

RAISED TO ETERNAL LIFE

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, April 22, 2012

Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, everything has changed! That may sound like an inflated statement, but I believe it to be literally true. The resurrection life of Christ has been released in our world and there is no corner, no crevice that has not been irradiated by it. The life and purpose of God the Son now infuses everyone and everything—all of creation!

Over the last few weeks we have noted that Jesus' resurrection has breathed God-consciousness into the world and rebuilt for all humankind a pathway back to God's favor and blessing.

We have also seen that the resurrection of Jesus has confirmed salvation for us—the forgiveness of sin and the gift of everlasting life.

Furthermore, we have learned that this salvation, once received by faith, generates a newness of life—a deadness to sin and aliveness to God, true godliness and righteousness—among us.

Oh, the power of the resurrection of Jesus! His new life has brought a new life and a bright, new future to this tired and fading world. God is for us, not against us! The Spirit of Jesus Christ is alive and present with us, revealing God's grace and glory! And this is just the beginning...!

For we have been *raised to eternal life!*

The Divine Objective

Your faith is not the end for which the Son of God died; it is the means of making you and I new creatures, devoted to God and to right living. Yet, even this new life of godliness and righteousness is not the end, but the means of something greater.

To the religious mind, what could be greater than a strong code of ethics and morality? But to the spiritual mind, a godly, loving lifestyle is only the *garment* of the life to come—not the life itself.

Isaiah 61¹⁰ *I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a bridegroom in his wedding suit or a bride with her jewels.*

You see, righteousness is the adornment of a bride, it is the bejeweled wedding dress of the Bride of Christ. It is the clothing that we wear to signify that we belong to Jesus. It is the outshining of the life within us—the resurrection life Jesus gives to us.

Martha's and Mary's brother, Lazarus, had fallen sick and died. Do you remember those two women? They were close friends of Jesus, and often welcomed Him and His disciples into their home. It was in their home one day, that Martha was busily hurrying through the house, preparing for her many guests, wishing that her sister would leave Jesus alone to help her.

Luke 10 ⁴¹ *But the Lord said to her, “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! ⁴² There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.”*

Perhaps you have been told by someone that Jesus was scolding Martha for her needless attention to house-keeping. Not so! Perhaps you have been told that Jesus values worship more than service. Not so!

Do you ever have too many things—good things—going on at once? So many details to keep in balance that your head threatens to explode? If so, what have you done about it?

Both Mary and Martha were responsible for their many guests—to see that beds were prepared, that dinner was cooked and served, that clothes were washed, that furniture was rearranged, that animals were fed, that various courtesies were extended—it *all* needed to be done. But the one thing worth being concerned about was not on that list—indisputably important as they were. The main thing was not the program of the evening, but the guests themselves.

Mary was tending directly to her guests, while Martha was carried away by the program of entertaining. The one thing was neither worship, nor service, but the people who were right in front of them. The excellence of the program could not substitute for loving attention.

Never Die

Now, their brother had died. And, in the midst of their grieving, but seemingly too late to make a difference, Jesus arrived with His disciples. Had He Himself been caught up with serving and teaching? Had He forgotten His friend? Each of the sisters said, *“Master, if only you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died”* (John 11:21).

John 11 ²⁵ *Jesus told [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. ²⁶ Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?”*

Minutes later, at the command of Jesus, their brother, Lazarus, stumbled out of his tomb, alive after four days! An astonishing miracle! The townspeople spoke of it for months. But the raising of Lazarus was not the real wonder. The real wonder was what Jesus said to Martha just before He called Lazarus back to life.

“Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.” This, Jesus demonstrated by raising Lazarus from the dead. But the real kicker is what He said next. Raising Lazarus from the dead was simply an object lesson, as if to say, if the first statement was true—and here’s Lazarus to prove it was—then the second statement is equally true! The second declaration was so over-the-top astonishing that it required miraculous validation. And what was that second statement?

“Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.” They had seen Him raise others. Sure, they believed He could do *that*. But it’s always more difficult to believe that He will do such things *for me* (for us).

Who here has ever wondered if you will really live again after you die? Some theologians have found it so difficult to believe, that they have redefined eternal life to mean something ethereal. I’ve heard it repeatedly in funeral talks: “He’ll live forever in our memories.” Do you think that’s what *Jesus* meant? That everyone who lives in Him and believes in Him will “live on in the memories of their surviving loved ones”? Nonsense!

Jesus said that those who were born again and trusting in Him simply *will never ever die*. They will never ever die. Who here has been born again? How many of you are actively trusting in Jesus as He leads your lives? YOU WILL NEVER EVER DIE!

We have been raised to eternal life—everlasting life, the God-kind of life. That’s not imaginary. God is not imaginary. (Well, some people’s god is imaginary, but not Jesus Christ.)

That’s real life—breathing, thinking, speaking, acting life. The kind of life that even death cannot stop. Jesus has given us unstoppable life. Unceasing life.

Your body cannot live forever. Your present body is subject to sickness and disease and aging and death. Why? Because of the influence and effects of sin. No matter how many times you are healed of illness, no matter if you are raised from the dead, your body will die. Eventually, Lazarus died again.

But your body is not you. You can lose an arm; you’re still you. You can lose the sight of both eyes; you’re still you. You are not your body; your body is your house (what the Bible calls a “tent,” emphasizing its impermanence).

Romans 8 ¹⁰ *Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God.* ¹¹ *The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.*

The Spirit of Life who lives in you may give you life over sickness—healing you of a disease—but He will certainly give you life over death—raising you up to live on in a brand new body. Even if your body dies (like Lazarus)—even if sickness takes you (like Lazarus)—you will open your eyes and draw your next breath on the other side. Christians cannot be killed!

That’s why Jesus said, *“Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28), or sustain both soul and body in heaven.

Affirmed: You Will Live

Listen to these affirmations of the life to come:

1 Corinthians 6 ¹³ *But you can’t say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies.* ¹⁴ *And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead.*

1 Corinthians 15 ⁴² *It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever.* ⁴³ *Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength.* ⁴⁴ *They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies.*

1 Corinthians 15 ²² *Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.* ²³ *But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.*

2 Corinthians 4¹⁴ *We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you.*

1 Thessalonians 4¹⁴ *For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.*

Beloved of God, we are on a journey—not an imaginary journey, not a religious trip, not a theological pipedream—we are going somewhere, and this journey has already begun, if you have been born again.

Let me tell you something: you will not always be tired, you will not always be weak, you will not always be sick, you will not always be sad. All these are evidence that sin is killing us; our bodies are dying every day.

1 Corinthians 15⁵¹ *But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!* ⁵² *It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.* ⁵³ *For our dying bodies (and even on our best days, our bodies are still dying) must be transformed into (the kind of) bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.* ⁵⁴ *Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into (the kind of) bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:*

“Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵ *O death, where is your victory?*

O death, where is your sting?”

When will death be swallowed up in victory? Then! On that glorious Day! No wonder it is called the “rapture” of the Church! What rapture that will be! What victory!

Revelation 20⁵ *This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.)* ⁶ *Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years.*

You see, my friends, this is what Jesus warned about. The second death is the destruction of both body and soul in hell. But for those who are raptured or raised in the first resurrection, “*for them the second death holds no power.*” Hallelujah!

Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once.

See Clearly, Live Rightly

You may ask me, “What difference does all this make? Why is it important to believe these things?”

Let me ask you, “How has it made you feel today to hear these things? How are you feeling right now about your faith in Jesus Christ?”

The answer to your questions is this: Having an eternal perspective *transforms* your immediate perspective. Seeing the Big Picture *clarifies* the little picture that’s right in front of you. Having a real hope of a real eternity with Christ diminishes the weight of this world’s burdens—that is, it makes you courageous and strong, so the burdens feel lighter and are manageable.

Folks who don't like to think about Heaven as a real destination, ignore the surpassing power of the resurrection of Jesus in real life, and, generally, become depressed, embittered, cynical, and cranky, not to mention frequently sick.

This is not the only cause of such conditions, but among Christians, it must be considered.

Jesus was raised from the dead *for you*. His resurrection was intended to impact *you* and your life. The Risen Christ has the power to *revolutionize* the way you live, if you'll let Him.

1 Corinthians 15 ³⁰ *And why do you think I keep risking my neck in this dangerous work?* ³¹ *I look death in the face practically every day I live. Do you think I'd do this if I wasn't convinced of your resurrection and mine as guaranteed by the resurrected Messiah Jesus?* ³² *Do you think I was just trying to act heroic when I fought the wild beasts at Ephesus, hoping it wouldn't be the end of me? Not on your life! It's resurrection, resurrection, always resurrection, that undergirds what I do and say, the way I live. If there's no resurrection, "We eat, we drink, the next day we die," and that's all there is to it.* ³³ *But don't fool yourselves. Don't let yourselves be poisoned by this anti-resurrection loose talk. "Bad company ruins good manners."* ³⁴ *Think straight.* (The Message)

Think straight and live right, and you, too, will be raised to eternal life.