



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual*

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## **“The Pass-Through Power of Resurrection” Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30; Acts 9:36-43**

I don't like to begin sermons with announcements. Beginnings matter. A seminarian turned in his typed-up sermon to his homiletics professor, and when he met with him for a conference the professor started out very positively. He said to the young man, "I like your exegesis. You have presented the meaning of the text in a helpful and clear fashion. Your three points make sense, they show balance and progression. Your introduction and your conclusion both show a great deal of thought. The illustrations you used seemed most appropriate. However, I am going to give you a D on the sermon." The seminarian was taken aback and said, "Why a D if it's all that good?" The professor said, "Well, frankly, it's because of your sermon title. It is one of the worst I've ever seen. Nobody will want to come to hear a sermon entitled: 'The Pericopes of Jesus In Relationship To the Eschatology of the Apostle Paul.' I tell you what I'll do. You see if you can come up with a better sermon title and I'll reconsider the grade. What you want is a title that will reach out and grab people by the heart, a title that will compel them to come and hear what you have to say. Imagine that title out on the sign in front of a church with such impact that if a car stopped in front of the church and the people in the car saw the sign, it would be so powerful it would motivate them to immediately get out of the car and run into the church." The young man said he would give it his best shot. So he went home and he wrestled with this task all night long, sweating bullets. The next morning he showed up at his prof's office and handed him his new sermon title, which read: "Your Car Has A Bomb On It!"

That's one kind of power, isn't it? The power of fear. We can be easily motivated by the power of fear. Some people fear going to the dentist so much that their teeth rot out, and they die younger than they need to, all because of fear. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 this nation felt a jolt of fear, and then of anger. And this man (Adolph Hitler) inspired fear in many millions. But there are many kinds of power, not just fear.

Here's power—power to perform work. (bulldozer)

Here's power—money is power.

Here's another kind of power—people power, as in the peaceful overthrow of the Marcos government in the Philippines, or the ill-fated Tiananmen Square demonstration in China. Tyrants fear this power.

Some people want a lot of power. Some people want very little power, because often with power, comes responsibilities. Most of us want at least enough power to secure our basic needs for ourselves and our families.

Jesus Christ has a lot to say about power. Listen first to Revelation chapter 7, starting in verse 9, as John in prison on Patmos relays his vision God has given him about the end of the world. Listen for God's Word FOR US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

Jesus is that Lamb of God, and faithfully following him—doing what he tells us to do even at great cost—means everything in the end. People from every nation where the gospel is preached—what a great inspiration to Jesus’ desire that we should make disciples of all nations! This is the reward for people who use resurrection power well, because of their connection with Jesus.

In John 10:22-30, we get a conversation between Jesus and his opponents, concerning his connection with the Father. Listen again for God’s voice in these words from the New International Version. *[text]*

Here is the root of the power of Jesus, which we just saw ratified in the vision John received. The root of the power of Jesus is his connection with the Father: “I and the Father are one.” If you read further, you see that people were ready to pick up stones to kill him, for what he had just said was blasphemy. This “oneness”—Jesus is saying he is God, which violates the doctrine of original sin, that humans are dirty, and there is this huge barrier between us and God. Anyone who teaches otherwise is telling lies about God, and must be stoned, as the Law of Moses commands in Leviticus 24. I encourage you to read further in John 10 today. There’s important material there to help us understand Jesus and ourselves before God.

Now, Jesus’ disciples were there during this controversy. We don’t have a record of their reaction to Jesus’ words—were they with the crowd, alarmed at their Master’s radical statement, and afraid for him and for themselves? I can imagine them sort-of *leaning away from him*, so as not to be seen as agreeing with what must have sounded like crazy talk.

Not so much in John’s gospel, but definitely in the other (synoptic) gospels, one of the big themes is, “the dullness of the disciples”. Jesus says something to them, or they hear his teaching the crowd, and they are clueless. We, with the benefit of 2000 years of study, can feel so superior to Jesus’ first men—but are we? Do we get this now, any better than they did? What caused their turnaround, their turn-on? At the end of May, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised, 50 days after the Passover when Jesus was executed. That day, the disciples “got it”—got the Spirit of God that helped them over the gap between when they had experienced and what it all meant. The book of Acts is a continuation of the gospel story, and in the coming and filling by God’s Spirit, the disciples are filled with resurrection power. They moved from mere witnesses of Jesus raised from death, and were transformed into apostles, missionaries of the Risen Lord with the power to do and to tell amazing things with this resurrection power of Jesus.

Great example—Acts 9, starting in verse 36. Turn there in your Bibles, please. This is our focus today. Listen for the Living Word of God. *[text]*

Here is resurrection power at work! But notice, it is what I am calling a “pass-through” power. Dorcas was dead. Peter raises this kind woman to life by the power of God. That’s clear from the record of Peter praying—connecting with God. Peter does it, but it’s God’s power in him—and THROUGH him—for the benefit of the Gospel, which touches all of life, not just our “beliefs”.

Peter is just like Jesus who is just like God—as long as Peter stays connected with God as Jesus did. Remember when the disciples were on the boat heading across Lake Galilee, and Jesus came walking to them on the water? (see Matthew 14) They at first thought he was a ghost. But Peter said, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water!” Jesus did—and Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. He was doing it. But then his

attention got distracted by the wind and waves, he took his eyes off Jesus, and he began to sink, with all his clothes weighing him down further. “Lord, save me!” he called. And Jesus reaches down and saves him—a great sample of God’s plan, reaching down to save us.

The point is, Peter even then was “doing it”—a miracle—as he was connected with Jesus. And because he received the Holy Spirit with the others at Pentecost, even though there was “no Jesus to see”, he could connect with Jesus in prayer, and that same resurrection power flowed to him, and through him, for the thing God wanted to do. Peter had the potential for Jesus-likeness even before he was launched out at Pentecost with the others. But it’s nothing without being connected to Christ.

Now, here’s the scary part. So do you. The pass-through power of resurrection is available to you. But just like Peter or anyone else, you have to be connected to Jesus, living “in Christ”, as Paul wrote, “asking in my name” as Jesus said. What might God want to do through you?

Literally, here, Peter raised the dead, fulfilling months or years later what Jesus had commanded his first disciples to do earlier, on their first mission field trip without him. You can read versions of this in Matthew and in Luke. In Matthew 10:5-8, Jesus said, “*Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*”

What might God want to do through you, with this pass-through resurrection power?

Might God want to heal? We have a healing service here on the third Fridays of most months. We do not heal. The pass-through power of the resurrected Lord heals. It requires the healing ministers to be in touch with God right then and there. It’s all about God, showing the power of his love in resurrecting Jesus from the dead, and bringing healing to people now. Might God want to heal, through you?

Might God want to raise the dead through you? How scary is that?!

I got great news this week! Perhaps you’ve noticed over the years that when I lead prayer here in worship, and we get to the part about “people who are far from God” or, “people who we want to ‘get it’ about God”, I have said two particular names (among others) FOR YEARS. I have spoken their names every week. FOR YEARS. And this week, word came to me that both have accepted Christ and started a new life. I was stunned. I’ve prayed for years. And when you pray for years, your enthusiasm can weaken, sort-of “gray over”. So when I heard about their salvation, it stopped me in my tracks. You mean, God still listens, even after weeks and weeks and months and years of praying, when I am weary of hearing my own voice say the same names over and over? ☺

Here’s the story, the parts with which I have been involved. Two folks showed up here at APC about 7 years ago. The woman loved our Lord, but her husband was a hard case. He was raised in East Germany, and his parents were atheists. He was educated in the atheistic schools. He became an engineer, and was surrounded by unbelievers. But the pressures of the Soviet state were crushing the family, and somehow, there was an opening and a Presbyterian church in New York sponsored the family to come over. This was the man’s first exposure to what we would recognize as genuine, living Christian faith. But it rolled off him; he found work in the aerospace industry for a subsidiary of Ford, as I remember. He met his wife, and they married

and had two children, a son and a daughter. The family lived in the Bay Area and the kids grew up and left home, one by one.

Now, how did the parents get to Auburn? Actually, they had not planned on Auburn at all. They had built a fine home on the banks of a river in Northern California. But remember the wet year we had, back in 1992, or whenever? Their home was threatened as the waters rose. Finally, it was clear the whole thing would be destroyed by flood. So neighbors turned out with pickup trucks and farm vehicles and unloaded the whole house. Then, with much sadness, they watched as the river surrounded, moved the house off its foundations, and took it downstream.

The move to Auburn had not been in their plans. The wife decided to visit us, and then her husband came with her. I took a shine to them, and listened a lot. I got to talking with the man, and heard about his family back in the Soviet Union and coming to America. We discovered a lot of common ways of thinking, and we spent coffee or lunch together on occasion. The man was clearly searching. He came to the Men's Breakfast Bible study. He and his wife joined a Life Group.

Then one Sunday, the husband comes in with this big smile. Sometime in the previous week, he had awakened in the morning, and suddenly he somehow knew that he had crossed the line. He was on the "believer" side—that was how he put it. He was surprised and delighted, and hungry to learn more. So more conversations, and a meeting with the Session, and we baptized him as a new believer in Christ—in his 60's, eager to make up for lost time.

But now he had a new ache, too. He wanted his son to discover God and follow Jesus, as his sister had been doing. But like father, like son, in several ways. The son was a sharp and very successful financial services manager. He had risen quickly in the company, and when the company was bought out by another firm, he got one of those "golden parachutes" that put him into retirement, not having to work at least for a while, and he was just in his 40's.

I got acquainted with the son, and found I did not click as well with him as I did with his father. And as our church grew and my responsibilities expanded, I found I did not spend much more time with him. And then there were additional responsibilities in the family that the son stepped up to shoulder, so he had less time, also. Visiting with him was on my "do-list", but it's been well more than a year since I sat down with him. Pretty pathetic.

Well, this solid line captures the part of the story I participated in. And from a distance, it makes me a hero—leading the father to faith, and helping the son. But that's misleading. Let's compress "my" part, and look at what happened before and after my contact with the family. Long before the parents got to Auburn, the wife had been praying for her husband with all her heart. She got others in her former church and then this church, and others in her friendship circles to ask God to lead her husband to come to Jesus for life. In the year before they came to Auburn, the parents had moved into a dream house they built beside a river here in northern California. But that year was one of the wettest on record, and the river rose suddenly, and started tearing at their house. With the help of neighbors, they frantically were moving furniture and family belongings out and onto pickup trucks, and then stood up on the road as their dream house twisted, and fell, and washed downstream. It was devastating.

All this and more—stretching all the way back to that Presbyterian Church that sponsored this Soviet family's immigration many years ago—happened before I even met the father. I did my part—not out of duty, or out of greed to get another member or our church, but out of genuine love for the guy.

With their son, I did what I could, but I was going in to his house cold. We talked. No spark. Life happened. The son stepped up to help care for his sister's daughter when that family fell apart in San Jose. That young girl was (and is) a believer, who moved in with her grandparents here in north Auburn. The grandparents got her through Forest Lake Christian School, and she's now in college and loving life. Is it too much to imagine that her love for our Lord affected her uncle, too?

The son loved to ride road bikes, in tours and races, and began to follow Lance Armstrong's career closely through his Tour de France wins, his cancer, his comeback. The son became a participant in Lance Armstrong's charity, raising money for support of cancer victims and cancer research. He got to ride in an event with Armstrong, met him personally, and spent some time with him during a national "thank you" event thrown by Armstrong's charity. But in the year after Lance's last Tour de France win, the son was riding his bike somewhere up here, and there was an accident. He was wearing his helmet, and it probably saved his life. But in the fall he had suffered some brain trauma, and that caused other problems. Serious surgery was considered, and many prayers were lifted for him. He got by this challenge, but his less confident balance issues have led him to give up bike racing. Another spill like that, and he'll be in serious trouble. Is it too much to think that coming face to face with his mortality cracked open his lifelong self-sufficiency? And made room for God?

Now, remember, there's no contact with me during much of this—a couple of short phone calls, is all. The grandparents—needing a youth program for their granddaughter—had moved their membership to another local church, and the son and daughter-in-law attended that church, too. So somewhere in another good local Christian church, the son and daughter-in-law crossed the line of faith, and are now part of God's forever family.

Did I lead the father to Christ? Well, no. God did that; I wasn't even in the room at that moment. A lot of crucial links were joined together before I even met the man. I did get to confirm his faith and celebrate it with our Church Family. It was very cool!

Did I lead the son to Christ? No. But I provided a link or two in the chain that led to he and his wife crossing the line of faith, with another church family to confirm it and celebrate it.

Now, why did I tell you this story? Because it's the most recent—in this very week—example I can think of, of the pass-through effect of the resurrection power God gives me as I walk with Him. This son and daughter-in-law were dead in their sins, as Paul says. Now they are alive in Christ. I helped raise the dead!

And so can you.

By calling some people "saints", or "heroes", we put distance between them and us. With all that we say about Jesus being "100% God and 100% man", we put distance between us and him. And so we feel excused, unqualified, not needed for serving God. We leave it to others—to the religiously zealous, to "hired holy men and women (pastors)" like me. And so we cheat ourselves out of resurrection power that makes us fully alive, and gives us huge gifts to give to others that will change their lives, too.

Now, are you sorry you came to worship this morning? Because I think you are discovering God has plans for you who call yourselves Christians, followers of Jesus the Christ. Yes, you.

What are you going to do about it?

Will you sign up for the next APC 301 class on spiritual gifts for your pass-through ministry? Will you sign up for the next APC 201 (“Contagious Christian”) and APC 202 (“Connecting with God”) classes? Will you start really PRAYING, setting aside time to HEAR FROM GOD, as well as tell God your woes and needs?

The pass-through power of resurrection, the Bible shows us, is there, it’s real, and our lives are puny without it. How much longer do you want to live on your own power, instead of resurrection power?

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on April 29, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]