

Easter for James
By Rev. Paul den Butler

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 15:7
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We shall now continue our reading in the word of God, read from the New Testament from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians 15:1-20. 1 Corinthians 15:1-20, and after the Scripture reading, we shall sing Psalter 378, stanza number 1. 378, stanza number 1. Now turning to 1 Corinthians 15,

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. 11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed. 12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. 16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. 20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

The word of God comes this morning to us from the portion of Scripture that we just, that we read just a moment ago, 1 Corinthians 15, the first part of verse 7. 1 Corinthians 15:7a,

7 After that, he was seen of James;

A few weeks ago, we were able to celebrate again the commemorable fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, Easter, and we heard the Easter Gospel proclaimed unto us and by giving us this opportunity, we have again and again been reminded of the greatness of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ who conquered death after he was given permission from his Father to arise from the grave.

What is the meaning of Easter? In the first place, what I said already, Jesus is victor. Jesus is the powerful Savior. Jesus is the living Savior. But to really celebrate Easter, we must not only hear this message that Jesus has arisen from the dead, but we also need to experience the resurrection power of the risen Savior. He must be our living Savior, and we will only know him as the living Savior when we experience the life-giving power of this Savior. This is what the Lord has done and displayed in the days after the resurrection, even the day of the resurrection itself was a day when he appeared to a number of his followers, the women and the disciples, and also after the first appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ, he also visited a number of his disciples, and that changed their life to a great extent. That changed also the life of this man whose name we find in our text, James, and he too was made a witness of the risen Savior, and that's why Paul lists his name also among the names of others to whom the Lord Jesus appeared.

You know about the situation in Corinth. I understand that you had a sermon last Sunday night on first this part of the Gospel, this part of Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, and you have been reminded how that the heresy was in the midst of the church of Corinth, and how many people were led astray by false teachings, teachings that told the people that there is no resurrection at all and that Christ is not risen. And you know, of course, how Paul has refuted that heresy and now he has proven that the Lord Jesus is the living Savior indeed, and therefore he also mentions the names of those who have seen him and who can say with the Apostle John, "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the word of life, that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you," and Peter is able to say that, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables but we have been eyewitnesses of his majesty." Well, in the midst of all these witnesses, there is also this man James, and especially in the life of James, it is evident that the Lord Jesus has life-giving power.

Who was this man James? We read in the Gospel about a few men called by that name. Even in the circle of the 12 apostles, the 12 disciples, there are two men called James. There is James the brother of John, the two sons of Zebedee; and there is also a son of Alphaeus also called James. Is it one of these two? No, I don't think so because what we read in the word of God is that after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ he did appear to his disciples but he came to his disciples not one-by-one but when they were gathered together. The only exception, the only one of the disciples to whom the Lord

Jesus had a separate meeting with Peter but Peter, of course, there was a very special reason for the private meeting, Peter was the man who more than others had forfeited the love of his Savior and who more than other disciples had made himself worthy that the Lord would never look upon him in favor anymore. But for the rest, the Lord never came to his disciples separately, so the James in our text could very likely not be one of these two disciples.

Who then is meant? I believe he must think of a man named James who is also called a brother of the Lord Jesus, for we know that after the Lord Jesus was born, his mother Mary gave birth to other children as well, four sons are even mentioned in Matthew 13:55, and we read the names of the brothers of Jesus, the half-brothers, I should say, the other children that were Mary's and Joseph's children. The first one after the birth of Jesus was James, and there was a Joses, there was a Simon, and there was a Judas. Now the Church of Rome has always denied that Mary had other children because the Church of Rome believes that Mary has always remained a virgin, but there is no evidence in the word of God to sustain that dogma. The Bible clearly tells us that Mary and Joseph together had other children, even not only sons but also daughters.

James, then, was the second oldest son of Mary, but what does the Bible tell us about these brethren of the Lord Jesus? We must now turn for a moment to John's Gospel, chapter 7. Let us read a few verses from the beginning of this seventh chapter of John's Gospel.

1 After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. 2 Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. 3 His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. 4 For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. 5 For neither did his brethren believe in him.

They did not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They did not believe that in Jesus God had fulfilled the ancient promises. They did not believe in him, and the Gospel informs us even more, about even more things they did. They went so far as to mock with Jesus. They held him in contempt. It's clear from this part of the Gospel of John that they believed, they accused Jesus that his intention, his only intention was to draw attention to himself and make himself important in the eyes of the people, and it was even worse than that with these brethren of the Lord Jesus, there was also an occasion, we read about that in Mark's Gospel, chapter 3, that they plainly stated that in their opinion Jesus was beside himself, he was even a danger for himself, so he better be protected. That, then, was the attitude as it is described in the Gospel, the attitude of Jesus' brothers. They did not believe in him. They expressed their enmity against him. They turned away from him. They mocked at him. They held him in contempt. And that's what they all did, James as well. He was no exception. He, too, did not believe in Jesus.

Why did he not believe? I believe it was because of the same reason why so many other Jews did not believe in Jesus. The Jews had rejected him because he was not the type of Messiah they preferred. They were waiting for an earthly king but Jesus was not like that. They waited for a liberator of the people, but Jesus did not make any attempt to liberate the people from the oppressing power of the Romans. Jesus was not like that. He spoke about sin, he spoke about the necessity to be delivered from sin, he spoke about the sacrifice, the sacrifice that he himself was going to bring at the end of his life, he spoke about the way of salvation through faith in him, he spoke about the blood that had to be shed and the cover only behind the blood, but in these things the Jews were not so much interested. Why not? Well, they had made up their own way of salvation. They had another solution for the sin problem, their own righteousnesses would suffice them, their own good doings would be able to remove guilt from them, so sin was not really a problem for them. As long as they obeyed the laws, as long as they walked in the ways of God's commandments, all was well with them and that's why they turned away from Jesus' preaching and that's why the brothers of Jesus did not believe in him either.

James did not understand that his own righteousness would never suffice, but that a different righteousness is required. But when a man clings to his own righteousnesses, he not only rejects the Gospel of Jesus and his blood, but he will finally also express his enmity against Jesus. When the Jews began to understand that Jesus' teaching went against their opinions and when they began to realize that if he is right, they are wrong and still in their sin, they were filled with anger, and you know what they cried out in the court of Pilate's palace, "Crucify him!" When James understands that Jesus' message is a condemnation of his own religious position, he does not look for grace but instead he hardens himself in his self-righteousness and even with a stronger determination, he turns away from Jesus.

Isn't that a terrible thing? Unbelief is a terrible thing, indeed. It is an inexcusable thing. It is the expression that we do not trust in the Lord, and that unbelief becomes still more terrible after we have received more light. Now look at James. He knew more than many other people knew. He and his brothers from their early years on had known Jesus, they have seen that Jesus, their eldest brother, was so different than they were, so different than other boys. Jesus never disobeyed his mother Mary or his father Joseph. Jesus never spoke bad words. Jesus was never mean to other people. Jesus never mistreated animals. James and Joses and Simon and Judas knew that. They knew all of that and yet they did not believe in him.

Moreover, we may safely suppose that James and his brothers have received an education from a God-fearing mother, not to mention Joseph because we hardly know anything about Joseph, but certainly we do know that Mary was a God-fearing woman, a God-fearing mother. Can you imagine Mary always having been silent about Jesus? Of course not. She knew too well who was her oldest son. She remembered too well the words spoken by the angel, "He shall save his people from their sin." She believed that he was God's promised Messiah. She believed the other word of the angel that he would be upon the throne of David, being the King of Israel. And she must have spoken about these things to her other children.

So James and Joses and Simon and Judas, they knew about these things for Mary told them, and Mary must have urged them and admonished them to also believe that God had very special purposes with Jesus, their oldest brother. Nevertheless, in spite of all that they heard at home, despite of all the instructions, despite of all the teachings, despite of having seen in their mother that she believed that Jesus was the promised one, nevertheless in spite of all that, James remained an unbeliever. To the Lord Jesus, that must have been a very sad experience, don't you think so? When he sometimes says to his followers that a man's foes shall be of his own household, he knows that he is speaking about. He has experienced it himself. When in relation speaking about these things, we must also seek to apply them to our own lives. We, too, have been told many things about the Lord Jesus, have we not? Many of us have heard about him since the early days of our lives, we have heard Gospel stories, we have heard the Gospel being proclaimed in church services, God has given to us more than he has given to many other people in our days, and what is the result? Are we like James still hardening our hearts in unbelief? Do we still reject the Lord Jesus? Must it be said concerning us as well, that we do not believe in him? Oh yeah, we believe in him with our minds formally, we believe that he has existed, we believe that he still exists, we believe that there are many more things recorded in the word of God that we hold true. James, of course, he did not deny the existence of Jesus, he did not deny that Jesus was a very special brother, he did not deny that Jesus was a sinless brother, but he yet did not believe with a personal faith in Jesus as the only Savior and Redeemer, and that's the question: do we believe very personally in him as God's answer to our sin problem, or is there no room for him in our hearts? Are we probably trusting in self-righteousness?

But now look what happens in the life of this James, this unbeliever, this enemy of Christ, this self-righteous man. He was visited by Christ. The Lord appeared unto him. The risen Savior was seen of James. Now there are many things that I cannot tell you about that meeting between Jesus and his brother James. I cannot tell you when it took place either on the day of the resurrection or a day later or a week later. I cannot tell you about what has transpired during that meeting, what has been discussed between Jesus and James. The details of the appearance of the Lord have been kept secret. We can only guess but we better do not guess because if God would have let us know what has transpired between these two, then he would have told us, but God has deemed it wise to keep it hidden from us and let us show respect for that secret. But one thing we do know and one thing we can boldly proclaim, this meeting between James and his brother Jesus has radically changed the life of James. After that meeting, James is a different man and he has never been the same anymore who he was before that meeting. How do we know that that change took place? Simply because of the fact that his name is now mentioned in the list of witnesses of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has called him to be a witness to the fact that Jesus is the victor of death, and that is the result of James having seen the Easter glory of the risen Savior.

What then happened? Well, the very moment when Jesus appeared to James, the resistance in James's heart was broken. He no longer hardened his heart. He no longer remained in his unbelief. He came to the conclusion he could come to no other

conclusion than that all the time he had been wrong. The powerful manifestation of the Lord convinced him how wrong he had been in not believing what Mary told him and what Jesus preached unto him. He had made a sad, a terribly sad mistake when he refused to submit to the truth, and now he finds out that Jesus is the Messiah after all, that Jesus was sent by the Father to be the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, and now James must acknowledge that he has sinned the sin of unbelief, rejecting God's Savior. And now he began to feel how grievously he has wounded his brother Jesus. In a word, a radical change took place in the heart, in the mind, and in the life of James. Christ by appearing to him, brought about that radical change and James is a different man now.

How did the Lord do that? By showing to him his Easter glory, his Easter power. Don't forget that that meeting took place after the resurrection, not prior to the resurrection but after it, and that is significant. Prior to the resurrection, James was still an unbeliever. We know that from that incident when Jesus was on the cross and when he knew and realized that he could no longer take care of his mother and that he had to entrust the care of his mother into someone else. Now what would have been more normal than that now the second son of Mary would take care of his mother? But Jesus doesn't say to James, "Behold your mother." He says that not to Joses, not to Simon, not to Judas, but he says that to his cousin John, the son of Mary's sister. John has to take care of Mary when Jesus is no longer to do that, and that tells us clearly that in the opinion of the Lord Jesus at that time, James was not the man to look after his mother. How could Mary tell her son James of her grief, of the pain of her heart, how could she tell him about her great disappointments, how could she tell him about the pain that was caused by the sword that was piercing her own soul according to the prophecy of old Simeon?

So prior to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, James was still a hardened unbeliever who trusted in his own righteousness and he didn't want to have anything to do with Jesus, but then the resurrection took place and then the Lord Jesus no longer was the man of sorrows, he was no longer in the state of humiliation, no longer in the form of a servant, now he is full of glory, victor over all his enemies, even death has been defeated by him. James knew that Jesus died upon the cross, that he was buried in the sepulchre, and now he sees him alive, no longer in the grip of death, and then through what he saw and especially, I believe, through what Jesus spoke to him, that great change took place. The resurrection power of the risen Savior by which he arose from the grave, it says in Romans 1:4 and I believe that Reverend preached on that text two weeks ago, it says in Romans 1:4 that Christ is "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead," and if he so reveals himself to James, James understands that Christ is the Son of God with power and that changed his life.

There is some similarity probably between the conversion of James and that of Paul. James converted suddenly, Paul converted suddenly. James converted in an instant, Paul converted in an instant. Both were enemies of the Lord, both had hardened their hearts in their unbelief, but then the moment came that there was that complete, that complete change that made them different men. Then the power of enmity was broken and when the unbelief was plucked out of their hearts and the willingness was destroyed by the irresistible might of the Savior, and those that used to mock with Jesus now began to beg

his mercy. "Lord, what must I do? Lord, what will thou have me to do?" The power of the risen Savior is a mighty power, congregation. That and only that knocks down our unbelief. That and only that grasps us out of the clutches of the evil one. That and only that brings us into the kingdom of light.

Then the Bible goes on to tell us and give us proof of that radical change in the life of James who is no longer an unbeliever now. When we turn to the first chapter in the book of Acts, we find the disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem after the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and the disciples returned to Jerusalem to stay there, await until the fulfillment of the promise that the Holy Spirit would be sent down upon them, and in the meanwhile those 10 days of waiting were used by the disciples as days of prayer. They continually had their prayer meetings, prayer that the Holy Spirit would come indeed, that the promise concerning the Holy Spirit would be fulfilled indeed, and whom do we find in that prayer meeting? The 11 disciples, of course. Furthermore, some women, among them Mary, the mother of Jesus. And then to our surprise, we also read, "with his brethren." What does that mean? It means that they who first were unbelieving and hostile towards their brother Jesus, they are now found in the company of those that are engaged in fervent prayer for the coming of the Spirit.

His brethren, James included. Do you see the change? James is no longer relying on his own self-righteousness, he no longer lives the life of a Pharisee, he no longer lives in rejection of the Savior, he is now found among those that seek grace from heaven. He is found among those that are so utterly dependent that they do not dare to move without the Spirit having come upon them. James is a man of prayer now. He may have prayed prior to that moment. Oh yes, being a Jew or being raised in the Jewish religion, he has been taught to pray as well, but all these prayers so far have been just the form of godliness but now he sees how much he stands in need of divine grace, now he is no longer able to assist himself and to bring himself out of his troubles, he now stands in need of the work of the Holy Spirit and therefore he is there day after day, 10 days in a row, praying, supplicating that the Lord would visit them with the Holy Spirit. His eyes having been opened for his own sinfulness, the sinfulness of his unbelief, he now realizes that he needs the Spirit to live a different life. He has been building up on a wrong foundation and now he sees the need of a true and faithful and reliable foundation in his life. When Christ came in his life, he lost his footing and he saw that gaping, yawning abyss of eternal perdition, he was a perishing man, and now he has learned to submit himself to God.

When I use these words, I use words that I have taken from James's deepest soul, "Submit yourself therefore to God." When in later years he is used by the Holy Spirit to also pen this epistle that we also find in the canonical books of the Bible, he has written these words, "Submit yourself," he urges the readers of his epistle to submit themselves and how can he urge other people to do so, how can he give the advice to his readers to submit to God? He has practiced it himself, to submit to God and to Jesus. He has learned to humble himself in the sight of the Lord.

This is what affects a man's life more than anything else, the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus. Do we then need a similar experience to the experience of James? Well, I do not say that but certainly we, in our lives, must know something of that resurrection power of the Lord Jesus. Why? By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins. Speaking from the spiritual perspective, we may say that we are all in the power of spiritual death. Death reigns over us. And because we have a carnal mind and we have been born with a carnal mind, there are the seeds of enmity against God in our hearts as well. It may be that you have never felt any enmity or hostility toward the Lord, it may be that you have never expressed any enmity against God, you have never said to God, "I hate you!" Well, thank God you never did, but it is no merit of ours, it is only because of the restraining grace of God that we have been kept from committing several sins. If God would have withdrawn his hand and if he would not have held us in check, we would do it as so many other people are not ashamed to do it. So thank God for restraining grace but it does not mean that we are exceptions to the general rule. The general rule is that we all have sinned and that we are all at enmity against God, and that's why we are in this spiritual grief by nature and nobody and nothing will be able to raise us from that spiritual grief, that state of spiritual death, there is only one power able to deliver us and that is this power that was revealed unto James, this power is the resurrection power.

Has the Lord ever shown you the real state of your life you are in? Have you felt something of the powers of death that make you unable to contribute anything to the salvation of your soul? Have you experienced, for instance, that it is so difficult, it is not possible at all to really pray unto the Lord because so many other things flush through our minds so that we cannot even concentrate, that we not even can bring our needs exactly before the Lord trusting in his word? Have you experienced the impossibility to change your heart and to keep a check on your thought life? Have you felt something of the impossibility of turning unto the Lord from your own accord and really believe on the Lord Jesus? That you need the help, that you need the assistance, that you need the power of the Holy Spirit, that you need the power of the risen Savior? If that takes place in your heart, in your life, you know what's going to happen, you will be a different person. James was a different man after he met the Lord Jesus and he is doing things differently. When he now prays in that company of disciples, then he prays differently than he did before. And when after the converting work of the Holy Spirit in our lives we pray, we pray differently than we did before. And if we go to church, we do it in a different way. When we read our Bible, we do it in a different way. What's the difference? Now our heart is in it. Our heart is in it.

So James learned to submit unto the Lord. Let me now continue the text from his epistle. When he had said, "Submit yourselves unto the Lord and he shall lift you up," and he is able to write that too because he himself did experience that as well. God in whose sight who he learned to humble himself, lifted him up. That means, in other words, that the life of James, that unfruitful life has been made fruitful now.

He was present in the company of the disciples in the days between ascension day and Pentecost, but not only James was there, and his brethren, Jesus' brethren were there with their mother Mary. James was there but Joses too, and Simon, and Judas, and they, too,

lived in unbelief. They, too, concerning them it is said they did not believe in him. What happened to them? Can you imagine? May I suggest that after James had seen the Lord Jesus and after he had experienced the power by which he was so completely changed, he could not keep that to himself. There have been times, many times probably, that the four brethren were in company, gathered together and that they spoke about Jesus. Again and again they heard about his miracles, and again and again they heard about his preaching, and then they consulted with one another, "What do you think of him?" And they came to one conclusion only, all the four of them, "He is a deceiver. He cannot be trusted." And now James could not keep his mouth shut but he went to Joses and to Simon and to Judas, and he said to them, "Brothers, I must tell you something. We have always been wrong. Our estimation and our opinion of our brother Jesus was completely wrong. We have sinned not believing in him." "Well, what happened to you, James?" "I'll tell you what happened to me, I've seen him." "Ah, he's dead." "He is no longer dead. I've seen him and the power of his resurrection. He is true. He is genuine. He is the Messiah. I know it for certain." And these brother brethren listening to James realized that he was sincere, that he was in earnest, that he meant what he was saying, and then the Lord was so pleased to also apply the words of James to the hearts of those other three. His testimony was blessed by the Lord by the working of the Holy Spirit so that they, too, began to see they're wrong, their wrongs and their evil and their unbelief, and they, too, turned unto the Lord. The Bible is silent of how it happened but the only thing we know and that is sufficient that we know it, they were amidst those people that prayed in great dependence for the Holy Spirit.

The change in James's life was made manifest. It was evident and then immediately he was given fruits upon his testimony, and is this not what every true Christian should desire? His desire should be to lead other people to the Lord. If the Lord has revealed himself to us, can we keep silent about it? Can we keep the secret between the Lord and us? Oh, there are things that may remain secret, they are so personal, so intimate between the Lord and ourselves that we do not speak about that unless we have someone in whom we fully confide, but for the rest, when we have experienced that change, is it not our desire to tell other people? When a father in a family has heard it and so being brought to believe on the Lord Jesus, does he not tell his wife? Does he not tell his children and urge them to also seek that grace? You can imagine James going to his brothers, don't you? Now that should be the desire of every true Christian. They must be able, the people to whom you witness, that you are sincere. They must be able to see in your own life that your words are in accordance with the way you live. There must be drawing power in the testimony.

Now in that way, James had been made fruitful in his life. Paul writing about him, he calls him "a pillar of the church here in Jerusalem" in his letter to the Galatians, "James, a pillar of the church of God." In Acts 15 we read about the synod in Jerusalem where a knotty problem had to be solved and at that meeting the witness, the testimony of James has been a foundational meaning, and who can tell how many people have been blessed already during the ages by reading the epistle of James? That very practical letter has been made an everlasting blessing to many already.

Now we cannot all become a pillar in the church, that's not necessary either. We cannot all be writers of epistles, that is not necessary either. It is not so important the way the Lord is pleased to use his people, but important is whether the power of the resurrection of Christ becomes visible in our lives, and will it ever be visible, it must be experienced. Amen.