

The Power of His Resurrection

by H. A. Ironside

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Col. 3:1.



From the moment that God, in grace, revealed His Son in Saul of Tarsus, transforming the persecuting Pharisee into the flaming apostle to the Gentiles, Paul's great and yearning desire was expressed in the words: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). I would ask you to consider this remarkable expression from three standpoints.

Power for Regeneration

First, God is the God of resurrection. He works with what He brings, not with what He finds. The excellency of the power is in Him and not in us. He who created all things by Jesus Christ, so that the visible universe was brought into existence by the Word of His power alone, is the God who now works in a creation ruined by sin, demonstrating His omnipotent grace. The same power that raised the dead body of the Lord Jesus Christ from the grave is the power that quickens dead souls into newness of life.

In the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ every Person of the Godhead had a part. He was "raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4) He was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18), that is, the Holy Spirit. He Himself said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). And again: "I lay down My life, that I might take it again ... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17,18).

Likewise, in the regeneration of lost men, in the quickening of those who are dead in trespasses and in sins, the entire Godhead has a part. It was the Father who planned our salvation. It was the Son who died that we might be redeemed. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts and attracts the soul to Christ. Jesus said: "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John 6:44), and, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me" (John 6:37). But "it is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). Our salvation is altogether of God. The same power that wrought in Christ to bring Him again from the dead is the power that is involved in the salvation of every individual. Through faith, he becomes a child of God.

Power for Service

In the second place, this is the only power for true Christian service. Fleshly energy counts for nothing. It is even worse than nothing, for it gets in the way of the acting of the Spirit of God. The servant of Christ needs, above everything else, to rely implicitly upon that divine power that alone can make the good seed to fructify and give life through the message. The great object of many today is to put over some kind of a program which they judge will prove effective in gaining the attention of men and in bringing them to some kind of a decision. But the true servant of Christ is not called upon to formulate a program nor to put over one

that others have devised, but to live in such fellowship with the risen Christ that he will know the power of His resurrection in a practical way. Thus he will be enabled to see the working of the Holy Trinity as he, feeble and helpless, and perhaps a broken vessel, holds forth the Word of life in a scene of death.

No one who is at all familiar with the Holy Spirit's quickening operations today questions the reality and actuality of Christ's resurrection. It takes just the same power to turn men from sin to righteousness, from the power of Satan unto God, and from spiritual death to life in Christ that it took to revivify the dead body of the Lord Jesus. To the observant Christian, happily engaged in his Master's service, life is full of miracles, every one manifesting in some degree the power of Christ's resurrection.

Power for Victory

In the third instance, this resurrection power is the dynamic for holy living. It is when I take my rightful place as crucified with Christ, and reckon myself dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God in Him, that the power of His resurrection works in me to enable me to rise into newness of life. Eternal life is far more than everlasting existence. All men, whether saved or lost, will exist forever. Eternal life is more than immortality. All believers who are living when the Lord returns will put on immortality, even as all who sleep in Christ will put on incorruption. But this refers to the body, not to the new life which we now possess in Christ. Eternal life is the very life of God Himself, communicated to the believer in the power of the Holy Spirit. This life has its own affections and desires. Sin is abhorrent to it. Holiness is its delight. Love is its expression. So truly is it the life of God, as revealed in Christ, that He Himself is called "that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (1 John 1:2). Therefore, it is written: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life" (1 John 5:12). The possession of this life gives capacity for the knowledge of, and communion with, the Persons of the Godhead. In His great high-priestly prayer our Lord said to the Father: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). This expresses the capacity which we have as possessors of that life. Such life is enjoyed only as we enter, in a practical sense, into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and know Him as only they can know Him who are identified with Him in His rejection by the world and who take the place of death to all to which He died as Man. That is, we experience death to the world, death to the law, death to sin, in order that we may live a heavenly life down here in the liberty of grace, manifesting that holiness which the Spirit alone imparts. This indeed is to know the power of His resurrection.

This was the truth which the apostle pressed upon the young preacher, Timothy, when he wrote exhorting him to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12). And this is the ideal which, I am persuaded, the majority of Christians have before them from the very moment of their conversion; yet many of them have to confess with sorrow that they never seem to realize it practically. What, then, is the trouble? Why is it that so few of us know the power of His resurrection in our daily lives? May I suggest again three things?

Causes of Defeat

First, it takes us so long to get to the end of ourselves! Even after we have realized that "the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63), so far as earning salvation or justification is concerned, we still imagine that, saved by faith in Christ, we are to be made perfect by the flesh. So we endeavor to harness our carnal nature and to bring it into subjection to God by law, forgetting that the Holy Spirit has declared: "The carnal mind ... is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

Therefore we struggle on, vainly endeavoring to please God on a merely human plane, "doing our little best" to work for Him and to glorify His name, only to learn at last that this old nature of ours is as incorrigibly weak at the end of years of Christian testimony as it was at the beginning. This discovery has a tendency to cast us into doubt and gloom and to make us wonder whether we have ever been converted at all, or whether everything is a hopeless sham. At such times we are tempted to give up the conflict, to cease witnessing for Christ, and to sink back to the low level of that world from which we sought deliverance. But "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). He, the blessed Holy Spirit, holds us fast. Deep in our hearts we know, through the inward witness, that we have passed from death unto life; that a great change has taken place; and that, unsatisfactory as our actual experience may be, we are the children of God. With many there is then the tendency to assume that there is no real way to escape from the hopeless conflict as long as we are still in the body. This leads to a settling down to a low level of Christian living, as though it were the best we could expect to be under existing circumstances. Yet the Spirit of God is constantly seeking to make us dissatisfied with such a state and to long for something better. Little by little we come to the place where we are ready to admit the hopelessness of the flesh: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18).

Then, in the second place, comes another step, one that we are generally very slow to take. We have to learn that, just as we were saved through the blood of the Cross, so we enter into a life of victory through the death of the Cross. When George Muller was asked on one occasion how he accounted for the marvelous way in which God had set His seal upon his work throughout the years, he replied in substance: "There came a day when George Muller died, and then God began to work." This is the experience into which we all need to enter. Judicially, we have died with Christ; His death was our death; but we are so slow to realize this practically and to say "Amen" to that which God has already declared to be true. Perhaps we try — try to die to the flesh, try to die to selfishness, try to die to ambition. But alas, we find in the hour of stress that we are just as much alive as ever! It is a great thing when we learn experimentally, in the presence of God, that we have died, and when in faith the soul can exclaim: "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). Then the struggle is over, for nothing is expected of a dead man.

How to Triumph

Yet in the Word of God we are exhorted to strive, and to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12). How shall we do this if we are dead? Ah, now we come to the third point, to that which the apostle expresses in our text. We are called to know Christ, the living Christ, and the power of His resurrection working in us, overcoming our enemies, defeating the world, the flesh, and the devil, and leading

us into a life of triumphant victory. Then the soul exclaims: "Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Thus the soul's quest is attained. Resurrection life is enjoyed even in a mortal body, and the risen Christ is seen in those whom He has purchased with His blood. This is bliss indeed — a foretaste of that which will be ours eternally in the city of God!