
Raised From the Dead

By David Wilkerson

September 7, 2009 As Christians we believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. After the Lord's crucifixion, the Holy Spirit entered the tomb where he lay and raised him up. This is why we sing on Easter that Christ rose from the grave, victorious over his foes, and now reigns forever with the saints.

We also believe that by Christ's power we will be resurrected. This will happen when Jesus comes again. Scripture says all of us will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. The Holy Spirit will raise us up from this earth with incorruptible bodies and place us in the Lord's very presence.

This is the resurrection power Paul describes in his epistles. It is the power of a God who raises the dead.

I want to show you that Christ still raises the dead today. I speak now of the resurrection life that God brings to those who are spiritually dead. Paul describes this kind of life-giving power in his letter to the Ephesians:

"You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

"Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:1-6).

Right now many Christians are dead in spirit, having no real life. When you live according to the flesh it eventually brings death. I'm not speaking of physical death. I'm talking about being drained of life. For example, the more bored you become with material goods and fleshly pleasures, the more sorely you're tempted to dive deeper into them. And the emptier you become. That is spiritual death.

Paul refers to this when he says we have a "sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9). He testifies, in essence, "The Lord delivered me from a great death. And he keeps delivering me. He will be faithful to deliver me in the future also."

There is a powerful story behind what Paul is saying here. On one occasion he was preaching in Ephesus, a city that worshiped the goddess Diana. The silversmiths in Ephesus had made fortunes selling little replicas of the goddess. But when Paul came on the scene, he preached, "Your god is false. There is only one true God. And his Son lived and died so that those who are dead in sin might live."

Enraged, the silver merchants realized their livelihood was at stake. So they stirred up a mob to take hold of Paul, determined to kill him. Paul was convinced he was going to die.

While at the very brink of death Paul wrote these compelling words. Paul confessed, "We were pressed

out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that *we despaired even of life*" (2 Corinthians 1:8, my italics). He added by way of explanation, "*We had the sentence of death in ourselves*, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (1:9, my italics).

Tell me, have you ever been way down as Paul was, far beyond your power? Have you ever been past all remaining strength, down so deep you despaired even of life? When Paul said, "I despair of life," he was saying he faced a death sentence: "We had the sentence of death in ourselves."

But God came on the scene and delivered him. Having experienced a miracle, Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "I have been resurrected from the dead. The Lord took me out of the grave. I stared hell in the face, but God resurrected me!"

Here in New York City we see multitudes in everyday life who appear to be vibrantly alive but are dead. This city appears to be the very definition of life. It is never still at any moment. CEOs of giant corporations are busy making deals, huge retailers are moving goods, entertainment companies are selling thousands of tickets to shows and performances.

Meanwhile, on the streets merchants hawk their wares, café owners serve up meals, and cab drivers come and go picking up fare after fare. Everything is hustle and bustle, with everyone so busy. New York simply isn't a city that looks like death.

But God's Spirit moves on the heart, prompting questions: "Is this all there is to life? Buying and selling, staying busy? Does mere activity translate into true life? What is underneath all the busyness?"

At night, people pour onto New York's streets to take part in the nightlife. For those who don't know Christ, partying in the city seems fun. Sin is pleasurable, and nightlife in New York has the appearance of being very much alive.

But sin eventually brings boredom. And the same sin that brings pleasure also brings a sorrow of soul when the party ends.

God means it when he says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Throughout Romans 8, Paul outlines the destructive realities of sin. He states, "If you live after the flesh, you will die. To be lust-driven, to live only by the senses, leads to death. The body is dead because of sin."

In short, death means having no life. And only Jesus provides life, declaring, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Because nonbelievers lack life, everything they pursue leads to death. This is the reason so many turn to alcohol and "recreational" drugs. Getting high is no longer a party for them. Rather, it is an attempt to numb the pain created by sin, a pain caused by real emptiness.

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:18-19).

What a horrible condition Paul describes. He's saying, "Such people are so given over to the world of pleasure, they're past feeling." In short, they have become numb to any sense of God or life.

In his mercy the Lord reaches out to every numbed soul. Paul contrasts the condition of those in Christ's body: "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Ephesians 4:20–23).

Paul is making his message plain: "You can be resurrected. You can be changed. You can come into new life."

When I preached this message at Times Square Church, I looked out at a woman in our congregation who had spent years dancing her nights away, carousing till the wee hours. She literally had spent ten years in a dance club nearby trying to find peace.

When she walked into our church she was weary of it all, spiritually dead. She came in with a yearning, seeking heart. As she heard me preach, she thought, "This man is speaking directly to me. He's reading my mind. He must be a psychic!"

She learned later that the Holy Spirit was revealing the contents of her heart. That night, she walked down the aisle and gave her life to Jesus. Now she is alive by the power of him who is the resurrection and the life!

In any church you can look around at those next to you and see once-dead people who have been raised to life. Like you, your fellow parishioners were once dead in their transgressions and sins. Indeed, many of the happily married couples you see had planned to divorce at one time. They were convinced their marriage was dead, beyond hope. But God raised them up to new life.

This week I received an e-mail from a pastor who had quit his church. This man was convinced he was a failure. He had fallen deep into sin and lost his wife and children. His whole life fell apart and he found himself staring at death.

In his darkest hour, he fell on his knees and cried for help. Jesus came to this broken, desperate man and breathed new life into him. Soon afterward, the man's wife called him, saying, "I miss Jesus. Can we try again?"

Today that pastor works in one of our drug rehabilitation centers. Consider Ephesians 2:1–2: "And you has [the Lord] raised up, who were dead in trespasses and sins...you walked in the lusts of your flesh, you fulfilled the desires of your flesh and mind, and by nature you were children of wrath."

Perhaps this describes your experience. Before you knew the Lord, you were doing your own thing. You were caught up in the spirit of the times, trying every sin and pleasure. You thought you would "put God off" till later. You believed your good works and donations would save you.

Then the Lord came to you. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4–6).

Beloved, this is all about getting new life, which can only be found in Christ. Paul isn't talking here about the final resurrection. He's describing what God does on earth — resurrection in the here and

now!

Tell me, what is it but resurrection when God's Spirit goes into the streets and reaches the destitute sinner, changing him? This has happened to hundreds upon hundreds of people in our church. Many were living on the streets — some homeless, some addicts, some prostitutes — and Jesus touched them with new life.

This same thing happens throughout the world in churches that preach the gospel, congregations large and small. Dead people are changed, given new life, because in Christ all things become new: "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I believe in what are called "divine appointments" arranged by the Holy Spirit. A young man e-mailed me recently about the most dramatic moment of his life. He wrote, "I was in despair because I had lost everything. I simply felt there was no hope for me. I had tried every sin, every possible way to find peace. But nothing helped.

"Finally I decided I'd had enough. I put a gun to my head, ready to kill myself. Then I said a last prayer: 'God, if you're real, and you love me, you'd better stop me, or I'm dead.'

"At that moment, I heard a voice inside me saying, 'Go, look inside your mailbox.'"

The young man set the gun down and went to his mailbox. An anonymous person had sent him a package. He opened it to discover a copy of my book *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

The young man sat down and began to read. He continued reading until he finished the whole story. As he closed the book he started weeping. He cried, "God, if you can save Nicky Cruz, a vicious gang leader, you can save me."

Today that young man is on fire for the Lord. God came and intervened, saving him from a double death!

I ask you, what caused you to first go inside a church? What did you expect when you first attended a church service? Did you go with an open heart? Were you hoping something would penetrate your soul and speak peace to you? Were you hoping to be touched deep down and given comfort?

I tell you, you did not end up in your church by chance. It wasn't just happenstance. The merciful Spirit of Christ led you there. In fact, he had had you on his radar for some time. As God tells us, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

The Lord is sovereign. He does not trifle with the lives of men. He can move heaven and earth to accomplish his purposes. And he put you right where you are, both to save you and to set in motion his plan for your life.

Some years ago a young woman who was addicted to heroin came to hear me preach. She was supporting her habit by prostituting herself. This hardened young woman was way past feeling. In fact, she had never once cried in her life. She was coldhearted, bitter, dead inside.

Then, in the middle of my message, she felt something warm inside her. Suddenly she was moved to pray: "God, if you are real, please make me cry."

One tear began to fall. Then another. And another and another, until finally a river began streaming down her face. Out came every ounce of bitterness and all sense of rejection.

That young woman was Cookie Rodriguez, who later wrote the book, *Please Make Me Cry*. She was raised from the dead! Right now Cookie is traveling throughout Texas telling the story of God's resurrection power.

The Lord is calling all his prodigal sons and daughters to come home. It does not matter to God how deep in sin you are. It doesn't matter that you think he doesn't love you. His love and mercy are at your heart's door. Just open that door, right now. He will come and raise you up in newness of life.

Here is God's call to you, from Ephesians 4:17-23 (paraphrased):

"Do not go the way of some, who are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. They are past feeling and have given themselves over unto lasciviousness. Put it all away, and be renewed — raised up — in the spirit of your mind." Amen!