



Acts 4:1-12

Jesus is risen! (He is risen indeed.) Resurrection Sunday is the most important part of our faith. Paul warned us that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17). The cross defeated sin and death and the resurrection was the final proof—the proverbial nail in the coffin of an empty tomb. We celebrate it once per year and we rely on it for our salvation and our eternal destiny. But is that all there is? Jesus is risen. Now what? How does that historic, miraculous, universe-shattering fact impact your daily life? Is there resurrection power in your life? I’m not asking if you understand the importance of the resurrection. I am asking whether or not it makes a difference in your life.

As you read through the gospels, would you say that the disciples seem strong and brave or weak and prideful? Clearly, at times they seem like a bunch of clueless wimps, but ten days after Jesus’ ascension, everything changes. They suddenly become bold and confident, preaching and proclaiming Jesus at every opportunity. And there’s one thing they always mention—the resurrection. The resurrection was at the core of all of their preaching and proclamation. Here is just a sample.

2:24—God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

2:32—This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

3:15—you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

4:2—[They were] greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

4:10—let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.

4:20—for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

5:30—The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.

10:39,40—They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day

13:30,31—But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people

The apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That must not be discounted but they were also empowered by being eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection changed them and it is supposed to change us as well. Let me read one story from Acts chapter four and then draw out some principles. But first, a little background to this story.

In chapter three, Peter and John went to the Temple to pray. Every day a lame man was carried to the gate of the Temple to beg for money. Peter said these now famous words to the man. "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (Acts 3:6) And what happened? (Singing) "He went walking and leaping and praising God. Walking and leaping and praising God. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" You know that song, right? Well now you do. It was a miracle of healing and those always draw a crowd. That's how they drew people in, in the first century. We sue email and Facebook. They healed people. When the people gathered, Peter used the opportunity to preach his second sermon post-resurrection. This is where we pick up in chapter four.

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." ¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

What we see in this story is resurrection power that Paul prayed for in Ephesians 1. That we would “know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph 1:19-20). This resurrection power is also available to you and me.

1. Resurrection power leads to Proclamation.

As I have already shown you, the fact of the resurrection was at the core of their preaching. Peter’s first, second, third and all subsequent sermons contained the resurrection. Now many of you will think right away, “Well, I’m not a preacher. I have never and probably will never preach a sermon, so how does this apply to me?” It’s true. Peter was a preacher. On the day of Pentecost, three thousand people were saved after that first sermon, so that was obviously a huge crowd. That would have been nerve wrecking even for me. But the vast majority of what Peter and the apostles did was not preaching, but answering. “Answer” is literally the word that is used. It’s usually a small group of people and the speaker is giving an answer. In other words, all they did was open their mouths and speak the truth. The vast majority of these were not sermons, they were conversations.

Most of you may never preach a sermon but you have conversations every day. But some of you are thinking, “Right, but this is not a typical conversation. It’s so much harder to talk about Jesus with an unbeliever.” That’s a common excuse, isn’t it? But there is truth in it. Could it be that it’s difficult to talk about Jesus to unbelievers because we don’t even talk with believers about him? We might talk about our struggles with one another and we might even ask someone to pray for us, but is Jesus really in that conversation? Are we bringing gospel truths into every day conversations with everyday believers? I am not suggesting that you pepper your conversations with trite phrases and a bunch of “praise the Lords” but that you actually bring Christ into your normal conversations with people who already know him. Resurrection power is the power to have conversations about Jesus.

2. Resurrection power leads to Transformation.

Did you notice the amazing transformation in chapter four? After Peter and John were arrested, Luke tells us that *many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand*. Three thousand were saved at Pentecost and now that number had swelled to five thousand. Do you know how many followers Jesus has before the resurrection? We know from 1 Corinthians 15 that there were at least 500 believers to whom Jesus appeared following his resurrection. There were at least that many but the total was relatively small compared to the thousands who were radically transformed after Pentecost. Of course, the lame man was also transformed. He went from being 100% disabled to instantly walking and leaping.

That was a miracle the like of which I have never witnessed. But I have witnessed dozens of miracles of a transformed life. Which is a greater miracle—to heal someone physically or to transform their soul from death to life? Which is a greater miracle—to allow a man to walk again or to take a God-hating unbeliever and transform him into a God-worshipping believer?

John Goeke’s testimony

After Peter testified to the fact of Jesus' resurrection, he called for a decision. *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus* (3:19-20). And on this wonderful day we remember the resurrection, I would give the same invitation. If you have not repented of your sins and trusted Christ alone for salvation, why would you wait one more day? If you know you not trusted Christ, what would prevent you from making that decision today?

3. Resurrection power leads to Courage and Boldness.

If you were here last Sunday, you heard Don Green refer to the money changers and the temple authorities as something akin to the mafia. They were wealthy and they were powerful. The ones who arrested Peter and John are the same ones who arrested Jesus just a few months prior: the captain of the temple, Caiaphas and Annas. These are the very same men who bribed Judas' to betray Jesus, held a kangaroo court and called it spiritual and begged Pilate to crucify Jesus. Luke tells us that they were "greatly annoyed" but we know it was a lot worse than that. A short time later in chapter five, they were calling for Peter and John's death. These men had the motive, the wealth and the power to make this happen. They did it to Jesus and they planned to keep that streak alive.

Humanly speaking, Peter and John could not possibly have been in more danger. Despite this obvious danger, they were bold and courageous. They were living out what Paul would later say in Acts 20. "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

Most of us will never have to give up our lives for Jesus' sake. It may come to that at some point but not all persecution is years away. Some can happen right now, but we'll never experience it without courage and boldness. There is a family in our church that in the last week almost lost their jobs and their home because they stood for the truth. They were bold and courageous in the midst of tremendous pressure. They were willing to give up just about everything to defend Jesus' honor and there was a point at which it looked like it would happen. But God honored their faithfulness by sparing them these earthly consequences—at least for now. I hurt for them but I was encouraged by their courage.

You may think that you are not capable of such a sacrifice. But what was it that allowed this family to be so courageous? What allowed Peter and John to risk their lives? Because...

4. Resurrection power leads to Clarity and Certainty.

Here is the key to their courage. *This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* No other name. The Jews called this blasphemy because they made Jesus equal with God. The Greeks called it atheism because Christians rejected their gods. This is the exclusive claims of Christ and it's also the thing that angers people the most. It's certainly what angered these religious leaders. There's no other name given among men by which we must be saved. You either see it as the greatest truth you will ever find or you will hate it. There really is no middle ground.

It's the reason they were so bold. In reference to the concentric circle of certainty, this is center circle truth. This is an absolute truth and they were willing to die for it. It's why the family in church were willing to lose their job and their home. Your level of courage is in direct proportion to your level of certainty, isn't it? The more certainty you have, the greater your courage to defend that truth. And conversely, the less certain you are, the less courage you will have when times get tough. This courage comes from a certainty of the resurrection. No other religions claim such a thing because they cannot make this claim. But it may cost you. Here's what it did for the apostles.

Peter—crucified upside down in Rome

Andrew—preached in Soviet Union, Turkey and finally crucified in Greece

Thomas—preached in northern India, pierced by spears of four soldiers

Philip—Ministered and martyred in North Africa

Matthew—preached in Ethiopia, probably stabbed to death

Bartholomew—Preached in India and Ethiopia, method of martyrdom not known

James—Ministered in Syria, stoned and clubbed to death

Simon—Ministered and martyred in Persia

Matthias—burned alive in Syria

Paul—beheaded in Rome

John—died from natural causes as an old man

Again, it will probably not cost you your life or even your home and your job, but at some point, it should cost you something. Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” But this will happen only when you believe and proclaim this truth. If you quietly believe that Jesus is the only way but no one else knows that you believe this—if you never have conversations about it—then you will never be persecuted. That's why these principles of resurrection power all hang together, don't they? If you are certain that they are true, it will give you courage. And if you have courage, you will proclaim this truth. And when you do that, you will continue to be transformed. The miracle of salvation does not stop at conversion but continues as long as we live and as long as we are willing to allow God to transform us.

5. Resurrection power uses ordinary people.

Verse 13 may be one of the most encouraging verses in the Bible. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* Uneducated, common men. Several translations say that they were ordinary men. In other words, they were just like us.

The ESV translates it as uneducated and common. The Greek word translated as uneducated is “no grammar.”¹ That's most of us, right? Not so good at grammar. The word common is the Greek word *idiotes*, which sounds like what? Idiot. But it doesn't mean they were imbeciles. Idiotes just means untrained.² The other day I saw this large bird with odd colors in the yard and said, “Hey dear, look out the window quick and tell me what kind of bird that is.” She didn't know either. I said I bet Tim Farrell would know. He knows everything in the natural world. He would have looked at that bird, stroked his chin and proceeded to wax eloquent. He would have

told me the genus and the species. He would have described the migratory pattern and mating habits. He knows all that stuff. But when it comes to the natural world, I am an idiot. I actually said that to Karen. I am a naturalist idiot. About all I can do is point at stuff and say. “There’s a bird, there’s a bug. Oh look, a fluffy cloud.” I am a common man. I am ordinary.

And so were the apostles. They were not priests or Pharisees or Sadducees. They were not from among the religious elite. They were not religious professionals. They were schooled and literate but not in the way of the Sanhedrin members. They were common and ordinary. Jesus did not call anyone from the “clergy” of his day. He called them ordinary men. And this should be encouraging to us. The world was turned upside down by ordinary people. Not just these men but by those whom they reached—men, women, children. They all had a part in spreading the gospel to the known world of the day.

They were ordinary, but they were disciplined. They were trained. They had in effect just graduated from the single greatest discipleship program ever, because Jesus had led it. And more than three years of discipleship training came to a head at the resurrection and fifty days later when the Holy Spirit was poured out on them. We are ordinary, but we also need training. We need to be disciplined. We can’t just think that we can grow spiritually without engaging in discipleship. But the encouraging fact is that we don’t have to be professionals.

6. Resurrection power leads to Hope.

I’d like to close with a story about a funeral for a young man named Jason who was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident. The young man’s father was speaking at his son’s funeral.

In his talk he rambled a bit, even during the “prepared remarks” written on notecards. He was a part-time preacher, and his preachy use of emphasis and Bible-thumping emerged here and there. But mainly he was a hurting father, who pulled his hurt and hope together at the end with a wrenching prayer. Speaking frankly as father to Father, acknowledging their common grief, claiming the perfection of Christ as his own and the inheritance of Christ as his promise, he concluded with a ringing request that sounded like a demand, echoing through the chapel: “Resurrect my son!”

The pain and the triumph—is there anything like it? The baby in the manger and the baby of the family, both working their way into human history, gathering personhood, generating memories, exerting their will, accelerating their years, intensifying their mission, whether deliberately in Jesus’ case or much less so in Jason’s. Speeding through life, faster and faster; until the incarnate Word picks up the carnal son and hurls him at the wall—and it yields.

Resurrect my son!

“And He will,” Jason’s father concluded quietly, with all confidence.³

He will be resurrected in the last day, along with all believers. That is our resurrection hope.

Rich Maurer

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¹ ἀγράμματος

² ordinary, untrained person, one who does not understand. <https://www.billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/idiotes>

³ https://world.wng.org/2018/03/failure_to_yield