

2 Timothy 2:8

Additional Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 15:3-22

Introduction

Sometimes the memory can be so fickle. Some people have even managed to forget their own name. The epitaph over Israel's grave could easily have been "They soon forgot", because of the way, time and time again, they went their own way, and had to be chastised by God. **The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs** (Judges 3:7) is so typical. Hence the many reminders in the Old Testament not to forget, and warnings of what would happen if they did.

Because of the danger of forgetting the Cross of Christ, the Lord's Supper was instituted. **Do this in remembrance of me** (Luke 22:19). How often the church has forgotten Christ, engaging purely in theological debate or human activity, or even institutional business. It is easy for the church to be concerned about procedures and organisation and instructions, but forgetting Christ who is at the heart of everything. One of the advantages in keeping the church's year is that at least annually we are reminded of the basic themes – the incarnation, death, resurrection, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. We can think, sing, and preach on them.

Paul urges Timothy to remember the most important theme of all: **Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel** (2 Timothy 2:8). He was never to forget that Christ was truly man, but risen from the dead, the Son of God. **He was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord** (Romans 1:4).

The meaning of the Resurrection

- (a) The Resurrection is the final proof that all the things Christ claimed and taught about Himself are true. He was not merely a great man or wonderful teacher. He was God's Messiah, the Son of Man, come to bring God's Kingdom, the Son of God, sent forth in the fullness of time, to give His life a ransom for many. By Him, the New Covenant was established. He was the Light of the World, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Resurrection was God's seal on these amazing claims. If He had been out of His mind, or the world's greatest deceiver, He would have remained in the grave. But He was raised to life on the third day. God was saying, "Yes, He is what He says He is, and I approve of all He said." To reject Christ is to reject the one whom God has approved of. We shall not get away with it. God will have the last word.
- (b) The Resurrection shows that Christ's saving work on the Cross was accepted by God. He had paid the penalty for our sins. He had met the Law's demands. Justice had been done. The debt was paid completely. Nothing more is required from us. How do we know that His death was enough to save us? Because God raised Him from the dead. He died in our place, and was raised for our justification. **Who will bring any charge**

against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life (Romans 8:3,34). **If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins** (1 Corinthians 15:17). *“Your debt He has paid and your work He has done.”*

- (c) His resurrection is clear proof that there is life after death. Shakespeare wrote that there is an “undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns”, and the sceptic would say, “We don’t know there’s life after death, because no one has come back to tell us.” This is not true. One has come back. Christ returned on the third day. There were witnesses to both His dead body on the Friday, and His resurrected body on the Sunday. There can be no doubt there is life after death. Then, after forty days on earth, Christ returned to heaven where He is preparing a place for us. One day He will return again and receive us unto Himself. Here is the answer to discussion and speculations and theorizing. We know. We can speak with confidence and knowledge on this subject.
- (d) His Resurrection is the guarantee of His people’s own resurrection. **For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive** (1 Corinthians 15:22). Those who have died in Christ are in His presence now. They are far better off. It is a gain to be where they are. But at the moment they are still disembodied spirits. On the great resurrection morning, when Christ returns, new resurrection bodies will clothe their spirits. **So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power** (1 Corinthians 15:42,43). The body Christ had when He rose is the pattern and prototype for ours. The end of this life is the doorway to the next one.

The place of this truth in the Gospel

We are not just dealing with a Christian belief which we ought to keep in mind. Along with the Cross, the Resurrection ought to be put at the very centre of our message. **This is my Gospel**, says Paul.

Nowhere is its centrality seen more clearly than in the book of Acts. **With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus** (Acts 4:33). **This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ** (Acts 2:23,24,36). This was the message proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles. **For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead** (Acts 17:31).

We must have the same close connection between the Cross and the Resurrection in our preaching. There is a danger of isolating the Cross. Certainly, it was at the Cross that His substitutionary work took place. But knowledge of the Cross alone is not enough. For salvation we must have living contact with the one who died. “There can

be no salvation from sin unless there is a living Saviour. But the living one can save only because He has died.” **If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved** (Romans 10:9).

In some parts of the world, the only concept people have of Christianity is of Christ as a helpless babe in a woman’s arms, Christ’s dead corpse hanging on a cross, and Christ coming as a threatening judge. No wonder people take refuge in the Virgin Mary. Something essential is missing from their perception of Christianity – the living, loving Saviour. This is why the crucifix is such a misleading symbol of Christianity – a dead image of a dead man. The empty Cross is what is important, the living, powerful Saviour, strong and mighty to save. **Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them** (Hebrews 7:25).

Faith in Christ is absolute safety, immediate acceptance, and the guarantee of final glory. Because Jesus lives, His sheep will **never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand** (John 10:28). He has put within us a living and incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever.

Remember Him, and always think of Him as risen

Whenever we think of Christ, it is important that we never just think of Him as a historical figure of 1900 years ago, but as our contemporary, living as we are. Every Lord’s Day is a reminder to us, the day of His Resurrection.

Dr Dale, of Carr’s Lane Church in Birmingham, was once preparing a sermon for Easter Sunday, when it suddenly hit him that Christ was alive. He got up, and paced to and fro in his study. Christ is alive – living as I am. He had long believed it and preached it, but the power and wonder of it arrested him as never before. “My people shall know it next Sunday”. Every Sunday service after that began with an Easter hymn.

We keep it in our remembrance also by relating and bringing the Risen Lord into every aspect of life. We find comfort and peace of mind, which arise when we take this truth seriously. We enjoy fellowship with Him, since He is alive, and we can communicate with Him.

The Apostles did not live charmed lives – they knew trials, bereavements, setbacks and persecution just like us. Indeed, they lived in genuine fear that the next knock on the door would bring arrest, prison and finally death. And yet there was assurance and joy in their lives. **The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name** (Acts 5:41). In the Philippian jail, **about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them** (Acts 16:25). Paul’s letters from the condemned cell in Rome are filled with the word joy. **But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you** (Philippians 2:17). **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** (Philippians 4:4).

Their secret was that the Risen Lord was with them and within them. They knew Him, put their trust in Him, and were in touch with Him. They were never lonely because He had said; **I will never leave you nor forsake you** (Hebrews 13:5). They had set backs, but knew **all things work together for good** (Romans 8:28). Every adversity was another opportunity to discover more of His grace. They knew His grace was sufficient and **therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong** (2 Corinthians 12:10). Death was no problem; in fact, it was gain (Philippians 1:21). Life was turned upside down because Christ was alive. They lived in His presence and experienced the power of His Resurrection.

The reality and glory of Christ being alive is most clearly seen at the end of life – the end to which we are all heading. The deaths of two men who both died in the year 1899 in the USA show the difference. The first was a man who had no time for Christ and had spent his career debunking the Bible and arguing against the Christian doctrine. He was Colonel Robert Ingersoll. He died suddenly, to the great shock of his family. His wife could not bear to part with his body, and the corpse was only removed from the house when it had started to decay and the health of the family was threatened. At the crematorium, the scene was so dismal that even the newspapers remarked on it. The funeral was devoid of all hope. His departure was an uncompensated tragedy.

The second man who died that same year was D.L.Moody. On the morning of his death, he had said to his son, “Heaven is opening, God is calling.” His son replied that he must have been dreaming, but Moody was convinced, “This is no dream. I’ve been within the gates and I’ve seen children’s faces.” As he was slipping away, he said, “There’s no valley here... this is bliss... this is glorious. Don’t pray for my recovery. God is calling. This is my coronation day. I have been so looking forward to it.” His funeral was the most joyful service. The congregation sang hymns and heard the triumphant words, **O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?** It was a victorious homecoming.

There is no hope apart from Christ’s Resurrection.

Conclusion

There is no fear that the Gospel and the cause of Christ will be extinguished and overthrown. It may have looked like it on the first Good Friday, when the Lord’s body was in the tomb, watched over by guards, a great stone covering the entrance. All his disciples had forsaken Him and fled. Was this not the end?

Then on the third day the whole situation was reversed. The Lord rose in triumph, and shook the gates of hell. He caused the universe to stand astonished. And now He is in heaven, many crowns on His head, and hosts of angels and the redeemed at His feet, bowing in adoration, worship and praise. Where are His accusers now? Where are His enemies, Pilate, the priests now?

His people are more numerous now than ever. His cause is making progress in many countries of the world. His cause will never be crushed. Christ is raised, and lives. So His cause lives. Defeat is unthinkable. The kingdoms of this world are going to

become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. He shall reign forever and ever. What folly to be opposed to Christ and His Gospel. What equal folly to be indifferent to His Gospel, and dismissive of His claims.

Because He is alive, He will have the last word. We will not. Out of cowardice or fear, or to win popularity, many have turned their backs on Christ. They will regret it. The only worthwhile thing is to know Him, trust and submit and belong to Him. This is the only thing that matters. All else is secondary and much of it is utterly trivial and worthless.