

Seven Words That Changed Our Destiny

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this evening I want to share with you seven words which have changed human destiny.

Seven words which have changed human destiny. And Phil read them to us this evening. They were up here on the screen, verse 6 it was, he is not here but has risen.

Recently we've been celebrating Easter and it struck me again as we celebrated that special time of year. How much emphasis was put on this amazing fact by the apostles and the preachers of the gospel in the very early days.

You know, in a sense the cross was something that they accepted, was something that they had seen before. The Romans had done it many times and they had crucified many.

So in a sense it wasn't the most offensive part of the message. But when they began to preach the resurrection, this was the offensive part.

[1 : 1 0] To say that this man who had died as a criminal on the middle cross, that he had risen again and that he was alive again. This was what caused such consternation and indeed such opposition on the part particularly of the Jewish opposition in those days.

But you see, Easter, the celebration of the resurrection is so important. In fact, if you go to Eastern Europe, places where we work, you will discover that they make much more of Easter than we do.

They make much more of Easter than they do of Christmas for example. Easter is a very special time of year, especially for evangelism in Eastern European countries and so forth.

And we can see the reason for that. The apostle Paul says, if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is vain. Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

So we can say this dear friends, that in a sense the whole edifice of Christian truth falls to the ground and is meaningless if the resurrection is not true.

[2 : 2 9] But you see, it is true. Yes, it is an impossibility. It is an impossibility, humanly speaking. But it is true. And the senior we are going to look at this, ask a few questions and draw out a few implications about this account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ 7.

Words which have changed human destiny forever. He is not here but has risen actually in the original Greek, it is only five words or even four.

But what words that have changed if you like the destiny of men and women from hopelessness and from despair to hope from death and all the darkness of death to the prospect of everlasting life, eternal life in Christ.

All of it because Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. But you say to me again, well, this is something which is impossible and so it is, humanly speaking.

And yet it lies at the very heart of our Christian message. And I want to ask you just a few questions this evening about this.

[3 : 44] First of all, I want to ask you, are you really hearing what Christians claim about their Savior? Are you really hearing that? That Jesus of Nazareth was scourged, he was beaten, he was tortured, he was humiliated.

And finally he was killed, executed by crucifixion, by the Roman authorities. And then three days later he rose from the dead in contradiction of the so-called laws of nature.

He appeared to his disciples and to others to their consternation and their surprise and indeed eventually to their delight. But this impossibility lies at the very root and the very heart of our faith.

And I ask you, what is your reaction to that? You know, it almost disturbs me when people can kind of nod their head in assent to a truth like the resurrection.

And then go on as if it had never happened. It is a strange thing that people, if you like, can say that they believe such a thing and then continue to live.

[4 : 56] In fact, as if it had never taken place at all. So I want to ask for a thought if you are really hearing what Christians claim about their Savior.

This impossibility. And then I want to ask you this, are you trying to explain it away? You know, there have been so many attempts over the years to explain away, not explain, but explain away the truth of the resurrection.

The youth authorities themselves, well, they foresaw the implications of this claim of this man who died in the middle cross and he was going to rise again.

And they said, listen to the Roman authorities, put a guard on the tomb. Don't let anybody get near it because this man has claimed he's going to rise again. We don't want them coming stealing the body.

And so they did put a guard on the tomb. To make sure that nothing like that could happen. You see, despite that, and despite all of these other things, so many have tried to find a way of explaining away this foundation fact of the Christian faith.

[6 : 14] The body stolen, well, from under the nose of the guards and despite the extra precautions that they had taken. And if it was stolen, why did the folk who steal it not produce it?

If the Romans stole it, why didn't they produce it when these Christian upstarts started to preach their message? If the Jews stole it, they could have just undermined the apostles and they're preaching straight away if they produced the body.

And the disciples themselves, some have suggested that they stole the body. Well, what an impossibility that is for eleven men, very different than their backgrounds and upbringing and all the rest of it, to be prepared to die for what they knew was a fabrication, a lie.

No, it just doesn't hold water. We're faced with the fact of Christ's resurrection and it can't be explained away.

My third question is this. Have you any understanding of the relevance of this event to you? In a sense, I'm asking a former question again in another way.

[7 : 36] Have you any understanding of the relevance of this truth to you? How do you respond to this incredible event or how have you responded to it?

Have you merely accepted it, assented to it, but it has made no change to your life, to your thinking, to your, to the direction of your life? Do you just hear it and carry on as if it had never taken place?

Surely a Jesus, whom miraculously rose from the dead, must command your attention, even for a moment or two.

Because the resurrection is a life changing and a destiny changing event. And I want to show you that really tonight through what we have read together.

It changed the lives of the eleven disciples. Those who had promised Christ, who had declared their loyalty, that they would never leave Him, that they would never forsake Him in his own need.

[8 : 44] And Scripture tells us that when that hour came, they all forsook Him and fled. And what did they do? Well, they hid away. They hid away in an upper room for fear of their lives.

They were fearful. They were defeated. And I think we could say at that point in time, they had certainly lost hope and they were hiding for fear of their lives.

They were confused because what they thought was going to happen and what had hoped would happen, hadn't happened. They were disillusioned and they were defeated.

And yet, what do we discover? We discover that not long after this, those same men are out in the streets of Jerusalem. Now, they're not in the streets of some foreign town or some foreign city or some far away place.

But they're out in the streets of Jerusalem itself, preaching in the very city where all of this had taken place. Now, if you or I were going to put it like a start a new religion or start a new faith, we would certainly go to somewhere or into a situation where we couldn't be, as it were, contradicted straight away.

[10 : 03] We would take it far away. Not the disciples, not the apostles. They went on to the streets of the city where the population had witnessed the humiliation and the torture of Christ and where many of them had witnessed His death.

And they preached the resurrection to them. How did they do that? Or why did they do that? How did the change come about when the change came about because of the reality of the resurrection and resurrection power?

Because the risen Christ had appeared to them and He had sent them. He had commissioned them to go on to preach that gospel and that good news.

Their lives were transformed because they recognized the truth of what had happened. And what about these two on the road to Emmaus? I love this story. It's perhaps one of my favorite stories of Easter.

These two disciples who obviously thought that the news of this resurrection or the rumors of this resurrection were impossible.

[11 : 21] They were on the way to Emmaus and we can describe them as with a whole lot of deeds. They were down in the dumps. They were disgruntled. They were discouraged. They were depressed.

They were deflated and they certainly had lost hope. There were very interesting little phrase there when they were questioned.

The stranger who had joined them asked them about what they were talking about. And they had said this in verse 21. But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. We had hoped but had lost that hope. Hope had gone.

They were sad. They were down. Their hopes, their expectations were dashed. And their faith in Jesus, the Messiah, was seemingly empty now.

And then they were joined on the road by this stranger who asked them what they were discussing so seriously together. And they told their story and then this wonderful revelation of Jesus to them as he began to teach them in all the Scriptures.

[12 : 42] And the Scriptures were the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He was explaining to them, interpreting to them the things concerning himself.

And then as they were going to part, they coaxed him to stay. And he went in to stay with them and then he broke the bread and their eyes were opened as he broke the bread.

What did they do? Those defeated sad, hopeless disciples. Well that hour of the night, maybe nearly midnight, I don't know. They got up again and they took the journey back to Jerusalem to share the news that they had met the risen Jesus.

He changed their lives. And they brought into their hopeless situation hope into their sadness. He brought joy and into their dashed expectations or against their dashed expectations.

He renewed that faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. So what do we see? We see a transformation from fear to faith, from doubt to conviction, from despair and hopelessness to joy and eternal hope.

[13 : 55] And so I put it to you tonight, dear friends, that you cannot profess to believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and then go on through life unmoved, untouched, unaffected by that impossible work of God.

To do so is in reality to deny the resurrection. You see, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as I said before, is something that has changed human destiny forever.

And we learn lessons, some of them very basic and yet very important. And the lessons include these. Number one, death is not the end. Death is not the end.

There are many today who proclaim a philosophy, a message of emptiness and hopelessness and despair. They tell us that life is, the reality of life is material.

This is all that we are. This is all that we have. This is what we can see and feel and touch around us. That's life. And so when this life is over, that's it. There is nothing.

[15 : 12] What a depressing philosophy. What a depressing thought. That all of the efforts, all of the hopes, all of the aspirations, all of the...

those projects that we have invested our lives in, that when it comes to the moment of death, that's it. They don't mean anything.

They've gone and there's no ultimate purpose or point in them all. You know, William Shakespeare was a great man in many ways.

And he put things in words in a way, perhaps not many of us can. And it always comes to mind when I'm thinking about this, you know, those words that he wrote, life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets upon the stage.

And then has heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Well, how wrong could you be?

[16 : 18] How wrong could anyone be that this life is all that there is, that when the earthy remains of an individual is led into the earth, that that is the finish.

Nothing. No meaning, no purpose, no ultimate reality in that life at all. So that's the first lesson that's very important. Death is not the end.

Sometimes people glibly say, well, no one has ever come back to tell us. Well, of course, we believe that Jesus came back to tell us. And indeed, he tells us so through the resurrection.

And then secondly, death has been defeated because its cause has been defeated. This is the wonder. This is why I believe that the resurrection features so strongly in the preaching of the early church.

Death is defeated through the resurrection of Jesus because he has he has taken care of the cause of death. He has repaired. He has dealt with the cause of death, which of course is sin.

[17 : 30] Because our Lord Jesus died to provide us with the forgiveness for that sin which brought death, which made death inevitable, that sin which destroys our lives here and now, and that sin which will take men and women and young people into a lost eternity, unless it is repented of and forgiven.

And the resurrection we might see as God's acceptance of what his Son has done. The resurrection, if you like, is God's stamp of approval on what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished on Calvary.

Scripture speaks in more than one occasion of God raising Jesus from the dead. And that's an important statement. I know that also Jesus speaks of him laying down his life and taking it up again.

He says, nobody takes it from me. I lay it down myself and I can take it up with myself. And that's true. Of course Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. But the Bible also speaks of God raising his Son Jesus.

And that's significant because it means that God approved of, God accepted what his Son had done for sinners. So death is not the end.

[18 : 54] Death has been defeated because its cause sin has been dealt with. Thirdly, death is the entrance into a new and endless and glorious life.

If we are honest, we tend to think very much of death in a negative way, don't we? And rightly so. One old Puritan, Thomas Halliburton, he called it the death, the death of King of Terror.

And that's right. That's why there's sadness. That's why Christ wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He saw the negative side of death. But you know dear friends, for those of us who are in Christ, there's something wonderfully positive about death.

Because death becomes not the door out, but the door in to the fullness of life. And I maybe have shared this with you before, but when I was a young man in ministry, in my first charge, I used to visit an old lady, a godly old lady in our village.

And we had many spiritual conversations and while we were consuming the beautiful cakes that she used to bake. And that's why my lean 10 stone 7 frame turned very quickly into a rather pudgy frame.

[20 : 17] But those are some of the glories of pastoral visitation and pastoral care. But Granny Mac, as we called her, was a wonderful Christian lady. And she had a profound influence on many people, many of her neighbors around her.

And I said to her one day, Granny Mac, are you not afraid of dying? She said to me, oh son, I'm not afraid of dying. She said death for me is like coming out of the skull ray, that was her little working kitchen.

Like coming out of the skull ray into the dining room. I've never forgotten that. It was heartfelt, it was absolutely sincere. She knew that well her years were almost spent and that death would come.

But for her, there wasn't anything negative or depressing about that. For her, this was the entrance into the fullness of life. Dear friends, eternal life is much more than endless life.

Eternal life is a life that was meant to be for us before sin entered the world. It's a life of intimacy with God or maker.

[21 : 29] It's a life that is full of all that is rich and good and satisfying. It is a life that has been emptied of all its soils and saddens and destroys.

It is eternal life. It is that glorious new life which we have in Christ. Death is not the end. Death has been defeated because its cause has been defeated.

Death is the entrance hall to new and endless fullness of life. Christ's resurrection, fourthly, guarantees our resurrection.

Christ's resurrection guarantees our resurrection to eternal life. Paul speaks of believers as having been raised with Christ.

And if you're a believer tonight, already you have had a first resurrection and you've been born again from your death and sin. But we await a resurrection into that place where God and all His fullness dwells.

[22 : 36] The book of Hebrews speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ bringing many sons to glory. I love that phrase, not just sons, but sons and daughters. Bringing many children to glory.

You see, Christ has gone before as the first fruits. That's what Paul calls Him. He's the first fruit of those who slept. Paul says, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead.

The first fruits of those who have fallen asleep for as by man came death, by man has also come the resurrection of the dead. And so our resurrection to eternal life is guaranteed because we are in Christ and He has been raised to His place, His rightful place of glory and sovereignty at the Father's right hand.

And here's the last thing, and this is perhaps more challenging. Death is not the end. Death has been defeated. Death is the entrance hall to a new endless fullness of life.

Christ's resurrection guarantees that. It guarantees our resurrection to... And finally, our eternal life is to be lived out now as a witness to what Christ has done for us.

[23 : 52] You see, believers are not waiting for eternal life. Believers are already in possession of eternal life. And that gives us another new aspect of death as well.

Where basically it's... Physical death is not the end of anything. In fact, it is the way in which God brings the reality of our present eternal life into, if you like, that dimension of purity and perfection and holiness.

Dear friends, our eternal life is to be lived out now. There are implications to the resurrection. Jesus encourages us, and the Scriptures encourage us to live in the light of Christ coming again to take us home to be with Himself.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us to encourage one another while it is dead. And he says, all the more as you see the day drawing nearer.

Apostle Peter asks this question. He says, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness waiting for and hasting the coming of the day of God?

[25 : 07] What a challenge that is for us. That we as God's children are to live out our resurrection lives in the context of a sinful world. A world that has lost hope.

A world that has no hope outside of Jesus Christ. A world that is largely ignorant of and dismissal of the truths of our faith.

And a world which very many of whom laugh to scorn the idea of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, the alternative to eternal life is what the Bible calls the second death. That's why this message is so important.

Second death is the everlasting separation from God and all that is good. You know there is a sort of an idea that floats about and sometimes it comes to the surface when unregenerate folk are talking that hell is going to be one great big party.

[26 : 16] Dear friends, don't be fooled. Hell is going to be a place where all that is good is absent. Where all that is pure and rich and enjoyable is absent.

Because the presence, the gracious presence of God will not be there. Those in hell will be separated from Him for all eternity.

That is the root of the torment and the punishment that is reserved for those who continue to reject Jesus Christ as saviour.

But what a joy, what a message the resurrection brings to us this evening. Seven words which change human destiny.

He is not here but has risen. Hope for hopeless lives. Fulness for empty lives.

[27 : 25] Forgiveness for guilty lives. And heaven for hell bound lives. What joy, what hope, what a thrill.

Jesus risen from the dead, raised for our justification. He the first fruit of those who slept.

May the Lord speak to us tonight through His Word. May He speak to any who are unsaved. But may He also speak to those of us who are His children.

And help us too by His grace to live out the truths of His resurrection. His new life before a watching word for the glory of His name.

Amen. Let us pray together. Our Father, we thank You this evening that we can say there is hope.

[28 : 28] There is hope. There is joy. There is fullness of life. And all of it Lord, we see rooted in this wonderful impossibility.

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Father, we thank You that He is the Prince of life. And we thank You, dear Father, that You who spoke a word in the beginning.

And that which was not came to be. We thank You Father that You too have raised Your Son from the dead. And that with Him You have and will raise many sons and daughters into glory.

Those who have trusted in His finished work on the cross. Lord bless Your Word to us tonight. And as we come to a close here, we remember Lord, those of our brothers and sisters in the land of Ukraine, many of them meeting in very difficult circumstances.

Some meeting in the ruins of their church buildings, some meeting in homes, some meeting in the open air, Lord. But many of them Lord, many of them still trusting and still living for You in the face of great evil and great destruction.

[29 : 47] Remember them for good tonight Lord. And remember us Lord, help us in our context here to live for Your glory. Bless the church here Lord. The churches, both churches here at Garloway.

We pray for Your rich blessing upon them, upon the ministry of Your Word, upon the fellowship of Your people. And we ask Lord that the days ahead may be days full of blessing for them.

We pray for Your blessing to be upon us tonight as later we separate and go our different ways. And we ask all of these things in the glorious name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen.