

The Hope of a New Creation

2 Corinthians 5:17

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 4, 2021

This morning, just like we did on Friday, we're here to celebrate one of the most important days in the year for us as Christians, and that is Easter, the day that Jesus rose. As Protestants, we don't have a lot of special days on the calendar, we don't have one every month, we basically have three: we have Christmas, when Jesus was born. We have Good Friday, when He died. And then we have Easter, when He rose from the grave. In fact, this is what makes Good Friday, good: the fact that He rose. If He died and stayed in the grave, that wouldn't have been very good; that would be a very normal thing. You guys all know people who have died and stayed in the grave. Matter of fact, you don't know anyone who's done anything else. The special thing about Jesus is that He went into the grave and came out of it. He didn't stay dead. We are talking about that this morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Second Corinthians. We're going to look in the book of Second Corinthians chapter five. And as you're doing that, just to introduce our passage to you, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Easter is defined as a holiday which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. It says that, although it's accumulated a great many traditions, some of which have little to do with the resurrection, Easter is still held by millions of Christians every year, as a reminder that Jesus rose from the grave. And it's considered to be one of their most sacred events. The encyclopedia got it right: the resurrection is a sacred thing.

You may not be aware of this, but the reason the church meets on Sundays is because of the resurrection. Acts 20 verse seven says the reason we have services on this day and not another one is because this is the day that Jesus rose from the grave. The Jews had a special day on Saturday, they celebrated the Sabbath on that day. We do it on Sunday because of this event. The resurrection was mentioned in the first Christian sermon, the first time anyone ever preached the gospel to a live audience. Because in Acts chapter two, the apostle Peter said to the Jews: "You delivered Jesus over to be nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." In other words, Peter says, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. You wanted to kill Jesus and put Him in the grave and keep Him down. And you couldn't do that because He rose to defeat death."

It also explains why the apostles changed so much in such a short amount of time. You read the Gospels, and you come to the end of it, and they look like a bunch of bumbling fools, don't they? But then you get in the book of Acts and they are heroes. What happened? Well, the resurrection happened. They saw a man come back from the dead and it changed their whole world. As a result, they wrote about it over and over again, all four gospels mentioned the resurrection, almost every letter in the New Testament talks about it to some degree. For the simple reason of this: this is where our hope is found as a Christian; this is where our joy is found...in the fact that one day God will bring us back from the dead; one day He will do for us what He did for His son. This world is not the end of us. There's another world coming.

I've talked to a lot of people recently that let's say they just wish things would go back to normal. You hear that phrase a lot nowadays. Well, I don't know about you, but it wasn't that great to begin with, was it? I mean, it wasn't that wonderful before all this happened. I want something else. I want a better world. The Bible says you can have one in Christ. There is a world to come. You also meet people a lot today that are so discouraged right now they're so upset because things are getting so bad. But again, you don't have to worry about that either. As a Christian, you don't have to be upset about that because this world is not your home anyway. This world is not

where you're going to end up. So don't get too caught up in something that's passing away. And that's what Paul talks about in the book of Second Corinthians, if you look in chapter five, the apostle Paul writes this. And he says in verses 1-5:

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

And then if you look down in verses 16-17, he says:

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

We'll stop the reading there. But just to say a few words about that, if you notice, Paul starts the passage off off by talking about the resurrection because he says in verse one, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The word "tent" there refers to our body. It refers to our outer man, because Paul says that even though that's failing away, falling away, even though that's being torn down, we have a building from God eternal in the heavens. The word "building" there is in contrast with the word "tent". Whereas the tent is going to be torn down, whereas the tent is going to be taken away, the building will remain, and it's eternal. That's referring to the resurrection. Verse four says that one day because of this, that which is immortal will be swallowed up by life. And then verse seven further down, says, "For we walk by faith and not by sight." This is because we're looking to that better place looking to that better life. And then in verse 17, which is our verse for today, says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away, and behold, new things have come." I'll explain that to you in a moment. We're going to walk through what this says. But the word "creature" here is a Greek word *ktisis*, which means something that's made from nothing, something that's been created from scratch. In fact, some of your translations have the word "creation" here... "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation," because this is what happens when you believe. This is what happens when you become a Christian: you become a new creation. God makes you into something that the world has never seen before. He doesn't take part of you and make it better. He doesn't take part of your soul or part of your heart and modify it like you would a car engine. No, he takes the whole engine out and he puts another one in its place. He takes the whole thing out and he starts all over again, replacing it with the new one. In other words, He brings it back from the dead. He resurrects it.

When you're saved, you are immediately, instantaneously resurrected on the inside. We try to make the Christian life so hard at times, don't we? We try to make it so complicated with rules and guidelines. And we tell people that if you want to be a Christian, you have to look like us and act like us. You have to change your hair, change your makeup, all that sort of thing. But this is far more simple than that, because here it says that when you become a Christian, you become a new creature. That's it, period. When you believe, forget the hair for a moment, forget the makeup. God tells you to live and you live. A God tells you to rise and you rise on the inside, deep down within your soul. It's a change that happens on the inside first, not the outside. It's a change that happens in

the spirit first, not in the flesh. One commentator says it like this. He says, “The change that a Christian undergoes cannot be minimized or underestimated in any way. Because in order to be saved, we must undergo a change that is as great as if we could return to our former nothingness and reemerge from the Creator's hand, and it's nothing less than that. Salvation is nothing less than this.

I want to emphasize this and make a point of it because like I said, so many people are discouraged right now. So many people are upset about what is happening on the news and what's happening with the government, that they forget this. There's something far more important going on in the world than what's happening with the government, Amen? And it's this: you are a new creation. God has made you new and the government can't touch that. No one can take this away from you. I also want to emphasize this because some people, maybe they don't get caught up in that, but they get caught up in all the rules. They get caught up in all the external things of the Christian life, that Paul says none of that matters. If you don't have this, none of your hair and makeup matter. If you don't get this, the old needs to go and the new needs to come; you need to become a new creature. A pastor friend of mine likes to say like this, “You can take a pig and dress it up like a cat, but that will not make it into a cat. He won't make it as nice and neat and tidy as a cat is because he'll still be a pig. He'll still like filth, because it's in his heart. It's in his nature. So in order to change him, you have to change that in order to fix the pig, you have to fix that problem.” And it's the same way with us. In order to be saved, your nature has to change, which is what we're going to talk about this morning.

So if you're taking notes this morning, in our passage, we're going to look at three lessons for our new life in Christ. There's no better way to celebrate the resurrection than to remind you of what you already have in Christ. If you are a Christian, God has resurrected you. Already. He's already done it. You don't have to just wait for it Sunday, you don't have to just look for it down the road. It's yours now on the inside. You're waiting for the completion of that; you're waiting for the body to come, but the soul can already be done now. The change that happened to Jesus has already in a sense happened to you. So you need to stop being so miserable. You have to learn how to enjoy this. We have a saying in the in the church I grew up that “It's Friday, but Sunday's coming.” It's Good Friday, it's dark Friday when Jesus is nailed to the cross and dead and buried in the tomb. But it's not over. That's not the end of the story. And friends, this is not the end of the story for you either as a Christian. Sunday is coming, a better day is on its way. And we need to learn how to live like that. And so we're going to do that with three lessons for our new life in Christ.

The first one is this, the new life is for anyone, which means this is available for you today. You can have this no matter who you are, no matter what you've done. This is an open invitation. If you read in verse 16, it says this: “Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.”

Just to say a few words about that, if you notice, Paul begins this passage with the word “therefore.” Which points you back to what he said before; it points back to what he said about the resurrection. Because it says since the resurrection has happened, it will bring us back from the dead. From now on, we recognize no one according to the flesh. Because what's the point? There's no sense in recognizing people according to the flesh, when that flesh is going to be dead and destroyed and buried. You get the idea. What's the point? I drive around chilliwack and I see all the beautiful houses being built and all the nice fancy cars and sometimes I just think as a preacher, what's the point? This is nice for a few decades and then it's gone. That's what this says. It says even though we have

known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him in this way no longer. It's a little hard to read there. But the idea is that we once looked at Jesus according to the flesh; we once looked at Him and His outward appearance. But now that the resurrection has happened, everything's changed for us, we see Him in a different light. And as a result, verse 17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature." That means that just as Jesus became new, so we have become new. Just as He received the new body and a new flesh and a new outer man when He resurrected, we have a new soul; we're a new creature. And He tells you who this applies to when it uses the word "anyone" here: "Therefore, if *anyone* is in Christ." In other words, this is who can have this. Anyone means anyone at all, anyone you can think of. It's an open-ended term; there's no boundaries here. Since the new creation is God's work, God sets the rules. Since it's His doing, he sets the parameters and the parameters are this: if you believe, then you will be saved. If you believe, you will become a new creature, and if you notice, it happens instantly. When you believe the new life is yours right away, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. Not "he will be" but "he is." Not "it may happen someday, if he works hard enough, and tries hard enough, and keeps all the rules, and he's a good person." No, he is one now. Right now. There's a sense of finality to this, a sense of completion. In other words, you don't come to church to be saved, you come to church because you are saved, Amen? That's the way it works. And that's the order. You don't come to church so you can change into this or develop into this or progress into this. You come to church because you were already changed.

You guys didn't come in here in the wind and the cold so you can earn your way into heaven or earn your way to God, you did it because it's already been earned for you by someone else. And you're just here to celebrate that. You didn't come here on Easter morning because you thought you were better than everyone else and godlier than everyone else. You came here because you know you're the worst sinner in the room. But Jesus saved you anyway. Some of you, I mentioned this, and I bring this up, because some of you may be reading this and saying, "You know, this is wonderful. It sounds so great. But I can't have this. I'm not good enough. I haven't kept all the rules." Yeah, well, let me ask you this friends, are you "anybody"? In this passage, it says you can have it. Do you have a heartbeat? This is for you. Others of you may read this and say, "Well, I like the way this sounds. I mean, this is so wonderful, but you don't know what I've done. You don't know how bad it is." And you're right, I don't know. But it doesn't matter. This is for anyone. This extends to even you. You just need to believe and humble yourself and receive it. In fact, the way this is worded here, the way the word "anyone" is used, it means that this is not just for the higher classes of society. It's not for those who are appealing according to the flesh. This is for those who are not appealing according to the flesh according to verse 16. And then it mentions anyone in verse 17, because this is for everybody else. Which leads to another point to consider this morning leads to another lesson for our new life in Christ.

The first one is that the new life is for anyone. The second one is that it's a miracle. A second lesson for the new life in Christ is that it's a miracle, which means that this is something that God alone can do. This is something that he alone can create in the human heart. That's why it's available for anyone if it was left up to us, and this would only be for the good people. This would only be for those who are really holy or righteous and that sort of thing. But if it's left up to God, it is for anyone. And that's what you see here. I won't read the passage again for the sake of time. I've already said a few words about the word "creature" here. It's the Greek word *ktisis*, which means something that's been made from nothing. And if you notice in verse 17, it is preceded by the word "new"; which means that this is something that has recently been made from nothing. In other words, it didn't start out that way; it had to be recreated.

Some of you are afraid this morning because your life didn't start out too good. You made a bunch of mistakes. But that's not what this is about. This is something new. It's quite a miraculous thing for something to be made one time but it's even more, it's been made twice. This refers to something that's been made twice recreated. The verse tells you how this happens when it says that it happens in Christ. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ," It is a term of location, which means this is how you get this now, this is how you receive it, you get it by being in Christ, you get it in light of your relationship to Him. When you came into the tent today, you left one environment for another. That illustration would be much better if the wind wasn't blowing so much to this thing. But you get the idea, you left one place, and came into another place. And when you did it, everything changed. In a sense, everything became new because your setting changed and your perspective changed and the way you looked at everything changed. Paul says the same thing happens when you're saved because you come into Christ. In a mysterious way that we can't fully explain, you've left one realm for another. And when you did that He made you into a new creature.

The word "new creature" can mean several things here. It can refer to a new heart and a new soul and a new nature like we just talked about. It can refer to a new mind and a new spirit and a new conscience or awareness of life. When you survey the Bible, you see several things that are used to describe this like a new birth. It's like being born again. It's like starting all over again from scratch, just like a baby would. There's nothing more new than a baby. And salvation is like having a new birth. It's also called a transformation because Colossians 1:13 says, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." That means He relocated you, He removed your soul from one kingdom and put it into another one, which is why it feels like a new birth.

In other parts of the Bible, it's called a resurrection and the deliverance. Some passages call it a healing or a restoration, or renewal or quickening of the soul. But the idea is that you change when God does this for you, you become a different person. Life doesn't go on like the status quo. This has impacted your life forever.

This is why it's a miracle. It's why it's a work of God. You and I can't do this. We don't have the power. But God does. You know, just using the illustration of a new birth here, when you were born, the doctor didn't shake your hand and say congratulations, you just birthed yourself. He shook your parents hand, he shook your mother's and your father's hand because they did all the work. You didn't do anything. It's the same way when you're born again. It's the same way when you become a Christian. We'd like to minimize this today because we know so little of this in the church. We see so little of this among professing Christians today. Because for so many of them, it's just same old, same old. They grew up in church, they're still in church. He grew up nice. They're still nice. Everybody's nice. We're all nice. That's not what this is talking about. This is a change of such greater proportions. I heard one evangelist describe it this way. He said, If I said that I got hit by a truck on my way to church today, you guys would say that you don't believe me. You would comment on how I haven't changed. If I said I got hit by a semi out on highway one, I was walking across the road and just plowed right into me. But here I am, you guys would say that didn't happen. In the same way my friends, if you've been hit by God, you won't look the same. If you've come face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ, it will change you.

One more point to consider for this morning. One more lesson for our new life in Christ. Just to review these other ones, the first one is that this is for anyone, which means that this is available for you. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done. And second, it's a miracle, which means this is something God alone can do. It's why

this is available for anyone. This is why you can have this, because this is all of Him. If you feel too weak and too helpless or too powerless this morning, you're in the right place. That's the kind of person God saves.

One more point to consider for our new life in Christ and that is that it is permanent, which means it lasts forever, for all eternity. If you have this, then you have this until the end, which is what verse 17 refers to. It says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

As Paul continues the verse here, he gives us more details about our new life in Christ; he gives us more information. He says, "The old things passed away; behold, new things have come." The word "passed away", is in a Greek tense that means it has completely passed away, it is completely vanished. In other words, this is not a gradual thing. It's not progressive, this is instantaneous. This is sudden, there is a sense in which you're being sanctified, and your sin is gradually being taken away from you. But that's not what this is referring to. This is instantaneous. Some people say they don't know when they were saved. They don't know the day or the hour. And I get that. I meet a lot of people like that. But there was a day and there was an hour because salvation comes on you like this. If you notice the verb is also in a tense that shows that it's permanent. Now, this is a fixed thing because the old things are not passing away and on their way out the door. No, they're already past, they're already gone. And the new things are already here. They've already arrived. To add to that, this phrase "old things", is very broad here. You could put a lot of things under this umbrella because it's general, but it basically refers to your old life before you became a Christian. It refers to the old person that you used to be. In the phrase "new things", it's just the opposite of that because it refers to your new life as a Christian, the new man that you are. Paul says that when you were saved, that completely changed for you. You went from one person to the next. Again, going back to what we just said, there was a difference in you. When you're saved, there is a passing there, it is a movement in your life. You can't stay in the same spot.

In fact, if you read the book of Second Corinthians, all of these things in this book are possible for you. Because of this because God has changed. I didn't mention this earlier. But we went through the book of Second Corinthians recently in the in the men's Bible study. And the book of Second Corinthians was written to give you encouragement. It was written to give you hope. People need some hope nowadays, don't they? And they need some encouragement. That's what this book was. It was written to people that are hurting. And so if you look in chapter four, verse seven, here's some of the hope that Paul gives us. 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing." I read that passage and I think about the church and Canada right now. I think about the church in British Columbia because we are afflicted but not crushed. And we are perplexed. It's perplexing right now isn't it?. We're perplexed every other day. But we're not despairing because we have a treasure in earthen vessels. The phrase "earthen vessels" means clay jars, Jars of Clay, which are very common in the ancient world. They're kind of like plastic bags are today. I mean, everywhere you go, you can see plastic bags, in your house and in the store. Paul says that's what we are as Christians, we're like plastic bags that hold a great treasure. Our hope is not in the bag. Our hope is not in the container, it's what's inside of it. You can scratch the bag, you can tear the bag. It doesn't matter. What's important is the treasure. And we're the same way as Christians.

Chapter Four, verse 16 says this another way. Verses 16-17, if you look further down, say, "Therefore we do not lose heart but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Now Paul says, "Though

our outer man is decaying, we don't lose heart." I've had to quote this verse to a lot of people lately, because I see a lot of people losing heart nowadays. Their hearts are just kind of sinking. Paul says you need to pick it up. You don't want to lose your heart because your inner man is being renewed. God renewed it once and now He's renewing it day by day. God changed it once and now He's changing it moment by moment, which gives you hope. It gives you encouragement. But the point is that all of this is possible. Because of this, all of this is possible, because God has changed you. The old things have passed away and the new things have come. My friends, this is important. This is a big deal because this is how you know you're saved. This is how you know you'll be resurrected one day, and experienced what Jesus did. You know it because your life looks like this. It looks like the old things just keep leaving you, they've left and they just keep leaving. You have less taste for the old things. The older you get as a Christian, they're just not appealing to you anymore. They're just not attractive. And the new things keep coming and the new things are more attractive to you. And they're more desirable to you.

This last year, if it didn't do anything else for us, it made us despise the world more and more and more as Christians. There's nothing appealing in the world anymore. You can't even enjoy a game of hockey anymore or basketball without something political being thrown in there. God is just stripping us away of these worldly things. He keeps changing us. On way that you can be assured of your salvation is because you experienced that change. It's been said that a Christian is a work in progress because God is never done with him. He's never done with us. And the way you know you're saved is because God just keeps working on you and keeps working in you. And that leads me to ask you friends, is God working on you this morning? Are you experiencing what it means to be a new creature? Are you drawn more and more and more to these spiritual things day by day by day? If you are, that means God has saved you. Listen, you're not going to see spiritual things in heaven if you're not seeing some of them now. And you're not going to like them in heaven if you don't like him now. So is that happening to you? Day by day I pray that it is friends. But if it's not, take the hope of this passage. This is for anyone. You can be a new creation if you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me pray for you now that you would do that. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the words of this passage that we've read today. Just the depth of it and the wisdom of what Paul writes here about our new creation. And I pray for my friends who were here this morning, because I know many of them are encouraged by this. They read this and they say, "That's me. I've gone through that." And Lord, would you bless him and build them up? Remind them that one day they'll see the fulfillment of that in glory and be resurrected. For those who are not seeing this this morning. For those who are reading this passage and saying, "I don't have that. I want that." Lord, would you draw them to Christ and draw them to the Savior? Would we see some become new creations this morning? Nothing would bring us more joy than that. As we come to the Lord's table, we want to remember what our Savior has done to make all this possible. Father, thank You for the cross. Thank you for the resurrection and the empty tomb. Would You be glorified as we remember it all today here at the Lord's table, we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.