

No Resurrection Without a Death

2 Corinthians 5:17

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There is a dangerous theory in Modern Christianity that teaches the only thing required of the Christian is behavior modification rather than a total heart transformation.

"All you have to do is be good," so it says. But Isaiah 64:6 tells us that all our righteous acts are like filthy rags and Romans 3:10-12 says, "...There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Here's the thing.

The world says, "you're breathing, you're thinking, you're moving, you must be alive." But the Bible says we are dead. Dead in our sins and trespasses with no hope of being anything else but walking corpses.

But in times of physical, spiritual or emotional pain, what we want from God is healing. We want to be restored to what was before and that's where the prayer ends. That sort of healing might disguise the symptoms of our brokenness, for a while, but God is not content with band aids that just "patch" what's broken. You see, the earthly healings we put so much stock in and spend so much time pursuing have an expiration date.

Jesus healed the young man let down through the roof, but where is he now? Dead.

Jesus healed the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, but where is she now? Dead.

In December 1967, Louis Washkansky, a South African, received the 1st "successful" human-human heart transplant. He died 18 days later.

The medical profession is obsessed with "new and better" ways of prolonging our lives, yet it is estimated that 150,000 people, globally, die every day.

As Benjamin Franklin wrote, "nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes."

The same is true of behavior modification. It only gets us so far and it doesn't really change the core of the problem. Behavior modification is a band-aid in every sense of the word, because it is seeking healing without transformation.

God's goal is not merely to "fix" our lives, but to conform us into the image of Jesus and that requires us to jump into the deep end with him to address the root cause of our brokenness – the condition of our hearts, because from God's perspective, our hearts are the problem:

Jeremiah 17:9-10 - *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

Revelation 3:17 - *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

We don't need earthly healing. We don't need behavior modification. We need a heart transplant and that is what God has promised to give us:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 - *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

He doesn't take dirty people and give them a shower.

He doesn't take bad people and modify them into good people.

He takes dead people and makes them holy, righteous and alive through Christ.

But make no mistake, that call to new life begins with embracing the cross and allowing our old selves to be crucified.

We must die - die to self, die to our sinful tendencies, die to our worldly desire:

Luke 9:23-24 - *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*

Romans 12:2 - *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

So that we can then experience the transformative power of resurrection.

Before there can be a resurrection, there must be a death.

In this, too, God is not content with our short-sighted earthly views. Earthly resurrections also have an expiration date.

Yes, Lazareth was raised from the dead – a testimony to the power of God, but he died again – his grave somewhere in Palestine.

The widow's son? Dead.

Jairus' daughter? Dead.

Eutichus, who fell out a window and was raised by Paul? Dead.

The resurrection God wants to give us is not temporary. It is a resurrection that brings an abundant life that far exceeds anything we could ever think to ask or imagine.

We are not simply given back what we had, we are given something different, something new, something better, something eternal – we are given the power of a risen Savior. We are given a new life in Jesus and he enables us to walk in freedom and victory over sin now and rewrites our eternal destiny.

Romans 6:6-8 - *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Through our connection with Jesus, we, the once dead branch become a beautiful and fruitful tree:

John 15:4-5 - *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

Galatians 5:22-24 - *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

When we die in Christ and are raised to a new life in him, we no longer have an expiration date, because even when earthly death does come, we have the promise that that is not the end of our story:

John 11:25 - *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;*

1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 - *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

Revelation 21:1-5 - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

My closing words to you today are these:

We must shift our focus from temporary fixes to surrender. The Christian life is not about behavior modification or moral improvement, but about total heart transformation.

Seek a heavenly heart transplant.

Seek to become dead to sin, but alive in Jesus.

Seek to make your robes white by the blood he shed for you.

Why settle for an old and temporary fix when you can have transformed and eternal resurrection?