

#### **4. Jesus' Victory Over Sin** **Luke 24:47; 1 Cor 15:17; Eph 2:1-7**

Good morning. We're continuing our series exploring the benefits of Jesus' resurrection for us today. And this morning we're focussing on his victory over *sin*. Let's pray, and then I'll start by reading from Luke 24. The context is that Jesus has just shown himself resurrected to his disciples in the locked upper room for the first time:

#### **[Pray]**

Father God, we ask you to speak to us by your Spirit as we explore this topic together. Open our heart and our minds to believe the truth of your word. For, we ask it is Jesus' precious name. Amen.

#### **[Read Luke 24:44-47]**

*44He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'*

*45Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46He told them, 'This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

Jesus' summary of what must be preached about him centres around his suffering in his death, his resurrection and, "repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name?" This is our topic for today.

As a family we spent most of last week self-isolating, with Fiona isolating herself from us too, because she had symptoms that could have been Covid-19. The tests came back negative, which was a surprise, not just because of the symptoms she had, but also because we knew of a specific incident at work the previous week, when she had been more exposed to Covid than normal. She was called to do an X-ray for a patient, but was not informed that they were a higher-risk Covid patient. So Fiona was not wearing the *full* protective equipment that is reserved for such patients. She had been very careful with this and with hand-washing up to this point, but on discovering the situation, whilst already *in* the room with the patient, she made the split-second to just do the required X-ray, rather than walk back out of the room first to fully prepare herself. One momentary letting down of her guard could so easily have given the disease a way in. And we thought it had, because this disease is indiscriminate. No-one is immune from it.

But the Bible says that there is a far more deadly disease than Covid-19, that is far more contagious and even less discriminate. The Bible calls this disease, "Sin." And sin needs no more than a momentary letting down of our guard for it to enter into us.

What is this disease called sin? In a nutshell, it is our wilful choice to ignore or rebel against God, and to make our own rules for how we live our lives instead of following his. Sin first entered the world through Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. They let down their guard, and listened to the temptations of the devil or Satan, who (depending on your point of view) either appeared as, or is depicted in the form of, a serpent or snake. Adam and Eve were seduced by the lure of being their own gods, and were sucked into a lie that brought disastrous consequences and judgements from God not just for them but for the whole earth.

Specifically, their relationships became adversarial. That affected their relationship with the rest of the created world (the snake would strike their heel and they would crush its head; the ground would produce thorns and thistles when they tried to cultivate it); their relationship with each other (which would be characterised by a desire to dominate each other); their relationship with God (as they hid from his presence for the first time ever, and were driven out from the Garden where they had enjoyed sweet fellowship with him); and their relationship with their own bodies (childbirth became enormously painful; they would now experience sickness, and eventually death – "for dust you are and to dust you will return"). Sin is the most

pervasive and dangerous disease known to humanity. Indeed, if it wasn't for sin, there would be nothing like Covid-19 in the world at all.

The moment we sin we die spiritually. Eventually, because of sin, we will also die physically. But the consequences of sin are not merely for *this* life; if sin is not overcome, the consequences are *eternal*. The Bible calls this "the second death" – eternal separation from God and his love. Essentially God extends into eternity the choice we make in time and space. If we do not want him in our lives, he permits us what we want – life without him. But in eternity, that will no longer be tempered by all his loving gifts that he graciously bestows upon *everyone* now, even if we don't acknowledge his hand in giving them.

As Adam and Eve discovered, what we *want* does not lead to the *life* we think it will lead to. Rather, our desire to be our own gods, leads to death – internally, and then externally, and finally eternally. Paul expounds this reality clearly in Eph 2:1-7:

**[Read Eph 2:1-7]**

*1As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

Paul's language could not be any starker. "You were *dead* ... in your transgressions and sins!" Clearly, they weren't *physically* dead, or writing to them would be a waste of time! But they were *dead* inside – spiritually dead – as a consequence of choosing sin over God. And worse still, *all of us* were likewise dead, for as long as we followed the cravings of our flesh (or sinful nature), instead of following God's plans for our lives! D.O.A. – dead on arrival – is not the most promising start to recovery from sickness!

But God specialises in overcoming that which is impossible for humans. We were *dead*, "But God" ... God "made us alive with Christ"! How? By dealing with the root cause of the deadness – which is sin. The Bible says, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). But God became human in the person of Jesus Christ so that he could die the death we deserved, instead of us. And so, "the free gift of God is eternal *life* in Christ Jesus our Lord." He owned our sin as if it was his own, and suffered its just punishment in our place. As the Bible says, "God made him who had no sin to *be* sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness [the goodness] of God" (2 Cor 5:21). This was God's purpose in Jesus Christ's death. To set us free from sin. Because the price we owed God to atone for our sin was far, far beyond our capacity to pay.

When I was a child my brother showed me how get into our house if ever I forgot my key and my parents were out. It involved climbing onto the garage roof, walking along the top of it, transferring from there onto the sloped roof between our ground and first floors, and wriggling through the always open fan window in our back bedroom, upstairs. We knew it was against all the rules, so we kept it hidden that we did this. Until one day, I tried it as an older teenager, and it went spectacularly wrong. The garage roof gave way under my weight and I disappeared up to my armpits through it, leaving a gaping hole! I was guilty and could no longer hide my guilt. But neither could I come *close* to paying for the damage I'd caused. So, who paid? Actually, remarkably the insurance company classed it as accidental damage, and they paid. But in reality, my dad paid through higher insurance premiums in subsequent years. I had wronged and effectively disobeyed him, but he footed the bill. That's what Jesus did for us on the cross – God footed the bill himself for our rebellion and disobedience to him.

Amazing! “But what does all this have to do with the resurrection?” you may still ask? In 1 Cor 15:17, Paul insists it has *everything* to do with the resurrection as well as the cross. In the midst of an argument in which he outlines the futility of claiming a Christian faith, yet denying the physical resurrection of Christ, he writes: “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is *futile*; you are *still in your sins*.” Without the resurrection, Jesus’ self-sacrifice on the cross would have been an heroic but ultimately useless gesture. Because sin and its consequence of death would have had the final say. *They* would have won, not Jesus.

The victory would have been as incomplete as if the allies had captured the Normandy beaches on D-Day, and then not pushed on through France to Germany. The sacrifices of that day would have been in vain. And without the resurrection, the sacrifice of the cross would have been in vain. We would still be in our sins. But combined *with* the resurrection, Jesus won the victory over sin. And, Paul says in Ephesians, that through the resurrection, we have now already been raised up with Christ, and seated with him in the heavenly realms.

What does this mean for us today? Firstly, it means that we *can* be forgiven for all our sins – past, present and future. All it takes is repentance – turning from the desire to make up our own rules, and turning towards a life with Christ, following his rules. That is a daily, even moment by moment, choice – to deny ourselves and the cravings of our flesh and to take up our cross and follow Christ. But if we make that choice, we will be forgiven for the times we fail to live up to it.

Secondly, the resurrection means that, in Christ, we *have* the power to choose not to sin, moment by moment. Because, everyone who repents and turns to Christ is filled with the Spirit of God – “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you,” the Bible says (Rom 8:11). And “His divine power has given us *everything we need* for a godly life” (2 Pet 1:3). We still have to cooperate with God. But we are not cooperating in a worthy, but futile exercise. We are cooperating in a certain victory. And “he who began a good work in you *will carry it on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6).

Thirdly, Christ’s resurrection is the forerunner of our own resurrection. And not only ours, but a resurrection that is still to come for the whole world. In that resurrected world, Jesus revealed to John, “There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev 21:4). The old order of things is the world damaged by sin and under judgement because of sin. But in the resurrected world to come, sin will have been comprehensibly eradicated, either through the repentance of God’s people and their consequent purification, or through the removal from the world of those who refuse to repent. So, the resurrected world will be a world without sin.

The greatest threat to human life has been defeated already through Jesus’ death and resurrection. And we can enjoy the fruit of that victory at least partially now, and one day in full. It just takes repentance – turning away from sin and towards God through Jesus Christ. And we will receive life in all its fullness. So, have *you* turned to him today? If not, *will* you turn to him today, and live?