

Happy Easter to you. Easter is a special time of year. It's a time of new birth when spring is in the air...along with the pollen of various trees, weeds and grasses! It's a time when kids get a visit from the Easter Bunny and their parents try to avoid a visit from the I.R.S. Don't forget, Tuesday is tax day - You're welcome.

You came to church today because you believe Easter is a special time of year. The empty tomb holds out promise that there is life after death. The life of Jesus appears to end on a bloody cross. But there is no Easter without the surprise of the empty tomb. When we are at our lowest point and all seems lost there is a resurrection power available to raise us up and give us new life.

Easter is special because the resurrection answers the question that has dogged mankind from the beginning of time. "Is there life after death?" But today I want to focus on a slightly different question - **is there life before death?** You see, the resurrection is not just a pleasant thought to help you sleep at night. Nor is it the trump card you pull out when you are trying to prove that Christianity is true. It is true that the empty tomb is the bedrock of our faith. As Paul said, "If Christ was not raised from the dead then our faith is in vain." But the resurrection is more than historical evidence. It is the guarantee that we can experience new life.

There is a passage in the book of Romans that tells us how we can experience this new resurrection life. It sets forth the proposition that the quality of our lives depends on our willingness to embrace the reality of the resurrection.

I. TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY...6:1-2. There seems to be a lot of confusion in our culture today about sin. Opinions on the subject fall between two extreme positions. For some, everything is a sin. We recently returned from Israel where it is a sin to push an elevator button on the Sabbath or to keep meat and milk in the same refrigerator. It's even a sin to tear toilet paper on the Sabbath. There are 613 laws in the OT and thousands of interpretations of those laws. The law serves to expose our sinful nature. In Romans 5:20 says, "The Law came to increase the trespass." In other words, every time God draws a line, we step over it.

But it's not just Judaism that is sin conscious. I'll never forget an encounter I had with Charlie Rasberry..."I can tell you that not one drop of alcohol has ever passed these lips!" Really? You might want to reconsider that.

The other extreme position on sin is that there is no such thing. I'm OK, You're OK. The world is a happy place where people all love each other with a few exceptions like Syria, North Korea, Iran. Sure, we all make mistakes but sin? That's such an antiquated concept...and a conversation killer for sure.

The Bible says "all have sinned." Sometimes the sinfulness of man is inescapable like when suicide bombers walk in Egypt and kill 49 Christians attending church on Palm Sunday. Or like the accounts of the brutality of the crucifixion of Jesus. Most people would agree that these vicious acts would qualify as sin. So if heartless brutality is the definition of sin, then we're all OK. But sin is subtle. Did you know that it has been documented that we take longer leaving a parking space if there is someone waiting for it than when there is no one waiting for us to leave? People sit at their table at the restaurant when they know someone is waiting for a table than they do when no one is waiting. What does this say about us? Oswald Chambers describes sin this way: "The nature of sin is not immorality and wrongdoing, but the nature of self-realization which leads us to say, "I am my own god." This nature may exhibit itself in proper morality or in improper immorality, but it always has a common basis— my claim to my right to myself."

Paul says those who have invited Christ into their lives have died to sin. This does not mean that sin no longer exists or that it is no longer an option for us. To die to sin means to be set free from sin as the dominant, governing influence in our lives. How do we do that?

II. TRUST CHRIST COMPLETELY...v. 3. To be baptized into Christ is another way of saying to identify completely with Christ. Just as baptism involves being immersed in water, baptism into Christ means that we are immersed in a new relationship with Jesus. It also means that we are immersed into His body the church. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." 1 Cor. 12:13.

We do baptism by immersion because we believe it is the best way to convey being immersed into this new relationship. I've never been a fan of baptism by sprinkling because there are too many people who have been sprinkled with a little Jesus. Jesus never left that option open to us. He requires a total commitment, a transfer of trust from self to Him.

If you have ever rappelled you have experienced this transfer of trust from yourself to some other person. "Lean back, I've got you." Girl, once I lower myself over this cliff you better learn how to fly!"

III. LIVE LIFE ABUNDANTLY...vv. 4-7. In v. 4 Paul throws us a curve. The sentence does not end as we might expect. For example, if I say...

"Garbage in/ garbage _____."

"God helps those who/ _____."

"Do unto others as you would have them/ do _____."

"As Christ was raised from the dead so we too might be _____."

You would expect, "raised from the dead." But he says "so that we too might walk in newness of life." His focus is not on life AFTER death but life BEFORE death! What does this new life look like?

I have a new attitude toward sin. I take it seriously because I'm an addict. Sin is the original addiction. I keep putting myself on the throne. I manipulate everyone and everything to serve my own selfish purposes. But because of the cross, I'm a recovering addict. I am not controlled by sin. Because of my relationship with Jesus, God does not even keep a record of my sins.

Isaiah said, "You have cast all my sins behind Your back." Is. 38:17

David said, "He has taken our sins away from us as far as the East is from West." Ps. 103:12

Micah said, "You will throw away all our sins into the deepest part of the sea." Micah 7:19

Jeremiah, "I will forgive them for the wicked things they did, and I will remember their sins no more." Jer. 31:34

I have a new understanding about life. Life is no longer about suckin' air and eatin' groceries. That's the bios kind of life. Jesus used a different word, zoe. Zoe is a quality of life that makes all things new. That's what Jesus experienced in the resurrection. Jesus was not just resuscitated. He was resurrected. He experienced a new form of life. Our identification with Jesus Christ in His resurrection, besides being the guarantee of a physical resurrection in the future, is the start of new spiritual life now. We are set free, separated from sin's power, to enjoy a new quality of life.

Bill Bartholdi..."I don't want to be rehabilitated. Rehabilitation means I just go back to the person I was before I did the crime. I want to be a new person." Bill wasn't looking for a resuscitation. He was looking for a resurrection. If God can breathe life into a dead man, then He can breathe life into a dead beat offender or a dead marriage or a dead church. Jesus didn't die to rehabilitate you. He didn't die on a cross to make bad people good or good people a little gooder! He died to make dead people alive!

I want you to hear from someone who has experienced the power of the resurrection...Marisa Arias...

Close with invitation