

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Truth leaves its mark: The Truth of the Resurrection**

“What I learnt in ‘A’ level physics changed my life. It totally transformed the way I look at the world, what I value and how I relate to people.” Have you ever heard anybody say something like that? No, me neither! I might describe my experience of ‘A’ level physics in many ways, but life-changing isn’t one of them. I don’t blame my teacher. He clearly enjoyed his subject, and did well at communicating some of that enthusiasm. Nor do I blame the syllabus. The examining body hadn’t omitted all the transformational parts of the subject, leaving only the less exciting material. No, the plain truth is that physics just isn’t life-changing in that way. Useful, yes; interesting, possibly; life-transforming, no. Nobody expects it to be. That’s not what physics is for. On the other hand, the Bible, and the truths that it contains, are definitely meant to transform your life. That was God’s intention in revealing them and they **must** have an impact on us. I cannot claim to have properly grasped any truth from the Bible, unless it has made a distinct difference to the way I think, talk and act. Not that we can’t have an intellectual grasp of a particular doctrine without it having an impact. Most of us have an intellectual grasp of many more scriptural doctrines than we have really thoroughly been gripped by, and seen worked out in our lives. The fact remains, that every single doctrine in scripture is intended to have a distinct impact on our lives. I am not meant to think about the promise of heaven, without it increasing my desire to acquire treasure there, and reducing my urge to acquire treasure in this world. A proper understanding of the forgiveness of my sins, and the price it required, must deepen my willingness to forgive others. Growing appreciation of the holiness of God, will make my desire for personal holiness grow. Every truth leaves its mark, but some truths have more obvious practical implications than others. Our subject for today is resurrection, and it’s easy to see how this has enormous implications for all parts of our lives. I will try and resist the temptation to cover them all, and confine myself to four main points!

1. Death to sin
2. Fruit to God
3. Hope for the future
4. Strength to suffer

### **Death to sin**

As soon as you think about resurrection, it becomes apparent that it relates to another, implied, truth. Resurrection means rising from the dead, and so it is impossible to think of resurrection without thinking about death. If there has not been death you cannot have resurrection. The two stand together logically, and they stand together in scripture. You can, of course, have death without resurrection. But you cannot have resurrection without death. The sixth chapter of Romans links the death and resurrection of Christ with my death to sin and rising “in newness of life”. Let’s read verses 10 and 11 from Romans 6. “For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Paul is not talking, in verse 10, about Jesus dying **on account of** our sins. Paul has plenty to say elsewhere about how Christ’s death and resurrection deal with the guilt and penalty of our sins; but that is not his point here. He says here, that Christ “died **to** sin once for all”. In other words, once Christ had died, sin had nothing more to do with Him, forever. Paul goes on to say that the life Christ now lives, in resurrection, “He lives to God”. Paul is setting out two opposites.

- Christ died to sin once, in the past, and now sin has nothing to do with Him at all.
- Christ is now alive again eternally, and this life is wholly for, and totally pleasing to, God.

This spells out some important truths about the work of Christ, but is not especially startling. The facts that Christ is now altogether apart from sin, and that His life is for God, are readily understandable. It is the parallel that Paul goes on to draw with ourselves that is breathtaking! Paul wants us to be clear that this also applies to us. “Likewise **you also**, reckon **yourselves**”, says Paul, as if to underline that this really does include you and me. We are not told to die unto sin, as if we still live to sin at the moment, and need to kill something within us. We are already “dead indeed to sin”. There is no room for doubt. If I know the Lord Jesus as my saviour, I am already as dead to sin as He is. Not only that, I am as “alive to God” as He is as well! Of course, I am not alive to God in the same way as Christ is. He lives to God in the power of His **own** life and pleases God in the value of His **own** worth. We are alive to God “in Christ Jesus our Lord”. Our life and worth derive totally from Him. Nevertheless the picture of the death and resurrection life of the believer is startling, and ought to have a massive impact on my outlook and behaviour. If I have died to sin, how can I

continue living as though sin in my life is perfectly normal? I can no longer accept sin as the controlling force in my life that it was before I became a Christian. Recognising that can be very liberating. Sometimes we struggle with a particular sin, and find ourselves confessing, and then failing again, time after time. Realising that we are not **bound** to keep sinning, can help set us free from the seemingly endless cycle. Sin simply does not have that kind of power over us anymore.

The fact that I have died to sin is really only half the story. The positive side is that I am now “alive to God”. I have a resurrection life that is active before God and capable of pleasing God. In fact, pleasing God is now my chief purpose in life. These two sides of the same truth should work together in my life. Not only am I now set free from slavery to sin, I am set free to please God. Now, when I think about how repulsive sin is to the God I serve, the very idea of sinning fills me with disgust. Being busy living to please God will also mean that I am too busy to allow my thoughts to keep running over temptation. This will result in considerable changes to the way I behave. Both Christians and non-Christians will start to see that I am a changed, or at least a changing, person. In fact they will see visible evidence of the invisible change, that occurred within me when I received a new life in Christ Jesus.

### **Fruit to God**

We find this idea set out in Romans 7:4-6. “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” I have bad memories of drama lessons at school, when I was asked to imagine I was a tree, and to sway in the wind. These verses bring the thoughts flooding back! According to Paul we are fruit trees, in fact we always have been. When we were converted the species of the tree was changed, and so was the kind of fruit we bear. Before we were saved, we were ruled by sinful passions. The law, far from controlling those passions, stirred them up. Just as small children immediately want to do the one thing they are told not to, so the law aroused our sinful passions. The result was “fruit to death”. That is, sinful deeds and thoughts were produced in the members of our body. The expression “members of our body” includes our minds as well as the physical parts of our bodies. The ultimate result of sin is death, so Paul refers to these sinful acts and thoughts as “fruit to death”. So, without realising it, we were once fruit trees that produced a very dismal kind of fruit! Surely only Satan can have been pleased with that kind of crop. Then, to mix our metaphors, that fruit tree died, and a new one was raised in its place. This tree is a different species altogether; one that bears fruit to God. Now, instead of sinful passions and the law, combining in my body and mind to produce fruit to death; the new life and the Holy Spirit combine, in the same body and mind, to produce fruit to God. What a total transformation, and what a good crop!

Some sins are physical; such as stealing, violence and bad language. Others are in the mind; such as jealousy, greed and lust. In a similar way, the fruit to God may be physical; such as giving money, doing the shopping for somebody or keeping somebody company. It may also be in the mind; such as meekness, loving thoughts or praise to God. In fact, our minds and our bodies are not as easily separated as my lists suggest. In practice, what we think, quickly affects what we do and, what we habitually do, gradually affects how we think. This was true in our sins, and is still true in our “fruit to God”. Good thoughts and good actions go together; which is one of the reasons why the Bible regularly demands both! In Titus 3:14, Paul, referring to actions, says, “And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful”. In Philippians 4:8, referring to thoughts, Paul says, “Whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report... meditate on these things”. Ephesians 2:10 talks about works. “For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” Romans 12:2 talks about our mind. “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind”.

A proper appreciation of the resurrection will produce fruit to God. What dreadful returns God has had since he “planted” mankind in the world, starting with Adam and Eve. Fruit to death started growing immediately after the fall, and nothing perfectly pleasing to God grew again, until Jesus Christ was born. Not that the faith of people like Abraham and David did not please God, but the ugly evidence of sin appeared, even in their lives. God longed for the day when Christ would remove sin, rather than cover it with another animal sacrifice. Now Christ has lived, died and been raised again and, in the power of that resurrection, people like you and me can produce fruit that pleases God Himself! Salvation has enormous benefits for me that should not be underestimated. But our society puts so much emphasis on our fulfilment, that we are in danger of forgetting that salvation is for God’s benefit, even more than it is for mine. You and I are creatures; God is God. He made mankind for His own purposes, not just for our blessing, and one of those purposes is bearing fruit to Him. As one of His creatures, my greatest purpose, and therefore my greatest pleasure, is to give to Him what He made me for. Bearing fruit to God is a wonderful outcome of my restoration to my proper place, and is a fitting result of the resurrection.

## Hope for the future

The ideas of hope and resurrection are strongly connected in scripture. They are explicitly connected in 1 Peter 1:3-4. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you". Hope relates to things we don't actually possess yet. Paul spells this out in Romans 8:24-25. "For we were saved in this hope, but hope this is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance." There is a great deal of emphasis in Christian teaching today on the results of faith in the 'here and now'. In as much as this draws attention to the fact that genuine Christianity affects all that I do in my life on earth, this is right and proper. However, the real focus of Christianity is 'heaven and eternity', not 'here and now'. It is **not** possible to live the Christian life properly if you never lift your view above this world. If anybody is tempted to think that the summit of Christian experience is Christ, as our aid and confidence in this world then Paul states, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable." 1 Corinthians 15:19. The Christian hope is not an anaesthetic, to dim the pain of a difficult life down here. Nor is it an emotional crutch for weak people who struggle with the realities of life, a kind of ultimate escapism. 1 Corinthians 15 explains how resurrection is fundamental, and central, to the whole of Christianity. I don't have time now to go through this lengthy chapter and all its teaching. I just want to glance at the last verse, verse 58. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Notice how Paul, having swept through teaching on a whole array of subjects that includes; the removal of sin, the method of our physical resurrection and the defeat of death, concludes with some practical exhortations, drawn from the whole subject of resurrection. Paul concludes that three things should characterise the Corinthian believers because of the teaching of the resurrection.

### a. They should be unshakable in their faith

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable..." Because of the power of the resurrection, they are not to be moved by any discouragement, opposition or false teaching. They are going to laugh at the death of death and stand with a glorified Christ; what power of man or demon can shake them?

### b. They should be vigorous in their work

"...Always abounding in the work of the Lord..." If all things are going to be made subject to Christ and they themselves are going to bear His image, then they have every motive to be vigorous in their work for Him. Neither the world nor their lives will last forever, so their work is to be urgent. He is more than worthy of their service, so they are encouraged to work worthily of Him. They shall be made like Him, so their gratitude should give extra zeal to their work.

### c. They should know that their work is worthwhile

"...Knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord". How much work that is done in this world is futile! People work for years on projects that are then cancelled. Others slave for relatives who show no gratitude at all. Some gather lots of wealth, only to see it disappear in some kind crash. What a waste! The Corinthians could know, and so can we, that work done for the Lord is never in vain. His projects are never cancelled. He is never ungrateful. The bank of heaven is never robbed, devalued or bankrupted.

Hope for the future then, is presented in scripture as controlling the way that I live and serve today. It does so in ways that will make my values, priorities and motives very different from most people. Whether I see this difference as an awkward conspicuousness, to be avoided, or a great opportunity to demonstrate the difference the Lord makes in a believers life, will show how much the future has changed my way of thinking already!

## Strength to suffer

Perhaps you have never connected resurrection and suffering in your mind. We tend to think of resurrection as taking us beyond death, and therefore beyond suffering. Maybe the idea of being given strength to suffer sounds rather too defeatist and negative for victorious Christians. If so, it shows how far we have moved from the teachings and practice of Paul and the other apostles. Listen to Paul's desire expressed in Philippians 3:10. "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death". I can think of lots of Christians who would like to know the power of Christ's resurrection, but not very many that are interested in the fellowship of His sufferings! When Paul was passing on the baton to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:12, he said, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." It is difficult to escape the fact that Paul thought suffering was an inevitable part of Christian life. Before you dismiss this as some kind of asceticism, peculiar to Paul, read through 1 Peter, Peter's first epistle! Peter has a lot to say about suffering and glory, and they come in that order; with the suffering first!

Let's look again at the four elements in Philippians 3:10 and see what Paul had in mind. First the whole verse once more; "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death". The four elements are:

- a. That I may know Him
- b. That I may know the power of His resurrection
- c. That I may know the fellowship of His sufferings
- d. That I may be conformed to His death

#### **a. That I may know Him**

All believers should want to know Christ more. On one level this will mean we read our Bibles. The gospels give us the record of what He said and did. The epistles provide insight into the reasons and consequences of the work of the cross, and how it applies to Christian life today. Revelation shows us what Christ will do in the future. It is clear from the Lord's own talk to the two on the road to Emmaus, outlined in Luke 24, that all of the Old Testament speaks about Him as well. On its own, reading will just produce better information about Christ; it can't guarantee that we **know** Him. To ensure our reading produces real knowledge, we will have to combine it with prayer, and a willingness to put into practice what we read. Most of all, we must want to change to become like Christ. This will mean thinking how He thought, having His priorities and showing the same personal characteristics as Him. It is clear that when Paul talks in this verse about knowing Christ, he includes a desire to be like Christ.

#### **b. That I may know the power of His resurrection**

The New Testament presents the resurrection of Christ as one of God's most powerful acts. "According to the working of [God's] mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead", says Paul in Ephesians 1:19-20, when He wants to illustrate the "exceeding greatness of [God's] power". Paul wanted to know this power, but not so that he could escape difficulties or impress large audiences. This power is only available to support Christ's own work. It is significant that the actual resurrection, that work of God's mighty power, was not witnessed by any human beings. Neither did Christ Himself appear to His enemies after the resurrection, to flaunt His victory. There will be time enough for victory parades in an age to come. Today, this power is usually seen in quiet ways.

#### **c. That I may know the fellowship of His sufferings**

Paul goes straight from power to suffering. He knows very well, much better than we often do, that knowing Christ, being like Him and experiencing the power of His resurrection, will involve suffering. Perhaps the most startling thing to us is that Paul expresses a **desire** to experience the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. He appears to see it as a way that he can be especially close to Christ, and enjoy a special fellowship with Him. The power of the resurrection will give Paul the courage and patience to accomplish this. Paul is not a masochist. His usual language is "**endure** hardship" 2 Timothy 2:3. But, if it is a necessary evil, it is one that Paul sees as having great benefits if he shares it with Christ. Anybody who knows the power of the resurrection, and looks forward to the hope for the future, will have the strength to suffer.

#### **d. That I may be conformed to His death**

This brings us back full circle to death; ours and Christ's. At first sight it seems an odd expression. How can someone's life be conformed to another person's death? Life and death are so opposite that it seems rather incongruous. The idea is, that Paul wanted the whole course of his life to fit in with the priorities and judgements of Christ's death. Christ died to sin; so Paul would no longer live for sin. Christ put the needs of others above His own; so would Paul. Christ elevated God's will above His own; so Paul would seek God's will first and foremost. Christ was uncomplaining in His suffering; Paul would strive for the same attitude. These were some of the ways Paul would be conformed to Christ's death, and we are called to the same priorities.

### **Conclusion**

Physics may not have transformed your life, but the truth of the resurrection can. I chose the word **can** rather than **will**, because you have a choice. It **will** transform you, if you choose to move beyond intellectual acceptance, and start letting it shape your life. If you allow the truth of resurrection to increasingly shape your thoughts, choices, priorities and actions it will make lasting changes at the centre of your person. They will be changes that bring pleasure and glory to Christ Himself.

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