

The Horizon of Christ - Part 6

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound implications of Christ's resurrection for believers and the Church, emphasizing transformation and the power of divine life.

Duration: 44:47

Scripture: Acts 1:8, Acts 9:1-9, Romans 6:4, 1 Corinthians 3:11, 2 Corinthians 6:17, Philippians 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 1:8

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the limitless power of Jesus to give life. Despite the limited time he spent on earth, Jesus was able to touch and heal countless people, even raising the dead. However, through his resurrection, Jesus released his life as a spiritual power for all mankind to receive. The speaker encourages listeners to live in the reality of Jesus' resurrection and allow his life to transform and empower them.

Transcript

In the sequence of our meditations through these days, today we arrive at the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Last night we were occupied with his Transfiguration. be that some of you will think that the next eminence, the next peak, the next epoch in the course of things should be the cross.

But if you will think again, you will see that the cross has been present in everything that we have said. It has been throwing its light and meaning down the path on every part of the way. We have been moving in the light of the cross all the time.

And the cross also carries forward right on into eternity its values, you can never get away from the cross, it stands above everything, so that we are not at the moment giving particular and exclusive consideration, we are letting the cross direct all our thoughts in every connection. We come to the resurrection, the Lord Jesus, a vast and comprehensive matter with limitless aspects, not our intention to try to cover or even to touch upon all that ground. These days we have one inclusive object before us.

It is to see God's Son as God's universal horizon, range, and character for all things within which horizon God has concentrated his whole attention in purpose and activity. The Son of God, the horizon of the Father for all men. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus brings that horizon very clearly into view, perhaps in a supreme way.

Three main aspects of it. One has a very clear, evident change in condition and position of Christ by resurrection, as the outcome of that in the second place, the essential meaning and nature of the Church as the vessel of his resurrection life. And in the third place, in resurrection, Jesus, the representation of man as he will be when he enters into the full meaning of that resurrection in body as well as in spirit.

Changed condition and position of Christ by resurrection. This is different from all other seeming resurrections which were not resurrections but resuscitations. We have those who were brought back to life from death in the Old Testament time.

But theirs was not a resurrection. It was but a resuscitation. They were the same people afterward and they went back to the grave.

We have some in the New Testament who were brought back from death like the widow's son in Cana, like Lazarus, but they were the same afterwards, the same people, and they went back to the grave eventually. That was not resurrection. Jesus is unique in this.

He is not the same and yet he is the same. There is his identity, the same. There are things about him which can be recognized as the same Jesus and yet there is a difference, a very great difference in him.

He is not just a spirit. He has a body, can be touched and handled. In it are born the marks of his death, his crucifixion, which can be seen and touched.

He can eat and drink with them. These are marks of the same Jesus and yet, how different, how different, doors may be closed and barred for fear of the Jews and he is in the midst suddenly. It does not seem that he appears and disappears, he is just present and absent and so we could go on with the change, with the difference, a difference which means everything for us and for the redeemed.

Now because our time is very limited, I want to resolve all this into one or two quite different, clearly defined matters. They are quite obvious, things that are very apparent in the New Testament. One is this, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is always spoken of as the supreme demonstration of divine power.

To use the words of the apostle, this is the exceeding greatness of his power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead. The power which exceeds all other power, it was in the power that lay behind the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that the apostles and the church gloried. Paul spoke of the power of his resurrection.

Christ risen is therefore the embodiment of divine power in its superlative expression. The greatest power known in creation, outside of Christ, is the power of death. No one can deny it, it's there.

The great battle in everywhere of man, both physical, moral and spiritual, the great battle in the creation, in nature, is always with death. To overcome death, to subject death, to hold death back, that is true, we know it. The greatest power outside of Christ is the power of death.

May labor and spend your whole life, as many of our brothers and sisters here in the medical world are doing, to stave it off, to keep it back, to postpone its triumph, to overcome it for the time being, but they all know, they all know, that in the end they're going to be defeated. Poor look out for some of you doctors. You're going to be defeated, men and women, in your whole life work, by this thing that you're fighting, death in the physical realm.

Some of you work on the land, and you know that that's what you're up against all the time. Your whole life is having to be given and poured out to keep this death at bay, keep it from gaining territory and swallowing up your life work. It's the battle, is it not, everywhere? And we know it in our own selves, not only physically, but we know it morally.

The awful conflict with some force that is seeking to bring us down morally, crush us down, press us down, so that our morale is broken. And as for the spiritual realm, if there is a conflict in other realms, we know it here, all the time. It's this terrific force of death in this universe, with which we are having to reckon, which is the realm of our encounter.

And all that as we know from the Bible, and know from our own natures, and from the deeper meaning in creation, is the fruit of sin, the fruit of evil, it's an evil thing, death. Not only encountering an abstract force, we are encountering something evil, something that wants to spoil, to mar, to destroy beauty, and joy, and everything that is good. It's evil, this death.

That is all outside of Christ. And it does give tremendous meaning and force to this, that in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, that mightiest force in this universe has been destroyed, has been nullified, has been overcome. As on the one side of human history, death is the most powerful force in creation, because of sin.

There is another side to human history, and that is the side the New Testament describes and defines in that one simple phrase of two words, in Christ. In Christ, there is a greater power, through his resurrection, than this terrible thing that is everywhere outside of Christ. That battle, that unceasing battle, that unrelenting battle of the ages, was entered into by him in his cross, and through death he destroyed him that had the power of death.

It is resurrection that triumph is brought out for all believers. The testimony of Jesus, raised from the dead, is that the most powerful adverse force in this universe has been destroyed in him and by him personally. That is why there is always such an inspiration, such an uplift, such a wonderful sense of release, when in the spirit we dwell upon his resurrection.

Singing the Psalms of Resurrection, reading the Scriptures of Resurrection, speaking together of the Risen Lord, is no mere historic thing, no mere feast on the religious, the ecclesiastical calendar, no mere annual observance, but for true believers an experience, when in the spirit, in the spirit, not just in the letter, in the history, but in the spirit, we dwell upon Christ risen, something wells up in us, a new hope, and we know exactly how Peter felt and what he meant when he said, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And if ever there was a man on this earth who needed to know that, it was Peter. A living hope for the last picture of him in the gospels before the resurrection is of a man going out and weeping bitterly over the utter mess that he had made of his life.

A living hope, a life completely transformed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It's a power to do that. It's a power.

Then the next thing that is so clear in this resurrection context is that it was a mighty release and emancipation for the Lord Jesus himself. He had said, How am I straightened, pent up, limited, until it is accomplished. One who from eternity knew that his significance was of universal virtue and value, that he was to stand related to the whole race and creation for its good and value.

One who knew that he himself was in his very person a universal person, comprehending heaven and earth. He has not come into something new by his resurrection and ascension when it is said that all authority in heaven and in earth had been given to him. That was his eternal right.

That was what belonged to him forever. He has received it through his cross for men. But that's the range of his person.

But here he is, pent up to a few miles of a little country, no larger than the country of Wales itself. Pent up to all the limitations of earthly manhood, time, distance, and so on. Groaning, groaning for the day when his great world ministry could be launched, he could be launched upon it.

I'm straightened, he said, I'm straightened. You know anything about that in your own little way? What on earth it is to be confined and restricted to a limited sphere and line? You have a large concern and a large heart, yet you're pent up. Are you groaning for the day to come when you may be released from all that? And some of you today are there just groaning in your limitation and your release, sharing the sufferings of your Lord in that matter that his resurrection was his emancipation.

His release, and what a mighty release it was. What did happen exactly? Well of course it was his personal release, we know that. And in those forty days of his resurrection we are able to discern something of what that meant.

Time no longer matters. He's here and he's there without any time limit. It took him days to get from one point to another before, but he's before them in Galilee after his resurrection.

I go before you, he said to Galilee, and you may be quite sure that those men didn't lose any time in trying to get to that appointed rendezvous. No, they were making for it, just as truly as those who dragged their weary way to Emmaus after his death returned to Jerusalem as runners in a marathon. The distance became as nothing by this new heart begotten in his resurrection.

Well they were making their way for the appointed place, but he said, I'll be before you. I go before you, and he was waiting for them every time. Distance is nothing, and not only the mileage of a little country, but we know it to be worldwide, universal, round the earth.

We know him to be here this morning, but he's just as truly there in China, in India, in the remotest part of the earth. At this very moment, he's released. Time and distance have been destroyed in the resurrection.

What a blessed inheritance that is for us. We haven't to wait in a certain sense. He is ever present.

But while it was his personal release, his personal physical release, it was the release of the life that had been pent up in him. What a mighty life was in him. You only have to go to your Gospels again, and you see that it does not matter how many people there are in need of life, how many places are calling for life, he can give it.

Give it with impunity. Give it prodigally. Give it without any sense of impoverishment, the life that is in him.

Touching death in all its forms, of disease, of infirmity, even unto death itself, the life giver. And yet, and yet, how limited during those three years and a few months. But now, the life that was in him, so full, so strong, is released.

Released for all mankind. Released for the whole world as a spiritual power to be received by all who will receive it. Released life.

Isn't this what he meant when he said, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone. He said, I am alone. I am alone.

There is no more lonely person in this world than Jesus, even with thronging, throbbing crowds around him. He was alone. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone.

It remains alone. But if it dies, what happens? Its life is released into many another corn, to an ever-growing harvest to cover the earth. And that's what happened.

The mighty life in him was released in resurrection. And in that release, the change, the wonderful change took place from the local to the universal. From time into eternity.

For this is the eternal life. From the temporal to the spiritual. It's a great change in the resurrection.

Many sided. All this we are prepared to accept as true of him. And much more.

And much more. We believe it concerning the Lord Jesus. But the challenge of this has got to be met by us individually and collectively.

I said that the second thing is the real vocation and nature of the church. As his body, and what is the purpose of a body in any case, in any kingdom, of a body, it is to contain, express, and give forth the life, isn't it? The central vocation of the church, when we speak of the church, we must not just lose ourselves in some visualized body of people. We must remember that we are members of his body according to the scripture.

Individually, what is intended to be true of the whole is intended to be true of each member, of each individual, and this is the challenge. There should be, there can be, and if we are going to be true to all that Christ written means, there must be about us something that corresponds to Christ written. There must be an eternal value in our lives.

Not something just for an hour, or for a time, or for a life here. Any eternal value about us that we mean something far bigger than this life. There is something in us that is far greater than this life and time, and time has no power over that something.

Shall I correct that and say, over that someone. Christ in us, and we in Christ. Moreover, about us individually, and collectively, and this is the test, there must be something that great reality, which is beyond the confines of our own little circles.

Any true expression of the church, of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ, in any locality, should really have a universal significance. Not living unto itself, not turned in upon itself, not just occupied with itself and its own spiritual building up, and activities, but always as a channel, a vehicle of this life beyond itself. That's a glorious possibility.

Look again at your New Testament, you'll find it's like that. Churches in certain areas had a testimony and a ministry that was spoken of far afield. The apostle said, I have no need to speak to them about you and what's going on among you.

Already they know. It's got there. It's got there.

Oh, it's glorious. Release this. It must be like that.

God save us from being less than the resurrection of the Lord Jesus would make us in life. I am not speaking now of any literal movement about the world. That is not possible to the majority of you, but I am saying this.

That there should be something coming from all of us which is superlocal, that is beyond ourselves and beyond our little circle, that is a ministry of Christ without these limitations. Eternal and universal in value. It is true when you get really in a spiritual and living way onto the basis of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

It just works like that. You haven't got to advertise. You haven't got to publish.

You haven't got to write it up. You haven't got to do anything by way of propaganda in the business sense. You haven't to do any organizing to get it out.

Making plans and launching enterprises. The New Testament knows nothing of that. It is what somebody has called the spontaneous expression.

And it would be like that. All that we have got to be concerned with, dear friends, is to live on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the rest will follow. The rest will follow.

The report will go out. There is life with that one, with those people. You want to touch life? That is where you will touch it.

Life, risen life, is the testimony of Jesus. And that life knows no bounds now since it had its release in his resurrection. That is, let me repeat, the supreme vocation of the church, the churches and its members.

But it is not only the power, not only the vitality, it is the very nature of that life. The nature of that life, this is a life which has met sin and conquered it. This is a life which has met evil and destroyed it.

This is a life which has met the powers of darkness and put them out. This is a life which has overcome iniquity in this universe. Therefore it is a holy life.

And if the vocation of the church is to minister that life in the universality of Christ's resurrection, the nature of the church, because of that life, should be purity, holiness, life. And does not, in its very nature, not by creed or doctrine about sin and sinfulness, but in its very nature, revolts against anything unholy, unclean, that you should be holy and without blemish. The church which is to be presented, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Dear friends, if we really do express Christ's risen life in any company, that ought to be noted about us. There are people who will not allow, will not put up with anything evil. They will not countenance sin.

They will not stand for anything questionable, anything doubtful. They stand as a people holy unto the Lord. I close by reminding you of the third thing mentioned at the beginning.

This is, of course, far from being a perfect realization. In our lives, it's progressive with us. It's progressive with us.

You can read your own spiritual history under the hand of God. If you are having a spiritual history, that is, you really are alive to the Lord. If you can read and interpret your own spiritual history, you can see this very clearly.

The one thing that you are being taught by the Lord or that the Lord is trying to teach you is that there is a life in you that is superior to your own life. And that has in it all the vitality, the energy, the potentiality of a complete transformation of you. It's very remarkable, as you look again into the New Testament, to see that while this resurrection life and power was so marvelously at work and manifested, it was always over against a background of human frailty.

God sought to that. God sought to that. Here you have no big people, as the world calls them.

If they had been big, they are going to be made very small when they get here. Some of them have been big. Saul of Tarsus had been big in his own realm.

And others have been like that. The Lord sees to it that there are no big people with great reputations that the world is going to take any account of in this realm. Oh, how Christendom is astray on this thing.

Always wanting to tack on labels of importance to its representatives, its servants, its ministers. As more and more degrees you can put behind the name, well, the better for Christendom. More the honors that can be associated with a person, the honors of this world in achievement and qualification, well, the better their standing.

The Lord knows nothing of that. Will have nothing of that. I suppose the apostle Paul, Saul of Tarsus could have graduated with the highest honors in any university because he has defeated all the intellects of the ages.

And they are still trying to get the better of him. No, but what is he? What does he think of himself? What has the Lord done with him? I glory in infirmities. I glory in weaknesses.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. What a change. Now it is over against the background of this divine activity to make the vessel know its own infirmity and weakness and limitation that this power is manifest.

That ought to comfort us. There it is. There it is.

So clear. It is a progressive thing. We have got to know the power of this resurrection over our physical infirmities.

We have. We may be in great physical infirmity and weakness and suffering. In agonizing limitation physically and yet God by his life can come in and carry through in complete triumph in anything that he wants to accomplish.

That is the great fact about the apostles. That is the great fact about the church in its history. A life that is so manifestly, so obviously a life superior to all human strength and all human weakness.

Dear friends, take this to heart. We are not just to give way and succumb to our infirmities and say that they rule and they govern and they dictate. If the Lord wants something, maybe there are times when he doesn't and therefore divine life will not come to us.

But if the Lord wants something, if that is in the will of God, there is life for it. When we are in utmost weakness and limitation, for us to lay hold on. I take it that Timothy was a delicate young man.

Paul said take a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine oft infirmity. And he was apparently from other things, not robust perhaps in any way. And so to him the apostles said lay hold on life.

Lay hold on life. Something we must learn to do. Lay hold on life.

Over against this background of infirmity. But this is progressive. We don't learn this all at once.

We learn it through the years. More and more perhaps our feebleness on the one side increases as the years go on. But it should have a corresponding or a super abundance of that other life.

It should be like that. Showing that with growing weakness that life is quite capable of coping with all those conditions. And well able to do it.

But this progress had a glorious consummation. A glorious consummation. The resurrection of the body.

That marvelous fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. When that is reached. Great transformation of the body takes place in the final stage of resurrection.

All these infirmities go. Then. Then Christ risen.

And all that Christ risen. As eternal life. As universal life.

As limitless life. Will be displayed in the seat. Moving toward the great destiny.

And consummation of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In a resurrected race. We read again our own spiritual history.

We shall see that the Lord is moving us onward. Ever onward. Along this line.

Knowing him and the power of his resurrection. With that goal ever in view. Man.

In the full expression. And enjoyment. Of Christ risen from the dead.

The Lord keep us moving that way. We'll just sing a verse.

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