

Resurrection Sunday—2020

“Is Anything Too Hard for God?”

(4/12/20)

Good morning and welcome to our Resurrection Sunday livestream service!

We are living in perilous times, where the faith of many has grown cold.

There are many that have allowed this COVID-19 pandemic to get their eyes off God and onto this ‘storm’ we find ourselves in—and because of it, many Christians are ‘going under’ in their faith.

Just like Peter when he stepped out of the boat onto the Sea of Galilee at the invitation of Jesus to come to Him—and Peter found himself walking on water!

However, almost immediately, he allowed the waves and the storm to so distract him that he took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink.

Terrified, Peter cried out, *“Lord, save me!”* and immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and lifted Peter up.

The Lord then said to him, *“O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*

Jesus had said to Peter, *“Get out of the boat and come to Me”*, not—*“get out of the boat and drown!”*

Do you realize that no one in the gospels ever died in the presence of Jesus—although we read that Jesus raised at least 3 (there might have been others) from the dead!

This is Resurrection Sunday, the day we celebrate the greatest event (and miracle) in the history of mankind—the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

As Christians, we believe with all our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead.

And since we believe that, it then stands to reason that—no matter what comes our way in life, no matter how scary and seemingly hopeless—it is nothing for our God!

I have told people over the years, who do believe in God but still have a problem believing the miracles in the Bible, that if they can believe the first verse in the Bible—everything that comes after it is easy to believe!

In other words, if they can believe—“**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**”—it should be easy to believe that Jesus *walked on water*; that He *turned water into wine*; that He *calmed the storm with just a word*; that He *multiplied a little boy’s ‘sack-lunch’ into a great feast that fed thousands*; and even that—He raised the dead!

I mean, if you can believe that God is so powerful so as to create everything with just the power of His word—then there is no problem, crisis or adversity you face in life that is impossible for God to overcome and solve.

Jeremiah 32:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ 'Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power...There is nothing too hard for You.

Jeremiah 32:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ "Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?

Luke 1:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible."

Pastor Chuck Smith in his book, *Living Water* said —

“...a miracle is something that is humanly impossible but divinely simple. [The] Difficulty [of anything] must always be measured by the capacity of the agents doing the work. When God is the Agent doing the work, talk of difficulty is absurd.” (Elaborate)

When Paul the apostle was brought from prison after being accused of inciting riots against the Law of Moses—he was allowed to make a case for his innocence before Governor Festus of Judea and primarily before a visiting dignitary named King Agrippa.

Paul opened his defense with these words:

Acts 26:2-8 (NLT2)

² “I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense today against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, ³ for I know you are an expert on all Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently! ⁴ “As the Jewish leaders are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵ If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion. ⁶ Now I am on trial because of my hope in the fulfillment of God’s promise made to our ancestors. ⁷ In fact, that is why the twelve tribes of Israel zealously worship God night and day, and they share the same hope I have. Yet, Your Majesty, they accuse me for having this hope! [*the resurrection of Jesus*] ⁸ Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?

Paul said this because he got himself into trouble with some of the Jewish leadership (Sadducees) for preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead.

You see the Sadducees (religious aristocracy in Jerusalem) didn’t believe in resurrection (life after death) or in miracles, angels or anything else of a supernatural nature.

But Paul is appealing to King Agrippa (who was not saved but was a believer in the God of Israel and a student of the Jewish Scriptures), using very simple logic—why is it difficult to believe that God, who gives life in the first place, can restore it again for someone who dies?

Or in other words, why is it so hard to believe that God (the Author and Giver of life and Creator of all things)—why is it thought an incredible thing that God *can* raise and *has* raised the dead?

The other day as I was busy doing something while I had today's message on my heart and not knowing what the Lord wanted me to say.

I prayed a quick prayer for direction and immediately, He brought to my mind the statement of Paul to Agrippa—*"Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?"*

As soon as the Lord popped that statement into my head I thought—that could apply to any problem or situation we face in life.

If God can raise a dead body and give it new life—why can't He resurrect a dead marriage? Or a dead faith/walk, or dead finances or business or a dead economy or—whatever?!

Paul was presenting some basic and sound logic to a man who claimed to believe in the God of Israel.

When we're talking about the Almighty God of the universe—is there anything that is too hard (or hard at all) for Him?!!

And yet like Peter on the Sea of Galilee, when he doubted the word of the Lord and began to sink—we too often doubt His word to us, take our eyes off of Him in difficult (or terrifying) situations—and start to drown in the waves of our problems.

And yet we cry out to Him for help, and being as kind and gracious as He is, He rescues us but then gently chides us like He did Peter—*"O you of little faith—why did you doubt?"*

That's an excellent question.

Why do any of God's children doubt the outcome of anything He tells us to do or doubt the certainty of any promise He has given us in His Word?

Well, Jesus told us why—because of a lack of faith (“O you of little faith”).

Let me put it another way—the more faith we have in God, the less unbelief we’ll have in our hearts; and the less faith we have, the more unbelief will fill our heart—and unbelief will kill the power of God in our lives.

Matthew 13:58 (NKJV)

⁵⁸ Now He did not do many mighty works [miracles and healings] there [in His home town of Nazareth] because of their unbelief.

Matthew 17:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁰ So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief..."

Biblical faith is a channel or conduit that connects us to God and allows the power of God to flow from Him into our lives in the form of—answered prayers, grace to live the Christian life and power for Him to work miracles and solve seemingly impossible problems!

I’m not saying that God is dependent on our faith to work—but often He will choose not to work where faith is not present—as the Scriptures we just read indicate.

Faith is a very important subject in the Bible—in fact faith is a topic that flows thru the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

The Bible says, “*without faith it is impossible to please God*”. (Hebrews 11:6)

There are basically 2 kinds of faith that a person can exercise—**saving faith** and **practical faith**.

To *come* to Jesus for salvation requires one kind of faith—and to *walk* with Jesus every day requires another kind of faith.

Saving faith is the faith of a moment which affects my eternity—*practical* faith is moment by moment faith which affects my daily life.

A classic passage with regard to saving faith is—

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

And a classic verse in the New Testament for practical faith is—

Hebrews 10:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ *Now the just shall live by faith...* [Hab.2:4]

What exactly is faith?

The best definition of faith comes right out of God's Word—

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)

¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

¹ Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Faith is always tied to “**things hoped for**” never to things that have already come to pass—even as Paul said—

Romans 8:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

Remember, we're still talking about how nothing is impossible for God—that He is the God of miracles, the God who raises the dead—but His power will only flow into our lives thru faith.

It reminds me of a woman in the gospels who was desperate to be healed—

Mark 5:25-28 (NKJV)

²⁵ Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, ²⁶ and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came behind *Him* in the crowd and touched His garment. ²⁸ For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." (Right now!)

It's one thing to have faith for *someday*—it's another thing to have faith for right now.

John 11:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (Explain)

Too many of us Christians have faith for the future—but no faith for the present.

(Mention church in rural area going through a drought but didn't bring their umbrellas to the prayer meeting to ask God to send rain)

And yet Jesus said, "*All things are possible to him/her who believes.*" ("possible" not guaranteed).

Listen, not even desperate faith for the present can guarantee that God will work a healing or a miracle on your behalf at that moment—but stay desperate, believing and praying which is the best place to be if you're going to see God work.

Streams in the Desert—

"Psalm 107 is filled with stories of God's lavish love. In every story of deliverance, it was humankind coming to the point of desperation that gave God His opportunity to act. Arriving at "their wits' end" (Ps. 107:27) of desperation was the beginning of God's power...

Study once more the prayers of Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah when they were severely troubled not knowing what to do. Go over the history of Nehemiah, Daniel, Hosea, and Habakkuk. Stand with awe in the darkness of Gethsemane and linger by the tomb in Joseph of Arimathea's garden through those difficult days. Call to account the witnesses of the early church and ask the apostles to relate the story of their desperate days.

Desperation is better than despair. Remember, our faith did not create our desperate days. Faith's work is to sustain us through those days and to solve them. Yet the only alternative to desperate faith is despair. Faith holds on and prevails."

Mark 5:29-35 (NKJV)

²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came behind *Him* in the crowd and touched His garment...
²⁹ Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of the affliction. ³⁰ And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched [Me] My clothes?" ³¹ But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, Who touched Me?" "

Her touch was different from the touch of the crowd—their touch was incidental, but hers was deliberate.

Living in a “*Christian*” society like ours people can’t help coming in contact with Jesus.

They *have to* come in contact with Him at certain times of the year—Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter.

They come in contact with Him through other Christians that they work with or live next door to.

They come in contact with Him through the media as they channel surf or try to find a particular radio station and hear Christian preachers and teachers.

But it’s an incidental contact on their part, occurring merely by chance and without intention.

And as such they really never receive any of the life and power and healing of Jesus in their life.

That’s because to receive anything from Jesus there must be a conscious, deliberate ‘touch of faith’—like this woman.

Her touch was a touch of faith that allowed the power of God to flow into her life.

Jesus said, "*Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.*"

She reached out and touched Jesus by faith—and immediately the power of God flowed from Him into her and she was healed.

There are a lot of Christians who come in contact with Jesus at church, as they read the Word, or at a prayer meeting or Christian concert—who really never experience His power in their life.

Often, it's because they have wrapped themselves in pride, carnality and/or unbelief.

And as such they have "*insulated*" themselves from really being able to come in contact with Jesus where there is a real connection made that would allow the life and power that is in Him to flow into their life.

To make a genuine connection with Jesus all the "*insulation*" must be stripped away and you must come "*naked*" if you will—with a naked soul and heart—open and honest and in humility, reaching out to touch Him by faith if you're going to receive from Him.

Something else—she stepped out in faith and chose to come into contact with Jesus.

So many Christians are waiting for God to "come to them", to do something for them—but God is waiting for them to step out in faith and do something for Him.

I'm not advocating trying to lead God, the point I'm making is simply this—if we take the initiative and step out in faith God will reward us with His power—just like Peter stepped out of the boat by faith and did the miraculous by walking on water (at least for a little while).

That was better than the eleven other disciples that stayed in the boat and ‘played it safe’!

It’s better to step out in faith and fail than to stay in your ‘comfort zone’ and never step out in faith to do anything for God.

Failure doesn’t hurt the Kingdom of God—unbelief does!

God wants to use all of us—and the only thing hindering that is our unbelief (Matthew 13:58).

And that’s why we’re spending some time on the subject of faith—and how it is connected to hope—*“faith is the substance of things hoped for.”* (Hebrews 11:1a)

Biblical hope is never a “maybe hope” or a “hope so hope”—it is always a certain hope, a settled fact—a sure thing kind of hope.

And the reason that biblical hope is a sure thing is because—it’s always tied to a promise of God—and God cannot lie!

Therefore, everything He has promised—He absolutely will bring to pass.

Romans 4:20-21 (NLT2)

²⁰ Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.

God is gracious and will often give us things we ask for—even if He hasn’t specifically promised those things to us in His Word.

A new bike for our son or daughter; a nice vacation for the family that we can't afford; or Christmas gifts for the kids when you're broke (like He did for my family years ago).

There are times when God will graciously provide non-essentials and even luxuries if we ask Him—because He's kind and loves to bless His children.

However, these things are not promised to us and therefore are not a sure hope.

What He has promised us is the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life when we put our faith in Jesus.

Furthermore, once we have put our faith in Jesus, He has promised to provide our physical needs because He is our Father and we are His children.

Peter said that the Lord has given to His children many “*great and precious promises*”—everything we need for life and godliness.

And so, these promises become the focus of our faith and the certainty of our hope—that what God has promised He is able to perform—and will do!

Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)

¹ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, **the evidence of things not seen.**

Faith is believing that you already own what God has promised in His Word—even if you can't yet see it with your eyes or touch it with your hands.

The word *evidence* simply means “*conviction*” or “*proof*”.

In the Greek the word is a legal term meaning—“*evidence that is acceptable in a court of law.*”

Evidence is something you take into court to prove your case—and if it’s a criminal trial—to get a conviction—**to bring the jury to a decision, a verdict based on the evidence.**

Biblical faith isn’t a blind leap into the darkness—it is reasonable and built on many infallible proofs—proofs that will stand up as evidence in any court of law.

Years ago, I remember reading a book by Josh McDowell called, “*Evidence that Demands a Verdict*”.

In that book he related the story of two Oxford University professors—Lord Littleton and Benjamin Gilbert West.

These two atheist professors decided, that together, they would deliver what they believed would be the fatal blow to Christianity and wipe it out once and for all.

The two main issues they felt they needed to refute were:

1. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Paul the apostle

2. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

Lord Littleton chose the conversion of Saul; and Benjamin West chose the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Both took a leave of absence from the university and went their separate ways to do their research.

They each wound up becoming Christians by the sheer force of conviction based on the evidence they uncovered.

And instead of writing a book *refuting* Christianity—they ended up writing a book *proving* Christianity called, “*Observations of the History and the Evidences for the Resurrection.*”

They said, any person who rejects Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the historicity of the resurrection of Christ from the dead—does so, not on the basis of evidence but on the basis of ignorance and/or stubborn willful unbelief.

Simon Greenleaf, the famous 19th century professor of law at Harvard wrote:
“*All that Christianity asks of men...is that they would treat its evidences as they treat the evidence of other things...*” (as in a human court of law)

Along those lines, noted historian and Oxford professor, Thomas Arnold wrote:
“*The evidence for our Lord’s life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been, shown to be satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad.*
Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece as carefully as every judge summing upon a most important case. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself.
I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God has given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.”

Let me say it once again—we are living in perilous times, where people’s hearts are failing them for fear of those things coming on the earth (disease, famine, financial ruin and global warming) just to name a few.

We must fight the temptation to take our eyes off of God and put them on our circumstances—because if we do our circumstances will drag us down, drown our faith, kill our peace and destroy our relationship with God (for many it has already happened as they have stopped reading, praying and going to church).

We must keep our eyes on Jesus—the “*Author and Finisher of our faith.*”

And keep reminding ourselves that we are children of God, and that when it comes to our God—‘*nothing shall be impossible*’—not even raising the dead!