

Effectiveness

Easter-Powered Lives:

Ephesians 1:18-23, 1 Peter 2:4-12

May 25, 2008

Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

This Memorial Day we remember more than a million American soldiers who were killed serving our country in various wars. Their deaths took place in host of circumstances. Do you remember former NFL football player Pat Tillman who left the Arizona Cardinals to serve in Afghanistan? Apparently, he was mistakenly shot and killed by an Army sniper. I read of another soldier whose family buried him in bitterness and emotionally-charged demonstrations. I then read of a proud mother, who spoke in gratitude for her son, Sgt. Jason Bishop, who saw a car speeding toward a checkpoint. Knowing his patrol was vulnerable, he took action to stop it. The car exploded taking his life, but he saved his patrol. I also heard of Private Milton Olive III who decades earlier walked single file with his buddies through a rice patty in Vietnam when an enemy tossed a live grenade in their midst. The buddies froze; but Milton picked up the grenade, tucked it in his abdomen, and fell to the ground, so that he could absorb the explosion for his comrades. He was successful. He died instantly, but his friends all live today because of him.

Although death is an ugly thing and a foe, it is not meaningless. Death is not the end of a person. It is the end of a stage of life. Today God acts to help you and me grasp this.

Some of you remember the Bible story about Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was a loyal and skilled soldier of King David. He acted more righteously drunk than his king acted sober. Uriah was needlessly and purposely killed in battle to cover King David's sexual indiscretion with

Uriah's wife Bathsheba. Was Uriah's death meaningless? The answer depends on two things: (1) what follows death for the believer and (2) what is the mission of the believer.

What follows death for believers like Uriah? Are we released from our bodies and go to a heavenly abode for spirits? Do we have an eternal escape from here? No, believers go to a temporary heavenly estate. Jesus said that in my Father's house are many rooms. A biblical study of that word *rooms* or *dwelling places* suggests it is used more of a temporary abode like a hostel. We have trouble with the term *heaven* because it has so many meanings. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven that is advancing on earth. In Revelation 12, a voice tells the heavens to rejoice because Satan and his angels have been hurled out of it where they once acted as our accusers. We see the stars and planets in the heavens. When we think of Heaven, we think of pearly gates and streets paved with gold; yet those features describe the New Jerusalem that the Apostle John saw come out of heaven.

Through Easter power, God doesn't scrap what he has created. He restores it. Through resurrection power, Jesus is the first fruit of all who sleep in death. His permanent home is an immortal body. The Bible says that all creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God, the redemption of our bodies. God is not scrapping what he has made. No, he is redeeming and restoring it. We will receive the permanent home of immortal bodies. God is making the heavens and earth new. The lion will lie down with the lamb, and there will be no death by earthquakes, typhoons, tsunamis, volcanoes or any other process.

Today, God is converting you. God is changing what you see with your heart. God is changing what you see and God is changing what you believe about what you see. God is changing you so that you see your glorious mission of redemption and restoration on earth, and readily give your life to it. God is changing you so that you see the riches you have in the family

of God. You are not impoverished. You have many gifts to unwrap with the saints that are for your work, health, and enjoyment. God is changing your heart so that you see the mighty power, the power that removed the hold of death on Jesus and makes his word rule all creation. That power is at work in you and for you. Every answered prayer is a sign of that power and what's coming. Every healing is a sign of that power and what's coming. They are signs of what God is promising to us, bringing to us and accomplishing through us.

Brothers and sisters, God is assembling us as his temple where Easter power, released by the Spirit of Jesus, restores, reforms and transforms a broken, dying world. Together he assembles us to be host for the Spirit of Jesus working in 21st Century. We cannot live Easter-powered lives if we resist the assembling work of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Peter we are given the image of stones that fit together. Peter begins with Jesus. Jesus is the cornerstone. He is the foundation and guide for our life. We need to know his words. We need to know his works. You won't understand yourself until you do. You won't understand your purpose until you do. You won't understand your potential until you do. Know Jesus' words and works. Jesus is also the capstone. He ties us all together in perfect form. Consequently, we must know his Spirit. We must identify his Spirit at work with us. Don't ask what is right or wrong? That is a godless vision. Ask what Jesus is saying and doing? We must know that. Everything else is irrelevant. If we don't know what Jesus is saying and doing right now, how can we claim to live and act in him. It becomes obvious that for the moment, at least, we are resisting or grieving his Spirit.

Second, Peter points to us as stones fitted together. There is no way for a temple stone to be effective unless it is fitted with others. To the degree a stone is not fitted, it is not useful. It even harms. Indeed, a rock out of place can do a lot of harm.

When I entered college 35 years ago, I played tennis. I've even experimented with playing competitively. The best tennis racket back then, in my estimation, was the Arthur Ashe Competition. I couldn't afford it, so I went one step below, the Head Master. I still have that racket. When it arrived at the university post office, I picked it up and I literally ran back to my dorm. Unfortunately, my right foot hit an out-of-place rock. Instead of playing tennis I limped in agony. Whether it is a pebble in the shoe, a rock in the path or a boulder in the highway, a stone out of place brings agony. Although it takes both work and maintenance to fit rocks together, it is much more costly and painful to let them lie about.

Listen to Peter's description of us Christians:

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10, NIV)

God makes it clear that our effectiveness as human beings, as missionaries of the resurrection, as possessors of Easter power depends on being his people, his priesthood, his nation. Moreover, the Bible reveals that being a people correlates with mercy. We are not a people without mercy.

Some of us want to hunt for a group until we fit, but maybe God plans to work with us until we fit. The tool he uses to make us fit is mercy. It is the key tool in lasting marriages, it is the key tool for self-acceptance, it is the key tool for growing Christ-like love, and it is the key tool for fitting broken individuals together as God's temple.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus has begun to make all things new through your faith. Therefore, found your life on Jesus' words and work. Fill your life with Jesus' Spirit. Fit your life with Jesus' followers, and you'll find your life is effective for eternity!