

## **A Living Church And A Risen Christ**

Since Easter we've been talking about the importance and significance of Christ's resurrection and I want to share one more sermon on the subject. I feel often the attitude of some is "Jesus died, rose again, blah, blah, blah, let's move on." I will say it again that Jesus' resurrection from the dead makes all the difference. We've talked about the difference it makes for us as individuals and this morning I want to focus on the impact of the resurrection on us as the church. **The impact of Christ's resurrection on who we are as the church.**

When we mention the word church, most people think of the building we are sitting in, but according to the New Testament we should be thinking of the church as the body of Christ. Paul writes, **"All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it."** **1 Corinthians 12:27** While there are a variety of other images used in the Scripture to describe the church, none is as powerful or as precise as this image of the body of Christ. (If you would like a study of the various images of the church, I would recommend the book *Without Spot Or Wrinkle*. Modesty prevents me from mentioning the author's name.)

We, the church, are the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul uses this image throughout his New Testament letters, but what led him to this revelation in the first place? Paul was first known as Saul. He was a persecutor of the church. He believed Jesus was a blasphemer deserving of death and he certainly didn't believe in the resurrection. Acts 8:2 says "Saul began to destroy the church", dragging off men and women and putting them in prison. He was given authority to arrest the followers of Christ and was on his way to Damascus to hunt for believers when he was suddenly blinded by a light from heaven. Falling to the ground he heard a voice call him by name. **"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."** **Acts 9:4-5**

Saul, who would change his name to Paul, had been persecuting the church. But what did Jesus say to him? "Why do you persecute me?" "I'm the one you are persecuting." Jesus is saying, "When you persecute the church, you are directly, not indirectly, persecuting me!" Paul isn't talking about the body of Christ as a corporate entity. For instance, when the teachers got together to talk about a walk out, someone might have said, "let's take a vote to see what the will of this body is on this matter." That's a corporate body. But that's not what Paul is talking about when he speaks of the church as the body of Christ. Stephen Seamands, in his book *Give Them Christ* writes, **"So when Paul says, 'You are the body of Christ', he doesn't mean, 'You are**

**a part of a corporate body of people who are together seeking to follow Christ.’ What he does mean is, ‘You are a part of Christ’s very own corporal body.’ And of course, that only makes sense if Christ has been raised from the dead. That is, if he is alive – not as a ghost or some sort of spiritual, ethereal force – and if he has a resurrection body as well.”**

**... Stephen Seamands**

When we come to faith in Christ, through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit we become a part of the body of Christ, his church. The church is not an organization, although we may interact with society and with government as an organization, but the true church is a living organism because we are connected to the living, risen head of the church, Jesus Christ. He is the head of the body, giving life to the body. We share a common life in the risen Christ!

Apart from the resurrection, this makes no sense. If there is no resurrection, there is no risen Lord and that means there is no life to share in. Without the resurrection of Jesus, we are just another service organization, getting together to fellowship or do good deeds. Without the resurrection it becomes all about us and what we can do. It’s “our church”, “my church”, rather than His church. It’s the resurrection of Jesus, which we believe and which we proclaim, that makes us who we are, the body of Christ, the Living church of the Risen Savior.

It’s not just who we are that is impacted by the resurrection of Jesus, it is also what we are to do. **The impact of Christ’s resurrection on what we do as the church.** Think of the influence of a risen Savior upon the church. **Jesus’ resurrection impacts worship.** We aren’t just gathering to sing about a guy that lived twenty centuries ago, we are singing and worshipping and praying and talking to a risen Savior who is alive and present with us by His Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”** **Matthew 18:20** When we gather to worship the Lord, we offer praise and thanks to him, we pray and talk to him, we confess our sins to him, we listen as he speaks to us, we receive his blessing, the impartation of his life and power to us to live for him and serve him. Our time is, or at least should be, centered on him because we know he is present here, with us, among us. The risen Lord and Savior. We aren’t gathered to admire and remember a dead rabbi, we are gathered to worship and risen and living Savior!

The early church was made up of Jewish followers of Christ who had always honored and kept the Sabbath (Saturday) but it’s interesting to note that over time they began gathering on Sunday, the first day of the week. Why? Because it was the day of the Resurrection. They

gathered to meet with each other and with the risen Lord on Sunday to celebrate his resurrection. Every Sunday was Easter Sunday for them because Christ was risen!! Their sermons and their celebration centered on the fact Jesus died for them and rose again in power and he was with them. The risen Christ was then and is now present in our gathering, in our prayer, our worship, in the bread and the cup as we celebrate the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, in the preaching and proclamation of the Word, in the benediction. From start to finish our worship is based on the knowledge that Jesus, the risen Lord and Savior is with us and among us, actively involved in all that occurs.

**Jesus' resurrection impacts evangelism.** Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus gave the church a command, we call it the great commission. He told us to take this message to the whole world, but he didn't then just ascend into heaven and now he is watching, cheering us on, hoping we can get the job done. Notice what he said, **"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus told us to go, but he added that he would go with us. He can't do that if he's dead. It's the risen Lord that promised to be with us to the very end of the age. He has in mind to bring the message of his saving grace to the whole world. He sends us to tell the story but he is going with us!

Some of you have perhaps heard of Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission. Born in England in 1832, he went to China in 1854 as a young missionary and would spend more than 50 years in China until his death in 1905. He wrote to his sister in 1860, **"If I had a thousand pounds, China should have it. If I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No. Not China, but Christ! Can we do too much for him? Can we do enough for such a precious Savior?"** ...Hudson Taylor

While on furlough in England in 1865 the Lord spoke to him and said, **"I am going to evangelize inland China, and if you will walk with me, I will do it through you."** Notice what Jesus said to him. "I am going to evangelize China." This was the risen Savior's plan and he invited Hudson Taylor to participate. Walk with me and I'll do it through you. Taylor returned and established the China Inland Mission. Within thirty years they had some 700-800 missionaries serving in the provinces of China. The risen Christ intends to bring the good news

to the whole world. He intends to bring hope and the message of salvation to our neighbors, our city, to the rich and the poor, to everyone, and if we will walk with him, he will do it through us! Let the world know, we serve a risen Savior and he can and will save you and give you life and hope and peace if you will open your heart to him in faith.

**Jesus' resurrection impacts our fellowship.** We are the body of Christ. That means more than just friendship or camaraderie, it means we are connected to one another. It means, at least it should mean, that we are doing life together, loving one another, bearing one another's burdens, slow to judge, slow to condemn, quick to forgive, to bear with one another, to go out of our way to serve one another, willing to lay down our lives for each other because we are members together in the body of Christ! The relationship we have with each other flows out of the relationship we share with the living, risen Christ! Consider now...

**The impact of Christ's resurrection on how we live as the church.** I said at the beginning we aren't just an organization, instead we are a living organism. We are the living church, the body of Christ. Because we share in the life of the risen Christ, we don't live like the world. We don't act like the world. We aren't the same. We aren't what we once were. We once were dead in our sins but now, through faith in Christ, we are new creations, raised to live a new life. The bible says, **"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."** Romans 6:4

When we place our faith in the risen Christ, (Paul is referring to that faith as evidenced by our baptism in this passage) a resurrection takes place in us. We are regenerated, redeemed, born again into a new life in Christ with a new, redeemed nature. Peter writes, **"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you..."** 1 Peter 1:3-4

Stephen Seamands writes, "For the believer, experiencing the power of Christ's resurrection begins here and now. The moment we put our faith in Christ and are joined to him, we share in his resurrection. In fact, from start to finish, from initial to final salvation, the believer's new life in Christ involves participation in his risen life." Stephen Seamands.

We are participating in his risen life. It's a new life, a new birth into a living hope and an eternal inheritance! In addition, through our faith in Christ and his resurrection power, we no

longer have to let sin and Satan control or dominate us. We are free to serve Christ, to live for him in this new life. Paul writes, **“Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer your selves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”**  
**Romans 6:12-13** We’ve been resurrected, brought from death to new life so now we can live like it!

**We’ve been raised with Christ, in Christ to a new life!** We are new creations with a new nature. Raised to a new life. We aren’t controlled by sin unless we allow it. Through Christ we have the power to choose, to offer our lives and our physical body to God as instruments of righteousness rather than giving ourselves up as instruments of sin and wickedness. We are part of a living church, risen with Christ to a new life and a new way of living. Stop giving in to sin and that old way of life and start living that new life in Christ!

**We’ve been raised with Christ, in Christ, to a new position.** Paul writes, **“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...”**  
**Ephesians 2:4-6** Our new position – seated with Christ. What does that mean that we’ve been raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms? It means that just as we share in a new life with Christ, we also share in his victory. His position, seated on the throne, means he is the victor. He has triumphed over sin and life and death. To be seated with him means we share in that victory, seated with Christ in triumph over the sin that once controlled and defeated us. John Stott writes, “We were dead, but have been made spiritually alive and alert. We were in captivity, but have been enthroned.” The church doesn’t have to live in spiritual defeat. We are a living church, risen with Christ to live in his overcoming victory!

**We’ve been raised with Christ, in Christ, to a new perspective and focus.** The life we live now is focused on Christ, on heaven and heavenly things. The bible declares, **“Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”**  
**Colossians 3:1-2** Our perspective is not that of this world. Since we’ve been raised with Christ and given this new life, our focus is on Jesus, on things above and not the things of this world or

the things of flesh. This world is going to pass away some day and we know it. We aren't serving this world or living for this world. We are living for Jesus. Paul writes, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20**

This is the life we live. This is the life we live as the church. Christ in us. This is who we are – a living church with a risen Christ living in us, working through us. We aren't just trying to imitate Jesus. Allow me to quote from Stephen Seamands again. “Whenever we fail to understand the nature of our life in Christ – that we have been joined to him in his death and resurrection – we always end up viewing the Christian life essentially as an imitation of Christ rather than a participation in Christ.” His resurrection power is at work in us, his church. We aren't trying by our own efforts to be like Jesus. We are sharing in, participating in his life through his saving grace. We are being made conformable to the image of Christ by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit! Eugene Peterson wrote, “Jesus' followers live resurrection-formed lives, not by watching him or imitating him or being influenced by him, but by being raised with him. It's formation by resurrection.”

You become part of a living church by repenting of your sins and placing your faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. The power of the risen Christ – the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead gives life to you and makes you a new creation, a new person, in Christ. Born again into a new life. And he gives us power to be his church, his body in this world. We have an assignment, a mission to carry out as his church and the risen Lord has promised to be with us, to go with us, to empower us to get the job done.

He is calling us to share in his life. He is calling us to stop surrendering to sin and start living lives of obedience to him. He is calling us to make a difference and we aren't on our own. He is risen and he is with us. He is at work in us. We are a living church serving a risen Christ. We ought to be making a difference in this world. May the power and blessing and anointing of the risen Lord be upon us today! Lord Jesus, make us the church you've called us to be!