



The Lost Foundations – The Resurrection of the Dead

Introduction

The elementary principles are not deeply mysterious. They are easily understood (for a child's mind) and consumed (as milk). Furthermore, they are the word of God – alive and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword (Hebrews 4:12); and they will accomplish that for which they are intended (Isaiah 55:11).

Even immature babes should have great hope for understanding, faith and obedience. Our Father is loving and good; and He has given us a great Teacher.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1Corinthians 2:12-13

It encourages me greatly to know that the kingdom of God is not reserved for those who are humanly superior in speech or wisdom (or writing).

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1Corinthians 2:1-5

Keep this in mind, as we search out this principle. Allow the Holy Spirit to demonstrate Himself and the power of God, in the resurrection of the dead. Listen for, and prayerfully consider, how He might use you to share this principle with others.

The Proof of Our Lord's Resurrection

The proof of our Lord's resurrection is not within the scope of this article; and many others have delivered said proof with Holy Spirit wisdom and power (e.g., Ravi Zacharias, Lee Strobel, Josh McDowell). However, an encouraging summary seems like a good place to start; so, consider these points and investigate further, as the Holy Spirit leads you:

1. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was prophesied (Acts 2:22-32).
2. The tomb where He was laid was sealed and heavily guarded (Matthew 27:62-66).
3. If the body had been moved, the Jewish leaders and Romans authorities would certainly have discovered its whereabouts and used it to refute the story of His resurrection.
4. The resurrected Jesus appeared to over 500 individuals before He ascended into heaven (1Corinthians 15:3-6). His distracters could have easily exposed Him as in impostor.
5. While men may profess a lie for personal gain, few (if even one) would die to hide such a lie. In this case, at least eleven men died for their confession. Many others were persecuted and driven from their homes.

God has seen to it that Jesus Christ's resurrection is irrefutable; bedrock for the foundation we shall find in the resurrection of the dead.

The Importance of Resurrection

For many the Gospel has been reduced to something like “Jesus died on the cross to save me from my sins, so I could be with Him in Heaven”. Resurrection, in relation to our salvation, is an afterthought – if given any thought at all. This is unfortunate; for without resurrection, our faith in the mercy and grace of the cross is worthless.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 1Corinthians 15:16-17

Furthermore, if you asked the average Christian what God has done to save them, they would likely respond with some form of “He sent Jesus to die on the cross, to save me from my sins”. Such answers expose our limited understanding of God’s work in the resurrection of the dead.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Romans 5:8-10

God sent His Son to die for our reconciliation, that He might save us by His life. Jesus Christ’s death on the cross reconciled us to God. However, His death does not complete the work of salvation. Clearly, it is His life that “much more” saves us. If He had not been resurrected – and we are not resurrected with him – we have no hope of salvation.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains the connection between Jesus’ resurrection and our own:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 1Corinthians 15:20-22

Without the resurrection of Christ there would be no resurrection of the dead. Think about that. He is the first of all who are resurrected! All subsequent resurrections are, therefore, into an entirely new kind of life.

The Resurrected Life

Jesus’ death would have been worthless without His resurrection. The same is true for His disciples. The effectualness of His death – our dying with Him – is accomplished in our being raised with Him into new life. If we are not resurrected with Him, then we are still spiritually dead. The transaction is incomplete. By grace, through faith, this is not the case.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives 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. Galatians 2:20

Our participation in the crucifixion of Christ accomplished two very important things: It killed our old man; and it positioned us to receive the life of Christ. We receive His life through our resurrection with Him.

This understanding adds significant importance to the resurrection of the dead. Understanding, believing and living out our resurrection takes on new meaning. The resurrection of the dead is not simply a future event described in the book of the Revelation.

Looking closer, we find that it has incredible meaning for the followers of Jesus Christ – on this side of heaven. The Scriptures have much to say about the resurrection of the dead. Paul’s earnest encouragement to the Church at Philippi is one of my favorites:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Philippians 3:8-11

Is it possible to be more excited and passionate about “the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus”? This same passionate desire lies in the heart of every disciple. How can we neglect so great a salvation? Each and every follower of Jesus Christ must also “lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

This passage contains seven things we are to lay hold of. The first three – gaining Christ, being found in Him, and knowing Him – are commonly taught and understood as present experiences of the normal Christian life; graces we grow into, by faith.

The fourth – knowing the power of His resurrection – is an experience much desired in the church today; and will be addressed later in this study. The next two – knowing the fellowship of His sufferings and being conformed to His death – though generally avoided in the Western Church, are also present life experiences. Those who have faithfully followed Jesus have experienced, and would testify to, these realities.

Last, but certainly not least, Paul would have us lay hold of the resurrection from the dead. It is this grace on which the others depend. Said in another way: These graces cannot be our present day experiences, if the resurrection from the dead is not also our experience in this life.

Paul tasted the resurrection life and determined that he wanted all that Jesus had for him. Paul’s passionate confession is a pressing on to attain the resurrection from the dead. Paul understood his “laying hold of” this grace as an ongoing activity – a process.

As with many of God’s processes (e.g., salvation, transformation), event-oriented theology has minimalized the importance of our resurrection from the dead. Fortunately, as we have previously discovered, God is a faithful process-oriented problem solver.

God’s process for our resurrection begins when we are born again, in Christ Jesus. It has come – as a present spiritually reality; and it is coming – the physical resurrection of Revelation, Chapter 20. Our responsibility to the process is pressing on to lay hold of Jesus Christ’s resurrected life.

How does this happen? The life which you now live in the flesh you live by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20). His faith is a gift (Ephesians 2:8) which comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (*rhema*; Romans 10:17).

Just as the faith of Jesus appropriates the grace for our salvation, His faith will appropriate the grace of His resurrected life. Our responsibility is to seek the word of God, receive the accompanying faith, and choose to respond in obedience to the word. In doing so, the faith of Jesus Christ comes alive in our hearts (James 2:20).

Keep in mind: The resurrection of the dead is an elementary principle. Though you may sense the depth of mystery that lies beyond it, this is not spiritual “rocket science”.

1. Jesus died on the cross.
2. We spiritually died with Him, by faith.
3. He was resurrected.
4. We have been spiritually resurrected with Him, into His spiritual life, by faith.

This is the basis of every Scripture passage that uses the phrase “in Christ”. “In Christ” is not some metaphorical concept. It is an elementary spiritual reality.

“Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!!”

This is the common cry on every Resurrection Sunday. It might help us to continue the response with:

“He is alive! And we are alive in Him!!”

Resurrection Power

Paul understood, believed, and lived from the power of Jesus Christ’s resurrection. The fullness and possibility of this power is beyond our comprehension. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (Ephesians 3:20-21). However, God has given us a glimpse into the possibilities.

What follows are some very exciting passages that help us understand the power of the resurrection; power that God has promised and provided for His children. As you read them, consider their truth and application in regards to your life and life situations. What does your resurrection, in Christ, mean for your trials, tribulations and kingdom adventures?

... nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. Luke 20:36

Being sons of the resurrection, we are accounted by Jesus as equal to the angels. Scripture is not clear as to the meaning of this equality. However, it is safe and profitable to consider, in this regard, their power and their importance as God’s messengers; indeed, for we are in the War of the Ages.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

As sons of the resurrection, we are empowered for the battle, by the grace of God.

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:33

Notice it was not with power, but with great power, that the apostles gave witness. There was more than grace upon them; it was great grace. As living witnesses of the resurrection, they walked in the greater than life that Jesus promised (John 14:12). The same grace is promised for His disciples today.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11

The life that comes to us through our participation in the resurrection of Jesus flows out to our mortal bodies, through the Spirit. This reminds me of stories I have heard of the visible glow of life seen in the children of God when they enter dark environments and countries. “You are the light of the world” is more than a metaphor.

Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers... that you may know... what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places... Ephesians 1:15-20

There is more than elementary principle in this passage; but, even on the surface, we find an exceedingly great encouragement for the power of Christ's resurrection directed toward those that understand, believe and obey the LORD. Stop and consider: Resurrection power is being directed, by God, toward you right now!

Conclusion

I have come to recognize, in searching out these elementary principles, that the elementary is often a doorway to the deeper mysteries of God. Particularly in this principle, it is difficult to avoid crossing the threshold. There is a force that draws the seeker into the depths; like the current of a great river.

That river is the life of Jesus Christ; and that force is the Holy Spirit. If you are being drawn, put down your ungodly fears, trust God, and surrender. Go with the flow. God's sanctifying, transforming and saving processes are incredibly dynamic. He is the only one that can manage them; and He can.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is working in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:12-13

His good pleasure is to give you His kingdom (Luke 12:32). Our fear and trembling should be in the possibility that we might get in the way of God working through the elementary principles; that we would remain babes, in peril of falling away.

Working it Out

The elementary principles are elementary. They are not difficult to understand; nor are they difficult to share. Invite a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ to search them out with you. Together, through the hearing that you have been given, receive the word of God into your heart; where it will become faith. Ask God to give you opportunity to walk in the new found faith of your resurrection from the dead.

Share this article with others in your spheres of influence. The truth will make them free; free to join you in exercising the power of the resurrected life.

To those that have been given positions of leadership, I particularly commend to you:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. 1Corinthians 1:26-29

The resurrected life will shine most brightly in the most unexpected places. It is important for those of us in leadership to give our attention to God's foolish, weak and base vessels – the less obvious bearers of God's glory.

Recommended Reading

The following are some of my favorite books on this subject. Most can be found at your local Christian book store, or at one of the many online distributors.

The Power of His Resurrection; T. Austin-Sparks

Like Christ; Andrew Murray

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Humbly Yours and Forever His,
Rob