

THE POWER OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

by George Whitefield

"That I may know Him, and the power of his resurrection." *Philippians 3:10*

The apostle, in the verses before the text, had been cautioning the Philippians to "beware of the concision," Judaizing teachers, who endeavored to subvert them from the simplicity of the gospel, by telling them, they still ought to be subject to circumcision, and all the other ordinances of Moses.

And that they might not think he spoke out of prejudice, and condemned their tenets, because he himself was a stranger to the Jewish dispensation, he acquaints them, that if any other man thought he had whereof he might trust in the flesh, or seek to be justified by the outward privileges of the Jews, he had more: For he was "circumcised the eighth day; of the stock of Israel (not a proselyte, but a native Israelite); of the tribe of Benjamin (the tribe which adhered to Judah when the others revolted); an Hebrew of the Hebrews (a Jew both on the father's and mother's side); and as touching the law, a Pharisee," the strictest sect amongst all Israel.

To show that he was no Gallio in religion, through his great, though misguided zeal, he had persecuted the church of Christ; and "as touching the righteousness of the law (as far as the Pharisees exposition of it went, he was) blameless," and had kept it from his youth.

But, when it pleased God, who separated him from his mother's womb, to reveal his Son in him, "What things were gain to me," (he says) those privileges I boasted myself in, and sought to be justified by, "I counted loss for Christ."

And that they might not think he repented that he had done so, he tells them, he was now more confirmed than ever in his judgment. For, says he, "yea doubtless (the expression in the original rises with a holy triumph) and I do count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

And that they might not object that he said, and did not, he acquaints them, he had given proofs of the sincerity of these professions, because for the sake of them, he had suffered the loss of all his worldly things, and still was willing to do more; for, "I count them but dung (no more than offals thrown out to dogs) so that I may win, (or have a saving interest in) Christ, and be found in him (as the manslayer in the city of refuge) not having my own righteousness which is of the law, (not depending on having Abraham for

my father, or on any works of righteousness which I have done, either to atone or serve as a balance for my evil deeds) but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,” a righteousness of God’s appointing, and which will be imputed to me, if I believe in Christ, “that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection;” that I may have an experimental knowledge of the efficacy of his resurrection, by feeling the influences of his blessed Spirit on my soul.

In which words two things are implied.

FIRST, That Jesus Christ did rise from the dead.

SECONDLY, That it highly concerns us to know the power of his rising again.

Accordingly, in the following discourse I shall endeavor to show, *FIRST*, That Christ is risen indeed from the dead; and that it was necessary for him so to do; and, *SECONDLY*, That it highly concerns us to know and experience “the power of his resurrection.”

FIRST, Christ is indeed risen.

That Jesus should rise from the dead was absolutely necessary;

FIRST, On his own account.

He had often appealed to this as the last and most convincing proof he would give them that he was the Messiah, “There shall no other sign be given you, than the sign of the prophet Jonas.” And again, “Destroy this temple of my body, and in three days I will build it up.” Which words his enemies remembered, and urged it as an argument, to induce Pilate to grant them a watch, to prevent his being stolen out of the grave. “We know that deceiver said, whilst he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again.” So that had he not risen again, they might have justly said, we know that this man was an impostor.

SECONDLY, It was necessary on our account. “He rose again” (says the apostle) for our justification;” or that the debt we owed to God for our sins, might be fully satisfied and discharged.

It had pleased the Father (for ever adored be his infinite love and free grace) to wound his only Son for our transgressions, and to arrest and confine him in the prison of the grave, as our surety for the guilt we had contracted by setting at naught his commandments. Now had Christ continued always in the grave, we could have had no more assurance that our sins were satisfied for, than any common debtor can have of his creditor's being satisfied, whilst his surety is kept confined. But he being released from the power of death, we are thereby assured, that with his sacrifice God was well pleased, that our atonement was finished on the cross, and that he hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world.

THIRDLY, It was necessary that our Lord Jesus should rise again from the dead, to assure us of the certainty of the resurrection of our own bodies.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body was entirely exploded and set at naught among the Gentiles, as appears from the Athenians mocking at, and calling St. Paul "a babbler and a setter forth of strange doctrines," when he preached to them Jesus, and the resurrection. And though it was believed by most of the Jews, as is evident from many passages of scripture, yet not by all; the whole sect of the Sadducees denied it.

But the resurrection of Jesus Christ put it out of dispute.

For as he acted as our representative, if he our head be risen, then must we also, who are his members, rise with him. And as in the first Adam we all died, even so in him our second Adam we must all, in this sense, be made alive. As it was necessary, upon these accounts, that our blessed Lord should rise from the dead; so it is plain beyond contradiction, that he did. Never was any matter of fact better attested; never were more precautions made use of to prevent a cheat.

He was buried in a sepulcher, hewn out of a rock, so that it could not be said that any digged under, and conveyed him away. It was a sepulcher also wherein never man before was laid; so that if any body did rise from thence, it must be the body of Jesus of Nazareth. Besides, the sepulcher was sealed; a great stone rolled over the mouth of it; and a band of soldiers (consisting not of friends, but of his professed enemies) was set to guard it. And as for his disciples coming by night and stealing him away, it was altogether improbable: For it was not long since, that they had all forsaken him, and they were the most backward in believing his resurrection. And supposing it was true, that they came whilst the soldiers slept; yet the soldiers must be cast into a deep sleep indeed, that the rolling away so great a stone did not awake some of them. And our blessed Lord's afterwards appearing at sundry times, and in divers manners, to his disciples, as when they were assembled together, when they were walking to Emmaus, when they

were fishing: nay, and condescending to show them his hands and feet, and his appearing to above five hundred brethren at once, put the truth of his resurrection out of all dispute.

Indeed, there is one objection that may be made against what has been said, that the books wherein these facts are recorded were written by his disciples.

And who more proper persons than those who were eye-witnesses of what they related, and eat and drank with him after his resurrection? “But they were illiterate and ignorant men.”

Yet as good witnesses of a plain matter of fact, as the most learned masters in Israel. Nay, this rendered them more proper witnesses. For being plain men, they were therefore less to be suspected of telling or making a lie, particularly, since they laid down their lives for a testimony of the truth of it. We read indeed of Jacob’s telling a lie, though he was a plain man, in order to get his father’s blessing. But it was never heard since the world began, that any man, much less a whole set of men, died martyrs, for the sake of an untruth, when they themselves were to reap no advantage from it.

No, this single circumstance proves them to be Israelites indeed, in whom was no guile. And the wonderful success God gave to their ministry afterwards, when three thousand were converted by one sermon; and twelve poor fishermen, in a very short time enabled to be more than conquerors over all the opposition men or devils could make, was as plain a demonstration, that Christ was risen, according to their gospel, as that a divine power, at the sound of a few ram’s horns, causes the walls of Jericho to fall down.

But what need we any farther witnesses? Believe you the resurrection of our blessed Lord? I know that you believe it, as your gathering together on this first day of the week in the courts of the Lord’s house abundantly testifies.

What concerns us most to be assured of, and which is the SECOND thing I was to speak to, is, Whether we have experimentally known the power of his resurrection; that is, Whether or not we have received the Holy Ghost, and by his powerful operations on our hearts have been raised from the death of sin, to a life of righteousness and true holiness.

It was this, the great apostle was chiefly desirous to know.

The resurrection of Christ's body he was satisfied would avail him nothing, unless he experienced the power of it in raising his dead soul.

For another, and that a chief end of our blessed Lord's rising from the dead, was to enter heaven as our representative, and to send down the Holy Ghost to apply that redemption he had finished on the cross, to our hearts, by working an entire change in them. Without this, Christ would have died in vain. For it would have done us no service to have had his outward righteousness imputed to us, unless we had an inward inherent righteousness wrought in us. Because, being altogether conceived and born in sin, and consequently unfit to hold communion with an infinitely pure and holy God, we cannot possibly be made meet to see or enjoy him, till a thorough renovation has passed upon our hearts. Without this, we leave out the Holy Ghost in the great work of our redemption. But as we were made by the joint concurrence and consultation of the blessed trinity; and as we were baptized in their name, so must all of them concur in our salvation: As the Father made, and the Son redeemed, so must the Holy Ghost sanctify and seal us, or otherwise we have believed in vain.

This then is what the apostle means by the "Power of Christ's resurrection," and this is what we are as much concerned experimentally to know, as that He rose at all. Without this, though we may be moralists, though we may be civilized, good-natured people, yet we are no Christians. For he is not a true Christian, who is only one outwardly; nor have we therefore a right, because we daily profess to believe that Christ rose again the third day from the dead. But he is a true Christian who is one inwardly; and then only can we be stilled true believers, when we not only profess to believe, but have felt the power of our blessed Lord's rising from the dead, by being quickened and raised by his Spirit, when dead in trespasses and sins, to a thorough newness both of heart and life.

The devils themselves cannot but believe the doctrine of the resurrection, and tremble; but yet they continue devils, because the benefits of this resurrection have not been applied to them, nor have they received a renovating power from it, to change and put off their diabolical nature. And so, unless we not only profess to know, but also feel that Christ is risen indeed, by being born again from above, we shall be as far from the kingdom of God as they: our faith will be as ineffectual as the faith of devils.

Nothing has done more harm to the Christian world, nothing has rendered the cross of Christ of less effect, than a vain supposition, that religion is something without us. Whereas we should consider, that every thing that Christ did outwardly, must be done over again in our souls; or otherwise, the believing there was such a divine person once on earth, who triumphed over hell and the grave, will profit us no more, than believing there was once such a person as Alexander, who conquered the world. As Christ was born of the Virgin's womb, so must he be spiritually formed in our hearts. As he died for

sin, so must we die to sin. And as he rose again from the dead, so must we also rise to a divine life.

None but those who have followed him in this regeneration, or new-birth, shall sit on thrones as approvers of his sentence, when he shall come in terrible majesty to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

It is true, as for the outward work of our redemption, it was a transient act, and was certainly finished on the cross, but the application of that redemption to our hearts, is a work that will continue always, even unto the end of the world. So long as there is an elect man breathing on the earth, who is naturally engendered of the offspring of the first Adam, so long must the quickening spirit, which was purchased by the resurrection of the second Adam, that Lord from heaven, be breathing upon his soul. For though we may exist by Christ, yet we cannot be said to exist in him, till we are united to him by one spirit, and enter into a new state of things, as certainly as he entered into a new state of things, after that he rose from the dead. We may throng and crowd about Christ, and call him "Lord, Lord," when we come to worship before his footstool; but we have not effectually touched him, till by a lively faith in his resurrection, we perceive a divine virtue coming out of him, to renew and purify our souls.

How greatly then do they err who rest in a bare historical faith of our Savior's resurrection, and look only for external proofs to evidence it?

Whereas were we the most learned disputers of this world, and could speak of the certainty of this fact with the tongue of men and angels, yet without this inward testimony of it in our hearts, though we might convince others, yet we should never be saved by it ourselves. For we are but dead men, we are like so many carcasses wrapt up in grave clothes, till that same Jesus who called Lazarus from his tomb, and at whose own resurrection many that slept arose, doth raise us also by his quickening Spirit from our natural death, in which we have so long lain, to a holy and heavenly life.

We might think ourselves happy, if we had seen the Holy Jesus after He was risen from the dead, and our hands had handled that Lord of life. But more happy are they who have not seen him, and yet having felt the power of his resurrection, therefore believe in him. For many saw our divine master, who were not saved by him; but whosoever has thus felt the power of his resurrection, has the earnest of his inheritance in his heart, he has passed from death to life, and shall never fall into final condemnation.

I am very sensible that this is foolishness to the natural man, as were many such like truths to our Lord's own disciples, when only weak in faith, before he rose again. But

when these natural men, like them, have fully felt the power of his resurrection, they will then own that this doctrine is from God, and say with the Samaritans, “Now we believe not because of thy saying,” for we ourselves have experienced it in our hearts. And O that all unbelievers, all letter-learned masters of Israel, who now look upon the doctrine of the power of Christ’s resurrection, or our new birth, as an idle tale, and condemn the preachers of it as enthusiasts and madmen, did but thus feel the power of it in their souls, they would no longer ask, how this thing could be? But they would be convinced of it, as much as Thomas was, when he saw the Lord’s Christ; and like him, when Jesus bid him reach out his hands and thrust them into his side, in a holy confession they would cry out, “My Lord and my God!”

But how shall an unbeliever, how shall the formal Christian come thus to “know Christ, and the power of his resurrection?” God, who cannot lie, has told us, “I am the resurrection and the life, whosoever liveth and believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” Again, says the apostle, “By faith we are saved, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.”

This, this is the way, walk in it.

Believe, and you shall live in Christ, and Christ in you; you shall be one with Christ, and Christ one with you. But without this, your outward goodness and professions will avail you nothing. But then, by this faith we are not to understand a dead speculative faith, a faith in the head; but a living principle wrought in the heart by the powerful operations of the Holy Ghost, a faith that will enable us to overcome the world, and forsake all the affection for Jesus Christ. For thus speaks our blessed Master, “Unless a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” And so the apostle, in the words immediately following the text, says, “being made conformable to his death;” thereby implying, that we cannot know the power of Christ’s resurrection, unless we are made conformable to him in his death.

If we can reconcile light and darkness, heaven and hell, then we may hope to know the power of Christ’s resurrection without dying to ourselves and the world. But till we can do this, we might as well expect that Christ will have concord with Belial. For there is such a contrariety between the spirit of this world, and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that he who will be at friendship with the one, must be at enmity with the other: “We cannot serve God and mammon.”

This may, indeed, seem a hard saying; and many, with the young man in the gospel, may be tempted to go away sorrowful. But wherefore should this offend them? For what is all that is in the world, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, but vanity and vexation of spirit? God is love; and therefore, could our own wills, or the

world, have made us happy, he never would have sent his own dear Son Jesus Christ to die and rise again, to deliver us from the power of them. But because they only torment, and cannot satisfy, therefore God bids us to renounce them. Had any one persuaded profane Esau not to lose so glorious a privilege, merely for the sake of gratifying a present corrupt inclination, when he saw him about to sell his birth-right for a little red pottage, would not one think that man to have been Esau's friend? And just thus stands the case between God and us.

By the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are new-born to an heavenly inheritance amongst all them which are sanctified; but our own corrupt wills, would tempt us to sell this glorious birth-right for the vanities of the world, which, like Esau's red pottage, may please us for a while, but will soon be taken away from us. God knows this, and therefore rather bids us renounce them for a reason, than for the short enjoyment of them lost the privilege of that glorious birth-right, to which, by knowing the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are entitled.

O the depth of the riches and excellency of Christianity! Well might the great St. Paul count all things but dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of it. Well might he desire so ardently to know Jesus, and the power of his resurrection. For even on this side eternity it raises us above the world, and makes us to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Well might that glorious company of worthies, recorded in the Holy scriptures, supported with a deep sense of their heavenly calling, despise the pleasures and profits of this life, and wander about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, in dens and caves of the earth, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

And O that we were all like minded!

That we felt the power of Christ's resurrection as they did!

How should we then "count all things as dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord!" How should we then recover our primitive dignity, trample the earth under our feet, and with our souls be continually gasping after God? And what hinders but we may be thus minded? Is Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, altered from what he was? No, "he is the same yesterday, today, and for ever." And though he is exalted to the right hand of God, yet he is not ashamed to call us brethren. The power of his resurrection is as great now as formerly, and the Holy Spirit, which was assured to us by his resurrection, as ready and able to quicken us who are dead in trespasses and sins, as any saint that ever lived.

Let us but cry, and that instantly, to Him that is mighty and able to save; let us, in sincerity and truth, without secretly keeping back the least part, renounce ourselves and the world; then we shall be Christians indeed. And though the world may cast us out, and separate from our company, yet Jesus Christ will walk with, and abide in us.

And at the general resurrection of the last day, when the voice of the archangel and trump of God shall bid the sea and the graves to give up their dead, and all nations shall appear before him, then will he confess us before his Father and the holy angels, and we shall receive that invitation which he shall then pronounce to all who love and fear him, “Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.

Grant this, O Father, for thy dear Son’s sake, Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, etc.