

# LIFE AFTER DEATH

EASTER - MARCH 27, 2005

## GALATIANS 2:20

On Good Friday and, as a matter of fact, in our study through Philippians through this entire Lenten season, we have been talking about dying. It is God's desire that through our individual lives and as our corporate life as Devon Church that we glorify Him in all we do and that we bring credibility to the Gospel message by the way we live our lives. Further, we said that we are supposed to do this by remaining unified. We are to stand together against the attacks of Satan and this world. And further, we are to be humble enough to make sure we are personally not a threat to the unity of the church.

But over and over again, we have seen two truths emerge. First, we must die to ourselves. In other words, we are to die to our pride. We are to die to the notion that we are good in any way. We are to die to selfishness and self-centeredness. We are to die to the world's definition of love. We are to die to all our self-absorbed ideas of love. We are to die to the notion that we can control circumstances and people. We are to die to the world's definition of success and what a meaningful life is all about. In other words, we need to let go of most of what we have come to believe in life. In order to experience the abundant life that Jesus promises, we have to admit that for the most part, we have been living a lie.

We talked a lot about that in our study through Philippians and we focused on that idea on Good Friday. But it is difficult for religious people to admit these things. That's why oftentimes it is refreshing to be around non-Christians.

During one Palm Sunday, we had a Palm Sunday presentation. As Jesus approached Jerusalem, one of the characters announced, "Behold, the King is coming." One of the unchurched teenagers jumped up excitedly, turned around and said, "You mean Elvis goes to this church?!"

Here is the main idea of this morning's text. **ONCE WE DIE TO OUR OLD WAY OF LIVING, WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE GRACE, PEACE, JOY, AND CONTENTMENT THAT JESUS PROMISES.** Paul said that once we die to all the lies we have come to believe, once we die to pride and self-centeredness, and put

to death our egos, we are ready to come alive in Christ. He puts it this way, "*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*" You and I have no power to make ourselves come alive. Only Jesus has the abundant life. We cannot get it apart from Him. Once we die and we open ourselves up to Jesus, He brings life into us. And since He is the Author of life, He brings the fullness of life into us. He brings with Him an abundance of grace, peace, joy, and contentment. And so as we walk through our earthly existence, we can experience this abundant life only as we live by faith in God and trust that He loves us.

And that brings us to the first point. On Good Friday we said that all of us desire to be in an intimate relationship where we can give and receive love, be loved unconditionally, and know and be known. **ONLY GOD CAN FULFILL OUR DEEPEST NEEDS TO BE LOVED. IN CHRIST WE COME ALIVE TO GRACE.** If we stop and think about it, no man, woman, or child can give us the genuine love that we crave. Listen to the beauty of this truth. God knows absolutely everything about us. He knows every unkind thing we have said and done. He knows all our sinful and perverted thoughts. He knows exactly how dirty and sinful we really are. Yet, He chose to give His life so that we could be in a right relationship with God. We could never stand in the presence of a Holy God on our own merit. We could never be good enough or clean enough. So as we die to all these notions that we are good in any way, Jesus comes into our lives, applies the blood of His sacrificial death to our accounts, then God declares us to be His children. That's love. That's grace. That's the kind of love we desire. It is only when we are filled up with this kind of love that we can experience the resurrection power of God's love living in us.

Let me explain. I have read and heard many statements about heaven and hell lately. Laci Petterson's parents said that Scott Petterson would burn in hell for murdering their daughter and their unborn grandson. People have said this child molester in Florida will burn in hell for raping and killing this little girl. People say that Saddam Hussein will burn in hell for all the people he has killed. Think about this theology. It says that I am better than Scott Petterson, all these child molesters, and Saddam Hussein. The truth is that I am no better. If I think I am better in any way, then I have not died to self. The theological truth is this. Scott Petterson, the child molesters, and Saddam Hussein, will not go to hell for their atrocities. If they go to hell, they will go to hell for rejecting Jesus Christ. If you and I go to heaven, it is not because we are better than these people in any way. It is because we have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and savior. Once we understand that Jesus loved us enough to rescue us from that destiny, then and only then, are we ready to be able to say to our wives, husbands, boyfriends,

girlfriends, children, parents, friends, and others, "I love you."

Grace is the mark of a person who has died to their old self and come alive in Christ. Grace is one of the marks of an authentic Christian. Once we truly grasp how much God loves us and fills us up, then we can truly be gracious to others and love them for who they are. A life lived by faith in a loving God who extends mercy to us, will demonstrate unconditional love to those around them. **ONLY GOD CAN FULFILL OUR DEEPEST NEEDS TO BE LOVED. IN CHRIST WE COME ALIVE TO GRACE.**

Grace manifests itself in and through the unconditional, sacrificial love given to us by Jesus. We can only demonstrate that love through the resurrection power of Jesus living in us.

Another characteristic of a life that has died to this world and come alive in Christ is peace. **PEACE IS GOD'S ANSWER TO FEAR.** In other words, our trying to control people and circumstances will never bring us peace. When we die to the notion that we can bring security to our lives through manipulation, power, control, violence, and money, we can then come alive to the notion that God loves us and has promised to never leave us nor forsake us.

The thing I like about God's peace as opposed to our worldly ideas of peace is that God's peace deals with reality, not fantasy. The world's idea of peace is the absence of conflict, the absence of pain, and the absence of suffering. God's idea of peace acknowledges that conflict, pain, and suffering will always exist in this sinful world. God's peace brings us confidence throughout all these negative experiences. Jesus knows what it means to suffer in this world. He was abandoned by family and friends. He was unjustly accused. He was tortured and executed.

If we expect a bump-free life, then we will always be disappointed. However, if we die to these notions and embrace the truth that we will experience suffering, trials, and tribulations in this life, then we can start to let Jesus minister to us and demonstrate the power of His peace in our lives in the midst of all these trials. It doesn't matter how holy we are, how obedient to God we are, how smart or intelligent we are, ... we will all get sick, we will all be hurt by people, we will all have to watch loved ones suffer and die, and we will all have to face our own death. However, Jesus knows the way to successfully navigate this life, and He knows the way to heaven. The new life in Christ lives without fear because we know our final destination is to live face to face and heart to heart with Jesus for eternity in heaven. Our peace comes from knowing

that we are in a right relationship with God. It comes from knowing that nothing in the physical world, nothing in the spiritual world, nothing in life or death can ever separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

And furthermore, nothing can ever catch God by surprise. He knows where we are going. People who have not died to this world are frantically running around to fix all sorts of situations and people around them. They are frantically running around trying to control people and situations. They are constantly worried about everything. Christians who have died to this world, live in peace knowing that Jesus will see us safely home, all the way to heaven. Peace in the Bible never means the absence of conflict, pain, and suffering. Peace in the bible means that we experience the presence and power of God even in the midst of conflict, pain, and suffering.

The life of faith in God and His love for us plays itself out in a life filled with peace. In other words, **PEACE IS GOD'S ANSWER TO FEAR.** Paul said, *"The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me."* Isn't this life much better than the life we described on Good Friday evening? Dying to ourselves and to the bondage of Satan and this world has freed us up to fully enjoy God's grace and peace. And being filled with God's grace and peace allows us to extend grace to others and bring peace into our relationships by not trying to control them. We truly become good lovers.

But there is yet more. The abundant life that Jesus promises is also filled with joy and contentment. No longer do we find ourselves chasing after power, fame, money and things to make us happy. No longer are we proud or arrogant. **WE FIND GOD'S JOY AND CONTENTMENT IN LIFE AS WE FIND OUR MEANING IN LIFE IN HIM.**

I don't know who said this but it is exactly what the Bible tells us about life in Christ. This person said, *"Find a job you like and you'll never work another day in your life."* In other words, if your job is exactly what you enjoy doing, and what you're good at, you will always feel as if you are playing. Many of us try to find our identities in life by what roles we play or by what jobs we do. However, if we have died to all these lies, and if we have come alive in Christ, then our whole identities are tied up in being children of God. My identity is not connected to being a husband, a father, a wife, a mother, a grandfather or grandmother. I am not an engineer, a doctor, a janitor, an electrician, or a pastor. Those are all things I do or roles I fill, but if I in any way look to those things for my identity, then that is idolatry. Once I die to those idolatrous thoughts, then I can come alive and be who God created me to be ... a

child of His. I experience joy as I live as an ambassador of God's Kingdom.

As I exercise my spiritual gifts for the good of the Kingdom, I start to feel fulfilled. Finding our place in ministry is what brings true joy to life. If we are authentically exercising our spiritual gifts according to our personality and passion, then we should never be angry, or frustrated, or burned out. If we find the job God has called us to in His kingdom, then we will experience joy. If we understand our mission in life is to further the Kingdom of God by exercising our gifts, it doesn't much matter what we do for work, how much money we make, or where we go. We will always be children of God and we will always be ambassadors for the Kingdom of God . As we learn to accept all of life as a gift from God, we can then begin to be content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. As long as we remember that we are children of God and that we are ambassadors of His Kingdom, we will never be confused about our identities. When we are confident in who we are and what we are called to do, we will experience joy and contentment. **WE FIND GOD'S JOY AND CONTENTMENT IN LIFE AS WE FIND OUR MEANING IN LIFE IN HIM AND IN HIM ALONE.**

It is truly amazing to me what kind of life awaits us if we are just willing to die to all the lies we have believed, continue to believe, and are reluctant to get rid of. In dying to our pride, selfishness, and worldly lies, we can come alive to Christ and the abundant life He promises. Grace awaits us. Peace awaits us. Joy and contentment await us. But we must die to experience resurrection. The truth of Good Friday and Easter is this. **ONCE WE DIE TO OUR OLD WAY OF LIVING, WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE GRACE, PEACE, JOY, AND CONTENTMENT THAT JESUS PROMISES.**

Let me just close with this because I think there is a lot of misunderstanding about death, resurrection and eternal life. You see, we just think in terms of physical death. In other words, because we have become Christians, someday we will die and go to heaven. In the last day, Jesus will resurrect our physical bodies and reunite them with our souls and we will live in heaven forever. All that is true. But eternal life starts right now. There is a death of our will and emotion that must take place right now. We are to separate ourselves from all our worldly thinking. We must die to our egos. We must die to pride, arrogance, stubbornness, selfishness, and self-centeredness. There is resurrection power that is available to us now. That power is meant to help us live this life to the fullest.

Listen to what Phillips Brooks says about this,

*"The great Easter truth is not that we are to live newly after death – that is not the great thing – but that we are to be new here and now by the power of the resurrection; not so much that we are to live forever, as that we are to, and may, live nobly now because we are to live forever."*

Jesus said, *"I came to give you life, and to give it to you abundantly."* There is an abundant life waiting for each one of us. There is an abundance of grace, peace, joy, and contentment available to each one of us. And further, we are to be channels of the overflow of this grace, peace, joy, and contentment to others.

*"I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me."*