

March 15, 2015

“Life After Death – Why Believe?”

Mark 16:6

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Several years ago, I came to know a man named Jim. His son and my son were friends at school, and I had many occasions to talk to him. I really enjoyed connecting with this guy, because he was, at the time, a rather famous professional athlete who was playing for one of the New York sports teams. Jim was a passionate believer in Christ, and we talked several times about the Bible, and about living the life of faith.

One time Jim told me his story, how he grew up in a non-religious home. His life centered around sports; and, as a young man, he quickly found fame and fortune as a pro athlete. He lived a fast, hard, glamorous life; but he felt empty, hollow. He knew things were spinning out of control.

In his late twenties, Jim came to know Jesus Christ for the first time. He started sitting in on the optional team chapel services, and began talking with the pastor who was leading those prayer meetings. He learned about Jesus. He started reading a Bible. And God began working on Jim’s heart, little by little, to bring him to faith in Christ. Jim settled down. He found peace. He married a Christian woman, and started raising a family. His priorities changed, and his values became totally different.

Of course, Jim still struggles against sin every single day, and against sin’s powerful grip on his behavior and attitudes, like we all do. And he’s still surrounded by a fast-paced, morally-loose culture, just as we all are. “But, when I look back at my life,” he told me, “I’m a changed man. I know I’ve

got a long way to go as a Christian; but I'm so glad Jesus gave me a new life."

Has Jesus given you a new life? Has knowing Christ changed you at all?

When you come to church on this fourth Sunday in Lent -- when you look up at that cross, when you confess your sins, when you start living your Christian life this new week -- do you expect anything to happen in you? Do you believe you can change? Do you think God has the power to bring about any real change in you?

Today we're talking about the ultimate change that God wants to bring about in his people. Today we're focusing on a big, huge topic -- one that is crucial to our faith. We've been breaking down the Apostles' Creed in our sermons, and this week we get to the part that says, about Jesus, "The third day he rose again from the dead." Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. But on "the third day," we proclaim week after week when we recite the Apostles' Creed, Jesus "rose again from the dead." We mean by this that Jesus rose physically, bodily, personally, literally. Not just a spiritual resurrection, or a moral victory. We believe it actually happened. Jesus rose from the dead. The angel on Easter morning said to the grieving, heart-broken women who came to the tomb, "*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here*" (Mark 16:6).

Imagine the roll call at the tombs of the founders of the great world religions. Mohammed: "Here." Buddha: "Here." Confucius: "Here." Moses: "Here." Jesus: no answer, because he is not there!

The Bible tells us that it was the power of almighty God that raised Jesus from the dead. Our Savior had paid for our sins with his precious body and blood. But then God broke the power of sin forever, smashed the power of death for all time, and demolished the power of the devil and every evil by bringing his Son back to life.

We believe that on the third day Jesus rose again from the dead! The Bible tells the story. Eyewitness testimony proclaims the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Word of God tells us it's true. But it all comes down to faith, doesn't it? It all comes down to believing.

Believing that Jesus walked out of that tomb and conquered death! Believing that God, who created the universe and brought life into existence with a single word, has the strength and capacity to restore life to one who's died! Believing that when we die in faith we do not die in vain! Believing that when our time on this earth is done, we have the blessed hope of heaven and the joyful promise of eternal life with God! Believing that even now Jesus can give us new life!

"I'm so glad Jesus gave me new life," Jim says, and he's grateful for what God has done in his life. Jim is a changed man, and he's living a new kind of life. And that's exactly what God wants, and intends, for you and me, too.

Lord knows there is still sin in our lives, right? Plenty of it! God knows that we all have weakness, deficiency, and susceptibility to temptation. We know, when we're honest about it, that we're guilty before God, and that there is so much in our lives that our Lord would like to change.

Paul writes in Romans 6, "²*How can we who died to sin still live in it?* ³*Do you not know that all of us who have been*

baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

God calls people like Jim, and you, and me, to saving faith in Jesus Christ – not just so that we can go to heaven. He also wants us to walk in newness of life now, today, every day. God wants every Christian to learn and grow in our faith, to improve and be sanctified, to strive to walk every day with Jesus.

How about you? Are you even trying? Or just pretending? Have you stopped, honestly, learning about Jesus? Are you trying to grow in your faith? Are you really striving to walk every day with Jesus?

We need help to do those things, don't we? We all do! Well, God's power is great enough to raise the dead! So God's power is enough, isn't it, to start molding you, to clean you up, to make some real and substantive changes in your attitudes and priorities, to give you a new life? That's what God wants, in us. And new life, through Christ, is exactly what we need.

Don't wait until Easter. Start today. Start digging into the Word. Take some extra prayer time. Examine yourself before the Lord, and be honest about your sin. Look at the life you're living, and by faith see the new life God wants to give you.

Let's pray. *Lord, when we proclaim our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, help us to take it personally. Help us to see the sin that is leading us to death. Open our hearts to trust in Jesus, and what he has done for us. As he*

gave his life on the cross, help us to die to sin this day, and rise to newness of life in Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.