

March 27, 2005 by Steve Brandon



The Power of the Resurrection

Philippians 3:10a

1. The Power of the Resurrection in Christ

2. The Power of the Resurrection in Us

Every time that I go on a trip on an airplane to a distant place, several thoughts always go through my mind. Picture the process with me. We pack our suitcases. I am usually the one with the responsibility to take the suitcases downstairs. I am usually the one who will place the suitcases in our car. As we walk through the airport, I am often the one who bears the load of the majority of our luggage. We stand before the ticket counter, and I'm the one who lifts the luggage up onto the scale, that it might be checked onto the plane. In these moments, I have two thoughts: (1) Perhaps we can pack lighter next time; and (2) How will the plane ever get off the ground?

I can barely lift our luggage off the ground, but we are soon to board an airplane with a hundred or two hundred other people who are in the same situation, with similar luggage situations. How will the airplane lift off the ground? These thoughts are consuming for me. My wife will attest that I verbalize these thought every time we fly together.

As we accelerate down the runway, thoughts run through my mind of the incredible weight that is on the airplane. I think of the strength of the wings and wonder whether they will break under all of the pressure. And yet, never fail, the powerful jet engines thrust the airplane along, we are pressed into the back of our seats, and the design of the wings lift the plane off the ground. Soon we are at 30,000 feet and I think nothing more of it, ... until our return trip when I carry our luggage to the car and to the baggage counter.

Now, as a physics major in college, I understand how it is that an airplane gets off the ground. I understand Bernoulli's Principle, which give the plane its lift. I understand the forces at work: gravity and lift. I understand that the lift of the wings is greater than the force of gravity, which allows the plane to fly. I understand the strength of steel, and the design of the wings to withstand the weight of the plane. So, it's not a matter of understanding. Rather, it's a matter of experiencing that of which I know. It's a matter of awe and wonder and amazement.

I tell you that story because there are parallels for our Christian lives. As believers in Christ, there is a power that we know of that ought to cause us to marvel and to wonder and to be amazed. We ought to desire to experience it fully. I'm talking about the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in our lives. The title of my message this morning is "The Power of the Resurrection." We will look at half of one verse this morning, Philippians 3:10a, which will form a sort of launching pad for us to ponder the resurrection this morning.

Philippians 3 is a great passage of Scripture, in which Paul clearly describes how it is not our works that bring us into good standing with God. But, rather, it is faith in the righteousness of Christ that makes us righteous before God. Having established that reality, Paul comes down to this great statement in verse 10, "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

There are several things in this one verse that we could unpack. We could look at Paul's great desire to know Him! Like every Christian, Paul knew Christ, but it was his consuming desire to know Him more intimately. Paul's desire was similar to the desire of the husband, who is madly in love with his wife (as I am). Certainly, he knows her. But, his desire is to know her more deeply.

We could also look at Paul's desire to fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. Every Christian is involved in a battle. Paul's heart was to be so like Christ that He would share in His sufferings. The sufferings of the believer are no small and insignificant subject in the Bible. But this morning, I will pass on this subject because of our focus on the resurrection this Sunday.

We are simply going to focus our attention upon this one phrase of Paul, "the power of His resurrection." However much we know about this power, we ought to have an ever increasing desire within us to know more about this power. This is the heart of Paul. You can almost feel him longing and groping for a fuller understanding of this power that was displayed in the resurrection. He says, "that I might know ... the power of His resurrection."

My outline this morning will have two points, as we seek to unpack a bit of this simple phrase, "the power of His resurrection." First, we will look at "The Power of the Resurrection" ... in Christ. Second, we will look at "The Power of the Resurrection" ... in us.

1. The Power of the Resurrection in Christ

I get this point from one word in the text. The word is "His," which refers to Christ. Paul is longing to know more about the power of the resurrection of Christ. There is a great power that has been made evident in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There are other places in which the Scriptures speak of the power of the resurrection.

On such instance is in the beginning of Paul's epistle to the Romans. In his rather lengthy introduction, Paul says in verse 4 that Jesus "was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). In other words, through the powerful display of

resurrecting the body of Jesus from the dead, God the Father declared that Jesus was the Son of God.

It takes great power to raise a dead body. I did a bit of research this week to discover what happens to a body when it dies from a physiological standpoint. When a body dies, several processes take place, the whole sequence of which depends upon the manner of death that takes place. In the case of Jesus, He died of asphyxiation, because He could no longer breathe. As He hung on the cross, His breaths became more and more shallow. As a result, there was less and less oxygen to be pumped through His body. Eventually, some of His muscles and internal organs would begin to be oxygen starved and would react. Muscles would cramp and other organs would stop working as they lacked the needed oxygen. One crucial muscle was His heart. When His heart no longer received enough oxygen, it stopped beating and cut off all flow of oxygen to his body. When that took place, the cells in His body would stop functioning, as they had no link to the needed oxygen. However, this would not take place all at once. Only when metabolic waste products build up would they stop.

When He said, "It is finished," and yielded up His spirit (John 19:30), His body temperature began to drop at about 2.5 degrees F an hour. His muscles relaxed, and the skin sagged into new shapes. When He was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, His blood would settle. Gravity would drain the blood from capillaries in the upper surfaces of His body and cause it to collect in the blood vessels in the lower surfaces. His skin near the top turned pale, while His underside was darkened in appearance. As the cells in the body died, they lost their ability to fight off bacteria. Bacteria began to form in His intestine, causing it to rupture. The putrefaction spread across the stomach, down the thighs, and over the chest. The bacteria produced gas that bulged the eyes, protruded the tongue, and pushed blood-stained fluid through orifices. Within only a few hours, rigor mortis would have set in, stiffening His eyelids and joints. After a few days in the tomb, the body of Jesus was a hunk of organic protoplasm.

This is what happens to every body that dies. Years earlier, God had promised to protect the body of Messiah from decay (Psalm 16:10), which is why Jesus was raised from the dead. To take His flesh and give life to each cell in His body and transform the corpse into a living organism would take great power, which is the point of Romans 1:4. In some sense, it is easier to start the formation of a body from scratch. With buildings, there are times when it is easier to tear down the building and start over, rather than remodel. But that's not how the Lord planned to do it with Jesus. He planned on raising the corpse of Jesus from the dead, thereby designating Him to be the Son of God.

At this point, you might well ask, "The Bible records many people who rose from the dead. For instance, Elisha raised the widow's son (2 Kings 4:18-37). Jesus raised several people from the dead. He raised a little girl (Matthew 9:18-26) and Lazarus (John 11). Near the end of Matthew, we read of many bodies being raised from the dead when Jesus died (Matt. 27:52-53). Peter even got into the action by raising Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36-43). How is the resurrection of Christ different than the resurrection of all of these others in the Bible?" Why is the resurrection of Christ so closely associated with power? Aren't the other resurrections a similar display of power?"

This is a great question. Everything that I said about a dying body was true for each of these resurrections as well. It certainly took great power to raise each of these corpses from the dead. So, what's so special about the resurrection of Christ. For the answer, we will look at Ephesians 1. The simple answer to the question is this: **when Jesus was raised, it wasn't simply to life, where He might die again. When Jesus was raised, it was a raising from the dead to the highest position in the universe, over all rule and authority.** This is what comes out in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Paul prays, "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:18-19a).

This is a great prayer. It's a prayer for greater wisdom and understanding and insight into our glorious salvation.

1. Oh, that God would show you the wonderful "hope of your calling" (verse 18). Oh, that you might see the great hope that you have in Christ. Though life upon the earth is difficult, there is a hope far greater and far beyond this life. If you see it and understand it, your life will change. You will gladly endure the temporary afflictions of this life, knowing what awaits you in the coming age.

2. Oh, that God would show you the abundant "riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (verse 18). Oh, that you would understand the scope of the spiritual blessings that you have in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Oh, that you would understand God's electing love (Eph. 1:4-5). Oh, that you would grasp the redemption that you have in Christ (Eph. 1:7). In Him, your sins are completely wiped away. Oh, that you would understand the working of the Holy Spirit, Who has sealed you until the day of redemption (Eph. 1:14). If you see and understand these things, your life will change. You will realize how blessed you are to be a child of God.

3. Oh, that God would show you "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (verse 19). Oh, that you would understand the magnitude of God's power. Paul describes this power in the last half of verse 19 through verse 21. He works in you according to "The Power of the Resurrection." Look at these verses...

Ephesians 1:19b-22a

These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet.

These verses are heaping in their description of the marvelous power and authority of Jesus. First of all, Jesus was raised from the dead. That is a display of great power. As the Jews say, "That would have been enough." But, the power of God in Christ was greater than that. Paul went on to say that Jesus was "seated ... at His right hand in the heavenly places" (verse 20). This is the seat of highest honor and authority. There is no greater seat of authority than the seat at the right hand of God. This is the seat of rule and power. This is the thrust of verse 21, where Paul said that this seat is "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion."

The seat at the right hand of God is above every ruler. It's above George Bush and the American presidency. It's above Tony Blair and the

English parliament. It's above Vladimir Putin and the Russian presidency. It's above Hu Jintao of China. I don't care how big and powerful and influential a country or its ruler is, the right hand of God is above all of them. In fact, it is "far above" their rule. Think of a world leader of the past: Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus, George Washington, or Winston Churchill. You name the ruler and the seat at the right hand of God is far above them all. Dream of a world leader in the future. Dream what you like of one man ruling all of the world. The seat at the right hand of God is far above it all in power and authority.

Dream of science fiction being real. Dream of the capability of travelling at warp speed and being able to visit all reaches of our universe. Dream of an emperor ruling the entire universe. The seat at the right hand of God would be far above any in this position. Think of the angelic realm. Think of the host of heaven. Think of the demonic spirits. There is not a demon or an angel whose authority rivals that of the Son of God upon His throne. The language here is inclusive enough to include everything in this realm and also in the spiritual realm. Verse 22 begins by pointing out that everything is in subjection under the feet of Jesus. There is nothing that exists that is not under the feet of Jesus.

Paul wrote these things that we might see and understand the incredible power of God that took place in the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is powerful. When you think of the resurrection, and its power, you ought to think beyond the mere body. Jesus didn't merely rise from the dead, only to die again. When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was to take the highest place of honor in the entire universe. When you think this way about the resurrection, then you will rightly understand the resurrection.

When the apostles preached the resurrection, they often included the exaltation of Jesus into their preaching. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached of the risen Christ, who has been "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33). Before the Sanhedrin, Peter spoke of how God "raised up Jesus ... and exalted [Him] to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior" (Acts 5:30, 31). When Paul preached in Psidian Antioch, he repeatedly spoke of the resurrection (Acts 13:30, 33, 34, 37), which included a reference to Psalm 2, which speaks of the coronation of the King over all nations. When Paul preached in Athens, he said that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead has "furnished proof to all men" that Jesus has been exalted as judge over all the earth (Acts 17:31).

This is "The Power of the Resurrection in Christ." Do you long to know of this power? Paul did. If we think back to our main text in Philippians 3, Paul says, "That I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection." Paul wanted to know this power. But, more than that, Paul wanted others to know this power. The whole point of this prayer comes in verse 17, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." Paul wanted to know the power of the resurrection. Paul wanted others to know the power of the resurrection.

Have you ever read a book that impacted you and helped you in your Christian life? Have you ever listened to a particular tape or CD that has been of great encouragement to you? Have you ever watched a video that impacted you? If you have, what have you done? My guess is that you have spoken to others about the book or the tape or CD or DVD. My guess is that you have even encouraged others to read it or see it or listen to it. This is the heart of Paul with respect to the resurrection. He knows about the power of the resurrection, and earnestly desires others to know about it. Do you want to know the power of the resurrection?

You need to be warned: a full knowledge of the resurrection is a bit allusive. It is difficult to fully embrace. If anyone was in a position to understand the power of the resurrection, it was Paul. He had a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ when he was on the road to Damascus. Jesus, Himself, appeared to Paul. Jesus, Himself, spoke with Paul. Jesus, Himself, sent Paul on a specific mission to the Gentiles. And yet, Paul cries out, "that I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10).

The power of the resurrection is difficult to grasp. We don't regularly see dead people coming to life. It's no wonder, really, why the disciples had difficulty believing when the women told them that the tomb was empty. Luke 24:11 records that the disciples considered their words to be "as nonsense" and refused to believe them. It's no wonder, really, why the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were "slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). It's no wonder, really, why many who heard the message of the resurrection from the mouth of the apostles didn't believe. It's no wonder, really, why so many people today refuse to believe the message of the resurrection from our mouths.

Apart from an understanding of the power of God, the resurrection simply doesn't make sense. A few months ago, we looked at the question that was put before Jesus concerning the resurrection. The Sadducees told this story to Jesus about the woman who had seven husbands, all of whom died. They asked Jesus, "[If the resurrection is really true, as you say, then tell us] whose wife of the seven shall she be? For they all had her?" (Matt. 22:28). Do you remember Jesus' response? He said, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). To believe in the resurrection is to believe in the power of God. To fail in believing the power of God is to fail to believe in the resurrection. In Acts 26:8, Paul spoke to a bunch of unbelieving Sadducees, challenging their understanding of the mighty power of God. He asked them, "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?"

At this point in my message, I want to turn a corner. The power of the resurrection is far more than something that Jesus experienced some 2,000 years ago. See, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was more than some historical event to allow the Lord to tell the world that Jesus was the Son of God who will come to judge. As we believe in Christ and embrace the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, His same power has an effect in our lives today! The power of the resurrection doesn't continue on until today as if it were some great idea or discovery or teaching. The power of the resurrection continues today in a real, power that each of us should long to know and to experience. Let's look at ...

2. The Power of the Resurrection in Us

For this point, we are going to continue to look at Ephesians 1. When we went through this the first time, I quickly passed over a phrase in verse 19 that links the resurrection of Christ to our life today. Look at verse 19. Paul wants for us to know "what is the surpassing greatness of His power **toward us who believe**" (Eph. 1:19). It is then that Paul goes on to describe the greatness of the power of the resurrection of Christ. I want for you to notice that the power of the resurrection is "toward us who believe." Through faith in Christ, we experience the power of the resurrection in our lives.

Perhaps you don't even realize how much power you possess by faith. The point of Paul's prayer is that you might know this! You possess resurrection power! Let me show you a verse that might blow your circuits. Turn over to Ephesians 2. (For those of you who have been attending our Flocks, you know how we have come back time and time and time again to these verses, as they demonstrate so clearly the sovereign role of the grace of God in our lives. But, we haven't placed much of an emphasis upon verse 6, until today). Let's pick it up in verse 4, ...

Ephesians 2:4-6

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

These verses speak of the marvelous work of God in the salvation of a soul. God takes us when we were dead in sin, and makes us alive to the things of God. God does this by the sheer mercy of His grace. But God does more than simply making us alive. Verse 6 tells us that He raises us up with Christ. It also says that He seats us up with Christ in the heavenly places. When Paul speaks of us being raised up and seated with Christ, he uses the same language that he did back in Ephesians 1:20, in the physical resurrection of Christ from the dead, and the supernatural exaltation of Jesus above all rule and authority.

Here's what this means: When God, by His sovereign grace, makes you a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), it isn't only an earthly reality. The working of salvation goes far beyond earth itself. When you are made alive in Christ, you are also resurrected and exalted in Christ as well. There is a sense, where, right now, you are seated with Christ at the right hand of God. I don't fully understand how this is. We surely seem to be seated here in this cafeteria. I have simply read it in Ephesians 2 and have believed it to be true. But, you need to know that Ephesians 2 isn't the only place in which we are told that we have been raised up with Christ. There are other passages that speak in similar terms and help to make this point clear.

In Colossians 2, a similar truth is described. "In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Col. 2:11-12). Verse 12 is where I want for you to focus. It says that you were buried with Him in baptism. If you were here a few weeks ago, you know that there is debate about this baptism, whether it is water baptism or spirit baptism. But, regardless of which this is, Paul speaks about how we, through faith, were raised up with Christ (verse 12). There is a sense where we have experienced the power of the resurrection in our lives through faith in Christ.

It's mentioned again in chapter 3:1, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." The thought here is the same. By faith in Christ, you have been raised up with Him. Paul's thought is that you ought to seek the things that are consistent with where you are: "Seek the things above!" In verse 2, the thought is the same, ... "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:2-3). In this verse, we begin to get a sense of how it is that we have been raised up with Christ. Those who have believed in Christ are "in Him" (Col. 2:11) and are "with Him" (Col. 3:1) and are "hidden with Christ" (Col. 3:3). So, as Christ was raised from the dead and sits at the right hand of God, by our connection with Him, we are raised up and seated up with Him as well.

Christianity is far more than observing the work of Christ from afar. Christianity is far more than watching a plane take off down the runway. We are on the airplane. We are in the airplane. We are with the airplane. As the airplane has taken off the ground through the amazing power of the jet engines and design of the wings, we have been carried along as well, to cruise at 30,000 feet. I believe that the parallel is the same with Christ. We are in Christ and with Christ to such an extent that we have joined with Him in His death, in His resurrection, and in His glorification.

This ought to focus our minds upon the heavenly realities of where we are. When you are flying in an airplane, you are not concerned with stoplights. Neither are you concerned with oncoming traffic or with gas stations. Rather, you are concerned about the things above. You are concerned about where you are going! So, seek these things!

Romans 6 is another passage that describes our lives in similar terms to Colossians 2. He connects the death and resurrection of Jesus with the way in which we ought to live our lives. He begins the chapter by arguing against those who would want to abuse the grace of God. He says, ...

Romans 6:1-4

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

The picture is of us dying with Christ and rising with Christ. We have died to sin, and we live "in newness of life" in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Our life should be different because of the working of the resurrection power in our lives. This is what Paul says in verse 11, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." When you think of your life, you ought to think of Jesus. He died a death for sin. So also should we consider ourselves to be dead. He rose again to life. So also should we consider ourselves to be alive.

The life that you live this week ought to depend upon the power of the resurrection, working in you. You should think yourself to be dead to sin and alive to God. Because you are, if you are in Christ. The admonitions continue in verses 12 and 13, "Therefore do not let sin reign in

your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Our lives ought to reflect the resurrection power that we have come to share through our participation in the resurrection of Christ.

As I thought about these things this week, I was reminded afresh of how our faith is far more than mere facts. Our faith is far more than creeds. Our faith is far more than a body of doctrine. Our faith is far more than following a good teacher. Our faith is far more than living morally. When we trust in Christ, we are joined to Him in a daily experience. We ought to know and experience His resurrection power in our lives. I believe that this helps to bring us to where Paul is in Philippians 3:10. I want for you to turn back to Philippians 3:10, and so, we can wrap up this message by returning full circle to where we began.

Paul says, "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10a). There are many powerful things that Paul could have identified to want to know more fully. He could have said, "that I may know Him, and the power of His creation (Genesis 1-2), which He created in six literal days with a word and continues to sustain until now. Paul could have said, "that I may know Him, and the power of the world-wide flood (Genesis 6-7), which covered the earth and destroyed many who lived on the earth. He could have said, "that I may know Him, and the power of the ten plagues unleashed on Egypt (Exodus 7-11), each of which were unique and often discriminating in its effect. He could have expressed a longing to know other displays of God's power:

- the power of the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 13).
- the power of making the sun stand still (Joshua 10).
- the power of the consuming fire that consumed the sacrifice on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).
- the power of the miracles of Christ.
- the power of plagues described in Revelation.

Why did he want to know the power of the resurrection? I believe that it is because it is resurrection power that works in us! Paul didn't express his burning passion to want to know historical displays of God's power (as helpful as this is to our faith). Rather, Paul wanted to know and experience the actual power of the resurrection in his life! He wanted to know the power of the resurrection in Christ, because that same power was at work in him (and in us).

And so, this resurrection Sunday, where's your heart? As you think of the resurrection, do you think of it as something that Christ only experienced? Or, as you think of the resurrection, do you think of it as something that you experience as well? The aim of my message this morning has been to take the resurrection out of the realm of mere historical significance and to bring it into the realm of your present experience. Do you have a passionate longing to know the power of the resurrection in your life? Can you relate at all with Paul's desire, "that I may know Him ... and the power of His resurrection"? Do you have a great desire to live in the power of the resurrection? Do you long to know these things in greater degree as Paul did?

My heart for myself and for you is that we would understand the great power of the resurrection in Christ as well as in we who believe, that we might live differently in lives that wholly please the Lord.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 27, 2005 by Steve Brandon.

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