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First Belton
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Series: Power of Moments

Title: Resurrection Power

Text(s): Gen 1:26, 31; 3:16-19; Rom 5:12, 6, 18-19; Is 7:14; 1 Pet 3:18-19; Rom 6:4-5; rev 21:5, 3-4

Good morning, I am so glad you have joined us this Easter morning. My name is Logan Reynolds, and I am honored to serve as the senior pastor of this church. If you are a guest, thank you for choosing to be here this morning.

Our culture is obsessed with stories of redemption. From the movies and sports we watch to the books we read to the music we listen to, we love the idea of beauty out of ashes, strength from weakness, and general underdog stories. This morning, I want to tell you a story. It is one of the most difficult stories recorded in history. It is hard and feels hopeless, but what you will see, if you are willing, is what Alessia Clara once said, "There is beauty in pain and there is pain in everything."

In 1918, Corrie Ten Boom observed her mother, who happened to be the greatest influence and spiritual foundation in her life, suffer a stroke that led to paralysis and an inability to speak. A few years later, Corrie said goodbye to her mom as she passed. Because of the faith legacy of both her parents, as the Nazis invaded the Netherlands in World War 2, the family utilized their home to create a "safe haven" for Jews fleeing Nazi soldiers. Betrayed by a Dutch informant, in February of 1944, they were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps. There, they said goodbye to their father, who died just ten days later, and Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to a women's concentration camp.

While they were in the camp, Corrie and Betsie led Bible studies, cared for the other inmates, and were a source of encouragement in the most difficult of situations. Nevertheless, they experienced severe overcrowding and lodging infested with fleas and lice. They were starved, having only molded bread available on occasion. They were pushed to exhaustion each day, no matter their physical condition. They were beaten regularly and often were publicly humiliated before their peers. To make it all worse, not a year later, Corrie's sister Betsie would become ill and die.

This morning, we all walked into this room with our own story. That story could be of triumph or of hardship. You may have walked in here as though with everything going great in your life – amazing! Others of you may have walked in here and life is hard. Regardless of where we find ourselves this morning, we have all observed enough of life to recognize that something is not right, which begs the question: What happened? Why does there seem to be so much pain and suffering in the world?

This morning, I want to give you God's answer to the problem of pain and suffering in the world. You might think I am crazy but just follow me. God's answer to this problem is Easter. Now, keep in mind, I am not talking about the holiday. I am not talking about the weekend we get dressed up in pastels and eat at grandma's house. I am not talking about the Easter bunny or candy or anything like that. I am talking about how the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is God's answer for the problem of pain and suffering in the world at large and in your life in particular.

Follow me here. In the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we are told how God created the world. Genesis 1 tells us all God created – the sun, the moon, and the stars. He created the earth and bodies of water. He created plants and trees and filled the earth with animals and the ocean with fish. In v. 26, God creates the pinnacle of His creation, humankind, which the apostle Paul says was His masterpiece. After everything that God made, He observed His creation and said, *"It is good."* Six times God said that. After He completed His work in creation it is as though God sits on His divine porch, observing all He had made, glass of tea in hand, and says, "Ah, this is really good." V. 31 says, *"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."*

What does God mean by that? In the beginning, there was no pain or suffering. Pain and suffering only entered the picture due to human intervention. God created the world good, some might say perfect, under His good reign and rule. However, believing God to be withholding something from them, humankind chose to disobey God by choosing their own way to live. This decision, the decision to intervene in God's plan, is what created the problem of pain and suffering we experience today.

In Genesis 3, we see the consequences of such a decision. In v. 16, God says to the woman, *"I will surely multiply your pain in childrearing; in PAIN you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, and he shall rule over you."* To the man, God said, *Because of your disobedience, CURSED is the ground because of you; in PAIN you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till your return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*

Notice, this is the first time in creation where pain enters the picture. Prior to this moment, everything is right, everything is living and working in perfect harmony. No pain, no suffering. But now, even the most beautiful of gifts, having a child, will be brought forth in pain. There will be strife in relationships, even the most sacred relationship - marriage. Work will be hard, providing for a family will be difficult. And worst of all, death is certain.

Because of this decision, we experience pain and suffering in the world. No matter how much good we have done, how much money we have, or how smart we are, no one is exempt from pain and suffering.

Now, here is how pain and suffering have spread. Paul tells us in Romans 5:12, *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”* The decision of humankind to intervene into God’s plan is what the Bible calls sin. And because of that intervention, even as we sit today, all humans are tainted by this decision. To put it another way, we have all inherited this sinful nature. Even the good things we do, deep down are tainted by selfishness. I do good things, to receive good things – praise, blessing, to be liked or understood, to be noticed or to hear a simple “thank you.”

In the beginning, God created everything with the expectation of perfection because He is perfect. He created humans in His image, meaning we were designed to image His perfect character as well. Yet, Paul says, because of sin, by our nature, we have all fallen short of this glorious and perfect standard. Since that moment, we have been chasing perfection in the way we work, the way we look, and the way we live, only to find it is a race in vanity and cannot be achieved.

So, today we look at all the brokenness in our lives and around the world and think, “How can a good and loving God, allow so much suffering to exist in the world?” The simple answer is, He doesn’t. There is this temptation to think of God, if we think of Him at all, as one who sits on His glorious throne in the heavens, arms crossed, indifferent to pain and suffering of the world.

But He isn’t. In Roman’s 5:18, Paul gives us the answer. He writes, *“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”*

As man’s intervention on God’s good plan created the reality of death, pain, and suffering in the world, God’s intervention into man’s predicament created a way to life, hope, and an end to all pain and suffering.

We celebrate Christmas because, on the first Christmas, Jesus was born. 700 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah prophesied of His arrival. In Isaiah 7:14, looking to God’s solution for man’s greatest problem, writes, *“Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and he shall be called, “Immanuel.”* The reason this is important is because Immanuel means “God with us.” In Jesus, God Himself intervenes into our world to fix what we broke and put an end to sin and death, thereby dissolving all pain and suffering.

By His life, He lived the perfect life, measuring up to God's perfect standard. In His death, He suffered the due penalty for our sin, dying the death that we all deserved to experience.

Back to the story of Corrie. Just ten months into the concentration camp, she experienced one of the most difficult moments in her life – the death of her sister Betsie. In her book, *The Hiding Place*, she says in some of her last words Betsie told her, *"There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still."*

Betsie may not have realized it at the time, but this is some deep theology. Instead of leaving the world as it is, in His love, God sent Jesus to this world to die. Peter puts it like this: *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison."*

On the cross, Jesus experienced the greatest "pit" one could bear. But for what? To bring us back to God. Whereas our sin separates us from God, His death offers us a way back to Him. Peter says we are made right with God by His death.

But there is more. Oh, so much more! By His death we are made right with God, but by His resurrection we are given new life and a hope for today and all eternity.

I love what Paul says in Romans 6:4. *"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall be united with him in a resurrection like his."*

By His death, Jesus overcomes sin and death. In His resurrection, He begins this process of making all things new. In Revelation 21:5, the risen Jesus says, *"Behold, I am making all things new."* In His resurrection, He began this process of restoring all things back to God's original intent, and there is a day coming when God will finalize this plan to make all things new. If you look at the sentence above, you will see that God tells John in v. 3, *"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

This is God's answer to the problem of pain and suffering. He is not indifferent but intimately involved fixing what is broken. Through Jesus, He gives us the guarantee that all things will one day be made right. Tolkien is credited with the phrase, in the end, *"all sad things will come untrue."* Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we are promised that all sad things will eventually come untrue.

Until then, we recognize that while God is working out His cosmic plan to make all things new, He gives us an opportunity to be made new today. Paul says (Romans 6:5), *"If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall be united with him in a resurrection like his."*

The key word is united. To experience this "newness of life," Paul describes one must receive this truth: Jesus lived the perfect life you couldn't live, died the death you deserved, so that, if you would repent and believe this is true, you would be saved from your sin, given a new transformed life, and the promise of eternal life with Him. He exchanged His perfection for your guilt so that, if you would receive Him as your substitute, you will be made right with God. Paul uses the word "saved." If you receive this on your behalf, you will be forgiven of your sin, saved from death, and promised eternity with God in the new heavens and new earth.

He also gives us the opportunity to be ambassadors, representatives, and messengers of this news of life and hope for all people. This morning, it is our duty to carry this message of life and hope into the world proclaiming that, because of the resurrection, sin and death have been defeated and life and hope are available to all who call on the name of Jesus.