

Melva's Corner



The Real Meaning of Resurrection Day!

April 2, 2007

(John 20:30-31)

Central Truth: The event that brought Jesus' life to an end is the same one that brought it to its goal. His death was not a defeat. It was a victory for mankind.

“Then [Pilate] handed him over to them to be crucified.” With any other person in that time and circumstance, those would have been the climactic words of failure, elimination, and despair. The Gospel of John does not hear them that way of Jesus.

John is about to tell the crucifixion story as he had participated in it. He was, insofar as we can be sure, the only one of the apostles present as the Romans put the Son of Man to death.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing beside her, He said to His mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then He said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home (19:25b-27).

Family is redefined for us in this scene. Although Jesus had sisters and brothers in the flesh, His final wish for His mother as expressed here was that she henceforth should be under the protection and care of “the disciple whom He loved” (i.e., John). Spiritual family is often closer and more important than genetic family. People who share faith in Jesus and a conviction about how life priorities are to be judged play a more significant role in many a person's life than blood-kin who are unbelievers or whose take on life runs counter to Christian discipleship.

John is standing with Mary and her friends at the crucifixion site. He is trying to sort out his own issues about all that is going on. At the same time, he is also trying to keep the women from collapsing from their grief or running afoul of the gruff-looking execution squad in charge of the scene. He does not make us privy to all that was running through his head that day. Some sixty years later, however, he writes of it in terms of a clear triumph in the midst of what looked to all the world that day to be an utter tragedy.

“His Hour” Had Come!

From the early pages of this Gospel, we are given to understand that its events are proceeding at a pace and in the manner destined to achieve some divinely ordained goal. As early as the beginning of His signs at the wedding in Cana, Jesus was saying, **“My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4b; cf. 7:6, 30; 8:20)**. At this point, all of John’s readers have figured out what that term means. Everything about the presence of the Word in flesh was preamble to His death (transition) and resurrection.

Ironically, the words at the Cana wedding were spoken to His mother; now she is with Him in His hour of glorification. Jesus addresses her here in exactly the same way He did that day; to address her with the word “Woman” was neither disrespectful nor impolite in either setting but fully deferential to this person He loved.

If we pause a moment to look back to John II, we see now what likely was not clear at first reading. The guest is really host at the marriage feast – that foreshadows His own with His bride, the church. That the wine has run out makes us aware of the emptiness of the religious forms so dominant when Jesus came on the scene (cf. Mark 2:22). The Messiah had come to bring fresh wine, to package it in new wineskins, and to declare an abundance that would prove inexhaustible to those who would come to His table.

In these unfolding events of His hour of glorification, Jesus’ prayer would be answered:

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal

life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed (John 17:1-5).

Do you see the reference to “finishing (Gk, teleiosas, from teleioo meaning to bring to fulfillment, reach the goal) the work” here? We certainly should not miss this claim in today’s text:

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (19:28-30).

The word “finished” in verses 28 and 30 is from a related word (Gk, tetelestai, from teleo meaning to bring to an end, complete) that points to something very significant. The event that brought Jesus’ life to an end is the same one that brought it to its goal. His death was not a defeat. Through John’s reflective eyes, it was what brought everything about Jesus’ ministry to fulfillment.

Missing the Point

The temptation for preachers in dealing with a crucifixion text from any of the Gospels is to explore the horrible physical events associated with this form of death. Thus the sermons that have been preached to explore the medical details of how one died on a cross. Crucifixion did not affect a vital organ, and so a person typically did not die quickly. He suffered excruciating physical pain over what must have seemed interminable hours – until death from blood loss, dehydration, and suffocation put an end to it.

Please don’t misunderstand what I am saying. I do not minimize His physical pain or suffering for a moment. But physical suffering does not set Him apart from other leaders.

What sets Jesus apart is the spiritual agony He endured in this setting. As His body was undergoing death (i.e., separation of spirit from body), so was His soul experiencing death (i.e., separation from the Father). It was His voluntary act of **substituting**

Himself for us to “taste of hell” in that separation that secures our redemption. **“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (II Cor. 5:21).**

“It Is Finished!”

As one writer has expressed it, John’s account of what happened that day is “a masterpiece of restraint.”

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by Himself, He went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written **in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.** Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’ ” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took His tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says,



“They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

And that is what the soldiers did . . . After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, **“It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (19:16b-30).**

The words could be spoken in a thousand settings and would have a different meaning in each one. A painter lays down his brush. A farmer with the planting done leaves the field. A woman in labor for

hours sees her baby. A prisoner leaves jail after serving his sentence. A couple watches as their house burns to the ground. A father comforts his child while the final stitch is placed in his knee. The words, it is finished, may have been the same in each case, but how different the meaning!

I began this message with a comment to the effect that Pilate's act of delivering someone over to be crucified typically would have been "the climactic words of failure, elimination, and despair" for that person. Not with Jesus! Even more than the Synoptic writers, John tells the story of the crucifixion not as failure but as identification, not as elimination but as revelation, and certainly not as despair but as hope for eternal life.

Go back again to an early section of this Gospel. **"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15).** "Verse 14 says, in a reversal of the old gravitational principle, whatever goes down must come up. The Son of man descends from heaven. He must be raised aloft if anyone is to believe in him." It was by the cross and resurrection that He was lifted up. Without either, it could not be the case today that we have eternal life. Without either, God's purpose for creatures in His own image and likeness would be un-finished.

It is finished! We know the identity of the one whom prophets of old had anticipated as the Servant-Redeemer of Yahweh. **"He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).**

It is finished! In His death, resurrection, and ascension, He has been made King of kings. Even though Pilate surely meant it to mock the Jewish leaders who had forced his hand in putting Jesus to death, he would not change the title he had written over his head: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." But the fact that His title was written in all the major languages of the Mediterranean (i.e., Greek, Latin, and Aramaic) prefigured Jesus bringing in the "other sheep" who were not of the Jewish fold (cf. John 10:16). Its amazing how the Holy Spirit orchestrated it all.

It is finished! Even though Jesus and His disciples had celebrated Passover the night before and even though Passover lambs had

been slain already, John clearly means for us to see this crucifixion scene as the ultimate Passover sacrifice. Although the legs of the two others put on crosses that day were broken to hasten their death before the Sabbath began, Jesus' legs were not broken. No lamb could be offered to God as a sacrifice that had broken legs (19:31-33). We need nothing further as a sacrifice, for Jesus has died for us – the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

“It is finished” is our signal that God has succeeded in accomplishing everything He designed to do in the life of His Son. In Jesus Christ God Himself was at work demonstrating His love for us, revealing His will for our lives, and bringing about a reconciliation that needs no supplement. Jesus' victory is the basis of our security. My confidence in God and the assurance of my salvation cannot be anchored in my religious performance. **“It is finished.”** What was needed to satisfy God ought to satisfy us as well. This is the good news of the gospel.

This is an event of glory, splendor, and triumph. Jesus is the Victor – not a victim – in this scene. How else can you hear His **“It is finished!”** except as a victor's cry?

This is not the moan of the defeated, nor the sigh of patient resignation. It is the triumphant recognition that He has fully accomplished the work that He came to do. Then He bowed His head, a detail mentioned only by John, and possibly the insight of an eyewitness. It is perhaps worth noting that the same expression, the same Hebrew wording, is used of going to bed: **“the Son of man hath now where to lay his head”** (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58). Implied is the thought of a peaceful death, the death of One who trusts His Father.

What a shame if that finished work of Christ is not allowed to achieve its redemptive goal!

Having thusfar studied the Gospel of John we arrive now at the crescendo of the beloved disciple's composition. The path marked from eternity past has had an epochal hour in view. All the events we have been reading marched toward God's glorification in the Son in His death and resurrection. In John 20, all the plot lines converge and the promises are fulfilled. This is the moment when

the world's darkness is not merely penetrated but overwhelmed by the light of Divine Presence.

It is the bodily resurrection of Jesus that validates all His claims to be the one and only way to God. To paraphrase Paul, if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then everything about the Christian religion is bogus and anyone who embraces Christianity deserves nothing better than pity (I Cor. 15:12-19). The bodily resurrection of Jesus on the third day after His crucifixion under Pontius Pilate is the hallmark doctrine of Christian faith.

John's Take on the Resurrection!



John's account of the resurrection presumes – just as his crucifixion narrative does – that we know the basic accounts from the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. That we know about the posting of a guard. We know about the earthquake. We know about the women running back from the empty tomb only to be thought crazy by most of the disciples who heard their report. We know of several post-resurrection appearances that John does not relate.

Consistent with the victory theme he continues with the crucifixion story, John tells of Jesus' resurrection in terms of immediate anointing, blessing, and anticipation. John 20 is almost Genesis 1! Out of the "formless void and darkness" of Jewish unbelief, Roman injustice, and devotee confusion – a veritable chaos, the Spirit of God acted to craft an ordered cosmos of faith, righteousness, and optimism about the future.

I see John's account of the resurrection as an invitation – an invitation for those who believe in Jesus to live in the power of the Holy Spirit who raised Him from the dead. But the invitation is rooted in the event itself. Theology is grounded in history. What men and women are called to experience in Christ grows directly from the fact that God has raised and glorified Him as the Son. But since the Son has indeed been crucified, raised, and glorified, there is no reason His disciples (you and me) should live in fear, whimper about our circumstances, or yield to satan's temptations to do evil. We share in Christ's triumph and are meant **"to know**

Christ and the power of his resurrection” in our life experiences (Phil. 3:10a).

Does It Really Matter?

The resurrection is not mythical for John. Oh, I am fully aware that many contemporary theologians don't mind when they make statements like this one: "Whether the miracles recorded in the New Testament happened or not is irrelevant to me, for I accept the Jesus story by faith for its enduring message of hope." How can they say its irrelevant if the events surrounding the resurrection are true or not.

If the resurrection didn't happen in space-time history, there is no place for preaching the gospel and no justification for hope in Christ. **"And face it – if there's no resurrection for Christ, everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors" (I Cor. 15:14, The Message Version).** The resurrection must be relevant in our lives . . . so it really does matter if the events are true or not

Evidence for the Senses

Precisely because the historical events of the resurrection does matter, John lets us know that he is relating events that he knows through the senses. The importance he attaches to the sensory nature of the event is clear from this comment he made in one of his epistles: **“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life . . .” (I John 1:1).** There is no theoretical meaning for events that never happened for this writer! The event of the resurrection is real to John!

Pay attention to the physical and first-person details in what John writes here:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set

out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that He must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her (20:1-18).

These events are datable in memory – early Sunday morning, before the sun rose, Friday's crucifixion still clear in memory. They are very specific in nature – carrying spices to anoint the body, being startled that the stone has been rolled back, running, weeping, and confusion. John saw the linen wrappings. Peter crawled inside the tomb. Mary grabbed and was hanging on to Jesus once she had wiped her eyes, focused on the man she had assumed was the gardener at first, and recognized Him as her Teacher.

I think the encounter with Mary Magdalene presumes knowledge of the resurrection accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It makes no sense, for example, for Jesus to tell her, "Do not hold on to me,

because I have not yet ascended to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." How does her clinging to Him – not telling her, as the KJV implies, that she could not touch Him – depend at all on His ascension? It makes perfectly good sense, however, to translate – as the Greek text certainly allows – this way: "Do not hold on to me. Because I have not yet ascended to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God, go to my brothers and say to them . . ."

Jesus wanted to spend some time with the apostles before His ascension. So He told Mary He had something for her to do that would preclude her staying with Him any longer at that moment. She would take two messages to the eleven: (1) I have seen the Lord, and (2) He will shortly be seeing you. **Jesus was back.** He was alive from the dead. But there were new things to know and new things to do. He and His followers were not simply going to pick up where they had left off.

On that very evening, Jesus sought out the eleven. In physical form and offering proof to them through their five senses, He appeared to them in a locked room where they had gathered – perhaps to discuss the meaning of Mary Magdalene's alleged experience that morning.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (20:19-23).

For reasons that are not explored in John's text, one of the remaining apostles – Judas has died by his own hand by this time – was absent from that meeting and missed the authenticating experience the others were provided. Thomas was adamant about wanting the same encounter with Jesus his ten comrades reported to him. So, since Jesus still had not ascended to the Father, he could and did accommodate him.

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (20:24-29).

The Perpetuation of Proof

Not everyone can have the evidence of his five senses that Jesus died under Pontius Pilate, was raised from the dead three days later, and appeared to many people under a variety of circumstances to establish that He had overcome death. For anyone to demand that proof today before he or she will believe that Jesus is the Son of God is to demand what cannot be provided. And it is just at this point that discussion ends for some people. "I'm not going to believe anything I can't see for myself!" They say.

Truth be told, nobody lives by the dictum that he will only believe what he can see – or otherwise validate by sensory experience – for himself. We believe what we can not see all the time. For example . . . was there ever a Pharaoh Raamses who ruled Egypt? Or an Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, or Napoleon? Do we know the beliefs and teachings of Plato? What about Immanuel Kant? Did we really know if Dolly Madison ever sewed a stitch? Have human beings actually stood on the surface of the moon? Is it really true that the more precisely we calculate the position of a subatomic particle the less precisely its momentum is known in that instant, and vice versa?

There is precious little that any one of us knows except through the testimony of others. That human beings live by our faith in what we know from the testimony of others and reach conclusions from that data rather than by seeing things directly for ourselves is

as true for history and science as for theology. **"We walk by faith, not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7)** Sometimes one has to believe in order to see.

Yes, Thomas was able to have the blessedness that comes through faith grounded in what he saw with his own eyes and touched with his own hands. But Jesus said there would be no less joy, no fewer wonderful experiences, and no scarcity of salvation for those who would later come to Him by faith grounded in other types of evidence. Grounded by their belief.

Indeed, John immediately declares that the reports and first-hand testimony he was giving in his Gospel – the very piece of literature we are studying now – is intended as evidence. Being offered as a witness both to the life experiences, teachings, and true identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

The Bible is the single most important document that bears witness to Jesus of Nazareth. Oh, we would certainly know about Jesus and have a broad outline of His life story without our canonical Four Gospels. But those are our primary documents. They are the texts that identify and define Him for Christians.

Holy Scripture has been subjected to a degree of scrutiny and skepticism that would be too harsh for any other document of antiquity. It has survived determined efforts of the enemies of Christianity to destroy it. It has been maligned, insulted, and written off by its harsh critics. But it not only survives but continues to anchor lives, give hope, and inspire devotion.

The Holy Spirit and Faith

Yet the real reason the Bible is able to function as the very Word of God is because of the powerful Holy Spirit. It is not simply a book. It is not mere words on a page. And it is not the struggling of human minds to find and communicate with the Divine Mind. These are God-breathed words (II Tim. 3:16) that penetrate to the

depths of the human heart (Heb. 4:12) and which are powerful enough to bring people to salvation (Rom. 1:16). Scripture is God's initiative to the human race and is part of the "perpetuation of proof" to generations past His own interpretation of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

There is still another way by which the Holy Spirit creates and empowers faith in the world. He acts not only through the Empowered Word of God but through the Empowered Church of God as well. And this is simultaneously both a great advantage and liability for creating faith in the world today.

Did you pay attention to the part of text that has to do with the Holy Spirit? I'm afraid we tend to read through the account of these marvelous post-resurrection appearances and miss that part. I certainly have in the past. So please read it again with me now:

Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (20:20b-23).

Do you hear an echo of the language of Genesis 2:7 here? Just as God created the physical (i.e., corporeal, natural) race of humankind by breathing into us the breath of life, so the Risen Christ is now creating the spiritual (i.e., Spirit-empowered, supernatural) race of Christians by breathing into His disciples His Holy Spirit. Yahweh breathed into the first human, and both His and those born of His descent became breathing, inspirited, animated souls; Christ breathed into that first body of His spiritual creation, and both they and those born of their descent became His living, vigorous, and dynamic presence to the world. The first race was given authority for tending the material universe; the second race has been given responsibility for nurturing the world of the new creation (II Cor. 5:17; cf. Rom. 8:19-21).

Announcing the "gift of the Holy Spirit" is not an afterthought to the forgiveness of sins on Pentecost Day but the means to living as a forgiven, Christ-claimed person (Acts 2:38; cf. I Cor. 6:19). The Holy Spirit is not an ornament for the church but its beating heart

that gives it spiritual life and power to function on behalf of Christ's redemptive work for all humankind (I Cor. 3:16).

The forgiveness of sins linked to Holy Spirit presence among Christ's disciples is a bit unusual – and obscured in the vast majority of English translations. Literally, Jesus says this: "Of whomever you forgive the sins, they stand as having been forgiven to them; of whomever you hold [the sins], they stand as having been held."

There is a critical point to be gleaned from this. No priest, clergyman, or church either "triggers" or "holds back" forgiveness from anyone. The perfect-tense verbs that come second in the two clauses of Jesus' statement refer to an abiding situation that actually began before the action of the two aorist verbs that come first in both clauses. In other words, God does not forgive or retain sins to someone because we grant or withhold mercy. We are not the ones who pardon or hold liable. To preach the gospel is to proclaim forgiveness or judgment, life or death dependant on whether the **hearer** accepts or rejects Christ. We only announce salvation; we do not originate it.

When a Spirit-empowered church functions in his life and vitality to love the unlovable, minister to the rejected, and eat with prisoners, lepers, and the poor, that church perpetuates the proof of Christ's resurrection. He is alive and doing again what Christ did in the flesh! That is why a church's first question about every one of its projects and ministries must be **"If we do this, does it make us look more like Jesus to the people who are watching?"** That is the question of biblical authority before the church. A church that lives with Scripture in preaching, teaching, and personal study will be led in fact by the Spirit in making correct judgments about its attempts to look like Jesus with its projects and ministries.

When a church lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, faith arises easily and naturally around that body of people. As each believer surrenders more completely to God's Spirit and bears the Spirit's gentle fruit in his or her life, Christ's resurrection power is on display. Faith is being lived out in the saved person and legitimated for the lost soul. The written and lived Word of God are both works of the Holy Spirit, and they combine to evoke saving faith.

When a church fails and does not function in the power of the Spirit, faith can seldom arise from that place. And when the work of the Spirit gives way to or is counterfeited by the methods of flesh, faith will actually die. The problem of unbelief as I most often encounter it is not with someone's dissatisfaction with the teaching or historical authentication of the Bible. It is rooted in angry rejection of the failure of Christians and churches to live its message in the vitality and joy of the Holy Spirit.

Without Christ's bodily resurrection on the Sunday following His crucifixion, the church never would have gotten off the ground. Without Christ's observable presence in the church as a second incarnation, faith will be a reality for this generation.

Conclusion

In New Testament theology, the power to overcome death resides in the person of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere is that illustrated better than in the Gospel of John. Made alive again from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus gave that same Spirit to His disciples so they could live in resurrection power. And that is why the story of the earliest church is one of vibrant life turning the world upside down. People were **saved** by scores, hundreds, and thousands. Local churches had thousands of powerful spirit-filled members. And even the secular powers took note of and sometimes feared its potential clout.

Churches today seem for the most part to be pitifully lacking in resurrection power. Churches are more often bogged down in the sickly, death-dealing experiences of compromise with the world, division, and helplessness – and some churches are just simply dead. Individual believers more often whine about any semblance of suffering and make excuses for being so tarnished by weakness. And that is why the modern church isn't turning its world upside down. That is why people are not being saved by scores, hundreds, and thousands. That is why nobody bothers with the church, except to make fun of its weakness. Where is the power of the resurrection in today's disciples? Where is the observable presence of the Holy Spirit? Where is the faith-perpetuating influence of the Spirit-empowered church?

In Jesus' own words from the Gospel of John, He promised "living water" (i.e., the Holy Spirit) that would keep His disciples from

thirst, from being captive to desires that can never be satisfied by the things of the world. More than that, He promised that the “water” He gave would become an artesian well of Spirit-given power “gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Indeed, He later returned to the same theme and said the Spirit would become “rivers of living water” flowing not only into but out of the lives of His people to a thirsty world (John 7:38).

Christians, you are not destined for weakness but for power. You are not doomed to serve your lusts but have been made alive from the dead to serve your Lord. Your suffering in this life is neither your curse nor your excuse for distrust toward God but your combat zone for drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit to triumph. Only a church that both teaches and models Christ’s resurrection power stands to have enough credibility to lead skeptics to faith, to become a stream of living water in this desert of sorrow and sin.

So take a strong stand on the bedrock certainty of Christ’s resurrection. Live your life not as a victim but in the tone of victory Jesus sounded at the cross and on the other side of the tomb. Know today – to use the words of Paul as commentary– that **“if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who indwells you” (Rom. 8:11)**. And live in Christ’s peace. Live eternal life here and now – as we wait for His glorious coming and the fullness of life, redemption, and the kingdom of God at His appearing. Resurrection life is yours today!

Scriptural References:

" Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (20:20b-23).