

MBC - 4/16/2017 - Easter Sunday - Pastor Doug Thompson  
“*Death, Then Life*”  
John 12:24-26

On this Resurrection Sunday, we celebrate our Lord Jesus’ resurrection from dead. But before He could be raised, He had to die. The order was death, then life. And what was true of Jesus, is also true for you and me: *the gateway to life, is death.*

- John 12:20-33 <sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [notice what Jesus says next:] <sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup>Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. <sup>27</sup>“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.

[pray: Our Father, open our ears to hear Jesus speak to each of us this morning. Show us what it means to die daily to sin and self “so that we who live might no longer live for ourselves but for Him who for our sakes died and was raised.” Show us what needs to die, that we might live.]

- An Italian radio interviewer was interviewing a Trappist monk who lived in a monastery in Italy. The Trappist monks live very quiet, serene lives. The interviewer asked this monk a good question: “What if you were to realize at the end of your life that atheism is true, and that there is no God?” He replied, “Holiness, silence, and sacrifice are beautiful in themselves. Even without the promise of a reward, I still will have used my life well.”

If that same interviewer had asked the Apostle Paul that question, he would have been shocked at his answer—(look with me)—

- 1 Corinthians 15:14-20 <sup>14</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. <sup>15</sup>We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. <sup>16</sup>For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. <sup>17</sup>And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup>Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup>If in Christ we have hope in this life only, *we are of all people most to be pitied.* <sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Most to be *pitied* - not envied! And jump down to—

- 1 Corinthians 15:30-32 <sup>30</sup>Why are we in danger every hour? <sup>31</sup>I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! <sup>32</sup>What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Paul’s answer would have been: “Unless Jesus *really* was raised, and we *really* will be raised, then the Christian life nuts. At least if we live it the way Jesus calls us to live it! Like Paul

did: in danger every hour for the sake of Christ. Fighting wild beasts in Ephesus -he says, “*I die every day!*”

But if there’s nothing beyond the grave, then he would say, “Pity me and call me the biggest sucker who ever lived! - unless it’s all true.”

- You see, if you live like that monk did: peace and quiet, sheltered from the world in mystical serenity - that’s a nice life even if there is no afterlife. But that’s not the life Jesus calls His disciples to. He calls them to follow in His footsteps in a life of suffering, sacrifice, and self-deprivation, *that only makes sense*, if the resurrection is true, and the next life will be glorious!

Now turn back to John 12: Jesus is telling us that to follow Him means putting all your eggs in one basket - to use an Easter metaphor! We bank it all on Him and His promise that what we lose here for the sake of Christ, we gain a million-fold on the other side. The order for everyone who follows Jesus is the same as it was for Him: death, then life.

**\*But here is the point I want to make this morning:** ‘Death, then life’ is not just the order at the *end* of your Christian life, but *throughout* your Christian life.

### I. For Jesus it was death, then life.

Let’s look at what is going on here.

- John 12:20-23 <sup>20</sup>Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

This is just days before the cross, and these Greek-speaking Gentiles wanted to see Jesus. They had heard that He could raise the dead; that He claimed to be the Resurrection and the Life - and that He could forgive their sins. So they went to Philip who had a Greek name like theirs and said: “*Sir, we wish to see Jesus*” (v.21).

This is huge. When the whole nation of Israel rejects its Messiah and is about to crucify Him, and Gentiles come seeking Him - that marks a turning point in redemptive history. But notice Jesus’ response—

- “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*”

What is He saying? “It’s time to shed My blood for the sins of My people.” But He said it was for Him to be *glorified* - yes, but Jesus knew that death was the gateway to glory.

These Greeks represented the “other sheep” and those “children of God scattered abroad” that He was going to gather together into one flock with one Shepherd. But that could only happen through His death. This is how it happens—

- John 12:24-30 <sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Jesus described His death like a seed which is buried in the ground and dies. They could all relate to that. They knew that one grain of wheat wasn’t worth much, but if you sacrificed

that one grain by burying it in the ground and allowing it to decompose - to *die* - it would come out of the ground bearing many more grains.

Jesus was about to lay down His own life: die, and be buried in the ground like a seed, so that He might bear much fruit. And the fruit He was thinking of was all those He would purchase by His death! All those names on His breastplate that we saw last Sunday - including multitudes of Gentiles, like most of us here. But the seed had to die before it could bear fruit. Death, then life.

- And this is dead center in our Gospel message: Jesus died, and was buried. He came to die - because He couldn't give us life apart from His death. We need to fix this in our minds: The center of our Christian message isn't Jesus' life, or His miracles - those are part of it: it's the Person of God who came to die so that we might have life.

Once you see this, you see it throughout Scriptures: In Gen. 3:15, that prediction that when Messiah comes He will be bruised by the serpent; God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of animals who had shed their blood; Abraham placed his *only son*, Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice, but God sent a ram as a *substitute*. Last week we talked about the Passover and the blood of the lamb that was sprinkled over each household. So many, many pictures and types pointing to Jesus' death.

And when we come to the Gospels, the shadow of the cross was over Jesus' life from the beginning when the magi gave the baby Jesus myrrh - what He was offered as He hung on the cross. John the Baptist sees Jesus at the Jordan and cries out, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" Jesus told Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life."

And I want to show you something in the story of the Mt. of Transfiguration—

- Luke 9:29-31 <sup>29</sup>And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup>who appeared in glory and spoke of his *departure*, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Two of the most important men in the Old Testament appear to Jesus - who is giving a pre-view of His glory - and what is the topic of discussion? "*His departure*," the Gk. word is "*exodus*." His death. Think about that: *Moses*, speaking to *Jesus* about *His exodus* - wow!

And the word "spoke," means, they continued to speak, they kept speaking about His death. Of course Moses and Elijah kept talking to Jesus about it because their own salvation was at stake in His death!

But I have to think that they were astonished and struggled to grasp that the Son of God had to die and be buried in the ground - *before* He would be glorified? Peter sure struggled with it —

- Matthew 16:21-23 <sup>21</sup>From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. [death, then life] <sup>22</sup>And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." <sup>23</sup>But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance

to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

To Jesus, the cross was a goal to be fulfilled. To Peter, the cross was a disaster to be averted. “Jesus, don’t You know that God wants You to have *Your Best Life Now?*”

Peter was *worldly* here! Even satanic! He didn’t like the order: Suffering and death, and *then* glory. But later Peter said that the prophets—

- . . . predicted the *sufferings* of Christ and the subsequent *glories*. 1 Peter 1:10-11

*Subsequent* - that means *after* the suffering, then glory. And if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, the order is the same for you—

- Romans 8:18 <sup>18</sup>For I consider that the *sufferings of this present time* are not worth comparing with *the glory that is to be revealed to us*.

The glory is coming! Jesus promised it! But—

## II. For Jesus’ followers it is death, then life.

Jesus moves from talking about Himself to talking about anyone who will follow Him. His reality will be their reality in this world—

- John 12:24-26 <sup>24</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup>Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Now there is a big difference between Jesus’ death in v.24 and our death in vv.25-26: Jesus’ death was for our salvation. We are saved when we trust in *His* death for us. We died with Him! Right? That is our justification.

But in vv.25-26, Jesus is talking about our *sanctification*. And it’s sanctification through *imitation*. We follow in His footsteps: suffering, *then* glory; death, *then* life. But Jesus isn’t *just* saying, “You will have a rough life here, but you have heaven to look forward to”—

He means that we are to choose to die to self, *daily*, so that we might live more and more to Christ, *daily*, in this life! *It’s death by choice*. Saying no to sin and self, to say yes to Jesus. Jesus promises here that when you choose to die to *self*-will, to live for *His* will, you will experience the abundant life of Christ right now - and forever!

- It’s exactly the opposite of the world we live in, right? Our world says no to nothing. “Get it now . . . have it all . . . YOLO - you only live once. . . . never deny yourself any pleasure.” The heroes of our world are those who indulge every desire and get the most pleasure, money and bling in this life.

But Jesus promises real life, abundant life, *in this life*, when you put to death your fleshly desires in order to follow Him.

That's what He meant when He told us to take up our cross daily: Crucify the remaining sin within! Be ruthless, be violent! Didn't He say 'pluck out your eye and cut off your hand?' This is what it means to follow Jesus in this life. Turn with me—

- Colossians 3:3-10 <sup>3</sup>For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. <sup>5</sup>Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup>In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup>But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Kill sin or it will be killing you! Are you doing that? Are you at war with the things Paul mentions here? Are you dying daily to those sins that once kept you from Christ? They will still keep you from Christ! The goal of putting these sins to death is not asceticism, or having something to make you feel spiritual - the goal is to die to sin so that you *live* more to Christ. Let me say it again: The goal isn't death, the goal is the life that comes through death.

- Let me say it again: **'Death, then life' is not just the order at the *end* of your Christian life, but *throughout* your Christian life.**

Janice and I were talking about what this means in the daily reality of our lives, and she read me a passage out of a book by Elizabeth Elliot, in a chapter entitled "Death is a new beginning."—

"Nowhere is the life/death cycle more obvious than in marriage. While bride and groom, consumed with joy, may well make it through the wedding without tears, the parents often do not. Newlyweds focus on the new life. Parents focus on the one that is over. It does not take long after the wedding, however, for the young husband and wife to discover that marriage is both a new life and an unexpected death. At this point each is likely to feel that a horrible mistake has been made. Marriage is death to privacy, independence, childhood's home and family, death to unilateral decisions and the notion that there is only one way of doing things, *death* to the self. When these little deaths are gladly and wholeheartedly accepted, new life---the glory of sacrificial love which leads to perfect union---is inevitable.

Then, in the normal course of things, follows parenthood, fraught with joy and pain. A new life, and a radically new laying down of life begins---through all of the sacrifices and sufferings of birth, weaning, training, school, puberty, adolescence, marriage, each with a different kind of loneliness. Thus the cycle goes on—life out of death, gain out of loss. . . [but] this is what the Crucified Life is all about."

We die to sin so that we might live to Christ. Let me show you four things that are very hard in this passage, and four things that are glorious. Look again at vv.24-26—

#### ***A. Four things that are hard.***

##### ***1.) Verse 24: The grain of wheat must die.***

Jesus came to die. And when Jesus calls a person to follow Him, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “He bids him to come and die.” That’s how the Christian life begins: with a decision to die to your old life and crucify your old self - to follow Jesus.

That’s *very* hard. It’s a brick wall and our self-will smashes up against it. Unless God breaks our self-will, we won’t follow Jesus. He told us—

- Matthew 7:14 <sup>14</sup>For the gate is narrow and the way is *hard* that leads to *life*, and those who find it are few.
- In Luke’s Gospel in 13:24, He said, “Strive - literally, *agonize* - to enter through the narrow gate.”

It’s agony because you have to die. A couple weeks ago we looked at—

- Galatians 6:14 [where Paul said] . . . far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, *by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

“I’m dead to the world.” When you follow Christ, you might have the same job, the same talents, the same family and friends, but your relationship to them is radically different. Jesus and His call on your life come first. And you might lose these if you follow Him—

- Luke 14:27 <sup>27</sup>Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. [And here is Jesus’ application - this is what it might mean:] <sup>26</sup>“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

*Hate* here means to love less - you must love everyone and everything less than Jesus. He comes first, even if it costs you your marriage, or family relationships. Even if it costs your own life. It cost Jesus His own life to do His Father’s will - and that’s why you and I have forgiveness and eternal life. The seed had to die to bear much fruit. And that’s hard.

## **2.) Verse 25: We must lose our life and hate our life.**

Nothing is to rule over us besides Christ. Nothing is to dominate us. He bought and paid for us, and we surrender ourselves over to Him and His will for us.

Amy Carmichael gave up her life to sail to India as a young woman. She ended up rescuing little girls given up by their parents to serve as temple prostitutes for the Hindu gods. She did this for 55 years without a vacation or a furlough. After an accident, she spent most of her last 20 years there in bed. She died and was buried there in 1951.

- Elizabeth Elliot wrote this about her: “Amy’s great longing was to have a “single eye” for the glory of God. Whatever might blur the vision God had given her of His work, whatever would distract or deceive or tempt her to seek anything but the Lord Jesus Himself she tried to *eliminate*.”

She *eliminated* certain things from her life - she said no. She died to those things that would “blur her vision of God, or tempt her to seek anything but the Lord Jesus Himself.” Do you ever do that?

- While she was in India, she received a letter from a young lady who was considering life as a missionary. She asked her, "What is missionary life like?" Amy wrote back and said: *"Missionary life is simply a chance to die."*

### **3.) Verse 26a: Jesus calls us to follow Him.**

That's hard. Where was He going? To the cross. If you sign up to follow Jesus, you're on the road to Calvary. That's hard. Your future is dangerous and uncertain. Don't listen to anyone who tells you different.

I mentioned Dietrich Bonhoeffer earlier. He was a brilliant German theologian. An intellectual, a musician, from a well-to-do family. He went to New York, to study at Union Seminary, but when he heard how Hitler was gaining power, he decided that he had to go back to Germany, even though he knew his life would be in danger—

- *I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.*

So he went right into the lion's den, and two years later he was hanged by Hitler at Flossen-berg concentration camp. But he wrote this as he waited to go to his death—

No one has yet believed in God and the kingdom of God, no one has yet heard about the realm of the resurrected, and not been homesick from that hour, waiting and looking forward to being released from bodily existence.

And which of us knows how near he or she may already be to the goal? That life only really begins when it ends here on earth, that all that is here is only the prologue before the curtain goes up - that is for young and old alike to think about. Why are we so afraid when we think about death? ... Death is only dreadful for those who live in dread and fear of it. Death is not wild and terrible, if only we can be still and hold fast to God's Word. Death is not bitter, if we have not become bitter ourselves. Death is grace, the greatest gift of grace that God gives to people who believe in him. Death is mild, death is sweet and gentle; it beckons to us with heavenly power, if only we realize that it is *the gateway to our homeland*, the tabernacle of joy, the everlasting kingdom of peace.

How do we know that dying is so dreadful? Who knows whether, in our human fear and anguish we are only shivering and shuddering at the most glorious, heavenly, blessed event in the world?

*"The gateway to our homeland!"*

### **4.) Verse 26b: Jesus calls us to serve Him - to take the lowest place among men to do His will.**

This is a real death - to crucify your pride and your ego. It's especially hard for Christians who are naturally gifted and talented, or intelligent; maybe they're strong, natural leaders. Christ calls them to take the lowest place. To wash feet—

- Matthew 20:25-28 [After His Disciples had been arguing about who among them was the greatest:] <sup>25</sup>But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup>It

shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup>even as the Son of Man [the most gifted, intelligent, capable Person who ever lived!] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

But now I want you to see that for every sacrifice Jesus calls us to make, He gives a promise.

### ***B. Four things that are glorious.***

#### ***1.) Verse 24: Yes, the grain of wheat must die, but it doesn't die in vain, it bears much fruit.***

The more you die to your own desires to live for Christ and the Gospel, the more fruit for Christ you will see! In the last verse of Paul's long chapter on the resurrection he says in—

- 1 Corinthians 15:58 <sup>58</sup>Therefore, my beloved brothers, [because He lives, and you live in Him] be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor *is not in vain*.

Jesus will bless all the sacrifices of His servants; all the times you died to self - there will be fruit! So go ahead and make that sacrifice, give up that sleep, that Saturday, for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. There will be fruit!

- John 15:5 <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

#### ***2.) Verse 25: Yes, we must lose our life and hate our life in this world, but we gain this life and the next.***

Think about what you gave up compared to what you gained! Good riddance, right?

- We give that up for eternal life! Good exchange. That's the Art of the Deal! And eternal life isn't just what lies on the other side! Eternal life begins the moment we trust in Christ for forgiveness of our sins. We are in synch with God and His universe, we know God and He knows us. If you are a Christian, you know that sometimes when you are worshiping, singing His praises, experiencing the love of the body - you feel like you've already died and gone to heaven! And for anything He calls you to sacrifice here, He will put back into your hands 1,000-fold in the next life.

You have to follow me on this: Jesus used two different words for “life” in this passage: “Whoever loves his *life*” = *psuche*, it means this physical life in this material world. Whoever loves *this life* and tries to keep this life instead of following Christ, loses it all when he dies. Everything: this life and eternal life.

But whoever will count *this life* as loss to follow Christ, “will keep it for *eternal life*,” different word = *zoe*. Notice, Jesus says that if we give up this life - we not only get real life, life lived in synch with God, *here*; but we also get eternal life, forever!

Here's the passage that proves this is—

- Mark 10:29-30 <sup>29</sup>Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, <sup>30</sup>who will not receive a hundredfold *now in this time*, houses and brothers



and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

**3.) Verse 26a: *If we follow Him here, we will be with Him there.***

Jesus' journey didn't end at the cross, and ours doesn't either. If we follow Him here, we will follow Him to heaven. He promised us—

- John 14:3 <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.
- John 17:24 <sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

We have to take it by faith that see Jesus in His glory will be the most thrilling, satisfying thing that a person can ever experience! It's what Moses wanted to see, and he just got a glimpse. Peter, James, and John just got a glimpse on the Mt. We will get the whole shot and we will say, "Paul was right when he told us, "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us!"

- When Jim Elliot and his 4 friends were speared to death by the Auca Indians in Ecuador in 1956, Life magazine had an article that asked, "Why are we sending our best and brightest to these savages just to be murdered?" But Jim Elliot answered that question in his journal: "*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*"

**4.) Verse 25b: *Yes, we must become Christ's servants, but His promise is that if anyone who serves Him will be honored by God the Father!***

If you follow Christ in this hard life, you will be honored by God the Father. Wow. Think about the greatest honor you have ever received: an award, a trophy, a medal, a degree. Jesus promises that everyone who dies to self to serve Him will be honored by God - we just don't have file folder in our brains for that.

Jesus even told a parable about how He will honor those who serve Him—

- Luke 12:37 . . . Truly, I say to you, He will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and He will come and serve them.

With sweet manna, all around!

\* \* \*

So are you ready to die to follow Jesus Christ?

I was reading near the end of Luke's Gospel a couple weeks ago and a passage just grabbed me:

- Luke 22:54 <sup>54</sup>Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and *Peter was following at a distance.*

Jesus calls us to follow Him, but never from a distance. We all know how that ended for Peter: he denied he even knew *Jesus*. I asked myself these question, and I want you to ask yourself the same questions:

“Am I following Jesus from a distance? Is there anything coming between me and Jesus?”

“So what needs to die so bring me close to Jesus again?”

“Is there something in my life that I am keeping alive that Jesus has sentenced to die?”

- 2 Corinthians 5:15 . . . and he died. . . that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.