

What's So Important about Jesus Dying and Rising from the Dead?

We Know How to Live!

A sermon based on John 14:19.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

A man he had known for about 25 minutes said something startling to the businessman as they were flying over the Caribbean Sea between Puerto Rico and Antigua. "I don't want to die. I want to live." You see, they were in the middle of a violent lightning storm. Ten seconds before he said this, their airplane had lost all power and had started to dip rather suddenly towards the deep blue expanse of water beneath them. Thankfully, the airplane regained power after only a few agonizing seconds. They quickly climbed back to our cruising altitude.

"Death scares me," he went on, "because I know nothing about it. I only know how to live."

Choosing between something you know nothing about and something you know quite a bit about is an easy decision. Almost everyone feels more confident with what is familiar. That's why this gentleman was not the first person to express himself in this way. He most certainly will not be the last. Who can feel more confident about dying than living since we only know about life and not about death and what that entails?

Can you?

What about Jesus? Jesus had never died either. But his intense and sorrowful prayer as he was sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. Watching any sliver of hope that he might be set free shrivel up before his eyes as the chief priests and teachers of the law carried on this sham of a trial...because they knew the verdict would be guilty, no matter how many or what kind of lies they had to fabricate. Standing before a huge crowd, Pilate half-heartedly trying to release him, hearing how they'd rather have a known killer – Barabbas – returned than this public nuisance. And finally, as he hung on his cross, Jesus knew. Death was coming. In fact, he had told his followers that was why he had come.

But would you have blamed Jesus had he started coming unraveled...with his mental fortitude fading? If he would maybe have started compromising...maybe staying away from the Garden of Gethsemane because he knew Judas would be there, ready to betray...if he had just said "no" once when he was being slammed with questions and accusations of claiming to be the Son of God? Or, if he had cried out on the cross, "But, God I don't want to die!"

We wouldn't blame him, would we? Because that would be us, wouldn't it? Friends, we only know how to live, too. We only know how to live...in sin.

It shows itself, doesn't it, in the way we often live this life? Let's not even talk about death here; let's talk about life after death. Think about what you do – the choices you make – every day. Are you living and thinking and talking and acting with life after death as your focus?

I'll be honest with you, there are a lot of times when I'm not. How easy is it to get caught up in this life, whether I live for the almighty dollar (for the paycheck). Or I live to please others and to make decisions

on what's going to get my peers' approval, even if God and his Word would disapprove. I'm so invested in my earthly relationships, whether that be family, work, friends, that I'm not taking the time or I'm investing so little precious time to working on my relationship with God in the way he's provided, through his Word – reading it, learning it, taking it to heart...in worship, in Bible reading, in devotions. Or finally, just acting in a way that seems right to me or is only looking to serve myself, and all the way I'm giving God the cold shoulder. That's me. Is that you?

You know, when you look at the Bible, especially God's law, one of the purposes it serves is to be a mirror...to reveal who we really are. Take a look. What do you see?

I see a sinner, who yes, tries hard, who wants to please God, who cares about his Word and strives to keep it...sometimes. But I still see a sinner. And I see death. Right? Look at God's Word, think about this standard of perfection God sets and how well (or really, how poorly) we've lived up to that, and then check the pulse of your heart...it's flat-lined.

How's that for a great paradox? While we live, we are dead. The Bible says, ***"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins."*** That's the only way you and I and every person knows how to live. Unable to live as God wants you to live...totally incapable of doing anything God-pleasing. And so, maybe not so surprisingly, we're left with a fear of death, not because we don't know how to die, but because we know what kind of death we deserve for the life we've lived. But in that realm, burdened by our sinful nature, we always choose death.

Thankfully, so did Jesus. Friends, Jesus chose death. He did so with you in mind. Jesus chose death over life to pay our wages of sin and to prove to you that those who follow him have no reason to be afraid of death. Did you hear that? You and I have absolutely no reason to be afraid of death.

Before that flight over the Caribbean, if the pilot had guaranteed the passengers they would land safely, that he had flown through worse storms before and had made it unscathed, and that the systems on the plane would keep any power outage from harming them, you think they would have been much more confident despite the storm? Certainly.

Jesus makes a much greater guarantee: You don't need to fear death. And he proved it by living – after he died. Right, Jesus lived this perfect life, where he showed there was no death of sin in his body at all. Everything he did was with a focus on heaven; everything was for our best interest; everything pleased God; in everything, he met God's standard of perfection.

And his reward was the cross and death. His reward was all of our sins – our spiritual sickness and deadness – heaped on his shoulders. Again, he knew it was coming, he went willingly, and he died for you. But his work wasn't finished. Right? Even in the face of death, Jesus exclaimed, "I live." The dead body of Jesus was placed in a grave, but he rose from the dead three days later...Easter, which we're celebrating today. Easter – Jesus' resurrection – which is worth rejoicing in every day of our lives...how because Jesus lives, you and I will live with him forever in heaven.

That's what he's promised. Just a few moments before Jesus told his disciples on the night he was betrayed, ***"Because I live, you also will live,"*** he promised them, ***"In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you...I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*** At the tomb of his friend Lazarus, Jesus promised, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."*** To a Pharisee struggling to

understand the reality of God's grace, Jesus promised, ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."***

But friends, Jesus' resurrection, his life, it doesn't only promise us life to come after death. But his resurrection and his life gives us life right now. Right before the words for our sermon this morning, here's what Jesus said to his disciples, ***"I will ask the Father, and he will give you...the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives you with and will be in you...Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me,"*** and then, ***"Because I live, you also will live."***

Jesus promised his disciples he would also live in them. By Jesus giving them the Holy Spirit, they would see him through the eyes of faith, something the world couldn't do. But that's something we can do, too. Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit...he's given us the gift of faith in him. That faith grabs hold of the results of Jesus' work on the cross – forgiveness and eternal life – and it makes it our own possession.

So now, when you follow Jesus, death's scare is taken away. The living Jesus gives you the confidence your grave will be empty, just as his was. He tells all his disciples, "Because I live, you also will live." He lives in us, and that "life" is what leads to eternal life.

What's the big deal about Jesus dying and rising from the dead? Jesus' death and resurrection are important because they guarantee believers in him – you and I - will also rise from the dead and live with him forever!

What confidence that instills! I can't help but think of my grandpa, who passed away this past summer. I got to preach his funeral sermon, and what was so great was I got to talk about the confidence he expressed (and felt in his heart) of where he was going. His faith was like a locomotive. You know how those work? It starts out slowly, little by little begins to pick up steam, but soon is moving briskly along, but in a short time becoming an unstoppable force.

God made my grandpa...God has made you and I and all those who are his own an unstoppable force of faith and trust in God's plan, God's purpose, God's way, God's love, God's forgiveness, God's gift of life...so with our whole heart, to our final breath, in faith we can express the same words Paul writes in Philippians, ***"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."***

What's so great about Jesus' life and death and resurrection? Now, we know how to live. We live in faith in Jesus and in his life, death, and his resurrection. Now, we don't fear death. Now, we don't know how to die, but we know what's waiting for us after that...the full extent of the eternal life we are enjoying in part right now!

And so, in our words, in our actions, we can express with confidence the words of one of the great new hymns of the Christian church – ***"No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the pow'r of Christ in me; from life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand; till he returns or calls me home, here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand."***
Amen.