



Ephesians 4:25-32
The Resurrected Life

This morning we celebrate the most important event in the Christian faith – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now why would I say that? Why would I say this morning is more important than Christmas? Isn't Christmas more widely celebrated? Don't we see Christmas decorations all over town, at the Mall, don't we fill the radio with Christmas songs and make Christmas movies and Christmas sweaters. Yes. And beyond all doubt, Christmas occupies much more of the world's attention. But Christmas is a time to celebrate Christ coming to earth. Easter, or Resurrection Sunday, helps us remember WHY He came.

That cute baby born in a manger in Bethlehem was here for a purpose – He came to die. He came to be a sacrifice to make up for all the wrong that people like you and me do every day. He came to bring forgiveness and fresh starts to people who could never make that happen on their own.

But how did we get here, how did we get to the place where someone would have to die on a cross and be buried in a tomb in order for me to be OK with God?

It all goes back to the very beginning when ["God created the heavens and the earth" \(Gen 1:1\)](#). And He created Adam and Eve, the first humans. They weren't born, they didn't evolve, God created them. And He put them, as fully formed, mature human beings, into a fully formed, mature creation on a fully-formed, mature, planet in a fully-formed, mature, universe. On the day they were created they appeared to be much older than they were, which I also believe explains the apparent age of the universe. Adam and Eve appeared to be much older than they were, and I believe the same thing is true about the world they inhabited.

But that's not the point this morning, the point is, they were put on this planet, in what the Bible tells us was a garden of paradise, and they were given the task of exploring the place, taking good care of it – they were to be the first, and best, environmentalists – and they had a direct relationship with God in the process. They had direct access to both the Creation and the Creator. And there was only one rule – not thousands of them – just one: don't eat from one particular tree, just that one tree, only it was off limits.

It was a way to test them – would they trust the God who made them and had given them so much to enjoy, or would they be suspicious of His motives and suspect they knew best?

One day, someone who had already rebelled against God tempted them – the Bible calls him Satan, Lucifer, the devil. He was not a human being; he was a fallen, rebellious angel. And he spoke to Eve and got her to doubt the goodness, the trustworthiness of God and to

trust in herself and her own intuition instead. And in a moment of self-centeredness, of self-trust, of self-confidence, she chose to do what she wanted to do instead of what God had commanded. And then Adam did the same.

The sad thing is, their little experiment in exploring their own ideas over God's commands produced no benefit and had disastrous consequences. They got nothing out of it, and lost everything through it.

In the Christian faith we talk a lot about the idea of sin. But what is sin? It's exactly what we see Adam and Eve doing – following their own ideas and preferences instead of obeying God's commands. Sin is also sometimes expressed as “missing the mark.” You're trying to hit a target and you just keep missing. There can be sins of commission, things you did that you shouldn't do, and sins of omission, things you should do, that you don't. There can be intentional sins and accidental sins. In our criminal law we have categories for murder and manslaughter. One requires intent, the other does not, but both are still crimes.

You can come at it from all sorts of angles, but the end result is the same – we do not measure up to God's standards on our own. Whether through intentional, willful, rebellion, ignorance, inability, or simply being uninterested, we just don't measure up to God's standards. So what is God to do? Well, like any parent has the right to punish disobedience in their child, like any government has the right to punish disobedience in its citizens, God has the right to punish us.

But here's the crazy thing, He knew we couldn't take the punishment. If it was physical, like a spanking, He knew we couldn't endure. If it was imprisonment, He knew it wouldn't change us enough. If it was a fine to be paid, He knew we couldn't earn enough, so He graciously determined to take on the punishment Himself.

And that is what we see happening on the cross – Jesus Christ was sent by God to stand in our place, receive our punishment, and offer us forgiveness. In what has been called the Great Exchange, we give Him our sin, our inability, our brokenness and He gives us His purity, perfection, ability and holiness.

The cross and the resurrection show us the mercy and the justice of God. God is just because He knows, and we know, there is sin in our lives. You might say it's a big deal, or it's not that big of deal, but almost no one will say they've never done anything wrong. We all see a need for forgiveness in our lives. So there is justice – God calls our wrongs “wrong” and He pronounces judgment on them. But then He offers mercy by taking our place.

And after the transaction was complete, He raised Christ from the grave as if to say, it's finished, it's done, it's over. It's time to start all over again. You once were stained and now you're spotless in His sight.

And if you need that, if you need to be forgiven of your sins, if you've done some things that are weighing on you, if you haven't been the person you know you should be, this is good news for you. If you've been trying hard to live the right way and you have this sense that

it's just not enough, if you feel like you're not quite making it, this is good news for you. Because the forgiveness of God is available to you today.

The Bible says that every single one of us has sinned.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

And every single one of us is guilty and deserves punishment. So if you're breathing you qualify as a candidate for forgiveness in Christ. The Bible also says God doesn't want people to suffer on their own; He doesn't want to punish you.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

He will. He has to if you insist on doing your own thing. But it's not His first option.

Instead He says

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You can argue with that all day long and talk about why you're different or it doesn't exactly apply to you or doesn't work for you, or you don't need it yet. That's fine. But when you're done talking or thinking, it's still going to be there in the Scriptures saying the same thing.

God is calling us to repent. That means to stop doing what we've always been doing, and do things His way instead. When that little baby Jesus grew up and became an adult and began His public ministry, His very first message was:

Matthew 4:17 Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

It's the message we hear over and over in the Scripture. Repent. It means turn around, go the other way, head toward your Heavenly Father's house instead of running away.

If you want to do that, you start by praying. And you can do it right here, right now, right there in your seat. You pray to God, admitting your sin, expressing a desire to repent and change, and to be forgiven. You commit your life to Him, thank Him for what Jesus did by taking our place, and you ask God for help to live the way He's calling you to live from here on out.

If you want to make that kind of decision, or if you want to reaffirm that kind of decision, you can do it right here and now. Will you pray with me? Bow your head and make these words your own.

Heavenly Father, I admit to you that I am a sinner. I have rebelled against you, I have ignored you or been unaware of you, and I have let you down, but I want to change. I want to be forgiven. I want to repent; I want to turn my life around. I want to do things differently. I want to be changed. Will you do that for me? I give You my life. I give You control. I submit to You. Where You lead, I will follow. I thank You for sending Your Son as a sacrifice in my place, I thank You for Your love and mercy. Now please give me Your strength, guide me, and show me how to live for You from this day forward.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, or something similar to it, if that expresses the desire of your heart, the Bible says you have been forgiven. God is never going to bring your past up again. There's nothing so big that you need to come back and make sure – did You really forgive me of this too?

If you have surrendered and submitted to Christ, it's time for you version 2.0. The whole system just got wiped. You've been upgraded to a new operating system and there is no going back. You've been adopted by God. You can call Him Father, and you can know that He loves you and is pleased with you. You've done well.

But in a sense, things have only just begun. And here is where the church has been missing something lately. You see, for the past several decades American Christianity has been focused on evangelism, that's why we're called "evangelicals." We want to share this good news, getting people to pray this sinner's prayer, but too often we have made conversion the end goal instead of the starting point.

We speak of being born-again, that's language we get from Jesus Himself - He said we must be born-again (John 3). But the moment of our conversion is only that – the moment of spiritual birth. Next, the spiritual baby needs to grow up into a spiritual man or woman who is strong and healthy.

And that doesn't happen automatically. In the physical world we see a difference between age and development, you might be 14 but you're acting like you're 6. You might be 32 but you're acting like you're 22. And we say that's a problem. Well, the same problem occurs spiritually. The Scripture talks about people who should have developed spiritually but who have not. They're still stuck at the basics, the foundations, and they haven't grown up yet.

Christian, don't be that person. Whether you're a brand new Christian, born a few minutes ago, or an aged-wrinkled Christian born-again several decades ago – we are all called to progress in the faith. We're called to continually develop, to mature. No matter who you are, or how long you've taken up the title "Christian" if you are healthy you will be able to say, "This is what God is working on in me right now." Or, "Here is where He is helping me grow or change." No one gets to stop growing spiritually until you're dead physically.

The problem is, too many people just learn spiritual truths without growing by applying them to their lives. They want the new-birth without the new life. They want Ephesians 1, 2, and 3 without Ephesians 4, 5, and 6.

It's easy to come to church and Bible study and just fill your head with information about God. It's easy, and it's good, to say, "God forgive me." But what about, "God change me?" What about, "God use me?" Those are the prayers of the growing, maturing, healthy Christian. There should be practical, external, evidence of change in your daily life. And those are things we find the Scriptures encouraging us with as we return to Ephesians this morning.

We've been examining this letter for several months now – learning what it has to say about God and what it has to say about us. You remember this is a letter written to Christians, written to people who have prayed the prayer, written to people who have been born again. And yet it's these people, people in the church, that Paul is still telling about God and encouraging them how to live as Christians.

We jump back into Chapter 4 where Paul begins to give us some very specific, very practical, examples of how our new life in Christ needs to look different from the lives of other people around us. He gives a very clear system of Christian ethics reflecting the change we are seeking as we repent, as we turn from the natural path of life to the supernatural. So He writes:

Eph 4:25 Therefore, putting away lying, *"Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,"* for we are members of one another.

He's saying Christian, stop lying, especially to other Christians, because you're members of one another, you're both part of the body of Christ.

Lying is making a statement contrary to truth, with the intent to deceive. I do that for several reasons. I lie to protect myself from consequences. I lie to make others think better of me. I lie in to control what's going on and what will happen. But Jesus said,

John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

How can you be putting on Christ, who is Truth and lying to other people in the church?

Look, we wouldn't be talking about it if it didn't really happen. We lie to each other. In big ways and little ways, we lie to one another, we misrepresent facts or events because we want to control or influence outcomes or perceptions, and God says, "Knock it off. You're all part of each other. You're not separate units, you're all interconnected." When I lie I think about myself, but God is asking me to think about others, which relates to the next practical thing we read:

26 “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil.

There are two kinds of anger. God is giving you permission for one, but not the other. God can be angry (Deu 9:8, 20; Ps 2:12). Jesus was angry in the Temple, knocking over tables and pushing people out because they had turned a house of prayer into a mini-mall (Matt 21:12-13). But Jesus’ anger was always others-centered. He was concerned about what was happening to others, not about how He was being treated.

Most of our anger though, is fueled by disappointment, frustration and exasperation, irritation, wounded pride, bad tempers. Our anger can smolder in passive aggressiveness or burst forth in a raging inferno called wrath. Jesus said anger is the seed of murder, we call them “crimes of passion” when someone is provoked and lashes out. That’s not godly anger, that’s sin and it reflects the devil, not Christ in you.

Some of us have the tendency to let things build up inside and let our anger suddenly blow up. And you try to say it’s OK, because then it’s all over - as if it’s somehow therapeutic. Let me just challenge you: ask the people around you, when you do that, do they see you modeling godly, righteous, anger at an injustice that harms others, or do they see you giving place to the devil?

Christian, this is written to you. You need to drag your anger problem before the throne of God and have a little talk about it. It’s not acceptable. If you’re walking around in a perpetual state of anger or irritation, something is wrong, and you need to address it. Now.

28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

Again, let’s remember the audience, this is written to Christians, to people who have prayed the prayer, been born-again. Now they need to grow up. There needs to be change in their lives they need to stop being so self-centered, so self-concerned and start thinking about others. The liar thinks first about self. The angry mom or dad, the angry teen, thinks first about self. The thief thinks first about self. The Christian is called to think about others.

The Christian is commanded not just to *stop* stealing, but to actually *start* being productive and benefitting others. Jesus said the thief came to steal and destroy (Jo 10:10) but He has come to give us abundant life. If you’ve put off the old way of life and put on Christ, people should see Him in you and one way that happens is when you give.

Giving to others actually provides two benefits directly to you. First, you receive the blessing of helping others either directly or by enabling the church to continue its ministries at home and abroad. But giving also keeps you from being selfish with your earnings. Think about this: both the thief and the workaholic have the same motive –they want to acquire more for themselves - they just choose different methods.

Christian, we're supposed to look to God for our needs and ask Him how He wants us to participate in His work and mission. Is it possible that God is calling you to work hard, to labor, and to succeed *so that* you can give and make other ministry possible?

God believes in hard work. When it says let him "labor" the word literally means, "to become weary." Working that hard. God gave Adam work to do before the first sin. We'll talk more about that in Chapter six, but I just want to note it here. God wants you to work, to work hard, and to be a good witness at work.

And He wants you to be active with *good* work. That's what the Scripture says: **28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands *what is good*.**

Would God call your employment good? Would God call the things you are occupied with most of the week, *good*? It's an important question to ask, because it's Biblical. The Bible says God wants you to labor, doing *good*. And then, He wants you to take some of what you earn and give it away.

That's just one way God can use you as a blessing to others. Here's another:

29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Do you ever think about what's coming out of your mouth? How would it be characterized? What words would be used to describe your words? We're told here not to let any "corrupt" words come out of our mouth. The word literally means rotten. It's used in other places to refer to rotten fruit or rotten fish. Pretty gross huh? In the book of Romans Paul says some people have a throat like an open tomb.

And yet Jesus said:

Matt 12:34 out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks

So, judging by what comes out of you, what's going on inside of you? Are things decomposing in your heart and then wafting up out of your mouth, or is your spiritual breath minty fresh and sparkly clean because you've got a Jesus filter controlling what comes in and what goes out? Whatever the case, it's going to affect others:

29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Notice, your words should bring necessary edification to others, your lips should impart grace to people who hear you.

We were over at someone's house recently and I love to hear this woman speak because she talks in such genuine, but strange, ways. She was trying to get her husband's attention and instead of addressing him by name she called him "Best Friend." It was odd, it sounded

strange, but in a really good, refreshing way because you don't have to spend much time around her to know that she means it. When you listen to her speak to family or her friends she uses those kinds of phrases that are awkward and unfamiliar, but true. And that's why she's using them, she's trying to impart grace. She's trying to edify, and it works. God is using her tongue to help others.

And that's what we're all called to do. She's not the exception, she's the rule.

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Christian, do you realize you can grieve God? When you repent of your sins, when you are pray that prayer, when you are born-again, the Holy Spirit instantly comes to live inside of you, you are instantly sealed for salvation.

But now that also means He is there, present, when you do all the foolishness that He's trying to lead you away from. He's not going to leave you, but are you grieving Him instead of bringing Him joy? That might be something some of us need to think about today. Is progress still being made in your spiritual life, or have you plateaued? Are there things still hanging around that really need to go? How vigorous, healthy, and mature is your new life?

Here's a summary of it all, a summary of what your new life should look like if you truly are repenting, turning away from the usual pattern of doing things, being born-again and then growing up in Christ:

31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Friends, I have no doubt that this is the kind of life you want to live. You want to treat others this way and you want to be treated this way by them.

And it's possible, but only through the resurrection of Christ. You do it all, **"even as God in Christ forgave you."**

So if you're looking for a new life today, a better life today, if you want to know God and you want others to know Him too - receive God's forgiveness, then grow up and change, and be a blessing to others - that's what Easter is all about.

Let's pray.