

## 8. Made Alive Together with Christ

*Sunday School 2011*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:5

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My name is Brian Arthur. This is study eight and the title, “Made Alive Together with Christ.” It is about his resurrection.

In life, on death beds, in churches, pastor’s studies, grave sides most people can cope with Jesus or with the Jesus that they have become comfortable with. We are pretty good at doing that. But speak about the risen Christ, present, ok, if he is not present, but if he is present as the risen Christ and passions arise. Just read the book of Acts. The apostles preached the resurrection and all hell broke loose all around them, all the time, passions of anger or embarrassment or fear or delight, but passions.

I have probably told this story, but I am not sure whether it is here. Some of you will have heard it.

I was once called to—not many years ago—to the bedside of an old lady in hospital and the message on the phone was, “Can you come and visit her? She is having visions of Jesus.”

Yeah. It was a Saturday afternoon and I was in my study in the middle of preparing for the next day and I grudgingly walked up the hill to the hospital thinking, “Lord, let me out of here.”

And when I got there the bedroom was full of relics. And I think they were hoping that I would come in and dispel the myth. And so I said, “Look, it may be good for you to go outside,” which was unnecessary. She was really deaf and everything we said was heard all over the hospital.

I won’t go... Dorothy said, “Don’t get caught up in the beginning.” And all right.

But she had seen Jesus standing at her, the end of her bed. And he told her that she had been a very naughty lady.

I said, “Is that all he said?”

She said, "I couldn't hear."

So yelling into her right ear I said, "Can you hear this?" And so I told her the rest of what he said. And then I had to face the crowds outside who by this stage and so I did, but that was only the half of it. Two days later I was taking her funeral and I thought, I just can't let that go and I can't wait for it. So I started the service by saying, "Three days ago this woman saw Jesus."

And the passions arose. Half the congregation, almost as many as are here today, their eyes filled. Some were so fuming you could see the steam coming out of their ears. Some were embarrassed, but they were caught in it.

So our state of death, the state we are at in our death is defined, is marked by the abhorrence of meeting the risen Christ.

So that means there is no possibility of life. If he is the source of life, we have an abhorrence to meet with him that is it.

Everything we feel significant, powerful, necessary, indispensable for the life that we want to live and we discover that when he died those things died and they didn't rise with him. It is not easy to try to hold on to those things and being with the risen Lord.

"For you died," Paul said. And then the next sentence is, "But your life..." You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

The resurrection like the cross are all part of the action of the cross brings us to the end of ourselves.

So its power, the power of the resurrection will only ever make sense when we are at the end of ourselves. That is the place where refreshing from the Lord begins.

I am indebted to Bart for what I think is a brilliant exposé of the sin that I find in my belly. He said it is marked by the three things. Firstly, falsehood. It will take what God has said has happened with me being combined in Christ on that cross in that tomb, in that resurrection. It will take that and falsify it. Having falsified that it then opens me to two other sins, pride in seeking to get where God said I was already at, but under my own sovereignty. And the last is sloth. I hardly need to say anything else but sloth to you. It catches it, of looking continually at the truth but whatever.

The study that we are looking at now is about the power of the resurrection and our participation in that power or rather those two are not separate. It is looking at the power of participating in the resurrection.

And against that in me as I prepared it and, boy, it was strong, and in you this morning Bart's little trilogy is going to be trundling along.

The falsehood, pride, sloth.

The answer to what is the power of the resurrection... Remember Paul on one occasion said, "Oh that I would know the power of the resurrection."

What is that? The more I looked at the study, the more I could... and it was an offense to come to this because it was a revelation to me that for so much of my life I had looked at the resurrection as something that relates to the end and not now.

Many of the references in the New Testament about the impact of the resurrection are in the present tense.

And I began to see that the question about the power of the resurrection, the meaning of the resurrection could only and can only be known in live action in the narrative of life because it is all about life. The apostles didn't develop a system of theology about the resurrection. They were too busy trying to keep up with the resurrected Lord. So they just declared it. They preached it.

So in the first instance the answer to the question, "What is the power of my participation in the resurrection, it is not a theological question from which we can then synthesize and derive our experiences. That would end up in falsehood and pride and sloth. It is public, real truth, a real event led by Christ at a time, at a point in history and we were all included, not by our choice. We were dead. But by the sovereign grace and mercy of the Father.

So the reality of the resurrection power must break into us as unexpectedly as it did to the disciples, as suddenly, perhaps, as it did to them. Certainly it must break in as evocatively, that is, it must get to the depths of my passions and it must undo me in my sin and put me together again that what Jesus sees and how he is is true for me.

For the disciples, it was a death to life experience. And their refreshing in that was that far reaching and that urgent.

So nothing refreshing can come from God if we cannot participate fully in what happened in that tomb, right down to the toenails. Nothing refreshing can come from God if we can't participate fully in what happened in that tomb.

Are we left as onlookers trying to build theologies of how God did it?

The power of the resurrection.

We are surrounded today by unimaginable demonstrations of power, aren't we? Everywhere we look, everything comes to us and is dressed up in terms of exclamations of power or proofs of power or promises of power, the electronic media, the power of personality and politics, the power of nation states, of money, of education, of armies, of weaponry, of ideas, of healing, to look into the past, to look into the smallest things.

We are all talking about impressive power and we are bombarded by it, so much so that it takes a bit to impress us, but sloth kicks in.

We are so used to seeing unimaginable things happening as they happen we become immunized against the whole notion of power.

No greater illustration, I think, of this than the military doctrine of shock and awe. Have you heard about that? They have a doctrine, a theology which they have... this is the United States, which they have... and probably others... and which they apply when they go into the battle fields. It was developed by a guy called Olman and another guy called Wade and it is... I will just read a few things about it.

It is to impose overwhelming level of shock and awe against an adversary on an immediate or sufficiently timely basis to paralyze him, to paralyze its will to go on, to seize control of the environment and paralyze or so overload an adversary's perception and understanding of events that the enemy would be incapable of resistance and tactical strategic levels.

They define four vital characteristics. This brings us pretty close to the tower of Babel all over again.

Near... it is interesting how they put that word "near" in.

Near total or absolute knowledge and understanding of yourself, your adversary and the environment. Rapidity and timelessness in application, operational brilliance, near or total control and signature management of the entire operational involvement.

And it is all about impressions, impressive power.

When Paul said, "Show me the power of the resurrection," he wasn't talking about shock and awe. He wasn't talking about impressive power. The resurrection, the power that he wanted moving in his muscles and in his heart and in his consciousness was, first, the resurrection that destroyed death.

Paul wasn't looking to be impressed so that there was a kind of stimulation that would come for a moment and that he would be driven out to be more persuasive for Christ, not about that at all.

The resurrection was, first, death destroying and life creating. It wasn't to paralyze the enemy. It was to destroy him. It wasn't to win people by being impressive, it was to move people into such a situation that they were changed completely, recreated. It is truly impressive, the resurrection of Jesus, but if we leave it at that, we miss the boat.

Forsythe says, "The resurrection power must be... must evoke within us that cry that says this is the greatest power in the universe."

How so? His argument this, that whatever overcomes the greatest enemy, must logically be the greatest power. Yet we are so barraged by shock and awe today of other powers that when the word “power” is used in the Scripture it may seem even inconsequential or pathetic or both, particularly when each display of power is presented as humanity gaining sovereignty over all things, given a chance, death, too.

So then the resurrection may be impressive whilst remaining inconsequential and unnecessary.

We have, as others have come to and others will come to, if we have an eternal, immortal spirit that with a bit of adjusting can dance freely into glory whenever, then the resurrection is redundant.

Small [?], just a bit of Pauline shock and awe.

And the attack against the resurrection it shouldn't surprise us, but it always does. And the attack might be very close to home for some of us, for all of us.

Holland's great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Berhof pointed out years ago that the West was in danger of losing the power of the atonement by an overemphasis on its legal aspect. He meant if we simply see the cross as the means God uses to say you are ok with me, and then the resurrection as the proof that when he says ok it is ok and we don't see the cross and the resurrection as death to life events, but not just death to life, but death to life as it is in Jesus, that is communion in full joy and in great delight, then we may still very well have a theology that on the surface looks ok, but it is a theology of independence and isolation because it hasn't delivered us from the sepulcher into the face of the Father. That is where Jesus went. That is where Paul ended up, we are going to see, in his sermon.

We may consider ourselves right with God and yet remain an observer on the things, on the life that Jesus shares.

We may see his rising from death divorced from the life that the Scripture says he now lives to God. Not for God, although that is true, too.

The tomb makes a difference. We may feel legally ok with God and even live for him and be stretched out doing all manner of things for him, but we are never to him and with him.

In other words, we have taken the very grace that is to usher us into life and we have reduced it and we have falsified it and it has become the means of stagnation and it delivers us into pride and sloth.

After the resurrection Jesus wasn't just ok with the Father legally. His death was not just ticked off as a, well, that is done, as some legal transaction, some contractual thing. Jesus resurrected is not just a congenial spectator in the presence of God. They don't simply

encourage one another from a distance, a safe distance, never quite know with winks and nods and perhaps the occasional text message.

Jesus took his and our humanity back into the glory that he knew before the cross.

Then consequentially Father and Son through the Spirit declare that same grace is for you.

So the sense of the power of the resurrection only comes to us, the true sense, through the real sense of our forgiveness and redemption as experienced in adoption. So the legal terminology is true. There was that side. But if it doesn't deliver us through to having a sense, that is a belly full of what adoption is about, we haven't... we have falsified what Christ has declared about his resurrection and we have opted for other channels of pride and sloth to achieve what we hope will be the same means.

So the power of the resurrection is the power to participate with Christ in the life he now lives to God. So whatever that means that is what the resurrection means to us. And it is the power to deliver fully into the communion and action of love. That is the essence of refreshing life. The resurrection of Jesus delivered him to unrestrained delight and joy in human flesh with the Father.

In Peter's first proclamation that we read where he goes in the Scriptures in Psalm 16 is really significant, I believe, as we think about that, the difference between a legal understanding of the cross and the resurrection and one that evokes a true sense as children.

We went to Psalm 16. We read it or we read part of it. And we assume that this must have been one of the psalms that Jesus took them to in that great Bible study 40 days after he rose, for 40 days after he rose.

Taken in context it is all about David, what David experienced. But then as Peter looked at it and as our Lord uncovered it, it is obvious that it is more than about David. It is truly a psalm about the resurrected Christ. And this is what Peter says.

David was a prophet and he knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on the throne. Seeing what was to come he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah. He was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.

But note where Peter ends in his sermon in Psalm 16. He ends with these words.

The resurrection experience of Jesus described in these words, "You have made known to me the ways of life. You will make me full of gladness with your presence."

Jesus didn't simply end up in the dock of God having a verdict of not guilty read over the

top of him. He ends up in the presence of the Father in our flesh, the flesh that nailed him onto that cross, flesh and bones, full of gladness, seeing a whole new pathway.

In the original psalm this is how David wrote about it.

“You will make known to me the powers of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forever more.”

What is this path of life, this way of life? It is humanity at the full pitch of joy, seeing and being drawn by the eternal pleasures at the right hand of the Father.

How do these joys materialize? Only in the presence of the Father. The Father’s presence is the place humanity was created to be, the place where all the juices flow in the right direction and love it.

And this is what Peter was preaching as times of refreshing. This is where the Spirit had shown Peter that he had been taken, not just, “You are ok with me, Peter. Stand out there and give me a wink and a nod occasionally,” but “Come in here and feel what it feels like when the humanity that I have created you to be is at full pitch. And guess what, Peter? Then you will know what it means to be holy from the heart.”

This is the life in which he has taken us, the life that is holy and true. Participation in God’s life.

The old Negro spiritual said or asked the question, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

The third verse goes on and says, “Were you there when he rose up from the dead?”

The question is directed towards participation with Christ.

You see, if we simply say, “Jesus died for my sin,” it is true. But it can be as wrong as the worst heresy. If it leaves me an observer in a humanity that is weak and defamed and dishonored by sin struggling to try and bring that into the glory of the Father’s presence, then Easter and the celebration of Easter is redundant.

It can be a religious cliché, a statement of a casual onlooker or even an impressed onlooker, something that sounds theologically true, whilst in reality expresses nothing of the power of the cross and the power of the resurrection.

Paul certainly said, “Christ died for our sins,” but he went on and explained the substance of how that happens and he says, “We were crucified with him.”

And when it comes to the resurrection, the same participatory language occurs. Jesus rose up from the dead for me can either be acknowledged by one who remains an

observer, a spectator or by one who knows the impact, the true shock of participating in that event.

“Christ,” Paul said, “Was raised up for our justification.”

No doubt about that. But he also says, “This happened since you have been raised up with Christ.”

But there are those who would say, “No, I would rather stand in God’s legal dock and then decide how much I can impress him.”

And they get very edgy about participating with Christ in the crucifixion and the resurrection. And the great gulf between Christianized law and grace opens up as a chasm and we come to that difference between being impressed by the cross and the resurrection as a kind of probe, a cattle probe to get us more dedicated. We become... The difference is shown up between that and being changed in the heart.

You see, fullness of joy is not an emotional bonus to an otherwise burdensome obedience.

And the pleasures at the right hand of the Father are not occasional treats of sponge cake amidst an otherwise bitter, diet of brussel sprouts.

Beloved, how much and how often do we hear of the great cost of obedience? And it deadly.

John, talking about in his little letter says, “We actually handled the resurrected Christ and we became lovers like him and we loved the command of the Father.”

And what did he say towards the end?

“That command is not burdensome.”

So when Jesus rises from the death in our humanity he looks at the Father and he doesn’t see a burden waiting to happen if God was to send him here or say that or do this.

Here is a human being confessing that every element of being human and functioning as a human is at home with the Father. Nothing incongruent there. Here is a human being confessing that nothing about the presence of the Father is anything but staggeringly, essentially delightful and that forever.

Pull back the curtains.

Now humanity has been recreated to be truly, suddenly, truly a servant, truly a creature and loving it.

No legal bargaining required. Resurrection grace doesn't simply impress, but it goes to the very bottom of my heart where it finds a heart that thinks everything about God is a burden. And it takes that heart through the cross, becomes that heart and it takes it into the resurrection and then out of the resurrection and the first sight of what it sees is a Father in whose right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

At last the true affections of that heart determine true desire and the practice of the heart. At last a heart that needs nothing other than the words of the Father for stimulation to holiness. At last as the psalmist said, a heart that volunteers freely in the day of that power.

So the further we go in understanding the power of the resurrection, the further we move away from that power as some raw demonstration of God to silence his critics.

We discover that it is participation.

The beloved Son of the Father, the eternal servant of the Father in our humanity becomes the prodigal, every prodigal in every far country, deprived and bankrupt and depraved and unrecognizable and the eternal servant, if we can use that same analogy of the prodigal son and brother, the eternal servant has become the wretched piety of the older brother locked away from the love of the father by infatuation in being impressed and impressive, living a death amongst the stinking paths of his dutiful service each one remembered of later calculations, steaming like great hills of dung in the frosty paddocks of his isolation. And the heart of Christ so full of the Father and the Father's home became the heart's [?] by all that.

What could bring life into the city of that dead? A third morning it dawned and then anguish of the far country and the depravity of the pig pen was finished and the eternal winter of religion hating God was reversed and the son was whole and pure again, wholly alive to his father, not free from his own sin, but from mine, no longer the greatest sinner, no longer distorted grossly like a cursed man, a barren desert.

All this Jesus did for us by taking us with him. All humanity lay there in the sun, big moment of crisis, perhaps the most critical moment in eternity, the humanity, all humanity lying there in the tomb, in the sun.

Would the final chapter be written? Would there be a homecoming for humanity to the Father's banquet? Would there be royal robes draped over real flesh? Would there be rings for real fingers? Would real feet ever run into the father's embrace? Would real hearts beat fit to explode for the joy of... or would holiness remain an external conformity to reach and unreachable dream? Would obedience remain a curse and a drudgery, a thing too much gloated over? Would the ceaseless anger and hatred of the Father really be burnt away? Would our calculating and our steamy heaps of refuge really be removed from the heart? Could Adam's flesh be made a new? Or does God at this moment have to scratch around and create something else? Or would he be able to call dead humanity out of the sepulcher? Or would we simply return to our pigpens and add desolation of death

and muscle stirred and blood moved, real blood and chest heaved and fingers flexed and eyes opened?

Were you there? Yes, you were.

So if what Christ did for us by joining himself to us is all true for him, then it is true for us. We are no longer a dark, an onlooker from the dark corner of the sepulcher, not just someone shocked by the unimaginable and the spectacular thing of seeing a human being raised. Every part of our humanity came alive like every part of Christ's and every part of our consciousness washed from sin like every part of his and every weapon that the enemy every scuttled against him was scuttled permanently and every moment of the stunning silence of true rest that he enjoyed floods your tomb and every beat of the heart focused upon one thing. Father, dear father, it is a whole new world.

How does it break upon us? Well, listen.

Jesus speaks all of the words that he ever spoke in his ministry he now speaks them to you from his place with the Father. And he speaks knowing the glory burning in a human heart and he says, "Come to me." And he speaks confident that the door that was slammed has been open and he speaks within a full view of the wedding feast. And he speaks with a conviction that all that he knows will actually fit into you. And he speaks knowing that the household of the faithful is ordered in all things and secured by the everlasting covenant that he secured for our salvation and for our desire, that is all of our joys and our pleasures. So listen. He is the bread of life. Do you believe it?

And then a voice speaks in our depths and the life giving Spirit of Christ defines his place in our being with the words, "Dear Father," words that are not just words, but a balm and an irrigation of refreshing. And our spirits stir and they echo the same words, "Father."

Gone is the pig pen and our crafting, remorseful, impressive repentance. Gone is the dawdling, shuffling heart calculating our goodness.

And now the worship leader brings continually an eternity of joy with the Father and pleasures forevermore and barren landscapes are refreshed and we stop.