

KNOWING CHRIST

“... and the power of His resurrection ...” – Phil.3:10

(Part 3 of 5 Messages)

Introduction:

Lessons from the apostle Paul – what was his highest goal? his greatest priority?

His longing, most fervent desire was that Christ might become “pre-eminent” and the very Centre of all Paul’s life and ministry. Cf. Gal.4:19 “... until Christ is formed in you.”

Our purpose in these meditations = so that we might follow Paul’s example.

God wants us to experience the HIGHEST and GREATEST things in life. These are ours “in Christ” and “through Christ”. God has given – our part is to receive by faith our full inheritance “in Christ” = to walk in it daily through trusting in Christ.

The HIGHEST we can reach for in life is to know Christ:

- doctrinally (in truth – in his mind – that the great truths about Christ would truly master his mind),
- spiritually (in his spirit, not just in his mind – that he would be able to perceive and see these truths in all their hidden glory, a glory that reaches far beyond the reaches of the mind of man), and

- experientially (that he would taste more and more of the realities of these glorious truths in his everyday living, transforming his life even down to the smallest detail).

Today's theme: TO KNOW THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION.

The resurrection of Christ is the truly unique part of the message of the Gospel. Other great world religious leaders have died, and some may have died as a martyr. However, none other than Jesus of Nazareth has risen from the dead. At the heart of early Christian preaching: See Rom.1:4; 1 Cor.6:14; 2 Cor.13:4.

Paul's longing is for a living experience of the POWER of Christ's resurrection.

This truth has two inseparable dimensions: objective & subjective.

- * OBJECTIVE – that which exists outside of man's experience – historical, verifiable events
- * SUBJECTIVE – that which exists inside man's experience – what we experience within ourselves

There are two fundamental realities – inseparably linked: the objective and the subjective.

- * The objective truth and reality that Jesus was raised from the dead.
- * Then comes the subjective reality of the believer's present, personal experience of Jesus' resurrection – to be followed one day by the objective reality of his own physical resurrection.

In Phil.3:10, Paul highlights the subjective experience. But it is firmly rooted on the objective reality = the event that took place in time-space history.

In popular religious thinking today, there is a major focus upon the subjective. Those who teach & preach this kind of false Gospel say that it doesn't really matter, eg if Christ rose from the dead, don't worry about whether something really happened or not, or exists or not, what is important is whether you personally believe it. The resurrection of Christ then is simply a faith issue, not an issue of history.

“If it helps you cope with life and death issues, then for us it is “real” and necessary.

In reality, this is total nonsense. Our faith in the power of Jesus' resurrection has meaning and substance only if Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. If this didn't happen, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 15, our faith is worthless and we are of all people most to be pitied.

BUT the truth is, no matter how much others deny it or don't believe it, THE PHYSICAL HUMAN JESUS DID RISE FROM THE DEAD.

The OBJECTIVE fact then becomes the FOUNDATION for our SUBJECTIVE experience within our personal experience.

Our experience of Christ's resurrection takes place in THREE TIME FRAMES: past, present & future.

THE PAST:

United with Christ in His death & resurrection – already present in the spiritual sense – yet truth reality, rooted in the fact/truth that we are “in Christ”:

- * Christ died for us – we died with Him
- * Christ rose from the dead for us – we rose with Him
- * Christ ascended for us – we live in Him, and reign with Him

See Rom.6:3-8; Eph.2:4ff; Rom.8:30; Col.3:3-4.

Our response: Believe, rejoice, stand.

THE FUTURE:

The fact of Christ’s resurrection means for those who are “in Christ” – a glorious HOPE – God will exert His power in delivering us from our last enemy, death.

See Phil.3:20-21.

Based on this truth/reality, we may have the present, subjective reality – no fear, hope, certainty. Wonderful reality of the Gospel – something to be proclaimed to others.

THE PRESENT:

This is what Paul was also praying for – to know the POWER of the resurrection of Christ in his present experience.

See 1 Cor.15:55-58. Here in 1 Cor.15 Paul writes about the FACT of Jesus' resurrection and then at the end of that chapter, he rises to a crescendo speaking about Christ's VICTORY over the root cause of death – SIN.

The power of Christ's resurrection meant Christ's victory was complete, final, perfect, total, whole:

- * Over man's internal enemy, sin (= sinful nature) and every last evil effect of his sinful nature (= separation from God, guilt feelings, slow process of inward death, alienation from self, broken relationships, fear of God's wrath and the final judgment, et al);
- * Over man's external enemies, Satan & the world which he controls.

It's not that Paul hadn't yet experienced these blessings and realities. He just longed to experience more and more of the reality of the power of Jesus' resurrection in his life. A longing. A holy dissatisfaction with just knowing these facts in a theological way – as truth external to living reality.

Paul's Gospel message was WHOLE, COMPLETE:

- * The reality of God's grace and His free and full forgiveness through the death of Christ. And ...
- * The reality of our victory and deliverance through the resurrection of Christ and through His sending His Spirit to take up residence at the very control centre of our lives – placing a new law within us – the law of the Spirit and life.

So the SUBJECTIVE, PRESENT EXPERIENCE of Christ's resurrection is founded upon our faith in THE WHOLE GOSPEL.

Have we believed in and received the complete Gospel? And are we daily believing in the Gospel of Christ as a living reality in our lives – not just focusing upon the wonderful grace of God for me, this terrible sinner but also upon the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead that I can enjoy “by faith”?

As a believer, you can choose to wallow in the stinking mud of the pigsty. You can also choose to rise above it because of the power of the new life of Christ within you. It really is up to us. If we are captives to the power of sin in our lives, then it has control over us – we are its slaves. Where then is the victory that Christ has won for us? See Rom.6.

I have seen this at work within my own life. I have seen how when I am being dragged down into a depressive mood, and my wife speaks to me: Get control over your feelings through the power of Christ, then I can either choose to “enjoy” staying miserable (a wretched sense of pleasure in groveling in the mud and making other people around me share in the “pleasure” = self-pity), or I can call out to God and together with Him step out right then and there from the mud of the pigsty and taste the reality of the power of Christ restoring my joy.

We who are now set free from the law of sin and death because of the law of the Spirit of life can “walk” in the life of Christ through the power of the Spirit who lives within me.

That’s the life Christ came to give to us – and we can know the reality of this level of living in our present experience.

Why don’t more believers have this longing? Why do so many of us just grovel in the stinking mud? Perhaps because of ignorance of God’s power, but also because

we are not willing to forsake or let go of the old patterns because it is the pattern we have settled into.

It's perhaps like people doing something, eg cooking in a particular way for many years – a pattern has been established and they don't see any other way, even if that pattern may be very bad and not give good results. How open are they to new, fresh input? Illustration: growing rice in Indonesia and the new “foreign” ideas.

Possibly we have allowed ourselves to develop patterns of weakness to grow up in our lives – and we don't even think or believe any longer that there could be another way. Satan may have gotten us so discouraged and downhearted so that we just expect consistent and persistent “falls” or slips rather than victory.

How can we as modern-day missionaries experience the power of Christ's resurrection in our ministry? See 1 Cor.15:58.

God longs that we ...

- * taste His divine power at work in destroying all the attacks of the enemy (see 2 Cor.10);
- * experience His power over the fear of becoming sick or even dying;
- * experience His great power at work within our minds and hearts releasing us from any self-hate (result of sin causing us to be alienated from the person God placed within this human body);
- * experience God's great power to set us free from the fear of failure in our Christian ministries (in the eyes of home church/supporters);
- * experience God's supernatural power over all the enemies that would want to destroy my ministry for Christ – internal (unbelief, pride, self-righteousness) & external (gov't authorities, laws, etc.).

- * experience the power of God in rescuing and delivering sinners from Satan's grip.

Conclusion:

God is sending us forth to preach this whole Gospel – but God longs that we might taste the reality of the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead in our present lives and experience.

Paul's conviction: 1 Cor.15:57. "THANKS BE TO GOD!" We have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, through His resurrection from the dead. We are "in Christ", alive in Him. His victory over sin and all its evil consequences, is as much ours as is our victory in Him over the final enemy, death.

Our responses:

- * Expect it. (= faith)
- * Seek after earnestly in prayer – praying with faith.
- * Long for it. Desire it with all your heart. As Paul did