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Easter: The Power To Change

Intro: It seems everyone's wanting to change something about themselves. Don't you ever get tired of those weight loss commercials?

- Where can I find the power to change my life? Where can I find the strength to not just change the external, but radically change the internal? Bible gives us the answer.

Phil. 3:10 "...I can really know Christ, and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead..." (NLT)

Eph. 1:19-20 "I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of His power for us who believe Him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead..." (NLT) There is power available! It is resurrection power. This is why the resurrection is such a significant event.

If the resurrection never happened, then there is no spiritual power that I can tap into. There are no additional resources that I can experience to live this life. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, I'm on my own! Transformation...real, lasting change, is all up to me.

The resurrection is not just an event that took place 2000 years ago, it is an event that unleashed power that we can experience in our lives today. God wants us to experience this power so we can experience real change. Resurrection gives us hope that change is possible. Easter is all about the power to change!

- Today, I want to share with you what this power will transform in your life, and how you can experience it. If you're looking for a change, Easter gives us a lot of hope.

I. God's Power Changes Our Emotional Condition

A. People struggle emotionally today

1. About 7% of the population (13-14 million people) will experience clinical depression in any given year.
2. Almost 40% of Americans surveyed said they are lonely.
3. 40 million American (18%) have some form of an anxiety disorder or problem.
4. 8 million people suffered through the emotions of grief after losing someone in their immediate family last year. (3%)
5. That comes stop 68% of the American population who is struggling emotionally in some way!!! The pursuit of happiness isn't working very well!

6. These statistics don't include all of the daily emotions we all struggle with in life. The uncertainties of this world (World events). The daily stresses of providing for family (gas prices / jobs / bills / parenting /)
7. I consider myself a pretty emotionally balanced person / emotionally healthy / Yet life can still get to me. I still have down days. I still get overwhelmed at times / circumstances get discouraging.

- Where do I go to find additional emotional resources to deal with life?

B. God offers spiritual power that impacts our emotions

Ps. 30:11 "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy." (NLT)

John 15:11 "I have told you this so that you will be filled with My joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! (NLT)

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you..." (NASB)

1. Is it really possible to have my grief transformed into gladness? Is it possible to have my discouragement turned into joy? Could it be that I can cast off my anxiety and stress and experience real peace?
 2. Because Jesus rose from the dead there is spiritual power that impacts our very emotions.
 3. God created us with emotions. God himself has emotions. Part of being made in the image of God is that we share emotions like the God who made us.
 4. God cares about how we feel. He cares about our hurts / our wounds / our anxieties / our stresses. Some people say; "Well, if God cares so much, then why has He allowed so much pain in my life?"
 5. Let me explain it this way: If you're a parent and your child is playing outside and gets hurt, do they run in the house angry at you? Do they blame you for their pain? Of course not! You scoop them up and love them.
 - Daughter broke her arm last year.
 6. We live in a world that is marred by sin and where God allows people the freedom to choose. This means painful things happen to good people. Unfortunately, so many people blame God instead of running to Him. We run from the very One who can heal and empower our emotions.
- What have you been doing? There is emotional power available!

II. God's Power Changes Our Relational Condition

A. People struggle relationally today

1. Approx. 50% of all first marriages will end in divorce. 30% of teens have been bullied at school / threatened in some way. 31% of American women report to being physically or sexually abused by boyfriend / husband / relative at some point in their lives.

2. We have a world that is filled with so much hatred / violence / crime. Something is not working. Something very wrong has happened to our relationships.
3. Relationships today are disposable. If you don't like someone just drop them and move on. About 6 years ago Lisa and I were in Las Vegas, walking around holding hands...Explain - someone thought we were newlyweds. "Wow...14 years! (Like it was something special!)"
4. We all long for and desire close relationships. We are created for intimate relationships. We are designed to be relational beings. How come we have such a struggle making them work?
5. Haven't you ever just said to yourself, "Why can't we just get along?"

B. God offers spiritual power that impacts our relationships

John 13:34 "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." (NLT)

Rom. 5:5 "...the love of God has been poured out within our hearts..." (NASB)

1. Can we really love each other the way Jesus loves us? You see, Jesus loves us unconditionally. We never have to earn His love and acceptance. It's freely given. Is this kind of love really possible for us to experience?
2. Because Jesus rose from the dead, the power of God's love can actually be poured out into our hearts. By itself, my heart can't love this way. There's just too many people that get on my nerves! My heart is just too selfish and self-centered. My love runs out.
3. I think about my marriage. God is the One who has made our marriage work. Lisa and I are so different. We have the potential for disaster! She's organized and neat / I'm creative and messy – She like routine / I like variety – She hates veggies / I love veggies – She drinks hot chocolate / I drink coffee – She like safety / I like risk – She hates mornings / I love them
 - The same: We both – very strong willed / very opinionated
4. This is why for 20 years I have asked the Lord to help me love my wife. Relationships don't work simply because you found the right person. Relationships work because God helps you become the right person!
5. If you desire God to transform your relationships, it begins by asking Him to change you. By asking Him to give you the ability to love the people in your life. There is power for relationships!

III. God's Power Changes Our Behavioral Condition

A. People struggle with doing the right thing

Rom. 7:15 "I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate." (NLT)

1. Who can't identify with this? How many times have you not followed through on a commitment / a new year's resolution / a diet / exercise / You really wanted to, but in the end, the will power wasn't there.
2. How many times have you let that mean – hurtful comment flow out of your mouth only to regret it later? “Why did I say that?”
3. What about the addiction you've struggled with for years. Those old habits that just refuse to let go of their strangle hold on your life? Statistics: Drug and alcohol / gambling / pornography /
4. So many people pack around guilt and regret because they struggle doing what they know is right. What we discover is that knowing what the right things are and doing the right things are two completely different topics. Just knowing is not enough. Just knowing doesn't = motivation!
5. When I was in grade school, I knew it wasn't right to unscrew all the lids of every ketchup bottle in the cafeteria...but I did it anyway! I did the salt and pepper the following week.
6. Doing the wrong thing isn't something we outgrow either. It doesn't get any easier as adults. The consequences just get greater. Where do I find the power to consistently do what is right?

B. God offers spiritual power that impacts our behavior

II Peter 1:3 “His divine power has given us everything we need for living a godly life...you will escape the decadence all around you...” (NLT)

1. Is it possible to experience spiritual power that will actually change my behavior?
2. A lot of times we try to influence behavior with external motivation. As parents, we use consequences. It is the fear of the consequences that impacts behavior. The problem with this method is that it doesn't change the person. It's an external restraint, not internal transformation.
 - Once the restraint is gone the person remains unchanged.
3. Many people think that God wants to motivate our behavior this way. That He wants us motivated to obey out of fear and dread of the potential consequences. God does talk about consequences, but He wants us motivated and empowered by something better...something internal.
4. Therefore, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead can change the way we live. In fact, His power gives us everything we need to behave in a godly way. This means we can live in a way that pleases God. His power is stronger than the pull of all the evil we feel in this world.
5. God knows that by ourselves, we are underpowered to change. We just can't break out of the habitual cycles of behaviors that weigh us down. So, He gives us His power to live free.

6. Are there things in your life you desperately want to change that you are underpowered to overcome?

IV. God's Power Changes Our Spiritual Condition

A. People are longing for a spiritual connection

1. In our society, it's not the spiritual that people disagree with...it's the religious. People don't want more religious trappings and meaningless rituals. They are looking for something deeper and more significant.
2. It is just an observable fact that people are spiritual all over the globe. Every culture / every nation / every tribe acknowledges the spiritual part of mankind. WHY? Because God put it there!

Ecc. 3:11 "God has planted eternity in the human heart..." (NLT)

3. Our entire planet is on a quest to connect with the spiritual. Just look at how many movies include the spiritual. How many box office hits include this in their story-line. Why do people go? We are drawn to the spiritual because it is in us. (New movies: "The Reaping" / 7 Last Plagues")
4. Yet for all our searching, all our curiosity, all our experimentation with spiritual things, we're still left trying to connect spiritually. This is why Easter is so significant.

B. God offers a power that will finally connect us with the spiritual

Eph. 2:1-4 "Once you were dead (spiritually), doomed forever because of your many sins. You used to live just like the rest of the world...All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so very much...He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead..." (NLT)

- To understand these verses we must understand what Easter is all about
 1. The Bible tells us we were spiritually cut off from God because of our sin. (Spiritually dead) Sin is simply falling short of God's perfect standard. So this includes us all.
 2. We were all under God's judgment. WHY? Because God is a just God and He has to punish sin. We all broke His spiritual / moral laws and we were all guilty. (Much like our justice system requires punishment for crimes done. Justice requires punishment.)
 3. Because God loves us and His greatest desire for us is to be connected back to Him, Jesus died on a cross in order to satisfy God's justice. His death became the payment for our sin. His death was all by design.
 4. His resurrection three days later became the proof that sin was now paid for and that spiritual power is now available to anyone who wants to connect with God through His Son Jesus.

John 1:12-13 “But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn! This is not a physical birth...this rebirth comes from God.” (NLT) (We become spiritually alive!)

5. Once we become spiritually alive, we can experience the reality of Jesus in our lives and experience a power to change. Power to change emotions / relationships / behavior / Power to live life!
6. So many people miss the simplicity of Easter. If we simply accept what Jesus has done for us and acknowledge that we need His forgiveness, I become His child, spiritually alive to Him for all eternity. I am reconnected / reborn / re-energized to live this life.
7. All we have to do is go to Jesus and receive what He offers.

John 5:40 “...you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.” (NASB)

- All he wants to do is give us life. Are you willing to go to Him today?
- No matter how wounded your emotions / broken your relationships / or how wrong your behavior has been, He can undo it all!
- I want to close by inviting you to pray with me this morning: Prayer