

Resurrection Power: New Commitment

The Beautiful Truth

Good Morning, Church. Today, whether we know it or not, we find ourselves in the in-between. We Christians have joy because we believe that Jesus is alive. Resurrection Sunday has come and gone, and our savior lives. Yet, we find ourselves in a place of discouragement and frustration due to the loneliness, isolation, and disruption we feel as a result of our nation's struggle to contain the effects of the COVID-19 virus. The battle against COVID-19 has stripped pleasure from our lives. It prevents us from being physically together for worship, education, communion, and community. The truth remains that the one thing it has not been able to do is rob us of the joy we experience in our relationship with God. What a beautiful truth that is! **No matter how hard it may try, the state of our physical world has no power to prevent our access to God.**

Two weeks ago, Pastor Richard launched us into a new series entitled Resurrection Power that details this truth. In those first two weeks, he has shared with us that the same eternal power that allowed Christ to conquer a real physical death will enable us to set aside the brokenness and sin, for a whole new way of life. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has restored humanity's direct access to our loving creator, father, and God. While our access to God may not have severed during this struggle with isolation, that does not mean that we are numb to the challenges it places in our life. Like any relationship, our journey with God requires certain things of us. In the first two weeks of our series Pastor Richard launched our conversation by showing us we need faith. He explained that we all need to believe that Jesus was whom he said he was and that his resurrection won a supernatural battle against the power of sin and evil. He added that we also need to believe that the resurrection restores our relationship with God and offers us a different way of life. **Keeping on the same path today, I am going to share with you the impact the resurrection should have on our commitment to a relationship with God.**

Examining our Commitments

When I think about commitment, I am reminded that few things have taught me about the value of commitment better than team sports. Whether I was catching pitches in a baseball game or executing the perfect tack in an attempt to win a sailboat regatta, I spent endless hours practicing, exercising and developing the skills needed to have the best experience I possibly could. I was committed to a process set out by my coach and did whatever I could to follow it to a T. Whenever I was training to compete, anything else, whether it was school, boy scouts, church, relationships, fishing, etc. became secondary. One might say that I had my priorities, and you could tell those priorities based on where my commitment was. Now, this is not an uncommon reality; all of us have a series of priorities and commitments in our life. The challenge we encounter with priorities and commitment is when we get them mixed up and out of place, thus causing unnecessary tensions to arise in our life. The reason for this is that **our commitments and priorities naturally reveal to us what we value.** They show us what is essential. While at face value, most of us would affirm this truth in our lives, it also creates tension, a question that we have to respond too. Do our commitments align with what we say you

value? Are we putting our money where our mouth is? Are we walking the talk instead of talking the walk?

As we ponder our thoughts, it is fair to admit that there are certainly a lot of different opinions out there concerning where people should place their commitments. Some people say family is a top area of commitment. Others say that acquiring wealth is a high area of commitment. Many people, through their actions, indicate a high level of commitment to success at work. There are more people still who say that faith should be a top commitment in our life. I think if we were to ask Batman what the high area of commitment in his life was, it would probably have something to do with apprehending the notorious villain the Joker, but I digress. This morning the point I want to make is that whatever areas of commitment we believe in, **every single one of us is in a place to examine the commitments we have in place.**

Whether a Christian or not, we have a unique opportunity in front of us to examine how we have structured our life and how we communicate to others what is important to us. The caveat, however, is this: **If we believe in God, if we want the power of his resurrection to impact our lives, we must understand that God is clear about his stance on our commitments.**

Surpassing Worth

Around here, anytime we discuss God and his desires for our life, we start that discussion by referring to the bible. You see, the bible is the story of God's interaction with our world; it is the way he most clearly communicates with humanity. If you were to go looking for a verse that directly states something about commitment or how you order your life, chances are you are going to come up empty in your search. However, the beautiful gift of the bible is that it is filled with stories of real people who lived real lives filled with joy, happiness, pain, and sorrow.

Today, I would like to share with you a section of the story from the life of a man named Paul. Now, Paul was a Jew who lived in the new testament times following Jesus' death. He started a religious zealot who made it his mission to disrupt the life of Christians and local churches, but eventually had a dramatic conversion and became the most prolific writer in the new testament. The majority of what Paul wrote were letters to other Christians instructing them on the regular ins and outs of the Christian life. This morning, I would like to look at a section of a letter he wrote to a church in Philippi, a major city in ancient Macedonia. He used this section of the letter to discuss some theological disagreements the church was having. In the third section of his letter, he makes the following statement,

"For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

This passage is an appeal for the church to consider its priorities. It is similar to a parent reminding a teenager who has strayed from the moral path of their family's behavioral expectations. A group of

people claiming to believe in the resurrection were demanding that other Christians follow a set of outdated, restrictive, religious, and cultural principles. **The church in Philippi was committing to something other than Jesus and the power of his resurrection.** Paul uses this letter to remind them of the truth and uses his testimony, his own story, to emphasize his point. You see, if anyone had a claim to the way of life these misguided people were espousing, it was Paul himself, but instead, he reminds them that this way of life is outdated. The sacrifice of Jesus has made it obsolete, and their commitment need not be to religious or cultural principles, but solely to Jesus and the truth of his resurrection.

From this bit of history and teaching, we can see that misplacing our trust and committing to things outside of Jesus and resurrection is not an uncommon theme even for people who claim to believe in it. **Even the best followers of Jesus have lost their way and committed to other things they thought would save them and fulfill their lives.** However, this does not mean that those people were not corrected and urged to reconsider the things they valued or the beliefs they committed too.

Considering Commitment

It is with this example in mind this morning that I want to ask you to consider the commitments you have made in your life. **What do your commitments say about your life?** What do you value? Are you committed to Jesus and the power of his resurrection, or have you placed your trust in something else? The fractured state of our world provides us with so many distractions, so many things that can easily steal away from the power of Jesus and his resurrection. If anything, we see today that even the church, the professed believers of Jesus, are capable of distorting his message. Christian or not, ask yourself, what do your commitments say you value?

While the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic has robbed you of our ordinary life and many responsibilities we have made, it is also giving you a unique opportunity. An opportunity to stop, breathe and evaluate. What do your commitments say to those around you? If you are a parent, what did your previous commitments teach your kids? If you are a Christian, what did your commitments teach the non-believers, you know? If you are a teacher, what did your commitments teach your students? If you are in a labor job, what did your commitments reveal to the other workers around you? If you own a small business or manage a company, what have your commitments exposed to your staff? Are you proud of the message they send?

As you consider your answer to those questions, I want to challenge you to see today as a crossroads, a day you can walk away from and remember the new commitment we made. The way I see it, two things can happen, and how it occurs mostly has to do with how you categorize yourself. Are you a Christian? **Have you committed to follow Jesus and believe in his resurrection power?** If you have then, your challenge looks a little different, but a response is still required. In the closing paragraph of his devotional on April 21st Christian author Oswald Chambers offers this piece of wisdom,

"Let not your heart be troubled ... '(John 14,1, 27). Am I then hurting Jesus by allowing my heart to be troubled? If I believe in Jesus and His attributes, am I living up to my belief? Am I allowing anything to disturb my heart, or am I allowing any questions to come in which are unsound or unbalanced? I have to get to the point of the absolute and unquestionable relationship

that takes everything exactly as it comes from Him. God never guides us at some time in the future, but always here and now. Realize the Lord is here now, and the freedom you receive is immediate."

If you have not come to know Jesus and the power of the new life he offers you, here is what I want you to know: There is a God who loves you. He could care less about what you have done up until this moment in time. He is inviting you to embrace his love and commit to a new way of life, a way of life that promises fulfillment and hope as long as you continuously make him a priority in your life. The more you seek to know him, the more of himself he reveals you, and the more will come to know the real resurrection power of God.

Now, if you have already decided to commit to Jesus and his resurrection power, here is what you need to know: **The priorities you have in this life communicate to others the truly impactful commitments in your life.** Do they reflect the commitment to Jesus that you express? Are you experiencing his resurrection power in your life? If not, maybe it is time to consider taking a step towards reengaging with Jesus and allowing the power of his resurrection to saturate your life.

A Letter to our Community

In addition to the individual commitments we have made, there is also an aspect of this message that applies to our church, to our faith community. If we asked our community, the city of Bakersfield, what our church has committed too, what do you think they would say? Would they say that we are committed to showing others the real power of Jesus and his resurrection? Would they say that we are a country club with exclusive membership and strict standards of conformity? Consider that for a moment.

Church, the bottom line is this, **if we are not committed to introducing all people God's resurrection power and challenging them to reorient the way they live their life then we are not doing our job.** Our commitment has fallen out of place. The purpose of the church is to serve as a letter from God to our community. He has given us a message to share and a mission to fulfill, and if we are going to survive and flourish, we have to commit to the role God has given us. Are we committed to our mission? Are we introducing people to the transforming power of Jesus Christ and journeying with them as they grow deeper into a relationship with him?

As we know, and in some ways are experiencing now, there are many people in our world searching for answers, searching for something to change the way they live dramatically. **God has given us, his church, the tools, and the opportunity to make a difference in their lives.** What would our world look like if we were committed to meeting those people where they are at and journeying with them as we introduce them to the new way life we have experienced in following Jesus? Because, if we can do that, then we just might experience his resurrection power in a new and fresh way. Lets Pray.