

The focus of this morning's sermon on the resurrection of Jesus was mostly on the great comfort that we have because Jesus has conquered death. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we will rise from the dead. Because Jesus rose from the dead we who believe have eternal life. That does not make the sadness of physical death go away, but it does transform it because it is not final. Because of the resurrection of Jesus we have hope in the face of death. That is an unspeakably great comfort as we live in the shadow of death because at the same time we live in the light of the certain hope of the resurrection.

This evening we will continue thinking about the resurrection, but this time we will be looking at the power of the resurrection in our lives as Christians and how it relates to knowing Jesus and sharing in his sufferings. The text this evening is the last part of a long sentence. We will take the time to get a sense of the whole sentence, but I will focus on verses 10-11 in which Paul mentions the power of the resurrection and relates it to knowing Jesus and sharing in his sufferings.

I will first summarize the flow of thought of this whole paragraph. The context is the false teaching that Paul was so often battling, the idea that our works contribute to our righteousness before God. He makes the point in verse 3 that true believers in Jesus "put no confidence in the flesh." What he means by that is that true believers in Jesus put no confidence in their human lineage or in their own works. He goes on to describe all the things that he could take confidence in if he were inclined to do so. He had been born a Jew. He had been a good Jew – "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" - a very zealous Pharisee. He had all the things that his Jewish opponents were trusting in and he had them in spades.

But all of that, he goes on to say, he counted as less than nothing "for the sake of Christ." His point is that he had turned away from all of what he had once counted as gain because in Christ he had a perfect righteousness apart from the works of the law. He is exulting in the righteousness "which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." He is glorying in being right with God through faith in Jesus Christ and he is passionately asserting that any goodness that we might think that we can contribute is in fact rubbish. This is one of the most passionate and powerful accounts of justification in Christ through faith in the Bible.

And so to connect with our text, Paul has been saying that he has rejected all his own righteousness in order to gain Christ and his righteousness by faith and then in our text he expresses why being justified by faith in Christ is so important to him. "Verses 10-11, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

What Paul is saying here is that the reason that having the righteousness of Christ by faith is so important to him is because it is the way to know Christ and it is the way to become like Christ. He is making the point that the great blessing of salvation is that it removes the separation between us and Christ so that we can have a

relationship with him and become more like him. In verse 8 he says, “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

There are different ways of expressing this idea. We could say that salvation is not an end in itself, but a means to an end and that end is knowing Christ. Or we could put it a little differently and say that salvation is knowing Christ. If salvation somehow left us free from punishment, but without a relationship with God, it would not be salvation. Fullness of life in biblical terms is a relationship with God through Christ. What salvation is all about is removing the separation that sin causes so that we can know God – so that we can know God intimately – or as Paul puts it here – he is so passionate about receiving the righteousness of Christ by faith so that he might know Christ.

Now as is so often the case, the way to understand this better is to begin with human relationships. We are made for relationships. Solitary confinement is such a terrible punishment because people are stripped of something essential to being human and that is relating to other people. When we think of our lives and what makes them worth living – relationships with others is a huge part of that. One of the hard things about this pandemic is that we are kept from getting together with other people and we do whatever we can through our phones and computers to continue to relate to one another the best that we can.

And a huge part of relationships is knowing the other person. Relationships are about knowing and being known. We delight in the people we love. We delight in the unique people that they are and knowing them personally is a way to describe a relationship. Relationships are about knowing others and the more intimate the relationship the deeper the knowledge and the greater the joy in the relationship.

That helps us to understand what Paul is talking about when he is so passionate about knowing Jesus. This is a whole other level than relationships between humans because we are designed and saved to experience our greatest joy and satisfaction in relationship with Jesus and through him with God. That is reflected in the greatest command which is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We are created to know God. We are saved to know God. We experience the depth of what it means to be human in knowing God. Fullness of life is knowledge of God. And as John Piper likes to say, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

So Paul here is expressing his passion to know Jesus – which here means to know him better. “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” That is why he was so passionate about justification by faith. It opened the way to knowing Christ. The greatest loss that sin causes is our relationship with God. And the gain that salvation is all about is our relationship with God.

And Paul’s passion here is an encouragement for us to value knowing Christ more than we do. Paul is speaking about his own longing so that we might imitate him. He is saying to us --- this is the most important thing in life – this is what life is all about – this is the way to honor God and to know the greatest joy possible.

And the way to grow in our knowledge of Christ is not difficult to know – spend time with him – work on the relationship – do things together – spend time with him in his word – spend time with his people because he is there in the gathering of his people and he even reveals himself through his people as he changes them into his image.

So Paul is passionate about knowing Christ, but he is also passionate to know the power of Christ's resurrection. The things that Paul is passionate about in these verses are very closely related to one another. They can be distinguished but not separated. In practice they intermingle with one another. Being passionate to know the power of Christ's resurrection is part of being passionate about knowing Christ – for it is to share in the life of Christ.

The power of the resurrection is the power that brings us from spiritual death to spiritual life. The reason that we have any desire to know Christ at all is that we have been made alive by the power of the resurrection. Paul refers to this power in an expanded way in Ephesians 1:19-20 when he speaks of “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.”

So, believers have received immeasurably great power which is the same power that brought Jesus from the dead. And what is that power for? It is to live more like Christ. The resurrection power that brought Jesus from the dead is the same resurrection power that brings us from spiritual death, and we receive it so that we can live more like Christ. There is an incredible intimacy here. Paul expresses this in Galatians 2:20 where he says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” The power of the resurrection is the resurrection life of Christ living in us and since it is Christ's life it will make us more like Christ.

So, Paul's passion here to know Christ and the power of his resurrection involves both his relationship with Christ and his becoming more like Christ. The two, of course, go together. If we are passionate about knowing Christ, we will also be passionate about becoming more like him in our lives. And what that means, according to Romans 6:11, is being “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Knowing the power of the resurrection means experiencing the power of the resurrection in a life that is dead to sin and alive to God.

So what Paul is speaking about when he speaks of his passion to know Christ and the power of his resurrection involves a passion for living for God. This is one of the things that the resurrection of Christ means for believers in the here and now. It means that we have in us the power to live for God. And that is not a little power. It is an immeasurably great power. And Paul wants to experience that power more and more.

Colossians 3 fills out what this means in more practical terms. Colossians 3:1-2 says “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” But what does that look like in the nitty gritty

of life? Verse 5 says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you." And he mentions a whole list of sinful things that we are to put away: sexual immorality, covetousness, anger, slander, and lying are some of the items on that list. Then in verse 12 he begins a list of all kinds of attitudes and behaviour we are to put on: compassionate hearts, bearing with one another, forgiving one another and love.

That is what it means to know the power of Jesus' resurrection. And in our text passage Paul is especially passionate about this. In verse 12 he writes, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me is own."

So, this is one of the biblical ways to think about the resurrection. When we think of the glory of what it means that Jesus rose from the dead, we should also be celebrating the immeasurable great power that is at work in us and the natural result of that is a longing to experience that power in a greater way. The power of Jesus' resurrection makes it possible for us to progress towards the goal of being more like Jesus. That is an amazing and glorious goal. Jesus is the perfect human being. Jesus' life is a beautiful life - showing us what life can be. Jesus perfectly reflects the perfection of God as the God-man and the more we reflect the perfections of God, the more we enjoy worthwhileness and reflect the glory of God as we were made to do.

This is exciting. That is what Paul is conveying to us in this passage. This is something worth being passionate about – knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection. Everything else is rubbish compared to that.

And making progress here is not impossible for anyone who believes in Jesus. That is one of the glorious truths of the resurrection of Jesus. If we believe in Jesus, we are risen with Christ. The power that brought him from the dead animates our lives and makes it possible for us to begin to live life as it was meant to be lived and to make progress towards the goal of Christ-likeness. That is something to be excited about. That is something to be passionate about. We can know the joy of progressing towards Christ-likeness.

But as Paul goes on to show, that involves sharing in Christ's sufferings. Paul is passionate about knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection, but inseparately linked to that is "[sharing] in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." Just as for Christ his suffering and resurrection were inseparable, so they are for those who share in his resurrection life.

Now it is interesting that the order for us is reversed. Jesus suffered and died and then rose from the dead. For believers the order is reversed, we are raised from the dead and then, by the power of the life of Christ in us we are enabled to suffer and die. That is why Paul orders his thought in this way in our text. He desires to "know Christ and the power of his resurrection and [to] share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." The power of the resurrection life makes possible the life of suffering and death.

The NT makes it clear that the Christian life involves sharing in Christ's sufferings. 1 Peter 4:13 says, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." Sharing in Christ's resurrection goes hand in hand with sharing in Christ's suffering and becoming

like him in his death. The whole idea of becoming like Christ involves becoming like him in his suffering and death.

This theme does not minimize the uniqueness of Christ's suffering and death. By his suffering and death Jesus conquered sin and death. He paid the penalty for sin. He broke the power of sin and death and Satan. The NT theme of believers being conformed to Jesus' suffering and death does not encroach at all on the unique accomplishments of Jesus's suffering and death. He is the saviour. We are the saved. We do not contribute to our salvation.

That being said, we do share in his suffering and death by becoming like him – the life and death of Christ are the paradigm for the Christian life. Jesus' suffering and dying are the model for our lives. What that means is that just as Jesus suffered and died to actually obtain our salvation, the way that that salvation is spread to the world is through the suffering and dying of the people of God. This is what Paul means in Colossians 1:24 when he writes "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...." Paul does not mean here that Christ's sufferings were insufficient for our salvation. He means rather that the way that the salvation obtained by Christ is conveyed to others is through the suffering of the followers of Christ.

The basic meaning of this is persecution. The way the salvation of Christ is conveyed to the world is through the witness of believers and the witness of believers leads to persecution. So there is a way that the church suffers and dies for the salvation of the lost. Again not in the sense that the church suffering merits salvation in any sense, but in the sense that bringing the salvation that Christ has accomplished to the world happens by means of the church sharing in the suffering and death of Christ. To reflect Christ in the world is to attract the hatred of the world. The way the great commission is fulfilled is through the suffering and death of the people of God.

Now the reality has always been that not all of the followers of Christ have been persecuted to the same extent. That is not only true of our time. It has always been true. And so the church has always had to struggle to understand what this meant in times of less persecution. The reality has always been that persecution has ranged from insults to martyrdom. There have been plenty of times in church history when there was very little overt persecution and the church has had to struggle to understand this idea of suffering and dying with Christ in such times as well as times or places of greater persecution.

In my reading this week for this sermon I came across a chapter in a book by Kevin Vanhoozer called *The Drama of Doctrine* in which he discusses the idea of martyrdom in the history of the church. This is some of what he writes, "To participate in Christ's sufferings is to engage in a mimesis of martyrdom." What he means by that is that we are to imitate the martyrs by giving our lives for the sake of our witness to Christ. In some cases that means literal martyrdom. In other situations that means pouring out our lives for the sake of the gospel. He draws on Augustine who had given considerable thought to the question of what sharing in

Christ's suffering and death meant in times when there was no persecution. He writes, "As Augustine observed, martyrs shed their blood out of love for the truth and for their brethren.... Bearing testimony to the truth of the cross may not require us literally to die, then, but it does require us to "die daily," which for Augustine meant to do charitable works. In late Medieval times, when there were no enemies of the church, martyrdom was transformed – creatively understood – rather than abandoned; 'spiritual' martyrdom was a matter of self-denial and faithful endurance of suffering of all kinds."

This is helpful for understanding our text when Paul speaks about sharing in Christ's sufferings and "becoming like him in his death." For Paul this meant persecution for the sake of his witness to Christ. It still means that in many situations even in our part of the world where at the moment it may be expressed as mockery and being treated as a bigot for holding to God's view of sexuality and marriage. But the self-sacrifice and love that was behind Paul's willingness to suffer can be behind our willingness to pour out our lives in order to witness to Christ by our words and by our deeds. We can suffer by dying to self out of a passion to promote the gospel by word and by deed. Then we are imitating Christ in his suffering and death by which he poured out his life in love for the salvation of sinners.

So what this means for us is imitating Christ in his suffering and death by painful sacrifice that can rightfully be describes as pouring out our lives as witnesses for Christ for the salvation of sinners. This is what knowing the power of the resurrection means and this is what it means to know Christ.

All these things go together. Paul was passionate to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and [to] share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...." The power of the resurrection is the power to share in Christ's suffering and death by giving of ourselves for the salvation of sinners to such an extent that it can truthfully be said of us that we are giving our lives for the sake of the gospel. The power of the resurrection makes it possible for us to imitate Christ by suffering and dying for others.

Paul has an ultimate goal in all this that he expresses in verse 11. "that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Paul was pressing toward the resurrection from the dead – the enjoyment of the fullness of the salvation that he was so passionate about preaching to others. The longing to know Christ better and know more of the power of the resurrection and share in the suffering of Christ and become like him in his death was all part of his longing for the ultimate goal – the resurrection from the dead. Paul would elaborate on this in verses 20-21 of this same chapter. "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

So we celebrate the resurrection of Christ. It is a glorious truth which is the foundation for our hope for our own resurrection from the dead. But the way to that hope is through the transformation that begins here already through the power of Christ's resurrection and that power makes us willing to share in Christ's suffering and become like him in his death. And all of that belongs to knowing Christ – to a personal

relationship with him – to intimacy with him. If we are truly believing in him we share his very life and so we are on the same page with him when it comes to what really matters. The way to glory is the way through suffering. Jesus gave his life that we might live. We express that life by giving our lives that others might live.

That will look differently in different lives. We are not all called to serve in the same way. We are in this together as the church of Jesus Christ. It involves sacrificial giving of time and money. It involves being involved in the life and mission of the church. It involves serving others in love. It involves speaking of Christ as we have opportunity. But the model that we follow is Jesus Christ. The sacrifice must be such that we can be said to share in his suffering and become like him in his death. And that is what the resurrection of Christ enables us to do.

But let us not look at this as an onerous burden. Let us think of it with the sense of excitement and passion that Paul conveys in this passage. What Paul is describing here is a glorious vision of the Christian life. It is motivated by great enthusiasm because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. May that be our motivation as well – “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him ... that I may know him and the power of the resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”