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THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

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"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection."—PHILIPPIANS 3:10.

THE resurrection of our Lord is set in four distinct relations in the New Testament.

I. It came, from the first preaching of the Gospel, most prominently into view as the evidence of the truth of Christ's claim to be the Saviour of the world. As fulfilling prophecy, both of the Old Testament and of Christ himself, it brought evidence of the divine purpose of salvation. As the manifestation of divine power in a result so transcendent, it furnished the attestation of Christ's claim to be the sacrifice and the life of all who believe. And as the exhibition of the love of God, it added to the attestation of omnipotence the actual exhibition of that power as grace, triumphing over sin and death and working out the salvation of men to its completion in spite of the most dreaded obstacles. In

this aspect of it the resurrection of the Lord became the corner-stone of the Church, the essential proof of all that he claimed to be and all that he promised to do for those who trusted him. And in this aspect also it was all-comprehensive, because the whole of what was necessary to be received of the teaching concerning Christ's person and his work was included in its proof. If Christ rose, he was true; and all he taught himself or by his apostles was true. If he was true, he was divine; the Atonement for sin, the Author of spiritual life, the Giver of eternal life to all who believed. So that by the conditions of its first promulgation the resurrection was the Gospel; belief in the resurrection was faith in Christ; and the proclamation of the good news of salvation was the preaching of Jesus and the resurrection. The conflict of the truth was with Pharisees, who denied the fact because they repelled the claims and disliked the character of Christ; with Sadducees, who scorned the doctrine itself, and denied Christ because of it; with philosophical objectors, who disputed its truth on the ground of the difficulties it presents to reason, or because the benefit which it promised seemed at best doubtful. And so the Gospel won its victory over unbelief in this doctrine, until it was enthroned in the very heart of the Church, and crowned in

Gospel, Epistle, and Apocalypse as the central truth of the New Testament. And the power of the resurrection does not wane. It stands to-day, amid all assaults of unbelief, the acropolis of our faith, founded on the rock of divine truth, with the power of God vital within it for the world's salvation and the light of heaven resting upon it, keeping securely all our hopes of immortality.

II. But the power of the resurrection is not alone in the testimony it gives, but is associated with the innermost life of Christians. "That I may *know* him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings." It is not the knowledge of an historical fact addressed to the intelligence, but inward knowledge, such as is conveyed by the light of the Spirit of God and is experimentally apprehended and incorporated with the Christian life. To know Christ is not to know what is taught about him, nor what he did; it is to have the spiritual experience of his personal presence with the soul; and knowing Christ is here expressed under the particulars of knowing the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. That power, therefore, has its sphere of operation in the most vital processes of spiritual life, and the resurrection of Christ is thus set in the most intimate relations with Christian experience.

Thus the resurrection is intimately connected in the New Testament with justification by faith. In this context Paul is suddenly moved to warn his readers against those who taught them to trust in the law. He sketches his own eminent advantages under the law, but declares that he counts them all but "loss, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, being made conformable unto his death." Here is the righteousness of the law on one side, and on the other the righteousness of God by faith. What Paul desires is to be found in Christ—that is, to have that union with Christ which secures the possession of the righteousness which he gives, and which brings spiritual experience of the power of his resurrection. The resurrection is evidently closely allied with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. Only they who have the righteousness of faith can know the power of the resurrection in this experimental sense; and the power of the resurrection is manifested in producing the assurance of justification. In Romans 4: 24, 25, this relation is even more clearly established, where Paul, in illustrating his doctrine by the case of Abraham,

who believed that God could fulfill his promise of raising the living from the dead, says that his faith was imputed for righteousness, and not for his sake alone, but "for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." That is, he was delivered unto death as a propitiation for our sins, and was raised again for our justification; emphatically declaring that our justification is not complete without the resurrection of Christ. We are not, indeed, to understand that his resurrection stands in the same relation to our justification that his death sustains, nor that it forms a constituent part of the sacrifice for sin. It is not penalty, it is reward; it is not suffering, it is triumph; it is not humiliation, it is exaltation to glory; it is not death, but the victory over death. But no process of conflict is complete without the victory, no labor without its reward. On God's part, indeed, the righteousness is procured, accepted, and the pardon secured. But on man's part there is no completed justification without resurrection; and the resurrection of Christ is for justification.

1. This will appear when we consider that the resurrection was necessary to exhibit the nature of the death of Christ as an offering for sin,—

that he did not die as a sinner, nor as a man like other men holden under the power of death. There was evidence, indeed, in his life of absolute holiness; there was evidence in his miraculous power, in his heavenly teaching, in his character asserting its divine origin; but all this would receive an utter contradiction and denial if it were possible that he should continue under the power of death. The elements of sacrifice are: the sinner, needing expiation; the priest; the perfect offering; and God above all, who accepts and pardons and grants life as the reward. The justification is incomplete and inoperative if any of these parts be lacking. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." And if Christ be not risen, there has been no victory over sin and no annulment of the law; and there can be no evidence for the sinner that the death of Jesus stands in any such relation to his faith as that the righteousness of God, which is by faith, is become his; or that, even though he died with Christ, he has a new and spiritual life in the soul. Paul traversed precisely this road in his religious experience. Jesus appeared to him as risen and glorified. Then he knew that his death had not been that of a malefactor or of a pestilent deceiver, but was the one offering for sin which was adequate, and that Jesus

whom he persecuted was his Lord and Saviour. Peter testifies to the same effect, when he tells us, that from the despair and sadness of the disciples at the crucifixion, and the disappointment of their hopes that followed, they were "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And the Jews, who could not receive the doctrine of a suffering Messiah, and to whom his ignominious death was an absolute bar to his claim, when they accepted Peter's testimony that he had risen again saw also in his death their atonement, and repented and were converted. We see the power of his resurrection for justification.

2. It will appear further when we reflect that only by the resurrection was the dignity of his person, and consequently the value of his death as a sacrifice, exhibited. "He was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection of the dead." According to the doctrine of the New Testament, the humiliation of the Son of God in taking our nature, in assuming the form of a servant, and subjecting himself even to the death of the cross, can only be known and proved to be a humiliation by contrast with the exaltation to the right hand of God which ensues. The deity associated with man that was subject to death must be manifested by securing the weakness of humanity from the power of death. And the

human nature, suffering and brought low, must itself also share in the vindication, and become partaker in the heavenly glory. The exaltation of Christ reflects its glory upon his humiliation. The exaltation alone exhibits him to our faith and reverence in the character he claims as our Saviour. And when we see him who proves his origin by his present power and glory submitting to death, we then may estimate the value and significance of his death. Pain patiently borne, dignity asserting itself amidst brutal usage, calm self-surrender to a noble purpose, supreme love for men, even for enemies—these have their power. But we have seen them often and illustriously, thank God, in the annals of the race. But death of the Prince of Life; suffering in ineffable and spotless purity; patience in the Omnipotent One; the bosom of God from all eternity, and the throne and the praises of heaven to all eternity, set in contrast with the cross and with the sepulcher:—these give the power which it possesses to the death of Jesus. The dignity of his person alone exhibits the value of his death, and the power of his resurrection, therefore, is for our justification from sin.

3. And, as I have said, there is absolute necessity for the declaration on the part of God of the acceptance of the sacrifice. What assurance has the

sinner of forgiveness until God himself declares that he has forgiven? Vague trust in divine forbearance will not satisfy in such a case. We must know from himself what God will do. And the frown of God rested in darkness on the cross and on the tomb of Jesus until the dawn of the resurrection morning. Not till then was our justification assured.

4. And we are taught that he has ascended to the right hand of God, where he ever lives, and that his perpetual living before God is in order to his making prevalent intercession for us. We were justified in his death; we were justified in the pardon of God, spoken in peace to the soul; we are justified by faith. But we do not conceive of this justification as simply a transient act, done once and for all. It is a permanent relation between the forgiven soul and God, by which we ever live forgiven and secure upon the ever-living righteousness of Christ, and continue to live as pardoned sinners in the enjoyment of the fruits of his perpetual intercession. He was raised again for our justification. Could we conceive for a moment of an arrest in the divine purpose between the crucifixion and the resurrection—that the tomb of Jesus still guarded his mortal remains, that no angels announced his rising to the women, no disciples witnessed it to the

Church—and with all the teaching and the death of Christ what would be the heritage? Where would have been the Church founded on the faith of the dispirited and disappointed disciples; where our assurances of the life of God in the soul? What would be to us the graves of our dead? We might turn to the miserable caricatures of rationalism to write for us the history of the life of Christ and of the origin of the Church. And of the Church, and of heaven itself, we would utter the lamentation, instead of at the deserted grave: “They have taken away our Lord,” and, leaving us only a shrine to visit in a holy sepulcher, his life and his Spirit are gone from us forever.

III. But if the power of his resurrection be for our justification, it is much more constantly in the New Testament, and more obviously, the source of the spiritual life of faith and of obedience. No form of statement is more familiar in St. Paul than this: “If ye died with Christ, ye also live in his rising again.” In this familiar argument it is evident that we have something more than an appeal to gratitude or love to awaken the soul to effort to please him who has done so much for us. What incentive, indeed, so powerful could be found? But alas for us if there were nothing but our gratitude and love to depend upon as the forces of the Christian

life! Nor is the conception of St. Paul that Christ has by his resurrection infused his own personal life into the Church, so that by faith his thoughts and energies become active in the free obedience of his people. For this it would seem that incarnation would be adequate without need either of death or of resurrection. But the doctrine is that the same Spirit of God that dwelt and dwells in Christ, making him in his humanity the organ of the divine Person, enabling him for his work and reviving him from death, dwells in the hearts of all those who believe in him. The same one, personal, all-powerful, and holy Spirit which is in him is the ascension gift to his Church. So that, having one Spirit, his people have one mind, one purpose, one life, as well as one destiny with him. This was the meaning of Christ when he told his disciples that his departure from them was in order to his sending the Holy Spirit. This was the intention of his words when he promised that he would be with them always, even to the end of the world.

1. And from this point of view we see clearly what Paul teaches the Ephesians, that in the resurrection of Christ we have a visible exhibition of the same energy which works in the hearts of all believers in their spiritual life; and therefore that we have the surest support to our faith that we

shall conquer in the conflict with sin, in the resurrection of Christ. "That ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." The words express two things: first, that the power is the same, i.e., by the Holy Spirit; and second, that it is not only the pledge of the bodily resurrection of believers, but the pledge and cause of their spiritual resurrection. The same power working to the same end, and working, therefore, unto certain accomplishment. The omnipotence of God in the resurrection of Christ stands related, therefore, not only to the evidences of his truth, but it repeats the miracle in the spiritual experience of believers, who are raised by him to newness of life.

2. But this energy is more than pledged and more than illustrated in the resurrection. The language of the Apostle proves that it is actually imparted to the believer, conveyed in and by the resurrection of Christ. Read that wonderful argument in the sixth chapter of Romans: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should

walk in newness of life. . . . In that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The argument of the passage is from the nature of union with Christ; if that be real and vital in his death, so that we are justified, then by the very nature and condition of that relation the union continues in his rising and in his present life. So that the Apostle teaches that there not only may be and should be, but that there was, the actual energizing of the soul of the believer with the power of God, in the resurrection of Christ. Read the same truth in Ephesians 2:5: "Even when we were dead in sins, God hath quickened" (rather did quicken) "us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"—i.e., when he raised Christ he imparted life to believers. Such is this union with him that his resurrection is a related event, and they have spiritual life in him. And in his ascension and exaltation they are brought up spiritually from the power of darkness, and from life in sin, and made to be with Christ. Exaltation of the present life of faith as well as the future life of vision are alike included. And so when he argues

in Colossians 2:12, 13, against an ascetic ceremonialism, his objection is that it dishonors that principle of life which we obtained from Christ when God raised him from the dead. In him ye have a spiritual circumcision and a spiritual resurrection, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. Faith in Christ and in the power of God which raised Christ are essentially the same thing and have the same life-giving energy.

3. Paul shows the power of the resurrection of Christ to sanctify, in the relation in which he sets the doctrine to the honor it gives to our mortal bodies. These frail, suffering, inadequate, sinning, treacherous, dying bodies are not despised under the Gospel, but kept as the temple of God and for the uses of the eternal life. Read the sixth chapter of 1 Corinthians, and what more profound statement of principles can be framed: "The body for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." It is not alliteration nor antithesis, "*The Lord for the body.*" "And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? . . . He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. . . . Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God,

and ye are not your own?" The power of the resurrection is for the safeguard and the sanctification of these mortal bodies.

4. And the context sets this power of the resurrection for sanctification in yet another aspect, in its enabling us to endure the sufferings which are laid upon us in this life. Paul is speaking of his sufferings and self-denials, endured for Christ's Gospel, and he says that he counts them as the merest refuse of the feast if he can win Christ and know the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. He alludes here, not to union by faith with the death and sufferings of Christ, but to the making up that which is lacking of the suffering of Christ for his body's sake, which is the Church. And in all active labor and personal self-denial which is to be endured in the great work, the power of his resurrection sustains and energizes and consecrates. Human life is become all sacred through this power; human nature glorified, because Christ was a man; the body honored because of the resurrection; suffering consecrated, death vanquished, the soul made pure and loving, the grave a peaceful and holy resting-place—all by means of the working of this holy life, which is in all who believe.

IV. Paul teaches that the resurrection of Christ is for our consolation. Under the conditions of its application you know how he dwells upon the truth as the assurance of our personal immortality, and as the invincible proof and absolute guarantee of our own bodily resurrection and triumph over death. "If we believe that Jesus rose, then also them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit which dwelleth in you." And this resurrection he teaches is to the eternal union with and vision of the Lord, and to the participation in his glory. "For when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." The power of the resurrection, then, as we have seen, is for testimony to the truth, for justification by faith, for sanctification of life, and unto the life everlasting.

Briefly, three thoughts suggest themselves in consequence of this study of the truth :

1. How deep is our need of faith to realize the unseen in order to obtain the benefits of this doctrine. In the struggles and cares and vexations, and especially in the sins of life, how hard it is to *know*, inwardly and experimentally, the working of

this life of resurrection. And death! Ah! as we go along in life we become no better reconciled to the thought. Indeed, to the high-hearted enthusiasms of youth it may even be less terrible than to the sober understanding of experience. We become familiar, less sensitive, hardened by use. But it remains the same bitter, ruthless enemy to the end, wrenching from us our joy, and us from the light of life. Oh, for Paul's faith!—to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection, that we might count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

2. How wonderful is the unity of truth in its New Testament presentation. We may analyze and separate into its parts and establish associations in our minds with this or that doctrine of the Gospel; but in the words of inspiration itself we cannot touch the truth at any point without being led directly into relations with its most fundamental principle, and through every varying and rich abundance of association with all other truth and duty. All centers in Christ.

3. And hence how impossible it is to hope for the advantage of any part of this scheme as a part dissociated from the whole; to look for the manifestation of this spiritual life in blessing, if we do not

seek it in duty; to look for it in moral growth, unless we have it in justification and forgiveness; to have any hope in the resurrection of the dead, if we have not the present spiritual life of holiness; or to indulge any hope at all in this life or in the next, unless we be in Christ and know him.