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Sermon preached by Mr J W Walder at Galeed Chapel, Brighton on 12th January 1994

"And the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings." Philippians 3:10

These words form a part of that living and gracious desire of the apostle Paul, to know and prove in his own experience those things which are to do with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Friend of sinners. And as this was the desire of Paul, it is indeed the desire and exercise of every believer - 'The power of His resurrection.'

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is a fundamental truth; we would that it was more verily believed, felt and known by us. The apostle in 1 Corinthians 15 speaks of the absolute necessity and the vital need of this resurrection of the Son of God: "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (v.14) and in verse 17: "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." It is a most important and vital matter in regard to the Church of God, which is formed by the mystical members of this glorious covenant Head, Jesus Christ.

Now the apostle here speaks of the power of His resurrection, and the desire that he might be given the personal experience of a gracious and sovereign measure of that power. We will notice first, briefly, the power that was manifest and demonstrated in the resurrection of the glorious Head of the church, Christ Jesus. We read in another place that by this resurrection He was proclaimed, or declared, to be the Son of God with power to save. So here there is the proof and demonstration of His personality, as God's Son in our nature – in the manifestation of His power, in His resurrection and ascension.

There is also demonstrated here that power which has overcome all the enemies of Christ and His people. Here is the assertion and the proof that sin was put away completely and absolutely; that the wages of it, which were so justly due to us, the Lord Jesus Christ endured and suffered in our place. He died in His people's room; and the proof that God accepts, with complete satisfaction, that vicarious act for such as we, is in His resurrection. It is demonstrated here that He did overcome and destroy him that has the power of death, that is the devil; for it became Him to be a partaker of the nature of His people, "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15) The grave and death were conquered by this glorious Person, and the power of His resurrection demonstrated the victory. He overcame all these things, and God raised Him from the dead as the Scriptures declare, thus setting His divine approval and acceptance upon the perfection of Christ's work, as having accomplished that which He was appointed to do.

O what a demonstration of power in His resurrection, when death, hell, the grave, and the devil were all completely and absolutely overcome by Him, as the church's covenant Head and vicarious Sufferer. And always remember too, that most precious fact and truth, that in all this the church was in eternal, indissoluble and glorious union with their Head, so that virtually and mystically the whole church rose with Him, as the Scriptures declare and as the hymnwriter speaks:

*One in the tomb; one when he rose;
One when he triumphed o'er his foes;
One when in heaven he took his seat,
While seraphs sang all hell's defeat. (405)*

Yes, one with Jesus, everyone who is in the church. We read in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (2:6) Well

then, there is the blessed fact of Christ's glorious resurrection, manifested, declared, demonstrated, and that with the blessed approval of God the Father upon Him and all that are His. What will it be to us? What is it to us? What can it be to us, unless we are privileged and favoured to know for ourselves, something of the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that experience which is compatible with our eternal union to Him, as risen from the dead? It is only made something to those who experience the words of the Spirit, by the apostle: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;" (Ephesians 2:1) and none other.

Well then I will try to notice a few of those ways in which God's people shall be brought to know and experience the resurrection power of Christ, as it is spiritually and personally communicated to them for their salvation and for their good. It is the precious token and evidence of their union to Christ and their possession of eternal life in Him.

The first thing we shall ever know about it, is when the Holy Spirit is pleased to quicken us into divine life; a most vital matter. Jesus taught and insisted upon this point: "Ye must be born again." (John 3:7) "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) This gathers in every one, therefore, that can trace some gracious evidence of the impartation of that divine life within, which inevitably brings with it new desires, new longings, new sorrows, new joys, new feelings, new exercises, new hungerings and thirstings – things to which they were total strangers before. Some there may be, who continue for a considerable period of their experience in this place. They have life – there is no doubt but what they have those true, humble, gracious evidences; there is a manifest measure of gracious exercise, godly fear, earnest longings and feelings of sin and their lost condition, but they want something further than this. I might perhaps use one Scripture portion as an illustration of the spiritual experience of God's people. You know how that when Lazarus was dead and had been buried, the Lord came to the tomb and spake with divine authority and power, as God: "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43) And immediately he did come forth; life was imparted. But although he knew something of the resurrecting power in being brought forth out of the grave, although he had life, he had not liberty. He was "bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin." (v 44)

Now there is a spiritual experience in God's people compatible with this; they have life, they have earnest longings, they have many fears, they have at times an intense desire after God's salvation, and they may be continually crying out of a felt sense of their need: "Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee;" (Psalm 119:175) 'O that I might be a partaker – feelingly, sensibly, comfortably, to the joy and comfort of my heart; O that I might be a possessor of divine life! I feel my sin, I feel my death, I feel my hopelessness, I feel my wretchedness; O I do want the Lord to come and deliver me, I want to know that measure of the power of His resurrection, that I might be brought into gospel liberty and brought to rejoice in God's salvation, that I might live in God's sight!'

There is a further experience of the power of His resurrection, when a seeking, longing soul is brought into gospel liberty and is enabled, through Christ's power and the power of His resurrection, to rejoice that they are delivered from sin and guilt and death and Satan. They have a precious and blessed hope and intimation, that through Christ they are delivered from death, damnation, the purposes and intentions of the adversary, and the power and mastery of sin.

Now to look very briefly at the ups and downs, the ins and outs, the changes in the experience of God's people. Those who have been privileged and favoured, in their measure, to know something of life; to know something of what it is to be raised to life, and realise a little of the joy of God's salvation, and who have been brought into gospel liberty – O would they not truly and intensely love and long to stay there always? But it is not so, for are we not prone to backsliding? Do we not

become drooping, withered, fainting? Are there not times and seasons, when that experience of divine life which we hope and trust the Lord has imparted to us, seems to be well-nigh extinguished? When life is so very, very low, there seems hardly enough to pray, sigh or look – we feel such coldness and deadness on our spirit. The more that we strive, labour and struggle to change matters, and to get a little reviving, the worse we become; nothing will do but the power of His resurrection. But that will do it in a moment if it is put forth in our hearts – if once again the Holy Spirit is pleased to grant unto us a resurgence of life, and brings us up out of these places of death and darkness.

The Psalmist very blessedly and sweetly describes the changes that he felt in his soul's feelings. There were times when he rejoiced and blessed God for that which he had experienced; at another time we read that he felt such death, that he said that he became like wood that is scattered at the grave's mouth: "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth." (Psalm 141:7) What did he need? A resurgence, a revival, a renewing! He wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection. Could it do for him to read about it?, believe the doctrine of it? hear it spoken of? No, he wanted to feel the power – and I am sure there are many, many seasons in our experience, when this is not only needed but earnestly longed for: "Wilt thou not revive us again...?" (Psalm 85:6) There are those seasons when God seems to hide His face, and we mourn and lament our wretched condition. We need our souls to be revived.

But there are times and seasons when the people of God may come into some very particular and very strong exercises, which they believe to be of God. In the first stages of it, they are as sure of this as they are living persons – and there may be much prayer and much communion with God in relation to the particular exercise of soul. But then it may begin to diminish, and they come to a place where the exercise seems almost to cease. Such death is upon it, that the poor soul who has been the subject of it is ready to conclude that it is all a deception, not of God, or it would have been kept more alive. They feel they must have been mistaken about it, or surely this would have been brought to some issue. As they look upon it, alas, it appears now to be dead and buried. O, the earnest cries to God! 'Lord, if it be of Thee, do renew it; if not, take it clean away!' Rightly exercised persons do not want to be mistaken in anything which regards their soul, their salvation, and their connection and communion with Christ and with God. Now it is proof of the resurrecting power of Christ, when the exercise is raised up anew, and as I trust I can say from my own experience, when it is resurrected, it is more active, more powerful, and more lively than at the first. This is also to know something of the power of His resurrection.

Another thing to notice; there are those of God's people to whom a promise has most definitely been spoken. It may be more than one of you have had a promise; it may be concerning yourself, or it may be concerning another. This, in the first giving of it, was very lively and brought much exercise, expectation, and longing. But alas, death has seemed to come upon it. Instead of it being fulfilled, everything seems to militate against it; everything seems to turn opposite to it; everything appears to have gone wrong, instead of according to God's word. The pathway that was seen so clearly under the influence of the promise, is now, alas, covered over. Weeds and grass have grown up and it cannot any more be discerned. The promise seems to have died and we well-nigh despair of the fulfilment of it. More than that, Satan is active, and our unbelieving hearts are active, and we begin to say, "Now if I am mistaken in this, I may be mistaken in everything. If this is not real I know not what is!" So that all our religion seems to hang upon the fulfilment of the promise; everything goes down with it, and this is a deep exercise with God's people sometimes. But O, if it is of God, it will have a resurrection and the power will be known. It will be revived, and in God's own sovereign way and gracious purpose, it will most certainly be fulfilled.

If we find death within us, by reason of Satan's power and influence upon us; if we find death within us, on account of sore and desolating and crippling afflictions, sorrows and losses; we need to feel the power of His resurrection. The apostle, speaking of his own experience, both spiritual and temporal, said "in deaths oft" (2 Corinthians 11:23) But he also said: " Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;" (2 Corinthians 1:10) There shall still be, from time to time, the demonstration of the power of Christ in His resurrection, communicated to His people who are in union with Him. For whatever may be their pathway, their experience, and their temptations, they shall never perish, they shall never die – for Christ is their risen and living Head.

Is this what we want to feel ourselves? We are in that place and that experience, one way or another, where we need the Lord to come and raise us up, to give us a resurrection, to give us to experience and feel the power of His resurrection exerted, demonstrated, and communicated in our poor souls.

Now notice the next clause of this verse: 'and the fellowship of his sufferings.' If we really are partakers of the power of His resurrection – if we are really quickened into divine life, if we are truly partakers of the Spirit and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, if He dwells in our hearts by faith and is formed in us the hope of glory – it is impossible that we should escape, in our little measure, those sufferings which are inseparable from the possession of spiritual and divine life. And so we may indeed know that side of it very deeply and very keenly at times. We may know the horror, the wretchedness, the dreadfulness, the heinousness, the burden of our sin; and that is part of the suffering. None but a quickened soul feels the burden of sin. Now there is none who ever felt that burden as Christ felt it, when God imputed to Him the sins of His people. We may be the objects, constantly and increasingly, of the assaults and buffetings and the dreadful suggestions and amazing power of the adversary. If we have a spark of life; if we have a speck of true grace, this will infuriate the enemy. Everything that is of God, he will oppose. Everything that is right, he will seek to overturn. He is a malicious, furious, vicious, subtle, cunning, powerful foe and God's people must suffer their measure of the adversary's assaults.

Do we know what it is at times, to feel to our sorrow and grief, more than we can express it, the sadness and affliction of desertion? O, it is inexpressibly sorrowful and distressing. If God seems to have forsaken us, if He hides His face, and we cannot find Him, we feel deserted and abandoned – so that the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are in their measure applicable to us and describe our own feelings: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" (Psalm 22:1) These are real feelings to God's people at times; some more than others, some more deeply than others, but it is a part of the sufferings.

Do we know what it is to have a wounded spirit? It is a part of the experience of God's people; none suffered it more than Jesus suffered it. It is in the book of Proverbs we read: "A wounded spirit who can bear?" (Proverbs 18:14) and those who have had the experience of it, will well know the feeling of it. Yes, those things which cause deep wounds in the soul.

A further thing is this – it is the desire of the people of God, that they should live godly. And they will indeed do so, if they have the grace of God within and the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Now what does the word of God tell us concerning these people? "Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12) It cannot be escaped, it is sure to come one way or other; there will be no possible way of getting by or round this matter, it will be their experience. It has been mine for many years, especially and particularly at one season of my early experience and youth.

Lastly we shall not escape reproaches. I well remember in my own little experience, being so painfully reproached, that my spirit fainted beneath the grief, the sorrow and the distress; I went into a secret place, put my head upon my arm and I said to the Lord, 'I cannot bear it any longer.' Reproaches, O, they are hard to bear, especially and particularly when they come from a source which we least expect.

But there is another point which I feel it important and I should not be faithful if I did not express it. There is a vast difference between us suffering reproaches for our own folly and sin and foolishness, and quite another thing to bear reproach for Christ's sake. If we act proudly, if we have the spirit of Diotrephes, if we seek to have the first place, if we are self-assertive – and we are reproached for it – we are only suffering for our own evil deeds. That is not the reproach of Christ. But if you walk humbly and tenderly in His fear, and walk according the blessed example of Christ, and suffer for it – that is a very different thing. It is one thing to suffer on account of our own folly; another thing to suffer on account of God in us. We may know one side of this, and I can say indeed and of a truth, I know the suffering alright; there have been sorrowful reproaches in my experience, but O that I might be favoured and privileged to 'have the fellowship of his sufferings.' That is what I do not feel to have; and that is what I want, and this is what the good apostle desired and earnestly sought for, "the fellowship of his sufferings."

*At most we do but taste the cup,
For thou alone hast drunk it up. (307)*

What sacred, blessed and precious experience is that, when we are privileged to feel a little of the compassion and pity of a once suffering Saviour; He who knew what sore temptations meant; He who knew what it was to be persecuted; He who knew what it was to be tempted of the devil in the wilderness – and not only in that season, but throughout His earthly sojourn; He who knew the burden of imputed sin, the hidings of God's face, desertion – as expressed by the hymnwriter:

Deserted? He was too. (787)

"The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." (Psalm 69:9)

Now Christ is well able to succour and sympathise with His afflicted followers. The thing the afflicted believer wants to experience, feelingly, is Christ's love and compassion, His tenderness and pity, with the sweet, precious and blessed returns of the heart, in response to that so felt. And what is that? It is for us to feel a blessed sympathy for Christ in His sufferings, which were vicarious, which were on account of sin, which were for this sinner's sins; that He may not only be a sympathising High Priest, but a glorious and blessed Saviour. I believe somewhat of this was experienced by thief on the cross, and he expressed it in those words: "And we indeed justly... but this man hath done nothing amiss." (Luke 23:41)

Now this will gladden and strengthen poor hearts in the midst of the deepest trial and temptation, if we are favoured with a little fellowship in His sufferings. He was tempted, He was deserted, He was persecuted, He suffered reproach, He knew what sore temptations meant – and He can well sympathise and well support us. If we know something of the afflictions, may we know something of the fellowship, for this was the desire of the apostle: 'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.'

The Lord bless the few thoughts.

Amen.

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