

The Power of the Risen Christ

We're going to look at the resurrection account found in Matt. 28, but I want us to start in chapter 27.

The other night we had Jon Taylor Maxim over for dinner and somehow in the course of our conversation we got to talking about Jack Lalanne and the amazing feats of strength he performed. In case you've never heard of Jack Lalanne, he was the original fitness and nutritional guru. I remember my mom doing exercises with him on the TV when I was just a little boy. But he was much more than just an exercise buff, he accomplished some really amazing feats of strength.

- At the age of 41 he swam from Alcatraz Island to Fisherman's Wharf, a little over a mile, while handcuffed.
- At age 42 he set a world record by doing 1033 push ups in 23 minutes on TV.
- At age 43 he swam the Golden Gate channel...towing a 2500lb cabin cruiser. The currents turned this one mile swim into a six and a half mile swim.
- At 45 he did 1000 jumping jacks and 1000 chin ups to promote the Jack Lalanne show going national. The skin on his hands began to rip off but he felt he couldn't stop because it would be seen as a public failure.
- At age 60 he again swam from Alcatraz Island to Fisherman's Wharf, this time with his hands bound by cords, and towing a 1000lb boat.
- At age 66 he towed 10 boats carrying 77 people for over a mile.
- He celebrated turning 70 by pulling 70 rowboats carrying people in them, once again, handcuffed, shackled, and fighting strong winds and currents, from the Queen's Way Bridge to the Queen Mary Luxury Liner, a distance of one mile.

We can't help but be in awe of a person who is uniquely powerful and it was kind of fun to introduce JT to Jack Lalanne and brag a little on his feats of strength, but this morning as we celebrate Jesus Christ risen from the dead, I want us to consider - and brag on - his far, far, greater power. His resurrection power is way beyond anything we can imagine or comprehend, but it does our hearts good to thrill at his power and be reminded how his power is working in our lives today.

Matt. 27:57-28:7

As I was reading this passage the other day, I saw something that I'm not sure I had ever noticed before. In an indirect way it reveals the majesty and awesomeness of Jesus' resurrection power. Let me share it with you.

After Jesus died, the religious leaders got nervous and went to Pilate, telling him that Jesus used to talk about rising from the dead after 3 days so he'd better make the tomb secure with a Roman guard. So Pilate obliges and they seal the tomb and set a guard to make sure the disciples don't try any funny business.

Most of us are familiar with the story: there's a violent earthquake, the stone is rolled away, and those poor guards are paralyzed so badly with fear they're like dead men. But here's what hit me the other day: reading through it quickly we can leave with the impression that it was the power of Christ that caused the earthquake, rolled back the stone, and frightened the soldiers. But it wasn't. It was the work of the angel of the Lord, not Jesus. Here's why it hit me: These things aren't reflections of the Lord's power,

they are reflections of the power of a being that bows its knee and calls Jesus Lord. The soldiers never came into contact with the risen Lord's power. They quaked in fear seeing one of Jesus' angelic servants, a being who bows in total and complete obeisance to the Risen Lord. That angel would say to the guards, I am nothing compared to Jesus. If mine is the power of one sun, his is the power of a hundred billion galaxies of suns. The risen Jesus is all powerful and Lord of all. Let's consider four aspects of that power and brag a little on the power of the risen Christ.

1. Jesus has the power to crush death

I pointed out on Good Friday that Jesus was even Lord over his own death. Death didn't come and take Jesus by force the way death takes the rest of us. Jesus was Lord over his death, choosing the exact moment he would die. But when he rose from the dead the Bible tells us that he conquered death, he broke death's back. Death didn't let go of Jesus voluntarily - death was defeated by Jesus in a crushing defeat. Death decisively lost the battle over Jesus, and in that moment, inevitably lost the war over all those who believe in Christ. On that resurrection Sunday, death lost its sting.

Death is an interesting phenomenon. It's not natural and it's not neutral, it is an enemy. It didn't exist before the fall, it was a product of sin. And death is very powerful. Over the years I've read about brave people who find out they have cancer and talk about fighting it and how they're not going to let the cancer win. We can fight, but inevitably death will win in the end. None of us can fight it forever because death is much more powerful than we are. And once it overcomes, we don't have the power to bring the dead back to life. It's grip is much, much more powerful than we are and seems so final.

But Jesus has crushed death with life. In the same way that darkness gives way to light, death must give way to life. When Jesus called to the dead Lazarus and said, "Lazarus, come forth", death wasn't asked for its opinion or permission. Life entered Lazarus by the power of the Lord and death had no choice but to vacate the premises. On that first Easter morning, death didn't cooperate with Jesus, it didn't willingly let go its grip on Jesus, it was crushed by the power of Jesus' resurrection life.

1 Cor. 15:25-26 tells us that Jesus will put all his enemies under his feet and the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. On that day, Jesus will shatter death, and its grip and its war will be over forever. There will be no more death, only life. All by the power of the risen Christ.

2. Jesus has the power to rule over everything

Some people think of Jesus as kind of a long haired, hippy-type, flower child. They were called flower children because in the 60's some of the hippies, with the mantra "make love, not war" would put flowers in the gun barrels of the military or police. And that's how a lot of people imagine Jesus - kind of a heavenly peacenik putting flowers in guns. A mild mannered, slightly effeminate long haired hippy. But nothing could be further from the truth.

After rising from the dead, Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. Before going, he told his disciples that all authority had been given to him. All authority. There is no one and nothing in the universe higher than Jesus with the exception of the Father. He is ruler over heaven and the universe. He is Lord of lords and King of kings. He has all authority, and he has all power.

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Col. 1:15-18

In him all things hold together. If Jesus stopped holding us together the universe would simply cease to exist. Satan would conquer Jesus and take his throne in a heartbeat if he could. But he can't because his power is nothing to Jesus. The devil isn't powerful. Compared to us he is, but compared to Jesus the devil is a weak, sniveling coward. One day every knee, including the devil's knee, will bow before Jesus and confess that he is Lord of all, ruler of all, King of the universe, Power above all powers. Jesus has the power to rule over everything.

3. Jesus has the power to make us right with God

I mentioned earlier that the guards and the stone being rolled away weren't done by Jesus (I checked every gospel account to confirm that), and that they never did come face to face with the risen Lord. If they had, they would have been even more terrified, but here's an amazing thing. Jesus was rejected and mocked and hated by the religious leaders that supposedly were representing God. Jesus was mocked and tortured and crucified by the Roman soldiers under Pontius Pilate's orders. And Jesus was abandoned and denied and in one case even betrayed, by his own followers. I don't know about you, but when people hurt me, my heart tends to drift towards thoughts of revenge. At least I am tempted to want to see them pay for what they did. If someone had beaten and mocked and humiliated me, and then I was given superhuman strength, I'd be thinking payback! I'd be thinking revenge!

Jesus wasn't thinking revenge when he rose from the dead. He was thinking reconciliation. He was thinking restoration. The power of his death and resurrection was aimed at taking lost and rebellious sinners and reconciling them back to God. Jesus came to make it possible for us to be adopted as God's own beloved children. As Patrick and Alicia fly to South Africa this week with their boys Owen and Leland to adopt little Faith, they are reflecting the heart of Jesus who came here to take us home as sons and daughters. Jesus didn't come to get revenge, he came to make us right with God and bring us back to his heavenly home. And only Jesus had the power to do that.

Sin had broken our relationship with God and there was nothing we could do about it. Nothing could restore our relationship - no human had the power to do it, and no angelic being had the power to do it. No power in the universe could restore us back into right relationship with God - except the power of the Son of God.

Jesus broke the power of sin when he died on the cross. He broke the condemning power of the law on us as law-breakers. Jesus lived as a man in perfect obedience to the Law, and died to pay for our transgressions so that God's just punishment for our law-breaking would be meted out on Jesus, rather than on us. The resurrection declares that God's righteousness and justice was and is fully satisfied by His Son's death. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote:

The Resurrection is the great announcement of the momentous fact that Christ has finished the work He came to do. He is no longer "under the law." He is back in glory. Why? Because He has done everything that the Law could demand. Now the Law has exhausted itself upon Him, and He will die "no more."

Jesus has the power to make us right with God when we come to him in faith and believe upon him. John 1:12 tells us that to as many as received him he gave the power to become sons of God, to those who believed on his name.

4. Jesus has the power to resurrect us from the grave to eternal life

We've been in a study of the book of Ecclesiastes and over and over again we read how life under the sun - life limited only to the here and now, to what we can see and touch in this life and with God out of the picture - is meaningless. And yet, we are also told that God has set eternity in our hearts. He has hardwired us to long for more than this life can ever give us.

When we are younger, we can distract ourselves with the promises this world offers. We think we have so much time, and there's so much we want, that it's easy to delude ourselves into thinking that God is unnecessary. But it goes by so quickly and then as we get older, we watch time slip through our fingers like sand, and we realize that nothing has brought us the deep satisfaction we long for. There are good times, and bad times, but through it all, deep inside we long for more. God has set eternity in our hearts.

In an interview, Apple creator Steve Jobs once said, *I'm about fifty-fifty on believing in God. For most of my life, I've felt that there must be more to our existence than meets the eye...I like to think that something survives after you die...It's strange to think that you accumulate all this experience, and maybe a little wisdom, and it just goes away. So I really want to believe that something survives, that maybe your consciousness endures.*

After a long silence, Steve Jobs continued. *"On the other hand, perhaps it's like an on-off switch," he said. "Click! And you're gone."* He then added, *"Maybe that's why I never liked to put on-off switches on Apple devices."*

When death turns the power switch to off, there is nothing we can do to turn it back to on. But the Bible promises us that all those who trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, will have that power button turned back to on, and then the power button is removed. There will be no more "off". We will live forever.

Jesus' power wasn't limited to simply resurrecting himself, he has the power to raise from the grave everyone who has believed in him and to give them eternal life. We will be raised in bodies that have the power to never wear out, never get sick, never grow old, never lack energy and ability. He has the power to give us *eternal life*. That is more glorious than anything and everything in this world combined!

And Jesus' power to resurrect us to eternal life also has the power to give us unshakable, unshatterable hope right now, even in the face of suffering, hardship, and loss. Even in the face of death. To know that the grave is not the end makes all the difference. For the Christian, we don't have to be fifty-fifty whether there is more after death. We know based on Christ's sure promise that there is more. Much, much more.

I read an incredibly moving story on Friday, I literally had tears running down my face as I sat in my office and read it and I want to share it, not for dramatic effect but because it illustrates the enemy that death is, and the awesome, awesome hope we have in Christ. It was written by a mom whose four year old son

Nolan was taken by cancer. After years of fighting this cancer, the doctors told his mom that it had become inoperable and there was nothing more they could do for Nolan. She returned to his room and told him, you don't have to fight anymore, you can go to heaven, and I'll meet you there soon. That made Nolan so happy! Later she went to take a 2 minute shower and when she came out, the nursing staff told her that he had gone into a deep sleep and would never come out. She climbed into bed and rubbed his face, and then suddenly he woke up, smiled at her, and said "I love you mommy." Then he was gone.

I hate death. I hate the parting, the ripping, the loss that death is. I hate the tears and the goodbyes and the empty seat where once a loved one sat and the thought that someone you love isn't walking this earth anymore. I hate it! Death is an enemy.

But I love the hope of the resurrection! I love the declaration the empty tomb makes that one day the dead in Christ will be raised unto eternal life, never to die again, never to be parted from one another again, never to say goodbye. Every tear wiped away, every sorrow swallowed up in everlasting joy. And the power off switch will be removed. No more death. That's what eternal life is. No off switch.

What a hope we have in Jesus! What a joyful hope we have this resurrection morning! The tomb is empty, Jesus is risen! And we have the promise of Jesus: all those who believe in him will never die, but one day will be resurrected to everlasting life. Our part is to believe. If you choose not to believe, you choose to reject the greatest gift ever offered, and God will respect your choice. But I pray that you won't reject His gift. You can pray and ask Jesus to come into your life and save you by his power and give you his abundant life now, and his eternal life on that day. What holds you back?

Let's pray.