



Resurrection Sunday

Living the Resurrection Life now!

4th April 2021

Main Point:

We were never meant to live with our eyes fixed on life after death, eagerly waiting for the day when God calls us home to heaven. Rather, God made us to be His 'Resurrection People', those who live the resurrection life day by day, and in so doing, give the world a picture of heaven now.

Intro | As you've already picked up, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrims Progress* is one of my favourite books.

In fact, when I was asked to articulate my philosophy of ministry about three years ago as part of my theology degree, I used Bunyan's allegory to describe my own approach to ministry as 'walking alongside other pilgrims as we journey towards the Celestial City, especially those who find themselves in the Dark Valley and need to hear another pilgrim recalling the wonderful promises from the King's book.'

So, when I was doing my Masters in Missional Leadership two years ago, I was delighted to find one of the subjects was "Missional Spirituality". We were to consider how God's mission alters our understanding of spirituality.

Knowing my love of John Bunyan's book you can imagine how startled I was when one of the lecturer's put forward the idea that there was a biblical flaw in the story he told.

I was shocked. A flaw in the story I admired so much? How could Pilgrim's journey towards the Celestial City possibly be defective? I knew every detail of the story, Pilgrim's journey over the Hill of Difficulty, his passing through Doubting Castle and so on.

But, as the lecturer continued with her explanation, little by little I began to grasp the point she was making – and how the story of Pilgrim's journey had significantly impacted the way believers viewed the aim of the Christian life for many years after.

Of course, some might be shaking their heads! But stick with me, for I think you'll soon get the point the lecturer was making.

As the story tells, throughout his long journey Pilgrim's eyes were set on one place, and one place alone - the Celestial City far in the distance. Apart from the occasional glance at the pathway to ensure he stayed on the straight and narrow way his only goal was to reach the glowing lights of the heavenly City.

The Celestial City – Heaven – his eternal home with the King.

Was it that John Bunyan drew from by Paul's words, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things?" (Colossians 3:2). We do not know.

However, throughout the years that followed, hymns were written, sermons preached, evangelists exhorted Christians to be pilgrims on their journey towards heaven, to have heaven as their focus, to look forward to, indeed, long for, their Saviour's call to their eternal home.

But would it surprise you to learn that nowhere in the New Testament is the disciple of Christ told to fix their eyes on heaven?

In fact, as we read of Jesus' ministry to those around about Him, we see His heart was drawn towards the sick, the outcast and the vulnerable, He enjoyed the company of friends and strangers. He partied, and he wept. He focussed His eyes on those around Him, not towards His life in his heavenly home with his Father.

Indeed, central to the incarnation – God taking on human flesh – is that God chose not to remain distant, unapproachable, in a faraway holy place but rather, He came FROM heaven to earth, to dwell with us. That's the message of Christmas.

So, what is the message of Easter and more specifically, Resurrection Sunday?

Point 1 | Resurrection life means more than 'life after death'

What thoughts does the word, 'resurrection', conjure up in your mind? Many Christians think only about rising from the dead, the after-life, going to their heavenly home.

So, when Jesus says, "**He who believes in me will live, even though he dies**" (John 11: 25) they hear only, "I have come so that when you die, you'll go and live in heaven with me."

In fact, in 1980s and 90s there was an entire evangelistic movement which revolved around the question, "If you were to die tonight, do you know whether you would go to heaven?"

Perhaps that sounds familiar to you.

But that is *not* what Jesus meant when He said, **“I am the resurrection and the life. ... whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”** (John 11:25-26)

The word ‘resurrection’ means so much more than ‘life after death’.

Point 2 | To receive resurrection life means you have received the ‘God-kind of life’.

When Jesus rose that first Sunday morning, creation changed, not just the world as we know it but the entire cosmos. It wasn’t just a new day. It was the dawning of a new age, a new era. At Jesus’ resurrection, a new creation was born.

The resurrection of Christ is all about beginnings.

It was Day 1 of the breaking-in of God’s eternal plan to restore creation to what He had always intended it to be.

And Jesus, we are told, was the first fruit of this new restored creation (1 Corinthians 15:20).

He was the first human to walk on earth with God’s *zoë* life permeating through him. “*zoë life*”, you ask? What’s that?

Zoë is a unique word Jesus used to describe ‘the God-kind-of-life’. There are three words for life in the gospels – *Bios* which refers to the physical body (see Luke 8:14) where we get the word biology, *Psuche* which refers to the psychological life, (see Matthew 16:25) where we get the word psychology. But when Jesus said, “I have come so that you may have life [*zoë*] and have abundant life [*zoë*]” (John 10:10), he used a new word – *zoë*. *Zoë* life means ‘the God-kind of life’, an eternal, everlasting life which only God may give, full of love, joy, peace and power.

Like the first fruit on a tree or grape vine – when you see the ‘first fruit’ you know there are many more to come.

What God did for Jesus on that first Easter Sunday, He will do for all His people till the end of this age.

So, if you are one of God’s children, a fruit of Christ’s vine, the *zoë* life – the God-kind of life – is now planted in you. The Apostle Paul describes the *zoë* seed as a guarantee, or a pledge, (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 4:30) of your future resurrection (see Romans 6:5).

On Resurrection morning God's eternal plan burst into action – and we, who partake of Christ's body and blood, have been raised with Christ to live this new resurrection life now (Colossians 3:1, Romans 8:11, Romans 6:4).

The Bible promises us that the *zoë* seed implanted in our hearts will, at the time of Christ's return, raise us up with him, transforming our bodies so that they can live the glorified world of the new creation.

We will then reign with Christ in His new creation, in a world restored to God's original design, for the schemes of Satan will have been destroyed (see 1 Corinthians 15:51).

And your loved ones? Those who have already died or 'fallen asleep' as Paul calls them? Paul tells us they enjoy the privilege of being ahead of us in the line for those who will have their physical bodies transformed into glorious bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

What does all this mean to us now? What difference does it make having this special *zoë* 'God-kind-of-life' implanted in us to our daily lives?

Point 3 | The resurrection life gives us a mission and a message.

Have you ever heard someone described another person as being "so spirituality minded, they're of no earthly use"? I understand the main thrust of that statement, but I believe it's completely misguided. Surely, the more spiritually minded a person is, the more earthly use they are!

After Jesus appeared to His disciples following His crucifixion, He was able to convince them that He was alive, physically, even though His resurrected body was unlike any physical body they had ever seen. He immediately breathed on them His Spirit (and this we'll learn more about this next Sunday).

It really reminds us of Genesis 1 when God breathed into Adam and he became a 'living soul'. In like fashion, the disciples received the seed of Jesus' *zoë* kind of life in their hearts. They were the first of a new creation, humans indwelt with God's *zoë* kind-of-life.

What were they to do now that their hearts had been fundamentally changed?

Well Jesus certainly didn't say, 'Well, now it's time to get you out of here. I'm taking you all to heaven'. Rather, He told them to wait for the anointing of the Spirit for then they would be empowered to live the God-kind of life.

You know these first disciples were a lot like us. Because they had a glimpse of the good things of heaven, they kept asking Jesus, whether it was time for His kingdom to be restored (Acts 1:6).

However, rather than allowing them to fix their eyes on the sky towards heaven, Jesus sent them back into the world.

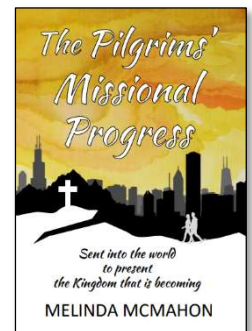
Now their eyes were to be fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith (Hebrews 12:2). In other words, with the guarantee of their resurrected life within, Jesus called them to participate in the ultimate adventure of shining Christ's light in the dark world.

So where does that fit with my lecturer's perceived flaw in *Pilgrim's Progress*?

You will recall, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian was called to **flee from** the City of Destruction and to set out on, what proved to be, his life-long journey to the Celestial city.

How different is Jesus' calling for His disciples to go **into** the City of Destruction, with a mission and a message to witness to Christ's life and transforming power.

So profound was this revelation that felt prompted to write my own book, titled "*The Pilgrim's Missional Progress*" which some may have seen on the bookshelf in my office. I was compelled to consider what might have happened had Christian and his friend, Hopeful, been turned back to do the work of evangelists *in* the City of Destruction. There are copies if you'd like to read my story.



Application | The resurrection life gives us purpose and meaning.

How are we to understand the process of living our resurrection life now?

We could think of it this way.

The world we are living in is thick with polluted air, air that contains the toxins of sin and death. When God breaths into us His zoë kind-of-life, that life enables us to inhale the fresh, pure, unpolluted heavenly atmosphere. And then, as the seed of the zoë kind-of-life grows in our hearts, our lungs become *filled* with heavenly air, so that what we exhale, allows those around us to benefit from our presence

We are Resurrection People. We have God's Spirit within us. Every word we speak, every action we take refreshes the air around us.

Now, that's an atmosphere in which people want to be – that is heaven on earth!