

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
“Focusing on God’s Power” – Part 2
Taught by Bruce Bickel
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Let’s quietly go before the Lord and know that he is God.

[MUSIC]

Precious Heavenly Father, we come to you with a Spirit of thanksgiving, a Spirit of praise and a Spirit of gratitude. Father, we’re just overwhelmed with your mercy, your compassion and your love for us in spite of our sinful nature. Father, we know from a practical point of view that a human teacher can lead to truth, but only you can lead us into the truth. We know, Father, that a human teacher can teach the heart, but only you can penetrate the heart. Father, we pray that your Holy Spirit would fulfill his job description this day; guide us into all truth, that we might see you more clearly for Christ’s sake. Amen!

Let’s turn in our Bibles to our passage. We’re looking at 2 Corinthians 4, continuing the study of our theme, which is Triumphant Living. Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and spreads everywhere the sweet aroma of the knowledge of him. That’s our major theme, just understanding the triumphant living.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul is writing a letter to the church at Corinth. He’s basically describing his lifestyle as an apostle, one who’s lived in the system of this world contrary to the system of this world, one who’s committed to the kingdom of God building. All of a sudden he begins to talk about his own natural life. He describes that for us in verses 1-12. In that he gives us a picture of what I would call normal Christian living. You can read about that in verses 7-12 where he talks about the various hassles that he goes through in life.

In verses 13, 14 and 15, where we are today, we pick it up and Paul understands this—he says there’s a possibility even though you know that you’re not a victim of circumstances, even though that you do know, that God has a plan and that is to share his life with us, that God has a purpose, that is to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God, that there is a process, and that is the external pressure of circumstances works with the inward resistance of grace, and the end result product is that Christ’s life is put on display. You’ll see in verse 11, “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” Death works in us, but life in you.

There you see the summary statement of this plan of the process of the purpose and of the product of our going through the hassles of life. Then Paul makes a wonderful transition because he has such a pastoral heart. Look at verse 15. He uses the word “but.” That’s a transitional word. He’s taking us from the previous 12 verses into something new because it’s almost like Paul understands this—I know that even though you understand God’s purpose in your life, you understand that God is putting his life on display. there may be times when you get discouraged.

Now what Paul is saying...the issue is not that you realize that you’re discouraged, but how do you manage your discouragement? He gives us the license to say you’re going to be discouraged perhaps when you go through the normal Christian life of verses 7-12. You’re going to be hassled, just like everybody else. But you understand there’s a plan behind it. But even though you know that, there may come a time when you just get discouraged because you can’t control the circumstances. In verses

13-15, he tells us what we need to do in those situations when you recognize that you are discouraged. He doesn't blast us for being discouraged. He says here's what you need to think about when you realize that you are discouraged.

Then we picked it up in verses 13-15, "¹³But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak, ¹⁴knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. ¹⁵For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God."

What Paul gives us here is three things about teaching us how to focus on the power of God. He's basically saying, "Look, you may have all the head knowledge of understanding the plan. You may have the knowledge of understanding the purpose. You may have experienced the understanding of the process. And you even know the end result product that God is giving his life away. But even in midst of that, just in our human nature, you likely might be discouraged." So Paul says, "Don't worry about whether or not you're discouraged. Here's how you need to think about it when you are discouraged. Here's how you manage your discouragement."

He gives us three things to focus on the power of God. His solution to our discouragement is not be overwhelmed by the circumstances, but focus on the power of God in three areas of our life. The first one is this—the thing that keeps us from fainting is the power of faith. That's verse 13. The power of faith—what we talked about last week. Focus upon the fact that you believe then you speak. It's what you believe that is important. The power of faith is what keeps him from fainting. It is the power of the resurrection that keeps him from sinking. The power of the resurrection keeps him from sinking. And then lastly, the power of gratitude keeps him from griping.

How do you handle your discouragement? Paul is saying this—you need to focus on the power of God in three areas. The power of faith will keep you from fainting. The power of the resurrection will keep you from sinking. The power of gratitude will keep you from griping. Those are the three things that Paul teaches us. Today, we want to look at the second one, and that is the power of the resurrection. Look at verse 14, "knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you." The second thing to remember in times of discouragement is the power of the resurrection; that Christ was raised from the dead by the hand of God the Father. It is the power of the resurrection that guarantees our resurrection.

Before I get into this, I want to take you to 1 Corinthians 15. This is a passage of what we would call a passage of full intent, meaning it is a passage that deals most with this particular subject. When we go to 1 Corinthians 15, this is the chapter in the Scripture that deals mostly with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we refer to it theologically as the chapter of full intent or biggest intent.

I want to call your attention to a couple of things in this to help us understand the power of the resurrection. I trust that you'll have time to go read this sometime this week between now and next week. Read chapter 15 and understand this big outline I'm going to give you. There are four key words in 1 Corinthians 15 dealing with the power of the resurrection. The first is the word "Gospel." That is in verse 1. Paul says, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand." The big concept here of the resurrection is the Gospel.

Secondly, it's the word "kingdom." You'll see that in verse 24, "then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power." These

are the consequences of the resurrection. First of all, the Gospel, and secondly is the kingdom. The third is the keyword “how” in 1 Corinthians 15:35, “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’” The third major issue is the word “how.” The fourth major issue is the word “immortality.” Look at verse 1 Corinthians 15:53, “For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

Your four keywords in 1 Corinthians 15 dealing with the major intent of the resurrection would be Gospel, kingdom, how and immortality. Now how does this apply? Well first of all, the power of the resurrection ratifies the Gospel. It ratifies the Gospel. You’ll see that in 1 Corinthians 15:1-19. In verses 1-19, it ratifies the Gospel. Read those verses under the theme of the Gospel and you’ll see how the resurrection validates and ratifies the Gospel and makes it powerful and makes it legitimate and makes it truthful. It is the power of the resurrection that ratifies the Gospel. The reason the Gospel is powerful is because of the resurrection of Christ. That’s what you see in the ratification of Gospel in verses 1-19.

Then you go to verses 20-34. It assures the kingdom. The resurrection of Christ assures the kingdom of God. It assures the kingdom. You’ll see that in verses 20-34. Then we see that the power of the resurrection harmonizes with nature. That’s verses 35-49. It harmonizes with nature. When you go read 1 Corinthians 15 under these four major themes, you’ll understand where we get these concepts of the power of the resurrection. Lastly, the power of the resurrection pledges immortality. It pledges immortality. That is verses 50-57, to the end of the chapter.

Please read that on your own, brothers. We don’t have time to go through that today. I wanted to give you that outline because that is the chapter of what we would call full intent on the power of the resurrection.

Paul is teaching us in 2 Corinthians the power of the resurrection to help us in our times of discouragement. He says, “Focus upon the power of God.” The one thing that I want you to understand in 1 Corinthians 15 is the significance of the power of the resurrection. Paul alludes to it here, but he describes it more in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul says one of the reasons how you can handle your discouragement is to focus on the power of the resurrection. By faith, we know that God’s great power even raised Christ from the dead.

We understand this—that God is sovereign. He can do anything. If he can raise Christ from the dead, what can he do with your discouragements? He can help you manage them. If God is powerful enough to raise Christ from the dead, don’t you think he’s powerful enough to help you think correctly in managing your own discouragements and the hassles of life? That’s Paul’s logic. He’s saying you go from the larger to the smaller, from the greater to the lesser. The greater thing is this—the power of the resurrection. Think on that. When you think on the power of the resurrection, all of a sudden those things that are discouraging you become less in your mind because you’re overwhelmed by the power of the resurrection realizing this—if God raised him from the dead, and because I’m in Christ, I’m going to be resurrected with him. All of a sudden, your mind goes to the greater and off the lesser. The lesser would be your discouragements. The greater would be the power of the resurrection. You see how that works?

He takes you from the greater to the lesser and the lesser to the greater. The greater thing is this is—focus on the power of resurrection. Think about it. Go back and read 1 Corinthians 15 when you get discouraged and just look at the magnificent sovereignty of God saying, “Look. You’re in Christ. You will be resurrected just as I resurrected my Son the Lord Jesus. I’m going to resurrect you.” That’s the power that helps us overcome our discouragements. We get the big long-range picture.

Carry this thought with you. Even if I die as a result of the hassles and the discouragements I'm going through in this life, I know because of the resurrection of Christ that I will be resurrected with Christ. That's Paul's logic. Even though I might die in this situation I know this; because of the power of resurrection, because I am in Christ, I know that I will be resurrected with Christ. That's what I would call the concept of future anticipation. Future anticipation. That will help us with our discouragements.

In the midst of our troubles and our discouragements, we focus not on the obstacles of life, but on the future confirmation of our resurrection because of our faith in Christ, the power of the resurrection. You see, sometimes you have to act out your faith and sometimes you have to act out the way you want to become, and so we need to think this. You see, it's this future anticipation. I'm realizing I'm going to be resurrected with Christ, so you begin to think about that more than you do the circumstances, which might even take your life.

Years ago, during the Vietnam War, a Naval officer assigned his pilots in his squadron missions where they would not under gage hot fire. He took those missions himself. He assigned the missions where they knew there was a hot zone. He took those missions and did not assign his other pilots [UNCLEAR]. They had other recon missions. Years later, at a reunion, one of the pilots came up and asked him, "Why did you do that?" The Naval officer said this, "Because I knew of my destiny, but I didn't know of yours." The power of the resurrection. You see that?

I knew where I was going to end up because of the power of the resurrection, but I didn't know that about you. So I knew that, even if I took this mission and I didn't make it back, I knew this—because of the power of the resurrection, I knew that I would be resurrected with Christ and I knew my destiny. You see, when you handle the discouragements of your life, you begin to think about future anticipation. That's the power of the resurrection. Brothers, if you're in Christ today, yes, this situation may take your life, but the great consummate peace and compassion and mercy of God is this, "Because I resurrected my Son, you are in Christ, you will be resurrected just like my Son and I will resurrect your body. That's the power of the resurrection. Please read 1 Corinthians 15 and you'll understand that more in-depth.

Even in your current situation, if this is the way in which God is pleased to take you home, focusing upon the power of the resurrection permits us to manage the situation in a manner that is God-honoring.

Let me give you an illustration. Turn with me to John 11. Can you following the logic of what Paul is teaching us? In other words, Paul is saying, "consider your future anticipation of your own personal resurrection. Go to John 11:1-6. Notice in verses 1-6, we see the situation of John 11, "¹Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³So the sisters sent *word* to Him, saying, 'Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.'" Notice verse 4, "⁴But when Jesus heard *this*, He said, 'This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.' ⁵Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶So when He heard that he was sick, He then stayed two days *longer* in the place where He was."

What was he waiting for him to do?

Audience Members: Die.

Waiting for Lazarus to die. Now you say, “Wait a minute. That’s not very compassionate. That’s not fair. That’s not merciful.” We need to see the rest of the story here, the context of it. In verse 4, Jesus said that the glory of God is issue so the Son of God may be glorified by it. So he stayed two days more.

Go to verses 40-45. Before you get there, look at verse 25, “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies.” There’s a significant point of why Jesus stayed to let Lazarus die. You see that in verses 40-45. Turn with me there in John 11:40-45, “⁴⁰Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’ Now this is what he’s saying right before he raise Lazarus from the dead. “⁴¹So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, ‘Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴²I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.’ ⁴³When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’ ⁴⁴The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’”

Now what’s the point of all of this? Look at it logical. How would God be more glorified? By the healing of a sick man or the resurrection of a dead man?

Audience Member: Resurrection.

By the resurrection of a dead man. That’s why Jesus stayed and let Lazarus die. You see, there was a purpose behind that. We would think, “Oh, we need to go rescue him right away.” Jesus is saying, “No. There’s a bigger issue.” This is the first time that Jesus ever said this—he revealed who he was when he said, “I am the resurrection and I am the life.” You see, there’s a perfect timing, and the perfect timing was to let his friend Lazarus die so that he could put the power of the resurrection on display, which was more powerful than the powerful healing of a sick man. You see how that works. That’s the doctrine of future anticipation. That’s how you and I need to look at our discouragement. Yes, we may die in this situation. This situation in which I find myself, it may be the means by which God will take my life.

Do you realize, men, that all of life is fatal? Life is terminal, not cancer. Life is. The very first breath you take, you’re one step closer to dying. Life is the terminal issue. The great confidence that we have is the power of the resurrection.

I know that God raised Jesus from the dead. He can do that for me, and because of my faith. You see, it is my faith, as Paul teaches us, in discouragement, that keeps me from fainting. I believe, therefore, I speak. It’s the power of the resurrection that keeps me from sinking under the situations that we have.

Dick: Bruce, in that context, even looking at Romans 8:28, that God will allow things to happen to a believer knowing that the believer has eternal life with him, but to show his glory and to allow others to witness that miracle to then allow them to be drawn...well, he will draw them, but give them the experience of seeing a resurrection. I mean, is that...can we take that as kind of solace when things don’t work out in our own personal situations, that God is working it for good for the greater?

Absolutely. Remember, the sovereignty of God is that everything that God permits and ordains is for his glory and our good. You’ve got to take a look at Dick’s question in the context of the previous verses of 2 Corinthians 4. What is the end product of the plan? The purpose, the process and the product is what? Jesus puts his life on display, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested.

How might the life of Jesus be manifested? It might be in the way that we die. Could be. It could be in the way that we die. Die with dignity. Die with honor. Die with respect. Die with faith. You see, it is faith in the midst of our discouragement that keeps us from fainting. But it's the power of the resurrection that keeps us from sinking under the circumstances. It's very, very possible because life is terminal.

One of the ways in which God will glorify himself just as he did with Lazarus. Jesus stayed two days so that Lazarus would die because his intent was to say, "I want to tell the world that I am the resurrection and the life, and that will bring more glory to God if I let Lazarus die than if I would raise him as a sick man." You see, our tendency is to always to remove the circumstances.

Now, I'm not suggesting that Martha and Mary were not people of faith. I'm not saying that. They have natural human tendencies, and that would be, "Come and remove the circumstances. Remove his sickness." Jesus says, "No, there's a bigger issue in his sickness. His sickness is the means by which I'm going to reveal to the world, for all the world to understand this; that I am the resurrection, and I'm life. The way I'm going to do that is I'm going to let your brother die as a means of bringing more glory to God than it would be if I healed a sick man."

You see, our tendency in our human nature is always to remove the circumstances. What Paul is saying is this—trust God behind the circumstances. You don't know what your future holds, but you know who holds your future. That's the power of the resurrection.

Tom: *Isn't that so many times the form of our prayers is for God to remove the circumstances.*

Absolutely.

Tom: *And we forget to go beyond that to his glory.*

That's what Paul is teaching us. Remember, in these circumstances, you've got to take this in the right context. Verses 13, 14 and 15 follow very logically verses 1-12 where he talks about the hassles of life. He's describing normal Christian living. It takes its toll on us. The end result is the product of verse 11, which is so that the life of Christ may be put on display. All of your life is the means by which God puts his life on display. That's why we spent that time in verses 7-12 looking at the plan is God shares his life with us. Treasure in the earthen vessel.

The purpose is to show the all-surpassing power comes from God, so that the all-surpassing power will be from God and not from us. The process is external pressures of hassles of life, inward his grace, resisting that, and the end result is Christ's life is put on display. God uses all of those hassles in our life as a means of visibly calling attention to himself and putting Christ's life on display. What Paul is saying is even in the midst of that, even though you know it, you may be discouraged. But that's okay. Just don't focus on the what if's, the how come's and the why for's. Think upon this—the power of faith. That's what's going to keep you from fainting. The power of the resurrection is going to keep you from sinking. The third one is the power of gratitude which will keep you from griping.

What Paul is saying is this—in the midst of the circumstances, where do you think? Where does your mind go. Remember the question we've asked numerous times, "What do you think about when you have nothing else to think about?" Where does your mind go? Paul is saying have your mind go to the power of God, the power of the fact that you believe, which is a gift that God gives you. As a result of that belief, you can hold onto the power of the resurrection. You know this; that Christ was raised from the dead and I know that because I'm in Christ, I will be raised from the dead.

All of a sudden, think on that and watch what happens to your overwhelming response to the circumstances which you're in. It won't remove them. It won't remove them at all. What it's going to do is it's going to help us manage the situation. Paul is not saying you're less spiritual if you're discouraged because of life. He's not saying that at all. He's saying that's going to be natural. You are going to get discouraged by life, because we don't have all the answers. But that's okay. The solution is focus on the power of God. Focus on the power of God.

Audience Member: *Romans 5 ties into what you're saying here, too. It's been encouraging to me [UNCLEAR] gone through stuff [UNCLEAR] he says, "The grace in which we stand and we exalt in the hope of the glorious God."*

Amen.

Audience Member: *So that gives us hope when we focus on the resurrection.*

Excellent.

Audience Member: *Then it goes on to the tribulation, so then we also exalt in our tribulation.*

Absolutely.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] knowing that tribulation brings out perseverance, and perseverance proving character, [UNCLEAR] character, hope. [UNCLEAR]...

That's a great cross reference. Notice, in the faith and hope in which we stand, in the grace that we stand, you stand in grace. Romans 5:1-2. You stand in grace. You're not in and out of grace. The word stand there means immovable and not changeable. The word stand means not moveable or changeable. You're standing in grace, and that's where our hope is.

There's another aspect we need to take a look at. I've just talked about our future anticipation, but there's another aspect of the resurrection that we need to consider. Look at Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you..." There's a point of hope. "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." What's the primary emphasis? Christ indwells you; you're in Christ. You see, there's the source of our hope. That is the grace in which stand that we read about in Romans 5. That's the future anticipation of your resurrection.

One of the things Paul says is, in the midst of the hassles, when you're discouraged, you believe, therefore speak about what you believe. Talk about your faith in Christ. Don't talk about circumstances; talk about your faith in Christ. You believe that.

The second thing that impacts your belief is the power of the resurrection. That is future anticipation. But I believe there's another power of the resurrection we need consider, and that is what I would call present confirmation. The power of the resurrection in present confirmation. We've seen the power of the resurrection in future anticipation, that is your personal resurrection because you're in Christ. Now there's another one we need to consider that is also a result of the power of the resurrection, and that's why I wanted you to back to 1 Corinthians 15, and that is to understand present confirmation. Let's talk about that for a minute.

We need to let God give us present confirmation and encouragement by his Word. Turn to a couple of passages with me. Go to Ephesians 2. This is present confirmation. Sometimes we just need to have present confirmation. Let me read Ephesians 2:1-10. This is very familiar with most of you, I'm sure. But focus on this—present confirmation. Something is being confirmed here about you because of the power of the resurrection. You see, the power of the resurrection not only has an impact on upon our future anticipation, but it also gives us the foundation for our present confirmation. Notice this, ¹“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Brothers, what is that? That is present confirmation of your salvation. You see, both of those are dependent upon the power of the resurrection. That's why you need to go back to 1 Corinthians 15 and look at those first 19 verses because you will see this; that the Gospel is ratified by the resurrection. You need to understand that what makes the Gospel powerful is the resurrection of Christ. That's what makes it powerful.

Paul is teaching us in 1 Corinthians 15, in those first 19 verses, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is what ratifies and validates the Gospel message that you preach. Paul says this in Romans 1, “I'm not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power unto all who believe.” What is the it? It is the message. You see, the reason that the Gospel is powerful is because of the resurrection of Christ. It ratifies it. So go back and correlate those two things together.

The second thing we need to understand is this—the power of the resurrection not only gives us future anticipation, but it also gives us present confirmation of your salvation.

Audience Member: *Is Jesus confirming the I AM?*

I would think so. He confirms anything he ever says. If he said, he's confirming it.

Audience Member: *God said, “I AM that I AM.” [UNCLEAR] Jesus implying that he is the I AM?*

Absolutely. He and the Father are one. You understand present confirmation? Let's take a look at a couple of other verses.

Audience Member: *When I think about that, that motivates me not just to give me security, but to share the Gospel.*

Oh amen!

Audience Member: *Who else...we're all going to die. Right? We're all dying. [UNCLEAR] take it for granted as Christians that Christ is resurrected, but that's our hope. No other religion teaches that.*

That's correct.

Audience Member: *There's no other resurrected being. Only Jesus.*

Let's go to Colossians 2. More evidence from the Word of our present confirmation. Certainly Jesus is the I AM. He's the Alpha and the Omega. Colossians 2:13, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." But God. Dead in your trespasses and sins...but God made you alive. You see, that is the glorious doctrine of regeneration. Remember, regeneration is a direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of a person. It's a direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of a person. That's what gives us our present confirmation.

One other verse might be helpful. Go to Colossians 3:1-4, "¹Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ..." What is he referring to? The resurrection. The power of the resurrection. "...keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." In other words, yes, you're discouraged in your circumstances, but don't focus on the circumstances. Focus upon two things—focus upon the faith that will keep you from fainting and the power of the resurrection that will keep you from sinking. There's where you put your mind. And the reason you do that is because of this word "for," "³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." You don't live like you used to. You don't think like you used to. That's the result of the supernatural work of regeneration. "⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

You see, if God can raise you from the dead, don't you think he can do it again? You see, you've already experienced a resurrection, haven't you? Do you realize that? If you're dead in your trespasses and sins, and you're alive in Christ, what happened to you? A resurrection. You went from death to life. That's the glorious, supernatural work of a direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit upon your soul. Your present confirmation is the fact that you believe. You believe. That means that you've experienced a resurrection already from death to life, from darkness to light, from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God. You've experienced a present resurrection already when you understand your salvation, that you were dead and now you are alive. You were dead in your trespasses and sins, but God made you alive. What is that? That's a resurrection. You've experienced a resurrection. We've already experienced that once. Now you know that you'll experience it again, because God said you would. You'll experience a second resurrection.

I've been doing some thinking here just recently. Somebody asked me to define Christianity. Well, first of all, Christianity is defined by the person and work of Christ. That's it. But in terms that the world would understand, I've just been trying to think about how would I answer that question. I don't have the answer for you right now, but I'm working on it.

I've come across one thing that I would suggest. First of all, Christianity is not a code of moral ethics. It is not a code of moral ethics. It is, what I would call, a supernatural phenomenon. It's a supernatural phenomenon, because of what I just read. We have lost sight of the supernatural of conversion. Something supernatural happened when I was resurrected from my death, being dead in my sins and transported into a life of grace and mercy. You see, we've lost sight of that. We've now constructed Christianity to be something that is your choice. You don't choose something that's supernatural.

My definition of regeneration is a direct and immediate, direct and immediate work of the Holy Spirit on your soul. That is supernatural. When you read the Book of Acts, what happened to Paul and Peter? The people of the world were astounded by them because they were told to be men of unlearned skill. They were not brilliant people. The world was astonished by them. Why is that? Because they had experienced a supernatural phenomenon known as grace and salvation. Christianity is not an ethical code. It is a supernatural phenomenon that causes the world to stand in awe of it because they can't explain it. How can an unlearned person like Peter preach like he was doing? He wasn't schooled in the Jewish temple. How can he do that? There was something behind that and they were just amazed.

The second thing I'm working on is this. I think one of the ways in which you can tell if you have an authentic Christian message is if the world rejects it. If the world rejects it, you know you're preaching the truth. Now if you come along and say, "Christianity is a technique to help you with at-risk kids," the world is going to say, "Wonderful! We want that." "Christianity is a moral code that is going to help you deal with abortion and unwed mothers." "Wow! We want that." If Christianity comes along and says, "What we can help you do is we can counsel you through your addiction in alcoholism." "Whoa, we want that." But if you say this, "The world is falling apart. It's under the condemnation of God and under his wrath," the world is going to reject it. I think one of the things in which we can tell if we have an authentic Christian message is the response of the world to it.

The Old Testament says, "Many say, 'Peace. Peace,' but yet there's no peace." If we come along say, "Christianity is going to help you get peace in the world," what are the politicians going to say? "Yes! We want that, because that's going to get me reelected." They're going to want all the stuff that we say that Christianity is. We've lost sight of the fact of this—Christianity is a supernatural phenomenon that cannot be explained. It's a mystery. Part of that mystery is this—you and I have been resurrected from the dead, in the transgressions of my life, and been transported by the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ to give me a life in Christ, and now the hope of my life is a future anticipation that my life I know is terminal. Every time I take a breath, I'm one step closer to glory. Life is terminal. But I have this wonderful hope that keeps me from sinking under the pressures of the discouragement of my circumstances in life. It's this—I have experienced a present confirmation of my future anticipation of the resurrection of my body for all glory in eternity.

So what do we think about? Don't think about the circumstances. You're, you're going to be discouraged. That's normal. That's okay. Don't beat yourself up for being discouraged and saying, "Oh, I'm not spiritual enough because I shouldn't be thinking that." No, it's going to be natural you're going to think that. The question is how do I think about what I'm thinking about that I should be thinking about that I'm not thinking about. {LAUGHTER} That's what we need to do.

Audience Member: *Can you say that again? {LAUGHTER}*

I don't think I could say it again. {LAUGHTER} In other words, what do you think about in the midst of your discouragement? Paul is saying, "Think upon three things." We've covered two of them. Next week we'll cover the third one, and that is this—think about the power of faith that will keep you from fainting. The power of the resurrection keeps you from sinking, and it will be power of gratitude that we will see next time that will help us understand and will keep us from complaining. You see, all of this is in the context of those 12 verses of 2 Corinthians 4. We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from me. That's the plan. The purpose is God shares his life with us, to put his life on display. The process is we go through the normal hassles of life

—external pressure, inward resistance known as grace, and the end result is this. So that the life of Christ may be manifested. We die in us, but life comes in You. We just give Christ’s life away.

So how do we manage our discouragements? The power of faith, the power of the resurrection and the power of gratitude.

Audience Member: Bruce, I was reading on down here [UNCLEAR] verse 19...

Where are you, please?

Audience Member: In Colossians 2:19, and I would just as soon you read that [UNCLEAR] in case yours is worded different than mine. Would you do that for me?

Colossians 2:19, “and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”

Audience Member: Yeah. That’s it right here. On mine it says, and I skipped some words, “We grow only as we get our nourishment and strength from God.” [UNCLEAR]...

Amen. That’s it. That’s great point. We only get that growth when we get it and the source comes from God. We have the treasure in earthen vessel. That’s where we get the shared life experience. We need to understand here the difference between growth and expansion. This word growth is talking about depth of maturity, not expansion of numbers. There’s a difference between church growth and church expansion. I’m committed to church growth, which means I want to take people deeper into the Word so they experience the power of God. It is my conviction that when you’ve preached the truth, and powerfully, from the pulpit week after week, you will have expansion, if God wills that.

I have a friend who is a pastor of a church of about 6,000 men. They asked him, “What did you do?” He said, “All we’ve done is preached the Scripture and the full counsel of God week after week after week, and it’s been God’s pleasure to have us expand.” People always want to say, “What did you do? Tell me your techniques. What are your programs? What are the things you do? Do you have small groups? Do you have this? Do you have that? Health groups? What do you do?” You see, we just preach Christ and him crucified week after week because we’re trying to take people into a church growth mode. There’s a difference between church growth and church expansion. Don’t confuse the two. That’s a great point. We will only grow as we get our source from the power of God. Think upon those things as we go through the discouragements of life.

Next week is Thanksgiving. Friday, do you want to meet on Friday? Or do we need to take a break?

Audience Member: Do you want to meet?

I have a wedding to do that morning, so I will not be here next Friday. Do you want to take a day off just to be with our families?

Audience Members: Yes.

Let’s do that. Shall we do that?

Audience Members: Yes.

Pass the word around. We will not meet next Friday. We'll come back in two weeks and we'll pick up the third of these, which is the power of gratitude. I trust you'll have a blessed Thanksgiving. As we have a time of Thanksgiving, let's just be thankful for the power of God, in our belief, the resurrection and our gratitude. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the privilege of sitting at your feet, that your Holy Spirit would teach us. Father, I trust that you are the one who brought us into your truth. We humanly can take us to the truth, but only you can guide us into the truth. I pray, Lord, that you have done that today. Remove anything that is inconsistent with your glory, and do it for Jesus' sake. May we only remember that which is consistent with your inerrant Word for your glory. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!!!