

Lesson 5: Developing a Resurrection Lens

In the first four sessions of this course, we spent a lot of time talking about death. There may be some of you wondering if that's all we talk about, dying, dying, dying. You'll be relieved to know that in this section, I'd like to make a more concerted effort to talk about resurrection. Let's do that by taking a look at Philippians 1:12 and following. The Apostle Paul says, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice."

When we read Paul's description of his prison life, we have to ask ourselves, does he sound more like an optimist or a pessimist? It's kind of hard to tell, so if we take a closer look at the passage, we see in verse 13 that he is very aware that he is in prison. In verse 15, he recognizes that he's not out of touch and that there are actually those out there who are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, and not goodwill. And so, if you've ever been slandered and then imprisoned for three years with the possibility of a death penalty, would you be an optimist or a pessimist? Would you be joyful or would you be bitter? I know I'd be quite bitter. But Paul seems, in the midst of all this, not out of touch with the circumstances but very much in touch. And yet, also joyful. And even thankful. So what explains the unusual way that he's viewing his situation?

We see that Paul is neither an optimist nor a pessimist. He's a realist. That is, he sees life realistically, exactly as it is. He recognizes that we do live in a broken world. Yet, he also sees the power of the resurrection of Jesus at work in the midst of it. Paul's lens of realism is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead on that first Easter morning did not go dormant until his final return. It is actively being worked out in our world today.

Now, like Paul, Paganism, in other words, religions before Christianity, were also realistic. Unlike Paul, they saw that life is a circle. The pagans would see that generally it moves this way. Life happens, and then we die, and then in many ways, it starts all over again. And so, we begin with birth, we grow, we move to death and decay. And we're in this endless cycle of dying and rising. And the circle of life is everywhere in ancient paganism. It's preserved by the priests who made Stonehenge in England, by the Taoists monks who created the yin and yang. The modern-day version of it is you wake up, you go to work, you eat dinner, you sleep, and then you repeat until you die.

Now, does the Christian deny the reality of the mundane life or difficulties? Of course not. Paul is well aware that he is sitting in prison with actual chains on his legs. Look at the way he describes the

challenging nature of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. He says, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Paul is well aware that we live in a broken world. He is very aware of the realities of this. And yet, if that's all we get focused on, then it's easy to see life as only problems and difficulties and challenges. Look at what life looks like if all we see is the broken world. Jars of clay, hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, always carrying around in our body the death of Jesus, always being given over to death, death is at work in us, outwardly we are wasting away, troubles, only what is seen, it's only what is temporary.

Despite Paul's reality of reality, how does he not get stuck in the death? The answer is that Paul has a resurrection lens. He mentioned this lens earlier in verse 6. In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul says, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."

In this short verse, we can see immediately that the most predominant theme is this idea of light. Light shines, light of the knowledge of God. Notice how the light grows from very broadly and narrows further and deeper. It starts from the light that shines out of the darkness. You get this vision of Genesis when God creates light that casts into the darkness. And then he moves, how that light begins to focus more narrowly into our hearts. And the way that the light is recognized is in the very face of Jesus. The resurrected Jesus is the brilliant light that casts shadow in the room.

Paul is completely enthralled with the person of Jesus. And that vision of that reality of the world as it really is, keeps Paul from getting stuck in the death. Paul sees life coming out of death everywhere he works, he lives, and he prays. Because the Spirit of Jesus is actively and repeatedly bringing life from death. It's the brilliant light at the centre of the room that casts light and transforms the darkness.

So, the resurrection as his floodlight or his flashlight. Paul then sees his circumstances in the darkness of reality in the light of Jesus. If we look at that same passage, he also sees that we have this treasure so that all the surpassing power is from God and not to us. Therefore, we are not crushed, we are not in despair, we are not abandoned, we are not destroyed. So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies. We who are alive. So that his life may also be revealed in our mortal bodies. But life is at work in you. Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with himself to you. We do not lose heart. Inwardly we are being

renewed day by day. Achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes on what is unseen, since what is unseen is eternal.

How do you develop this resurrection lens? Two quick thoughts. We need to become a resurrection hunter. One of the ways we do that is that we have to be intentional. Evil is easy to focus on. We don't have to try to do that. It comes at us, invited or not. And evil has this sticky quality to it. And it's really not hard to see it everywhere and have it dominate our minds and our hearts. So we have to work by faith and in prayer to see the resurrection power of the Spirit at work in our lives. It's almost like if you take a coin and put it all the way up close to your eyes, in theory that coin can block out the light of the sun. Evil has that ability, proportionate to the size of the sun, it's nothing. If you get it close enough, if you stick it to your eyes, it can block out the light of the sun.

Notice what is the relationship between evil and darkness, and the good and the light. Who's winning? A light is cast throughout the entire picture of what Paul paints. God is on the move. Are light and darkness equal powers? Of course not. While evil is present, God triumphs in the midst of evil.

And secondly, resurrections are often subtle and happen over time. It doesn't just require faith. It requires patience. So if you're currently in a season that is extremely difficult, and it's very easy to see death all around you, let me encourage you to continue to look in the face of Jesus and his light might be cast and shine into the darkness. And that you might be able to see his work of the Spirit, of the power of the resurrection, in your life today.