Living the Resurrection

4/22/2018
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Acts 4:1-12

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, [2]much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. [3]So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. [4]But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand. [5] The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem,[6]with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. [7]When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' [8]Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, [9]if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, [10]let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. [11]This Jesus is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone." [12]There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

1. Barbara Bush Will Be Missed

Barbara Bush, the former first lady and wife of 41st president George H.W. Bush, passed away Tuesday evening at her home in Houston, TX. She was 92. I am sure that she will be missed by her husband George H. W. Bush, and her five children, 17 grandchildren, and 7 great grandchildren. Her life had an impact not only on her family but also on many Americans. One person on Twitter wrote, "You were a beautiful light in this world and I am forever thankful for your friendship."

How did people feel when Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended? Many people were healed, fed, and taught by Jesus. The disciples spent three years living every day with him. The people thought Jesus would be always with them. When he was ascended 40 days after his resurrection, the people were sad. But Jesus' ascension was not the end of his story. His disciples and many his followers experienced Jesus' presence and power in their lives.

2. A Crippled Man Walks

If we want to understand the context of today's scripture, we need to read chapter 3 of the Book of Acts. One day, Peter and John go to the temple to pray at three in the afternoon. At the temple gate, they meet a beggar who is crippled

from birth. They look straight at him and Peter says to him, “look at us.” When the man gives them his attention, Peter says, “***I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk***.” (3:6). The crippled man’s feet and ankles become strong and the man jumps up and walks. People who see him walk are amazed at what has happened. While the beggar holds on to Peter and John, the whole crowd is astonished and comes running to them in the place called Solomon’s Porch (3:11).

Peter explains to the people how the beggar can walk. The man walks not by Peter’s own power but by the name of Jesus (3:12 & 16). While Peter and John talk to the crowd, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees come to seize them and put Peter and John in jail. But many people hear Peter’s message and believe it. After the healing incident, Peter preaches to five thousand people and they believe that Jesus is the risen Messiah. Peter and John are like Billy Graham of their time.

The next morning, the high priest Ananias and the other religious leaders bring in Peter and John and ask them, “***By what power and in whose name have you done this?***” (4:7) Peter says, “***we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed***” (4:9). Luke, the author of Acts, stresses that Peter is “***filled with the Holy Spirit***” (4:8) when he responds to the high priest and the religious leaders.

Peter makes it clear, “***This man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth***” (4:10). He points out that the miracle happened not in their power, but in the name of Jesus. Jesus is not physically present with the disciples, but his power is still active through the disciples. By quoting Psalm 118:22, Peter reminds the high priest and the religious leaders that Jesus the healer is like the stone which the builders rejected.

3. The Living Christ

What does the healing of the crippled man mean to us? Matthew 4:23 says, “***Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people***.” Jesus focuses on teaching, preaching, and healing. Jesus teaches the Torah, preaches the good news of the kingdom of God, and heals the sick. In today’s scripture we notice that Jesus’ threefold ministry continues through his disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Peter and John teach, preach, and heal as Jesus has done. By healing the crippled man, they show the people and the religious leaders that the risen Jesus is present among them. Verse 4 says through their ministry, five thousand people become the followers of Jesus.

The power of the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit transforms Peter and John. They are not afraid of dying anymore. Peter and John are willing to die while preaching the good news of Jesus. The high priest and the religious leaders ask Peter and John to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus (v. 18). Peter and John answer them, "***Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God***" (4:19, NIV). Despite the religious leaders' threat, Peter and John say that they can't stop speaking about what they have seen and heard. They are filled with passion for preaching the good news of the risen Jesus. God's transforming power is revealed through them. They are living the resurrection and a missional life.

4. St. Paul's Perspective on Death

The resurrection of Jesus has made a big difference in the lives of his disciples. Their perspective on death and dying has changed. If we read Paul's letter, we can understand their perspective on death and life. Paul says in Galatians 2:19 & 20, "***I have been crucified with Christ; [20]and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me***." Paul says our old self has died with Jesus. Now the risen Christ lives in us. We live the resurrected life. We live a new life.

Let me explain a Christian perspective on death from a different angle. When someone passes, how do we say about his or her death? I am asking whether we see death as loss or gain? Most people think death is loss. But listen what Paul says in Philippians 1:21, "***For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain***." For Paul dying is not loss, but gain. Why? It is because for Paul, his ultimate concern is Christ and his relationship with him. Paul is ready for dying at any time. Paul says in Romans 14:8, "***If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's***." For Paul living or dying does not make any difference.

The most important concern for the disciples is not how to live a healthy life, but how to live with a purpose. They do not live for themselves but for their mission, which is to share the good news of the risen Christ. They do not care about any risk in their missional life.

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "***I die every day***." What does Paul mean by this? If we read the whole chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, we notice that Paul talks about physical death and resurrection. In its context, Paul seems to remind us that he is in jeopardy of being killed every day. Yet he does not be afraid of dying. Are we afraid of dying?

5. Russell Conwell & Johnnie Ring

Let me share with you a story of a boy who was not afraid of dying in 19th century. Russell Conwell was born in South Worthington, Massachusetts in 1843 and entered Yale University in 1860. In 1862, before graduating from Yale, he

enlisted in the Union Army during the American Civil War. He became a captain of a company of his friends and neighbors that he recruited. Conwell served in North Carolina and first engaged the enemy at Kingston, NC.

Conwell had an assistant during the war. His name was Johnnie Ring. Johnnie was a boy roughly sixteen or seventeen, the son of a neighbor. He volunteered to accompany Conwell in the service. Johnny Ring was devoted to his captain, and Conwell came to love him dearly though he was annoyed by Johnny's daily reading of his mother's Bible and his devotion to Christ. Conwell was an unbeliever and agnostic in those early years. Conwell had a decorative sword given to him by the city of Springfield at the time of his departure for the war.

One day, when a surprise Confederate attack routed the Union camp, the men retreated over a covered bridge and set it on fire to keep the rebels from pursuing. Suddenly Johnny raced across a flaming bridge and through enemy gunfire to retrieve his commander's ceremonial sword. Johnnie brought back the sword, but died that night of his burns as Conwell knelt by his bed in prayer.

That night Conwell was touched by Johnnie's love for Jesus and for him and vowed to live a life for Johnnie as well as for himself. Later he became a Baptist pastor and the founder of Temple University in Philadelphia. His name lives on at Gordon Conwell Seminary in South Hamilton, MA, which is formed by the merging of two former divinity schools, Conwell School of Theology of Temple University and Gordon Divinity School in Wenham, MA. Through Johnnie Ring's life Conwell experienced the power of the risen Jesus.

6. Conclusion

Last Sunday I asked ourselves whether we see the risen Lord in our lives. Many unbelievers may ask us the same question. How would you answer them? Where is Jesus? In today's scripture, Peter and John show the unbelieving high priest, the Sadducees, and people that the risen Christ is still present among them and allows the crippled man to walk again. This is the same risen Christ that allows for five thousand people to become believers in Christ.

7. Application

Christians are not the people who just remember the resurrection of Jesus. Rather, Christians are those who live the resurrection of Jesus. A church is a community of believers who live the resurrection together and help bring that resurrection power of Jesus to the world. Christians are those who live the resurrection life with passion, purpose and mission. We need to take care of our health, but focus should on our mission. There are so many churches that focus on survival, but we should focus on our purpose. I believe that God wants Swift Memorial Church to exist for God's mission. May God remind us and show us each day that the risen Jesus is with us and help us to live the resurrection in our lives and in this world. Amen.