

## How the Resurrection Redefines Life

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The resurrection is like a fork in the road. If you believe it, it takes you one way; if you disbelieve it, it takes you another. But it's no ordinary fork. What we choose to do with it alters our entire life. *And we'll see in this text it changes the way we define success, transforms our approach to suffering, and alters our ultimate destination.* Fork in the road.

### Redefining Success

*The Discovery* is a film about a scientist who makes a discovery so significant it drastically alters the world. He discovers that brain waves continue to emit from the mind after a person dies. He finds scientific proof of an *afterlife*. How do you think people respond? By committing suicide, millions, all around the world. Why? With definitive proof of an afterlife, they now have hope for a better life. So to escape the hardship of this life, they pull the trigger. To be reunited with loved ones, they kill themselves. If you had definitive proof of an afterlife, how would it affect you? If you knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, you enter another life after you'd die, what would you do? Pull the trigger? Paul made a discovery so powerful it radically altered the rest of his life. *He encountered the resurrected Christ, and came to believe that, not only was Jesus raised from the dead, but that all who hope in Him will also be raised to eternal life.* But his response was different. Instead of taking his life, he gave his life; instead of leaping to find what's on the other side, he transformed his life on this side. You could say he "pulled the trigger" on his old life, a life of remarkable achievement. Paul was no slacker: "[circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin](#)" (3:5). He was not an adult convert to Judaism, so he was circumcised so early, *he was raised in the faith.* Of all the people in the world, he was from the chosen people, Israel. And out of all of Israel, he was from a special tribe, the tribe that contributed the very first king. You get the idea—he had great pedigree—but he also had some great accomplishments. He was an expert in Jewish law, both in theory and practice. Esteemed by many. He was the Steve Jobs of Judaism, with a passion for perfection to go with it. He arrested and persecuted Christians, who perverted his Jewish faith with belief in Jesus as the Messiah. And that all before he wrote half the New Testament, turned history on its head by preaching the gospel, and planting churches all over the Mediterranean. Kinda leaves you asking what have I done with my life? We don't have to have immense success to identify with the longing for it. Have you ever been around successful, notable people and suddenly felt small and insignificant? A tiny voice pops into your head and starts interrogating you. What have you accomplished? What do you have to show? Why do we do that? Sociologist Ernest Becker says it's a response to death. He describes us as emerging from nothing, then we gain a name, a consciousness, deep inner feelings, an excruciating yearning for life and self-expression, and then we die. Sensing our impotence, our ephemeral nature, we create what he calls "immortality projects." We might build a temple, get a higher degree, establish a family, start a business, engage in philanthropy, take a selfie, all in an attempt to avert death. We're haunted by questions like, "What will people think about me after I die? What will they say at my funeral? Will anyone remember me?" Becker says this undeniable impulse is an attempt to deny death. To construct a way for us to live on, long after we are gone. Paul comes along and puts a gun to

his immortality project when he says, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (7–8). Resurrection fundamentally changed his notion of success. He looks back at all his accomplishments and describes them as loss—three times he uses the word. Now what would compel a person of his stature to throw shade on his accomplishments? One word. Christ. Each time he mentions loss, he pairs it with a gain: loss for the *sake of Christ*, loss because of the *surpassing worth of Christ*, counting them as rubbish to *gain Christ*. The word *surpassing* means above the mark. He’s saying when I stack my accomplishments next to Jesus, they can’t even see him. He’s so good he’s off the scale, beyond measure valuable. In comparison, my accomplishments are rubbish, refuse. Now success is: “**knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection**” (3:10). Have you found something this great? Something that puts your accomplishments in its shadow? Until you do, you’ll be driven to perform, to compare, to manufacture a kind of self-righteousness. Everything will have to bow down to your success—family, ethics, even your own health. If you have found something this great, can people tell? Or have you fallen back into an outdated form of success?

### Transforming Suffering

What difference does the risen Christ make? Well, I hope you’re starting to see through Paul’s life just how transformative it can be. Not only does it change our notions of success; it transforms our approach to suffering: “**and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death**” (10). Typically, suffering is something we try to avoid. We minimize it in as many ways possible—adopting the latest diet, maintaining rigorous exercise, monitoring our steps, obtaining the very best medical care. I’m not suggesting these aren’t beneficial, but what I am suggesting is that we’re crazy if we don’t think an obsession with health hasn’t influenced our view of suffering. When I was in Burma, I saw a beggar with a vestigial leg, one leg dwarfed and another very long thin leg sticking out in the dirty street. Sitting on his haunches, leg outstretched, he begged for money. We don’t see that in America. We hide our sick and deformed. We sterilize our society from suffering. We go on a cruise to die. Did you know they have a morgue in the bottom of cruise ships? So, when Paul says he wants *to share in his sufferings*, it strikes us as odd, as something to avoid. So why should embrace his approach? The Greek word he uses for share is the word sometimes translated as fellowship, *koinonia*. It means to be in close association, intimate relationship. Suffering can put us in touch with Jesus. Say you’re talking to a casual friend, someone you have fairly surface conversations with, and then one day they open up and share about some pain or difficulty in their lives. Suddenly your whole relationship changes. You’re connected in a way you never were before. You fellowship over the suffering. Paul is saying: suffering is an invitation to intimacy with Jesus. But you have to take it, and if you do, it keeps things from staying on the surface. It puts us in touch with *why he chose to suffer.* It wasn’t suffering on a whim; it was suffering in our place. Suffering for our sins. Was that necessary? Say your car gets hit. There’s a lot of damage. It is necessary someone pay for it? Absolutely. We insist on it. If they don’t want to hand over insurance we’ll get red-faced about it. How much more serious do you think God is about the damage we’ve done to his glory? All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Our immoral choices make a wreck of his glory. Our immortality projects a spit in the face. So you see, someone has to pay the price to repair the damage done to his glory. We can pay it, in death and hell or, in a stroke of mercy, God can pay it, Christ on a cross. See, when Jesus comes down, he doesn't come just to be in touch with our suffering but to take on our suffering. To absorb the cost of our sins. Resurrection insures that payment. So when Paul says he wants to share in Christ's sufferings, he's saying he refuses to stay superficial with Jesus. He won't just accept just the shiny side; he'll embrace the painful, hard-to-look-at cost of the cross. Are you being superficial with Jesus? Is he just an accoutrement to your life? You can't count on that. To share in his sufferings is to appreciate the depth of his sacrificial love, so much that we become like him in his death. We die to Self and live for Christ. That puts us in deep fellowship with God.

### Final Destination

The resurrection *changes the way we define success; transforms how we approach suffering, and finally, alters our final destination.* Putting it all together our aim should be to: "know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (11). Now, this final phrase can be a bit puzzling. It seems to suggest that, after all the loss, all the suffering, resurrection is only a *possibility*. But earlier he says, "to live is Christ and to die is gain...My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better (1:23). So he's sure; he's not saying it's a possibility. And notice, he does not say My desire is to depart and be in heaven. The Bible never baits people with heaven; it calls them to Christ, because Christ is the reward, not heaven. The question is not are you going to heaven when you die? It's do you have Christ when you're alive? Christ, not heaven is the ultimate destination. A couple implications. Let's start with *Jesus' resurrection*. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then there is no final payment for sin or victory over death. We are a mass of meaningless cells moving towards decomposition. Guilt, love, hope all hormonal secretions. But if Jesus did rise from the dead, guilt is forgiven. Love is as real as the cross. And hope is a signal meant to lead us to Christ. If Jesus did rise from the dead, then he is the first new life pushed up from the dirt. He is what Paul calls, "the firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:16), with a whole new humanity to follow. A glorious new resurrection body. In Anthony Doer's book *All the Light We Cannot See*, a boy who loves shortwave radios is conscripted into Hitler's brutal child soldier program. He is so good with radios, he is selected to work on them for the Nazis. But what they don't know is that he has tuned into a broadcast from a French girl and her father. When the girl and her Father read great literature over the radio waves, it sparks hope in the boy for something more than the cruelty of war. As it turns out, there are many forms of light that we cannot see, radio waves just one of them. Commenting on the meaning of his title, Anthony Doer says, "The light that cannot be seen—radio waves from a girl—was salvation for the boy that received them." The resurrected Jesus is sending back light that we cannot see through this Word. It is his way of reaching *you*. If we follow the waves, they will lead us to him, and eventually land us in a resurrected body in a resurrected world, with a resurrected Christ. The one, true immortality project. Jesus continues to send back reminders of a success we could never construct, meaning in suffering we could never create, and a destination we could never imagine. Resurrection, the fork in the road.