

Lesson 6: Rising in Christ

Alright, this is session 6 called Rising in Christ of the J-Curve course. I wanted to talk a little bit about resurrection more specifically because they can sometimes be confusing. If we take another look at the J here, sometimes, we might be in a J-Curve and we're wondering what happens or when we finally get to the bottom of the J. We might be in a situation where we've been praying for a long time that things will change and one day something changes and we're hopeful that we're now on the uprise of the resurrection, but the next day things get even worst. And so what's going on?

Sometimes, what we're experiencing are mini Js that are hanging off the big one. They are small resurrections that God is doing but we're in a bigger J-Curve story. At other times, one of things that's confusing is also that we experience death and it's in that death that we experience resurrection. And so it's at the very bottom here that might be sometimes the most painful for us, that resurrection is actually simultaneously happening.

I want to take a closer look today at that today in Philippians 1:12 again. Looking at the passage when Paul is in prison and he 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."

Let's not forget where Paul is when he writes this, he is in prison. And the word that he uses for imprisonment is actually the word "chains" and so here's a picture of little Roman chains. And so, Paul is strapped with his leg in irons and probably his wrist as well. Paul has a remarkable way of describing the message that the palace guards have heard from him. Most translations say "I am in chains for Christ." And we would expect Paul to say "for Christ". I'm doing it for him. But the Greek is clear in the original text, Paul is in chains in Christ. By saying in Christ, Paul means union with Christ. And so remarkably the palace guard has some sense that Paul is not just in chains, but he is also in Christ.

Paul sees imprisonment through the lens of Christ dying and rising. We can easily picture Paul's guards wondering why he's so joyful and thankful. And Paul will not be shy about connecting his joy with his being in Jesus, as opposed to being in chains. Paul is fully aware of his circumstances, but he sees Christ at work in them.

The Christian life does not get stuck in death. Rising, not dying has the last word. Notice the two distinct resurrections that Paul sees in verses 13 and 14. He says, "it's become known throughout the whole Imperial guard and to all the rest. He sees resurrection happening before them and in them, and then he talks about the other brothers who are now much more bold to speak the word without fear. Verse 12 implies that the Philippians were concerned that Paul's imprisonment would hinder the gospel. But notice that Paul does not say the gospel is getting out in spite of prison or because of prison. Paul says prison is the means for the gospel getting out even more.

And so the very resurrection that God is doing is embedded in the very death that Paul has experienced in chains. It's very similar to the description of Jesus in Philippians chapter 2:8-9, who was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. That is why God has exalted him. Just as prison was the means for the gospel getting out more. So Jesus' death was the means of the resurrection. So what is the connection between dying and rising? Resurrection is embedded in Jesus' death and so that's captured in the phrase "that is why".

So resurrection comes out of death. Without death, there is no resurrection. And so what are the deaths for Paul from Philippians 1:12-14? He's in chains, he has no freedom, he's in danger of physical death, he's there because of slander by fellow Jews in Jerusalem. And it's in the midst of all of this dying that blessing is coming out of what Paul is doing. What doesn't resurrect for Paul? It's his circumstances. He's still in chains, he's still in prison without the possibility, at that point, of getting out.

Here's another example of that. 2 Corinthians 4:10-12, Paul says, "I'm always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who always live are being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh. So, death is at work for us, but life is at work in you.

Who is still experiencing death? What phrase does Paul use to describe that? He says, "we" were still experiencing death, we're always been given over to death. Death is at work for us. Where is the resurrection happening? It's happening in others. How is that like the gospel? Jesus died for our sins literally. He experienced death that we might experience resurrection. If we look at this chart, here's where resurrection is happening on the inside of our hearts. Resurrection is happening outside in the world. For Paul, his heart is encouraged. He's been resurrected. For the Philippians and the Romans, their hearts are being encouraged and resurrected. In Jesus, he's enthroned and resurrected. For Paul, he's dying, still in a circumstance, he is still in chains.

But the resurrection is happening for the people as their circumstances improved and Jesus is being made known. The only grid, if you look at this chart, where resurrection isn't happening, is Paul's experience of his world. In other words, Paul is still in chains. He's still in prison, his circumstances have not been resurrected. But his heart has, the hearts and the circumstances of the Philippians and Romans have. And Jesus is being raised on high all throughout the prison. And so as you think about your own life, you may be continuing to be in a season of death. Don't be discouraged and let me encourage you to look all around you because the resurrection that he might be bringing in and through your death is happening all around you, it might be in your heart, but it most likely is happening in the lives and the hearts of others that Christ may be glorified. See you next time.