



BECAUSE HE LIVES

Becky Douglass 24/04/2022

I was watching an online Church Music conference a while ago and they were remembering and singing some of the songs which had had an impact on the church over the past 50 years or so. One of the songs was “Because He Lives” by Bill and Gloria Gaither. I hadn’t heard that song for a long time and as I listened, it brought back so many memories! I was first introduced to it at a Billy Graham Crusade which was held in Pontiac, Michigan (north of Detroit) where we lived during some of my teen years. My mum and I sang in the choir and went every single night for two weeks! It was a hard time for my family, and I remember that the song brought great encouragement to us as it reminded us that because Jesus was alive, we were not alone. The chorus says:

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives, all fear is gone.
Because I know who holds the future
and life is worth the living just because He lives.

As I celebrated Easter last week, the song came back to me. It prompted me to do some thinking about how the resurrection of Jesus affects us today. What does the Bible say about the impact of the Resurrection?

Impact of the Resurrection

This could easily be a whole sermon series! But I just want to do a brief overview and then take a look at our passage from John to focus in on a few specific ways we are impacted by the resurrection.

- PAST – We can know life instead of death

Jesus’ resurrection signalled His victory over Satan and sin and death and the provision of forgiveness and life for us. Paul, in Ephesians says:

God ... raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.
(Ephesians 1:20,21)

And what is true of Jesus becomes true of us as we share in his resurrection as we read earlier:

... even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead ... and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4,5)

He defeated sin, paid the penalty for our sins, cleansed us from all unrighteousness and gave us resurrection life. All this was made available to humanity when Jesus was raised from the dead and it is given to each one of us when we turn to him and trust in His salvation. Because He lives, we can know life instead of death.

- FUTURE – Life after death

In our mid-week meditations, we've been looking at some Easter songs which help us to remember the rich meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. This next week, the song is a traditional spiritual from the US south called "Ain't no grave can keep this body down". It reminds us of the promise that because Jesus was physically raised from the dead, we too will be physically raised from the dead one day. It points us to Paul's assurances to the Corinthians:

*Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back ... they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength.
(1 Corinthians 15:20,43,44)*

One day, we will be raised to life again with Christ and our physical bodies will be transformed, just as our spiritual lives are transformed now. The effects of sin and death will no longer deform us, and we will enjoy perfect fellowship with God and each other. Because He lives, we can know life after death.

- PRESENT – Life with Him each day

But Jesus' resurrection doesn't just affect our past and our future. It can transform our lives right now. In the passage from John which we read this morning Jesus makes a promise to His disciples.

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. (v. 18,19)

He promises that His departure is only temporary and that when He comes back to life again, he will come back to them. And when He lives, they will have new life in Him. His death isn't the end, but rather the gateway into something even better than they enjoyed before.

This new life with Jesus is many-faceted, but this particular passage addresses two areas that I want to look at in more detail this morning. Firstly, it gives us some ideas about how we can grow in our new lives with God. Secondly, we get a picture of how this life with God enables us to handle difficulties as they arise – and they will arise in this sinful, broken world!

A New Life – Realigning ourselves with God's will

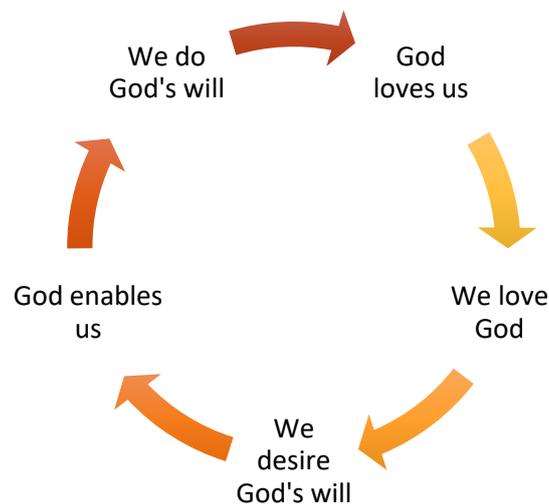
When God created humanity, He created them to be in a living, growing relationship with Him, serving as His representatives on this earth and reflecting His character. We were made for close relationship with Him, walking in step with His will. However, Adam and Eve

chose to turn their backs on this life and go their own way, thinking they knew what was best for their lives more than God did. Our new life in Christ involves learning to re-connect with God and re-align our lives with His will.

I think in the passage in John we see a cycle of growth that makes this re-connection and re-alignment possible. (We saw something similar in Colossians 1 when we studied that book last year.) The cycle starts with God and His love for us. In the John's first epistle he says:

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.
(1 John 4:9,10)

God's love starts the cycle, and everything flows out from that. His love is what prompts our love in return. We could not love God if He didn't love us first and make a way for us to respond to Him. And as we are drawn in love to God, our desires begin to change. Jesus said that, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (v. 15) As we turn to God, we will want to walk with Him, in accordance to His will. We will see the goodness of God and want to reflect it in our lives. We will know that He has our very best in mind and want to follow Him.



However, that is sometimes easier said than done, isn't it! We want to align ourselves to His will, but the sinfulness in us and the sinfulness around us pulls us in other directions. But God does not leave us alone. He is not up in heaven demanding our obedience, but right here with us enabling us to do His will. We cannot do it apart from His power in our lives. But with Him, we can change, we can re-align ourselves to His will and live in step with Him. Take a look at the passage from Psalm 119 for a moment. If you've got a pen, just underline all the things the psalmist asks God to do for them. "Teach me ... give me understanding ... make me walk ... give me eagerness ... turn my eyes ... reassure me ... help me"! The writer knows that without God's help, they have no ability to keep His commandments, or understand them or even to want to keep them. But as God does all these things – and He is always eager to help us! – then then it becomes possible to keep His commandments. And then our lives are renewed by His goodness.

But how does God enable us to do His commandments and re-align our lives to His will? The Bible gives us many ideas about this, but in this passage, Jesus tells us that all three members of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - are involved. Jesus himself, the Son, intercedes on our behalf, asking God to send another Helper to be with the disciples. (v. 16) He also promises to manifest or reveal Himself to us. (v. 21) The Amplified Bible translates

this as: *"I will let myself be clearly seen and make Myself real"*. We can only truly know Jesus as He reveals Himself to us. The Father responds in gracious giving. The one who gave His Son for our salvation will not stop giving us all we need. And what He gives in this instance is the Spirit.

The Spirit is called a "Helper" in the translation we are using, but that is woefully inadequate. The Greek word is "paraclete" which comes from a verb which means "to come alongside". Again, the Amplified Bible helps us get a better understanding by translating this as *"Comforter, Counsellor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, and Standby"*. Essentially, there is no single English word which is adequate to cover the rich way in which the Holy Spirit ministers to us. I've chosen to just say that He "paracles" us! He will guide us into truth and give us all we need to align ourselves to that truth.

As God – Father, Son and Spirit – works in our lives, then we will be able to keep His commandments, aligning ourselves to His will and outwardly showing that we love Him by our actions. And this takes us full circle because Jesus says that *"whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father ..."* (v.21) As I ponder this cycle, I am tremendously encouraged. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, I am able to enter into a "forever" relationship which will enable me to grow into all that God intends. I am not left to struggle on alone, trying to meet an impossible standard demanded by a distant God. No! I am given life so that I may grow in relationship with God and become like Him. That is a life worth living.

A New Comfort – Enfolded in God

But as wonderful as this is, we all know that this doesn't stop this broken world throwing a few difficulties across our path! How does our life with God help us when things go wrong, and life gets hard? I think Jesus has some very good words to help us with this as well. We find them in the middle of that passage.

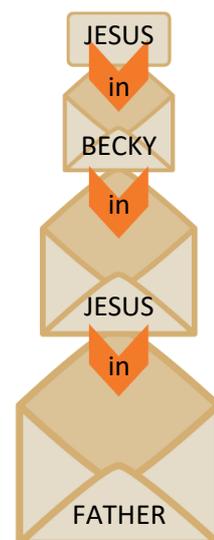
In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (v.20)

Jesus is explaining the nature of the relationship we will enjoy with God as a result of His resurrection. I like to think about it using the following illustration.

I have a piece of paper and three envelopes of increasing sizes. The paper has JESUS written on it. It is placed inside the smallest envelope which has BECKY written on it - *"I in you"*. This in turn is placed in the next envelope which has JESUS written on it - *"you in Me"*. Finally, this is placed in the largest envelope which has FATHER written on it - *"I am in the Father"*.

What strikes me is how safe I am. I am filled with Jesus and surrounded by Jesus and the Father. Nothing can get to me unless it first goes through the Father and Jesus; and when it gets to me, it encounters Jesus in me. If Jesus and the Father allow anything to get through to me, it must be because they've got it all worked out and know exactly how to handle things. I am not facing it alone!

Yes, we must live in this broken world and Jesus told his disciples that *"In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]"* (John 16:33 AMP). We can face these things with courage because we face them with Him.



One more thing – can anything separate Jesus from His Father? Of course not! They are one. Jesus says that our relationship with Him is just like that. I love the way that translators have translated this idea into one of the African languages. In trying to convey what Jesus is saying in the idioms of that culture, they have translated it: *"You will know on that day that I and my Father, we are one living-entity, and I and you, there's no longer any separating us."* (Source: Tagbanwa Back Translation) How good is that!

This world has some very scary things in it. Fear is a logical response if we are facing them alone. We can't see what is going to happen tomorrow and what the consequences will be in our lives and in the lives of those we love. But God can see, and God knows how to handle anything which we face – He's got a plan just for us. Why are we so often afraid?

I like to know what is happening and I am often straining trying to see what is around the next corner. I don't find it easy to relax into my relationship with God and trust Him completely. But I am learning. One thing that is changing as I learn more about trusting God is how I pray. Our natural approach is to work out what we think needs to happen and then go to God and ask Him to do what we want Him to do. Have you ever done that? I have! But I am learning to trust God enough to not feel like I have to give Him directions. For me, trusting God means going to him with open hands, willing to receive whatever He gives me, trusting that it will be what is best for me. Yes, I find it very helpful to talk to God about what is happening and to tell Him my fears and dreams and excitements and disappointments. I don't pretend a bad situation is anything but bad. But slowly – and sometimes I fail miserably at this! – I am slowly learning to then leave everything in His hands to do whatever He wishes in the situation. I am learning to allow Him to work out His solution according to what He knows is best for me and everyone else. And I am learning to trust that if things don't go the way I think they should, if something happens that causes me to react in fear, that if God allowed it to happen it is because it has gone through Him and through Jesus before it came to me. They have had plenty of time to work out a solution! And when it gets to me, Jesus will be right there within me to enable me to face it. And He will ask the Father to give me more of the Holy Spirit to "paraclete" me so that I will not go under.

Learning to live life with God each day is a process. We have a lot to learn. But because He lives it is possible. He loves us and desires to have us walk with Him. Will you respond to His love and allow Him to work in you?