience a relationship with him that is beyond mere mental acknowledgement of the fact of the Resurrection? How do you experience a relationship with anyone? You talk to them. You listen to them. You share life experiences together. You celebrate joys together, and you walk through struggles together. The same is true with Jesus. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me.” Jesus invites us to share a meal with him. This symbolizes enjoying a relationship with him. When we want to get to know someone better, one way to do that is to invite them into our home for meal. Jesus wants to get to know us—to have a relationship with us. He invites us to have a meal with him. We develop the relationship as we talk with him. How do we talk with him? We pray. Prayer is just a conversation with Jesus. You do not need to have a special vocabulary to talk with Jesus. You just talk with him as you would a friend. You talk with him about what you are feeling and thinking. You talk with him about what is going on in your life. You ask his advice. You ask for his help. And you listen to him. Jesus speaks to us through a still small inner voice as we pray. But he primarily speaks to us through the Bible. It is the Word of God—the main way he speaks to us. When we go through a joyful experience, we go through it with him. When we go through a difficult time, we go through it with him—he is our friend. To experience a relationship means that we sense his presence during the day just as we sense the presence of our friends and loved ones. Sometimes we just sit in silence together. And sometimes his love just overwhelms us. When you are in relationship and you experience someone’s love—how do you describe it? You can’t, but you know it is there and it is real.

In a real relationship we experience a variety of things. Margaret sometimes confronts me. Sometimes she gets angry with me. Sometimes she makes me laugh. The same is true in my relationship with Jesus. Sometimes he challenges me. Sometimes I get angry at him. I don't understand why he allows bad things to happen in my life. I argue with him about things that I don't understand. I ask him what in the world he thinks he is doing! Sometimes Jesus gets frustrated with me, and asks me when I'm going to let go and trust him completely. A real relationship with Jesus is full, vital and real. It is multidimensional like any real relationship. We experience all of life together—the ups and the downs. It is two-way relationship.

Do you know Jesus? Religious people believe the facts about Jesus. They are very busy doing religious activities. They expect God to make everything in their lives smooth sailing. When something bad happens, they think God has let them down or is punishing them. They do not want to have anything to do with him. Many people quit church because they feel like God let them down. But the reality is they never had a relationship with him.

Persons who know Jesus walk with him through every experience of their lives—the good and the bad. When I go through a rough time, I might question him about why this happening. I will be honest with him. But I will keep talking with him. As I talk with him, I realize I could not make it without him. I'm thankful that I do not have to go through this rough time alone. Jesus will walk with me through the experience. I can lean on him. He will give me strength and comfort. As I walk with him through this experience I draw closer to him.

Couples who go through a crisis together, lean on each other. They face it together and cry together. They encourage each other and comfort each other. And they come through it closer to one another. They get to know one another at a deeper level by going through these experiences together. The same is true in our relationship with Jesus. Paul

said: “I want to know Christ.” How about you? Do you know Jesus? Let’s listen as Pastor S.M. Lockridge asks that question in powerful way.

VIDEO: “That’s My King”

Paul said not only did he want to know Jesus; he wanted to know the power of his resurrection. To know the power of his resurrection goes beyond just knowing Jesus. Some people enjoy a relationship with Jesus—they know him as a friend. To experience the power of his resurrection means to experience his transforming power to become like him. The same life energy that flowed into Jesus’ dead body can come into my dead soul and raise me up. It is a supernatural power that enables me to become like Jesus. What does that mean? His resurrection power can take the dead stuff in me and transform it. He can take the resentment inside of me and transform it to forgiveness. He can take the insecurity in me and transform it to confidence. He can take the selfishness in me and transform it to extravagant generosity.

To know the power of his resurrection means that I experience more than a relationship with Jesus, I receive power to change—to become like him. Too often we want to use Jesus for our own personal success. We tell him our plans and ask him to bless them. We like having him as our buddy. But we don’t want him to change us. We don’t want to ask him if he might have plans for us that might be different from our plans.

As we get to know him, we grow to trust him. We know that he wants the best for us. His plans may be different from ours, but his plans will be better. As our creator he knows what works and what is best. He wants to mold us and shape us into his image—to become all that he created us to be. He wants to set us free from the dead things in our lives. He wants to give us life and give it to us abundantly. When we get to know Jesus, we want to be like him. We want to experience his courage, his love, his wisdom and his

power. When we really get to know Jesus, we want his resurrection power to transform us to become like him.

Paul says he wants to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection and to share in the fellowship of his sufferings. Why would he put that last? Why wouldn't he say I want to share his sufferings then experience the power of his resurrection? Jesus suffered on the cross and then was resurrected. You would think that Paul would say that he wanted to experience suffering first and then resurrection power on the other side. But instead he says that he will share in Jesus' suffering after experiencing the power of his resurrection. Why? Because it is by the power of the resurrection that we become like Jesus. When we begin to live like Jesus in the world, we will experience what he did. Jesus spoke the truth in love. He turned the other cheek. He spent time with the down and out. He challenged the status quo. He confronted pretentiousness and greed. He was an advocate for the oppressed. When the resurrection power of Jesus makes us more like him, then we will live in the world as he lived. That means we will live counter to the values of the world. We will be dangerous to business as usual. We will live in such a way that we will challenge materialism, injustice, superficiality and greed. As a result, we will experience the same rejection, mockery and persecution he did. But, like him we will transform the world. We will turn it right side up—we will join with Christ in restoring the world to what he intended it to. As Jesus lives through us we will experience a life of eternal significance. It is a dangerous, yet exciting life.

Do you know Jesus? Do you know the power of his resurrection? Will you join in the fellowship of his suffering? It is the only way to experience the fullness of life as God created it to be.