

The Power of the Resurrection

The tsunamis following the massive December 26, 2004 earthquake off Indonesia's coast swallowed coastal inhabitants by the tens of thousands, from hardworking fishermen to vacationing beach frolickers. Some bodies were never found. Homes, schools, businesses, and houses of worship were destroyed. The scale of the horrific suffering and magnitude of this disaster was brought home to North Americans as they watched television. How do we cope with it and its horrific aftermath? Can we still believe the Gospel in the face of the loss of so many lives, bitter disappointments, illness, handicaps, and other tragedies? In our age of science and technology, many people believe they can accomplish almost anything and prevent disasters of all kinds. But the tsunamis made us aware again that life is fragile, and our existence on earth is but a fleeting moment. No one can escape death, whether through devastating tsunamis or after a lengthy illness in the hospital or at home. Even the Bible knows death as the ultimate enemy of man. In death, and often before it, the body of a man is destroyed. Sometimes it is wasted by sickness; sometimes it is crushed in the abrupt terror of an accident. All people are born to die. There are no exceptions. Hanging over the cradle of a newborn baby hangs the shadow of death. Does death end all? If this is true, human beings are no more than mere accidents in this world, without a past or a future. If there is no future, you have to make the best out of life as you live only once.

The tsunamis brought a sense of mortality and raised questions about the meaning of life. Where do we turn for answers? In the tsunami-stricken part of India a pastor observed, "The unbelievable may have happened, but we can't live in hopelessness. Christian faith should help." In the Bible we read of the horrid, unfathomable afflictions that God allowed to pile up on his faithful servant Job. But the story does not end there. It points to the One Who overcame death and despair. If Job is a type of the "suffering servant," whose suffering cannot be explained by his own deeds, and whose sufferings are, on the face of it, horribly and inexcusably unjust, so also is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the sinless One. He forewarns His disciples of the suffering He will endure and alludes to Job more than once. Even in the midst of his suffering, Job had hope. He foretold the wondrous Easter event and put his hope in the Lord. Job declared, "I know that my Redeemer lives," and "that in my flesh I will see God" (Job. 19:25,26).

There is always a horror about death as we know it. It is connected to sin. And yet, in none of these grim experiences have we heard the end of the story. In the fullness of time the Redeemer came to the world. He is God's answer to natural evil. The Christian faith knows that both natural disaster and human sins are the result of the fall of our first parents in Paradise. Their rebellion corrupted God's very good creation. The problem caused by the fall is so great that the Triune God of love offered a radical solution: the death of the Son of God for the life of the world. Hence, any answer to the "why" of disasters must begin with Gethsemane and Golgotha. God took the sin of mankind so

seriously that He sent His only Son to this world. In the hellish reality of the cross, He let His Son die a terrible death. Through God's Son's atoning death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead we have become free and are now anchored in hope. The death and resurrection of Christ are sufficient for us as we face the tragedies of our time. The risen Christ, therefore, is God's answer to the multitude of questions we may have. Death is our last enemy. To overcome this death, our only help is in the Lord who conquered death for us. Faith in the risen Lord is for us a source of rich comfort. Through Christ's death and resurrection, our death is our entry to eternal life. Death does not have the last word. Christ the living Lord has the final word. All who die in Christ shall be with Him forever. We also know that all who are in Christ shall be meeting again in His presence. We shall be in transformed bodies. The former sadness will fade away in the light of the unending joy of eternity.

The rays of the resurrection of hope shining from Christ's empty tomb pierce the darkness of grief. In most churches throughout the world the words of the Apostles' Creed are repeated each Sunday - "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Jesus rose again from the dead in the body. His bodily resurrection is the unshakable evidence for our own resurrection. That is why the apostle Paul says, "the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil.3:21). Jesus is alive. Because He lives, we shall live. Because He was transformed, we shall be transformed. We are assured of this wonderful truth through the fact of our Lord's physical resurrection. The good news is; because Jesus lives we have a future. We have a living Lord in heaven, who gives His people eternal life. And when He returns in glory the whole world will become new. Paradise will be regained.

Christ's complete victory over sin, death, and hell has also wonderful benefits for our lives today. Because Christ rose from the dead, all who put their trust in Him can be assured that their slate of sin is wiped clean. Why? Because the resurrection proves our justification before God. The apostle Paul states that Jesus "was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). How does this happen? Jesus had claimed that His death would atone for man's sin. He had said that He had come to "give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). He died as He said. Each Good Friday we remember His death. But the question remains: How can the death of this one man be acceptable to God for others? After Good Friday we celebrate Christ's resurrection. His claim is established. And, thus, by the resurrection God shows that He has accepted Christ's atonement for ever. In the victory of life over death on Easter morning, we may welcome our own victory. We were dead unto sin but now we are alive unto God. This is the marvel of it all. With the risen and ascended Christ we are already in the heavenlies. The apostle Paul testifies, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). If Christ is alive and we are alive in Him, how then should we live?

In the power of the resurrection! The apostle Paul's desire "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection" was a daily spiritual experience, one he found compatible with "the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings" (Phil 3:10). Resurrection power, experienced by believers as a living hope, sustains Christian obedience and perseverance. What more can motivate the Christian to live in this world than faith's conviction that, in Jesus's bodily resurrection, the tyranny of evil, injustice, and death has been overcome? As Easter Christians, we work and pray for the coming of God's Kingdom with the assurance that Christ will come again. For this reason we can heed the challenge to stand firm, fully committed to the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). As surely as the Lord lives, so surely will He keep His Word. It is the only saving word for the world. "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). Therefore, we can joyfully confess even in the midst of natural disasters such as tsunamis:
Jesus, Names above all names,
Beautiful Saviour, Glorious Lord.
Emmanuel, God is with us,
Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.

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