

The Fruit of the Resurrection

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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I Corinthians 15:17-20

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Night never seems so dark as when you're hurting. And there is something about darkness that makes you feel more alone. The blackness is so thick you sense you can't escape it.

It must really have seemed dark those three nights after Jesus' brutal slaying. For His followers the despair must have seemed darker than the blackest midnight. They had followed the carpenter from Galilee for three and a half years and it all ended suddenly and surreal, a nightmare from the black mist of hell itself. Why at the beginning of the week it seemed the whole world had come out to hail Him the Messiah as He entered Jerusalem. Now at the week's end the darkness with its eerie silence was all they could hear.

But something brewed in the world of the unseen. It was the first day of a new week. Jesus had been dead three days and three nights and something stirred. The naked eye could not detect it, but it was real nonetheless. The dark forces of hell felt an agitation they hadn't since they were thrown out of heaven. A spirit of fear came upon Satan and his unholy cohorts. And then it came, a rumbling that began in the corridors of hell and made its way outside Jerusalem to a small garden cemetery where a huge stone guarding the tomb rolled from the force of the quake. Talk about the domino effect! What turned hell upside down, turned the world upside down, JESUS AROSE!

Now, I know what your thinking. *It isn't Easter!* You're right. It's autumn and in three months it will be Christmas. But who said Easter is the only time of year to celebrate the resurrection? Every day is a celebration of the resurrection because He lives and so do we! So I bid you a Happy Resurrection Day!

I want to talk to you about the hope we have because of the resurrection. The resurrection had a more prominent part in preaching for the early church than it does for this latter church of novelty, where the new and not the old has precedence. These men spoke often, perhaps more often, about His resurrection than His death. Without the resurrection we have no justification because Jesus was justified by the resurrection and therefore we are declared right in Him. With-

out resurrection we have no sanctification because without the resurrection there is no sanctifying life of Jesus to work within us. And without the resurrection we have no hope of glorification because if Jesus did not rise from the dead to enter into His glory, then there is no resurrection from the dead unto glory for us either. It all hinges on the resurrection.

It's that same power that raised up our Jesus that I pray would raise you and me up to do something that is impossible. I pray that God would do something in us that is just as impossible to us as raising Jesus from the dead was impossible for the first followers of Christ. Do you not think that if they could have brought Him back to life they would have done it? Yes, just as much as you would save your children, grandchildren, neighbor, friend, and co-worker if you could. If you could give them eternal life you would have done so by now. But as the apostles could not raise Jesus, you and I cannot heal the broken, we cannot give life to the spiritually dead, or restore the hopeless. That's impossible to us.

However, He was raised by the power of the Holy Spirit and that same Spirit that raised Him from the dead is in us. "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

The power of the resurrection resides in each one of us, and oh that God would make us to know, believe, and be confident that that power resides within us and that nothing is impossible to us if it's God's will. Not one devil, not one sulfur-ridden evil spirit can stand in our way, when the power of God resides in you and me.

It certainly was a good thing that Jesus got up out of the tomb that resurrection morning and it is my intent to show you the hope we have because of that, the hope that is found in its implications.

I. The Hope of the New Covenant

Because Jesus rose from the dead, God has a new deal with us. It's called the New Covenant.

"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (1 Corinthians 15:17)

Why would the apostle make such a statement like this? He is dealing with the false teachers that had crept into the church at Corinth, some who were advocating there was not a true bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. His Spirit lives but He didn't bodily rise from the dead, therefore there is no resurrection from the dead. The apostle sets pen in hand and deals with this heresy. He wants to show them that if there is no resurrection we are in serious trouble because that means the New Covenant cannot be enacted. Without the life of Jesus up from the grave, there is no New Covenant. If that is the case and Jesus is not alive, it means we are still in the Old Covenant. But Paul wants them to understand that's not the case. We have seen an end to the Old Testament Covenant.

A. An End to the Old Testament Covenant.

We are not under the jurisdiction of the law of God. This is good news, dear child of God. This is good news for those of you who are yet to be saved. God will have a relationship with you not based upon duty or performance or commandments. His relationship is based upon a New Covenant. But, if Jesus is not raised from the dead, then that Old Covenant is still in effect with its sting of death and its certain penalty. You and I are under condemnation if Jesus did not rise from the dead. Why is that? If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, what He did on the cross was insufficient, our sins are held against us, and the law and its terror still thunders a voice of condemnation. We are still in our sins if Jesus did not rise from the dead.

The only way you could relate to God under the Old Covenant is through those laws and commandments. That meant that no one could know God by those commandments because they were a reflection of who He is—perfect in mind and behavior—and therefore, unless you were perfect in mind and behavior, you could have no relationship with God. You were condemned by that very law. That's why the writer of Hebrews celebrates this in the tenth chapter,

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” (Hebrews 10:1)

The law of God, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, could not make us perfect, even though it seemed to cover everything about life. There was a law and rule about everything, more than 630 of them. Sacrifices were instituted but the writer of Hebrews said they could not make you perfect and that's why they had to be continually offered. They couldn't get the job done.

“But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:3-4)

Those sacrifices doomed them to a futile exercise year after year after year because the animal's blood was not sufficient for the forgiveness of sins. But thank God there is one sacrifice by whose blood we have redemption and the remission of sins. It is the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. However, without the resurrection the blood is rejected. Had God not raised His Son from the dead, the blood that He shed on Calvary, no matter how precious it is to us, would have no cleansing power. It would not have the ability to absolve or forgive you of your sins. But the Bible tells us He did indeed rise from the dead. Because of that, your sins are not held against you. You are now in a New Covenant relationship with God. A Covenant of Grace!

B. A New Covenant of Grace.

Blaise Pascal said, “The law demands what it cannot give; grace gives all it demands.”

You cannot give all that the law demands of you: perfection in mind and behavior. But under the Covenant of Grace it gives all it asks, “for it is God who works in you both to will and do His good pleasure.” That’s the Covenant of Grace. Something has happened in this New Covenant, a new relationship to God apart from the law. You are considered one with Jesus. Whatever is true about Him is true about you. If Jesus died to the law and our sins, you too have died. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then you too have been raised to walk in newness of life.

“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.” (Romans 7:4)

All that God requires under this Covenant of Grace is faith. That’s the only duty He requires. It’s not your religion He requires, it’s not a fulfillment of some regulation, it’s not a covenant that we might make among ourselves. The only thing God requires of you and of me is that we trust Him. How simple, how easy to trust in someone who has never lied nor can He. That’s all He requires. You say, *I think I’ve got that. I believe in Him. I believe Jesus died and that He got up out of the tomb. I believe the Bible.* I didn’t ask if you believed facts about God. I’m asking if you trust Him. What is the measure of your trust? That you do what He says. If you trust somebody you will do what he or she says because you truly believe them. You have confidence in them.

God says, “If you trust Me that way, if you actually put your life into My hands and trust Me with it, what is true about Me is true about you. When I died to that law and all of its jurisdictional powers and penalty, you died too.” The law says once the man is dead the law can’t do anything to him anymore. Did you hear me? You’ve died to the law through Christ. The law can’t do anything to you.

But pastor. I’ve broken the law of God. Even this week I broke one of the commandments of God. I’m sure that’s probably true, but the law can do nothing to you. It has no sting, it has no teeth, it has no power—you’ve died to it. How is that? Jesus died! And what’s true about Him is true about you. You’ve died to the power and the jurisdiction of the law so that you may be married to another. Who is this other? The One who came up out of the grave and was raised from the dead. Jesus Christ.

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” 17 then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.” (Hebrews 10:16-18)

I want to give you three facts about this passage.

First, God grants those who have faith a new disposition.

“I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.”

God gives every sinner who trusts in Jesus a brand new disposition; a whole new set of loves, affections, and desires for that which is holy and good. He rips out of us a disposition that loves evil and sin and all that is unclean and replaces it with a love for Him and His ways. You don't earn it; you don't tamper and tinker with your soul as someone working on an engine trying to recalibrate it. God does it! It's a miracle. It's the supernatural power of God. He gives a new disposition. You think and feel differently. You want to live differently.

Second, God will not remember our sins.

"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

This is good news. You've heard it all your life: good news, good news, good news, until you're bored to tears with good news. Ask God to give you ears to hear. The good news is there is nothing but the blood of Jesus that can wash away your sins. Not your goodness, not your upstanding morality, not your faithfulness to parents or to employers or to government or church could save you. Only the blood of Jesus Christ!

He has promised not to remember our sins. You won't have to come against the judgment bar of God and give account for your sins because His Son gave the account for you. Jesus stood before our justice bar and the powers of the law were dealt to Him and He paid it all. There is not one outstanding warrant against you. There is no warrant against God's people.

Third, God has granted remission of sin.

"Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin."

The reason there is no remembrance of our sins is because there has been remission and there is no longer an offering for sin. Remember what He said? These sacrifices were continually offered year after year and they didn't cleanse or perfect any one with God. But the sacrifice of Jesus did perfect the worshipper and that is why there is no more need of a sacrifice, the one sacrifice was sufficient. How do we know it was sufficient? Because Jesus rose from the dead! That is the evidence. It seals it. The Father says to the Son, "What You've done is sufficient. The sacrifice is enough." It's infinite in value and can cover not just a million sinners but billions, more than those who will ever know that sacrifice. Spurgeon said it was sufficient for 10,000 worlds. That's why there is a remission, forgiveness, of sins.

It's so sad that a great many never learn this. There are so many that have some kind of experience and they try to show they've had some change in their lives, but time elapses and they return to the world like a sow to her wallowing and a dog to its vomit. They return to their old life. Do you know why that happens? Once having had that experience they come into another realm but there is no power within to fulfill it, to live it. The resurrected life of Jesus is not in them and without this power a person cannot live for God.

Some people see grace only as a means of removing the guilt of past sins but now it is up to them to do the best they can. But they will always fail—we always fail. It's not just the ones who professes faith but aren't truly converted, it's the child of God—we fail too. We do not live up to this Lord who has died for us. We do not always follow His example in word, deed, or thought. We fail and we will fail.

If we believe that somehow we are still responsible for our sin and we must try to cleanse and expunge the sin from our record, we're on a cycle that will destroy us. We will do nothing but feel the heavy condemnation of the law. We will never dig out. At this point some people throw in the towel and say, "I can't live this way. I cannot be good enough."

If the law is not satisfied and silenced by the death of Jesus and we are still under its jurisdiction, then we are most miserable. We are doomed because none of us can be good enough.

*"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."
(1 Corinthians 15:19)*

We still fail but the New Covenant of Grace answers the law's condemnation. I'm not making light of the sin and I'm certainly not saying the sin has no consequences. What I'm saying is that now I'm under a New Covenant, a new arrangement, and a new relationship with God not according to the law. Under the New Covenant of God my sin reminds me only of my need for grace, my need for the undeserved love of God that is freely given to me because One freely laid down His life.

The Covenant of Grace causes me to want to return to Him, knowing the access to Him has not been closed because the sacrifice is good now and forever.

This is not just for our position or status under grace. This is to have influence over all of our lives.

C. All of Our Lives Comes Under the Covenant of Grace.

That means something that very few in history has grasped. That is that God is working in our lives all the time. He's working all the time.

The Covenant of Grace says the very One who rose from the dead now lives within you. The Christian is an anomaly to the sinner. He is a mystery, a conundrum. They can't figure out why you say and do the things you do. The answer is not the Christian themselves but the life of Jesus in them. They have someone who is supernatural dwelling within them.

The sinner can see that in you but often you cannot see that in yourself. You forget that God is working in you.

In Romans 12:1, Paul says we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice. That means Jesus, who rose from the dead, is now alive to work in my life, in me bodily, so I become a mere representation of Him. In this way His activity continues in this world even though He is seated at the right hand of the Father. That means God is working in your work.

If you will offer yourself to the Lord Jesus and say, "My life is Yours, my work is Yours, whatever You say. I just want to live as a vessel, dedicated and sanctified, to Your glorious purposes and the advancement of Your kingdom," God will honor that, even when you're unaware of it.

Two weeks ago in the men's prayer meeting, I made a statement at random. Someone said that statement had been with him all week long and had made somewhat of an impact. Here was the statement: I believe the Christian life can be boiled down to this one statement, "The Christian is to live with the consciousness of God's love for him or her. The first moment you're not conscious of that love, you catch yourself, stop, and acknowledge that truth and keep going on until the next moment you're not conscious of it and not thinking about it. You stop and think, 'Oh, Lord, You are with me. You do love me more than I can understand. There is no explanation for it.'"

Another way to say that is you yield your life to the Master and the first time you recognize you are not conscious of your yielding, you stop and surrender yourself to Him. You do this until yielding to God in absolute surrender is a constant habit.

If we would learn to develop that godly habit, our lives would transform. You would live what you are because God is always working; even when you don't see it. It often seems God is not around or working in us but He is if you're trusting Him to do so.

God is working in our relationships. He is working not just in our victories, but in our losses also. Has anyone suffered a loss, a defeat, lately? Pay attention. God was at work in that. We're not talking about your sins, we'll get to that in just a moment. I'm talking about a mistake, a circumstance didn't turn out the way you wanted it to, a prayer didn't get answered the way you hoped, and it was a loss to you, a defeat. God is working in our defeat, that is, defeat as man defines it.

We hate to admit our defeats. We are so proud we hate losing. I read a story about a prideful man named Zeke. He could hardly admit when he was wrong. One day, Zeke went into the local blacksmith shop near his home and the blacksmith saw him reach over and pick up a horseshoe that was sitting in some sawdust. The blacksmith had just finished making the horseshoe and it was cooling off. Zeke picked up the horseshoe and immediately dropped it again. "Kinda hot, ain't it," said the blacksmith. "Naw," said Zeke, "just doesn't take me long to look at a horseshoe." He couldn't even admit it burned his hand, he was so proud.

We're like that. At least I am. I can only speak for me. It's hard to admit that you made a mistake, that you misjudged, misspoke, or had a mistaken deed. It's hard. But to walk by faith is to learn that even in your defeats, in the situations that don't appear to come out victoriously, God is much at work. How do I know that? Because of the resurrection.

Jesus' defeat was His greatest success. This is what the cross and resurrection tells me. God allowed Himself to be brought under the cruelty and savagery of some of the vilest men. They mocked, beat, stripped, and crucified Him. At that moment, Satan and all of hell rejoiced because they believed they overcame God. He was defeated. And for three days the disciples believed it. The dream was gone and it ended in tragedy. It didn't happen as they supposed, with a victorious Messiah and they reigning beside Him. The dream was gone and for three days and three nights that's all they could believe. But on Sunday morning Jesus arose.

You have to learn that what you are calling a defeat or loss is God's activity. Start looking because the resurrection is coming.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian who suffered in a Nazi prison camp and was executed two weeks before Hitler took his own life, wrote:

In a world where success is the measure and justification of all things, the figure of Him who was sentenced and crucified remains a stranger and is at best an object of pity. The world will allow itself to be subdued only by success. It is not ideas or opinions which decide, but deeds. Success alone justifies wrongs done... With a frankness and off-handedness which no other earthly power could permit itself, history appeals in its own cause to the dictum that the end justifies the means... The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.

God was not interested in success, but in obedience. If one obeyed God and was willing to suffer defeat and whatever else came one's way, God would show a kind of success that the world couldn't imagine. But this was the narrow path, and few would take it.

Few want to take it today, even in the church. We want successes, we want victories, and God doesn't work that way. Oh yes, He brings victories, the resurrection is the greatest of them, but He does it His way. He doesn't bypass difficulty. He takes us through the valley of the shadow of death so that you can testify that you're not afraid. "I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

God is working in your defeats. How else do you explain Paul and Silas who, in prison, are singing praises at midnight? They had done no evil, they committed no crimes. Paul cast a demon out of a girl and her masters didn't like it so they had Paul and Silas publicly beaten, humiliated, and then treated as the worst of the worst criminals in the inner dungeon. But at night, with their backs bleeding, they were singing praises. It looked like a terrible defeat, but they were singing praises. Why? Because they believed in the resurrection. At midnight the earth began to shake, the building trembled, and God broke their bonds and set them free.

What were the odds that Abraham would have a son when he was 100 years old and his wife 90? What were the odds that Moses could convince Pharaoh to free the Israelite slaves? What were the odds that a virgin could have a child? What were the odds that a crucified man could come back to life? With God all things are possible, whatever the odds.

No labor for God is futile or in vain. Remember this tomorrow as you dedicate yourself afresh and pray, “Lord, help me remember You are working in my labors.” Dedicate your labors to God and that means God has to go to work in you and through you. No matter what you see—disappointment, defeat, discouragement—do not be discouraged, do not be defeated, do not despair; the resurrection proves there is victory after defeat.

We are so easily discouraged because we have this idea of success that is entirely worldly and not godly. We share our faith with somebody and they act uninterested so we say we failed. No you didn't! You didn't fail at all. When a farmer plants seed, just because it doesn't come up the next day doesn't mean he failed. You planted the seed of the Gospel, and if God so chooses, at His Word it will sprout. One plants, one waters, but God gives the increase. You didn't fail! God is at work in your work therefore no work is ever futile.

Not just our successes, and not just our defeats, but God is also at work in our failures. Grace does not excuse failure, grace works in us to turn the failure into a godly work, if you believe.

Again, we aren't making little of sin and we aren't saying the consequences of sins cannot be terrible and scandalous and bring a reproach upon our Jesus. But Jesus knows all about reproach. He is not unfamiliar with it. If you will let Him, God, through the Covenant of Grace, will restore you to Jesus. You can have the knowledge that you are right with God and He will take our failures and sins, our ugly vileness and disabilities and work victory because of the resurrection.

Chris Pratt, a popular actor recently featured in *Jurassic World*, professes faith in Christ. His son was born prematurely and faced the probability of disabilities. It was an ordeal for Pratt and his wife. Rather than being destroyed by this event, the experience drew the family closer to God. Pratt said, “It restored my faith in God, not that it needed to be restored, but it really redefined it. The baby was so beautiful to us, and I look back at the photos of him, and it must have been jarring for other people to come in and see him, but to us he was so beautiful and perfect.”

Karen and I know something of this. When we're in public with Victoria, our 16-year-old daughter who has Down syndrome, we see the people look at her. They stare, especially children. They look at her so strangely. They're not accustomed to seeing somebody shaped and formed by God like this. Even adults will watch her curiously. I don't know what they're seeing but I know what her mom and dad see. We see a beautiful little girl.

“Of course you see her that way,” you say, “you're her daddy! Of course a father would say that. Dads and moms think that way. Love colors their vision. This is the way parents are! Every one of their children is beautiful.” You're right that's what a father thinks. And that's what your Father thinks about you. He doesn't see the deformed figure, the disability of your sin, He sees His Son. He sees you perfectly formed in His image. He sees you perfectly.

You don't believe that? It's true. If you can love your children, if Pratt could say this about his child, I'm telling you it's much more true of our Heavenly Father. He has more love than any of

us. When He looks at you, even when you have failed Him and brought reproach to His name, you are beautiful to Him. Why? Because we're not under the law! We're under the Covenant of Grace enacted by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Sin may deform and debilitate but divine love covers a multitude of sin.

I don't have time to complete this message. I have other fruits I would like to talk about but I've been so blessed talking about this one I don't have time to complete the others. This Covenant of Grace—hallelujah! What God is offering us, saint and sinner alike, is a relationship where there is no pressure to perform at all! The only requirement is to trust because you love Him. Why could you not love God when He looks at you, well aware of your disabilities and deformities, your sin and your depravity, yet through Jesus Christ is able to love you and not only love you but to welcome you into His presence and smother you with His love. Why would you sit there this morning and reject that kind of love?

Before the service I was talking with someone about a child who has gone from one home to another not having real parents to love him and all he is doing today is acting out in misbehavior because he's crying out for somebody to love him just the way he is, unconditionally, and undeservedly.

My dear friend, I understand why you're not a Christian today. It's the same reason I wasn't before Jesus saved me. I wondered, "Can He really love me? It's probably not true." So we act out. We misbehave. We do things we know He clearly disproves of just to test it, just to see if He's as good as He says. There needs to be no further testing this morning. Do you hear me? The greatest proof of His love is the cross and an empty tomb just outside of Jerusalem. He is not there! Come and see. He is alive and He can live within you. He can change you. He can transform you and put within you a new disposition, a new heart, and a new power to live victorious over sin, the world, and the devil. He can give you ambitions and bring things that you believe impossible to surety.

Dear church, if I had more time I wanted to say to you that because of the resurrection we have every reason to believe that God can do things that are inexperienced and unheard of. He can turn our littleness, our weakness, and our disabilities into the greatest triumph if we will believe it. Yet we fight to believe. We labor.

Dear friend, if you're not a Christian, you don't have anything on us. We know better and we still struggle to believe. We don't fault you for not believing because we understand it quite well. The only difference is we've tasted and seen that He is good. You can sit in resistance all you want, you can reject Him all you want but in the end you will not win. I'm not talking about hell, although that is the greatest consequence. I'm not here to frighten you, although we ought to be frightened. You're losing because you have never known love. That boy will never give you love like you think he will. That woman will never give you love like you think you want. Money will not give you what you're looking for. Education will not put you on the pathway to success. And even if you taste success, you will get there and say it was all in vain. You were made for the love of God and, because Jesus has risen from the dead, love can come into your heart and transform you this morning.

I love the possibilities in new beginnings and that morning, when Jesus rose from the dead, it was a new beginning. A new beginning for a church that had given up hope. Eleven men and their associates had given up hope but resurrection morning gave birth to a new dawn, a new day, and a new beginning. Believe in your Jesus, trust Him, and you will see Him do great things. Amen.