

Living The Resurrection Life - Transformation

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Matthew. I'm married to Evelyn, and Evelyn is in the business of transformation.

I discovered this fairly quickly in her marriage. She takes a house, a flat, her first house, and she transforms it.

She transforms it into a home. Bedrooms, kitchens, doesn't matter where it is, Evelyn transforms it. Gardening.

She can take a garden which doesn't look like anything at all, and by the time Evelyn's finished with it, it's a fabulous garden. We had a couple of really good gardeners a week ago, and we were wondering what they would think as they walked around her garden, because they asked to see it immediately.

And they were thrilled with it. And this is Evelyn's work. She is a transformer. She changes things. She takes an empty house and makes it a home. And she's also helped to transform people through her counseling and the many people who have come to her and people she's gone to.

[1 : 22] And she's helped to transform their situation. It's not surprising that Evelyn is a transformer because she takes after her father. Not Bob Fair, grand old man.

I'm sorry that none of you ever met him. Wonderful man. But I don't mean that father. I mean her heavenly father. She takes after her father in heaven because God also is in the business of transformation.

In Romans 4.17, I want to apologize, by the way, to the 50 or so verses that are in my preparation notes that I will not be using tonight.

There's an awful lot to say in this subject of transformation and resurrection. But Romans 4.17 is a good place to start. Paul describes God as the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

The God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Politicians tried to do this.

[2 : 35] Theresa May called the general election saying she wanted a larger majority. She called what was not and she didn't get it. Jeremy Corbyn, now he's calling to be the next government.

Maybe he shall be, but at the moment, it can be nothing other than a hope. We won't go on to Nicola Sturgeon and Scottish independence, but perhaps that's in the same category.

Calling, trying to call something that is not into being. But this is what God does. When God calls, it happens. He calls things that are not as though they were and it happens.

He said, Abraham would be the father of many nations when Abraham was an old man and Sarah, his wife, had a barren womb, a dead womb, the Bible actually says.

How can that happen? That's utterly impossible. But God called what is not and made it happen? It was. And you know the story.

[3 : 40] If you know the Bible, you know that that did indeed happen. They had a son in their extremely old age. God is in the business of transformation.

Or take creation. In the beginning, the earth was formless and empty. God spoke and creation came into being. He saw things that were not as though they were.

He spoke and life was created. He saw mankind although it was not.

And then it was. Well, the Valley of Dry Bones, one of our favorite stories, first thing ever, preached on here. There was, I don't know if it's still up there, a mural about the, oh no, that was Ezekiel crossing the sea.

Just forget that. The dry bones, you know the story. In Ezekiel's time, the nation's dead and God uses dry bones, things that are not, to bring a message to the nation that he wants to give them life.

[4 : 48] He calls to the dry bones and they take on flesh and they come alive again. He spoke and life was created. God is in the business of transformation.

What about the disciples? They had witnessed the resurrection. That certainly changed them but they weren't quite transformed. They were waiting for God to send his spirit.

And then, in that amazing day of Pentecost, a rushing wind and tongues of fire and all of a sudden, there were different people and they went out and spoke and they had courage and they continued to do that.

The disciples were never the same again once God called what was not into being. You could say that was the church itself.

Are these just stories though? You know, are they just because having taught RE for six years, I know I know what challenges people put out.

[5 : 57] Oh, they're just stories. You know, somebody wrote them up. They're not actually real. Are they? Are they just stories from a bygone age? Is that just what God used to be like?

Are they good things to tell the children in Sunday school? Are they just for back then? Or is God still transforming? What about today?

I'm reading a book at the moment called End of the Spear. It's a fascinating book. In 1956, five North American missionaries tried to befriend a tribe called the Wayodani deep in the Ecuadorian jungle.

Their nickname was Oca, which means savages. This was an awful group. They murdered for fun. You know, if they didn't have a fight in the playground, they killed each other.

And this group, they became very famous. Five missionaries thought they were doing well. They'd started to befriend them. They'd begun to be in conversation with them, giving them gifts, receiving gifts.

[7 : 00] And then suddenly, the Wayodani turned against them and murdered all five of them. It's amazing then, isn't it, that Jim Elliott's sister immediately went to them and stayed with them and found that they were in the process of transformation.

Why? Well, because God was at work. But because five missionaries armed with guns had not lifted the guns, had not retaliated in the Wayodani and he had never seen anything like this before and they wanted to ask about it.

So when Jim Elliott's sister went there and his son later followed and grew up with him, they wanted to know what this was about. and en masse, they became Christians and the spear was laid down.

They stopped killing almost immediately. God's spirit was transforming them. What was not, what seemed absolutely impossible was the conversion of a violent, murdering tribe of savages.

But God called and the impossible happened. Fiona Dunn, Fiona Dunn was one of the sweetest, nicest young women who ever joined our summer mission.

[8 : 20] I cannot speak highly enough about Fiona. Just an absolute delight. Christ shone out from her. Her faith was so obvious.

But Fiona was shy. And so, on our summer mission where we interact with people from the moment the sun rises till it sets, Fiona stuck herself in the kitchen.

She cooked, she washed the dishes, she was a great addition to the team from that point of view.

But she was shy, she didn't take part in any of the services or in any of the outreach.

Such a shame. We were going through Acts that summer, the Acts of the Apostles in our team Bible study if you want to sit in on that. And she heard time and again phrases like the power of the resurrection, the power of the spirit.

She heard about scared disciples bursting out onto the street to preach. She heard about the same disciples saying to a lame man, take up your bed and walk in the name of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 27] But it didn't seem to reach her. she still kept in the kitchen. Then it was time for her to go back home she went. We don't know what happened after she went home because she refused to tell us.

But she came back unexpectedly for the last week of the mission. She just turned up and she said her first words, I'm not going in the kitchen.

And she threw herself into the work of the mission. She asked to speak at our services and my abiding memory of Fiona, this ex-shy young Christian lady was of her standing on a table and preaching to the campers in that campsite.

Wonderful. Fiona ended up going to work with Operation Mobilization. Last I heard she was still there.

You see, God was at it again. Transformation. He's still doing it. He's still changing lives from the worst of people like the way of Danny tribe to the best of people like Fiona Dunn.

[10:37] Of course, the biggest transformation was Jesus' resurrection. Last week, Dan talked about the assurance that Christ's resurrection gave the disciples and gives us.

I love that Easter shout. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. It's a highlight of Easter for me when, as a church, we shout, Christ has died.

Christ has risen. Christ will come again. Wonderful. I feel great that that's the case. We feel assured. That's what we believe.

Jesus is alive. I've been several times to Jerusalem and visited the Garden Tomb, a lovely place of quiet in the midst of such a bustling city.

And in the Garden Tomb, there is a tomb. They don't claim that this is the tomb, which I appreciate. But it could be. It could be. It's like that. And as you go in there, there's a space where a body could have been laid.

[11:43] It was a burial tomb. And if you shut the door behind you and then turn and look at it, these words are on the door.

He is not here. He is risen. And every time I've been in there, I've left that tomb feeling just that little bit better, that bit more excited.

Of course he's not there because he's risen. And the resurrection is real. It's wonderful. But the Bible goes further than that.

The Bible says that because Jesus is resurrected, we too have been raised. Because Christ is in us and he has been raised from the dead, we are also raised, we share in Jesus' resurrection.

Now at the time, round about the time of Jesus and when the New Testament was written, there was a big debate about the resurrection of the dead and I don't want to go into that because that's not what this was about.

[12:49] It wasn't about the time when we shall all be raised at the end of time and be with Christ in glory as one of the songs said. It's about now. We are raised now.

We share in the resurrection now. Now, Colossians 3.1 says, the passage that Matthew read, begins, since you have been raised with Christ.

And as I read that and read it again, it struck me that it's saying since you have been raised. It's happened.

It's past tense. Since you have been raised with Christ. And everything in the passage that follows on from there describes what life is like for someone who is raised with Christ and the challenge that is there for them.

But how does that work? Jesus is resurrected from the grave. We know that. We know the whole story. But what are we resurrected from?

[13:55] Well, Paul makes it clear many times over. Colossians 2.13 he says, you were dead in your sin.

Well, to be resurrected you have to be dead. And Paul says, you were dead. You were dead in your sin. He says the exact same thing in Ephesians 2.1. You were dead in your sins. In Ephesians 2.5, but God made us alive with Christ when we were dead in our sins.

So our resurrection is a resurrection from the death of sin. If we do not have Christ then we are spiritually dead.

It doesn't matter how good we are or how devoured. We're dead. But when Christ lives in us we are united with him.

We're united first in his death through our death to sin. But now in new life because he rose to life because he is alive we have new life in him.

[14:59] The old is gone and the new has come. I was talking with someone in this re-addition to my notes.

I was going to go through my notes without any additions but I don't know that I'm capable. As Martin says, once you give Gordon a microphone you can't get him off. I was talking to this person and he told me that he had a struggle in his Christian life but it was because it was his basic nature. And I thought that's not right. And I pointed him to this verse that says we are new creations. The old has gone and the new has come.

And you know sometimes we think well my basic nature doesn't allow me to change. Basically I'm this kind of person.

But you know it's not true. Basically we have died to that kind of person. We have died to the old person and now the new person is here.

[16:11] Radically new. Radically different. And that's what resurrection is for us. You know I love bold creedal statements dead to sin alive in Christ. It's good to know that I'm resurrected.

But I've got the kind of mind and it's the new person who has it not the old person. I have the kind of mind that says that I still want to ask well what does resurrection look like?

Martin gave Darren and I a book to read by Sam Albury definitely recommend it called Lifted but it has a subtitle experiencing the resurrection life.

And I guess that's what I'm after. We're really good at repeating phrases like we share in Christ's resurrection Christ in me the hope of glory.

Christians are absolutely brilliant at this. I have given my life to Christ I have been born again. I'm a born again Christian. And they're all good. they're all true. But do we know what they mean?

[17:19] Somebody said to me I'm a born again Christian. I said what does that mean? They said I've given my life to Christ. I said really? Really? You've given your life to Christ?

And they said well I've made a decision. They're huge statements. And often we make them and we reduce them in size because we're not really saying them as if we mean them.

If I have been raised with Christ if you have been raised with Christ how does that change me today? What effect does it have on me?

What difference does it make to tomorrow? What difference to the rest of my days and hopefully years on this earth? How do I experience the resurrection life that the Bible says I already have?

Well the most obvious place to go is back to the disciples. In a very short space of time they'd seen Jesus crucified and then they had met him resurrected from the grave the risen Christ.

[18:32] and now they were told to wait. Acts 1 4 Jesus says do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my father promised.

God is in the business of transformation and these disciples needed to be transformed. They'd heard all the stories that Jesus told. They'd listened to his teaching but now it had to be inside them. It had to be a transformation that basically changed everything about them and so they were told wait in Jerusalem. Wait for the gift my father promised.

God was transforming the disciples as he sends his Holy Spirit in the most dramatic manner.

Sometimes we really have to be stopped in our tracks before God can continue his transformation of us a few times in my life I've been ill thankfully not very often in my life but a few times I have been ill and on numerous occasions God has used that to stop me.

You know slow up Gordon Reed I want to speak to you and I can't because you're running off to this that and the next thing. He stopped me because he wants the transformation to continue.

[19:56] From that moment on the disciples were transformed Acts 4 33 says with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord.

With great power these men who fled from Jesus at the cross who were hiding in a room with great power they began to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

That's not an easy thing to do. That's going out in the streets and saying remember this man Jesus? Yeah he was there it's not 2000 years ago it's just a short time ago seven weeks or something that Jesus was crucified but we have seen him alive and they testified to that resurrection.

How did that happen? Well Jesus promise that he told them to wait for was that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

So to experience the resurrection life like the disciples we need to receive God's Holy Spirit. We need to let God transform us by the power of that Spirit.

[21:17] This is what resurrection life looks like. It transforms Christianity from a moral code of goodness to the greatest adventure that we can ever experience.

God is at work in us by the power of his Spirit. He's transforming us. He's changing us and there is no limit to this. There is no end.

The hymn says changed from glory into glory until at last we see his face. Until that day he continues to transform us.

the good work that he has started in us he will perform until that day. So we experience the resurrection life as the power of God's Spirit transforms us to be like Jesus. And we live the resurrection life in the power of the Spirit as he helps us to change. We have power. The church has power.

[22 : 24] A small group of people, 12, when they added Paul, are accused of turning the world upside down. As Christians we have power.

We have the power to change this society around us, to change this city. That's what God has given us. That's what we can ask for.

Amen. As we experience the risen life, the power of God's Spirit transforms us to be like Jesus. And therein lies a tiny problem. We have a battle with the old self. That's maybe not so tiny. If you're like me, it's not tiny.

We have a battle with the old self. We are new people in Christ. But the old self keeps nudging us, keeps trying to get us to remember.

[23 : 29] Remember what you were like? You can't help it. You can't help it that you do this. Yes, you can. But the battle with the devil goes on and on.

And it's a battle that we will not escape from, that is with us every day, and one that we have to be ready to fight. Not in our own strength, but in the power of the Spirit.

Colossians 3, 5 recognizes this. Paul says, put to death, put to death, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.

And he goes on to give that list, and then a second list. There's lots of things, and neither list is fully comprehensive. There's lots more. There's your earthly nature, my earthly nature, and all the things within that, that have to be put to death.

The battle with the old self is real, and it needs firm action. It needs put to death. You know, we try to deal with it like New Year resolutions, well, I'm going to try better.

[24 : 41] I'm going to try not to do this any longer. I'm going to try not to be that kind of person. I'm going to try not to criticize everybody and anybody. I'm really going to be nice, but New Year resolutions never last for very long, and neither do these.

We need help. My family and I play a lot of games, and we used to have a game I haven't played since they were small, and they're now big.

It's called Blockade. It's a simple little game. You simply had to get across a board, but the board had grooves in it, and you had six blockers, and you could play these blockers to stop your opponent getting his man or her man to the other end, and of course they played blockers to stop you, and so the game was called Blockade, and you had to keep changing direction.

And I've thought about that game, and I've thought, what a picture of what we do with our spiritual life this is.

We put in blockers. We should be walking with the Holy Spirit and going in the same direction as the Holy Spirit, but we put in a blocker. And when that happens, I feel the Holy Spirit has to deal with that, or we've got to find a way around it, but that's not as good as actually just getting rid of it, is it?

[26 : 07] It's not as good as putting it to death, but we keep doing it. We keep putting up the blockers. Put them to death, says Paul.

And then, when he gets to verse 10, he says, and put on the new self. Put to death the old self. Put on the new self.

Because that's who you are now. You're transformed. You're a new creation. You have been raised with Christ, past tense.

And from now on, this is the real you. But you're still in a battle. Galatians 5, 17 makes this very clear.

The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. So within each one of us is this battle with what the sinful nature in us wants, and what the Spirit wants for us.

[27 : 12] They're in conflict with each other. So Paul says, live by the Spirit. Be guided by the Spirit. And this is the power of the resurrection.

This to me is the resurrection life. Living by the Spirit, being guided by the Spirit, because God's Word, God's Spirit is at work within you, transforming you.

God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and so on.

But that's not achieved by trying harder. It's not the fruit of your efforts. It's the fruit of the Spirit. And this is where we come to have to believe in the resurrection life.

God actually is at work in you by His Spirit, transforming you. He is making you a more loving person. He is making you a more joyful person.

[28 : 18] He's allowing you to access peace which is beyond comprehension. He's at work in you. And finally, in verse 25, since we live by the Spirit, since you live in the light of the resurrection, here's His advice.

Keep in step with the Spirit. We've all either taken part in three-legged races or we've watched them, very, very hilarious usually, as people fall about all over the place.

But there's a reason for that, because one person's left leg is tied to the other person's right leg. You're out of step from the moment you start.

You know, if you're marching, you all start on the same foot. But if you're in a three-legged race, you start on a different foot. And so you fall all over the place because you're not in step with one another.

Keep in step with the Spirit. We are in a battle. Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature, and keep in step with the Spirit.

[29 : 32] Paul doesn't go on to give an ABC of what that means. But I think we can imagine it. For me, it means seeking the Spirit's guidance first thing in the morning.

Checking midday. Am I still in step with the Spirit? Going back over the day and the evening, have I walked with the Spirit?

Have I been in step with God's Spirit? I think that's a great way to do that, to keep in step with the Spirit.

Spend some time, read some verses. If you don't have time, don't tell me if you don't have time, because I don't like anybody saying that.

I feel I want to say to you, don't tell me, tell God you haven't got time. Of course we've got time. We all have time for what's important. And if the spiritual battle for our souls is important to us, then we have time to learn how to walk in step with the Spirit.

[30 : 48] Transformation then. God is in the business of transformation, and we just need to let him get on with it. Let's pray.

Amen. Thank you, Heavenly Father, that from the moment you started creation, you have been transforming people.

You've transformed nations. through your Son, you have transformed us again to be your people, alive with your Spirit, witnessing through the power of your Spirit to those around us.

Help us, Heavenly Father, to put to death the blockers, the things in our nature that are in the way, and to let your Spirit work in our lives.

Amen. Amen. Amen.