

Here's a question you probably have never heard a pastor ask, especially not on Easter morning. Why would anyone in their right mind want eternal life? For that matter, why would any want a resurrection? I mean, c'mon, let's be real here. Look around, people! You've all seen the pictures of the bombed-out buildings in Ukraine and the semi-trailers filled with Covid corpses in our country, right? If you watch television, then you've seen all the drug commercials and you know we're all bags of increasingly complex drug interactions and side effects just waiting to go wrong. None of us asked to be born into this mess, but do we really want to re-up to do this all again, and then do it forever? What kind of a crazy idea was Easter anyway?

A recent AIG survey reported that 53 percent of Americans want to live to be 100 years old, even though the same number said they're uncertain their savings will last that long.¹ There are all kinds of crazy wrapped up in these numbers. The average life expectancy in the U.S. in 2019 was 78.79 years, well short of 100 by more than twenty years, and that number has decreased rather than increased in recent years due to Covid. We can't all be above average, so why do so many of us think we have any kind of reasonable chance to live to be 100?

Then there's the complication of our failing bodies. Physiologically we hit our peaks in our 20's, with health limitations beginning to pile up with each following decade of life. There are always some outliers who remain in great health in the later years, but they're far from average. As the percentage of our population aged 65 and older grows dramatically in the US², our aggregate need for medical and social care is increasing, senior housing and care workers are in short supply, and medical costs are rising at twice the annual rate of inflation.

Life is hard, and for most of us, it will get harder in many ways as we get older. If that's true, why do so many of us want to live to be 100? John records Jesus as saying that he came into this world that we might have life and have it abundantly.³ Is there such a thing

¹ <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20190410005283/en/More-Than-Half-of-Americans-Want-to-Live-to-100-but-Worry-about-Affording-Longer-Lifespans>

² <https://www.seniorcare.com/featured/aging-america/>

³ John 10:10. New Revised Standard Version

as too much life, Jesus? If getting older requires that we suffer through more climate change, global war, and the indignity of failing bodies, do we really need and want an abundance of life, let alone eternal life?

Don't worry, it's not time to call the bishop, at least not yet. We do want abundant life, and eternal life will be even better. But to appreciate them, we have to think clearly and faithfully about the difference between life as I just described it and the kind of life Jesus offers us.

I've said many times that we don't have to wait for our deaths to start living. When we're baptized by water and the Spirit in the name of Jesus, we die to a life of serving ourselves and are reborn to live a life of serving others in Christ. This life can be so much more than collecting paychecks, doing laundry, and trying our best to complete our tax returns correctly and on time. When we choose to believe in Jesus and make our home in him-that is, abide in him- we can discover our true purpose and a source of joy unlike any other in sharing the light and love of Jesus with the world.

Don't get me wrong, faithful Christians still get old and infirm, suffer, and die. Life is not easy, and life is not perfect, but life is good. Abiding in Christ makes it even better, equipping us to live abundantly with the joy of Christ in this life. So that's the starting point in appreciating Easter: Life is good. It's a gift from God, but we'll never really know how good it can be until we die to ourselves and begin living in Christ.

But Easter promises us even more than the Spirit-filled life we can live now. This life must come to an end, and no number of next-gen drugs, gene therapies, or diets will forestall our deaths forever. This life is a fleeting gift that Jesus calls us to enjoy one day at a time, embracing our lives and loving others out loud. And yet, Jesus not only promises but demonstrates that there's more life to come.

The details in John's Gospel often deserve a closer look, and the angels appearing to Mary in the tomb are one such detail. Unlike in the other Gospel accounts, John reports that there are two angels sitting in the tomb, one sitting at the head and one at the feet of where the body of Jesus had been. John likely wants us to understand this as an allusion to the Mercy Seat, which is the portion of the Ark of the Covenant that sat on top of the Ark, with two angels on either side of the seat. This seat was the symbolic throne of God on earth, and

it was on this seat that the High Priest sprinkled blood on the day of atonement to ask for forgiveness of the sins of the people.⁴ By adding the detail of the sitting angels, John is pointing us to the role of the death of Jesus in atoning for our sins- not annually, but once for all. In other words, Easter Sunday is a reminder that our sins are forgiven, and we're welcome into God's holy presence. That's an important part of the good news of Easter Sunday, but it's not the only good news.

The empty tomb on Easter Sunday puts an exclamation point on every teaching of Jesus that came before it. Because Jesus lives, we know that we will live also. In John 11, Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."⁵

And in John 14, we hear Jesus make this promise to his disciples, a promise that so often brings us comfort when facing the death of someone we love: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."⁶

What will this eternal life be like? I don't have any drone footage of heaven to show you, but the Scriptures paint some beautiful images if we allow ourselves to hope and trust in Jesus.

Jesus himself described it to the thief on the cross as "paradise."⁷ In John's Revelation, it's described in this way: "And God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more."⁸ And the Apostle Paul describes our resurrection bodies in this way in 1 Corinthians: "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." And all that is to be understood to be in the presence of Jesus, the light and life of

⁴ Adam Hamilton. *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*, p. 150. Abingdon, 2015.

⁵ John 11:25-26. Ibid

⁶ John 14:1-3. Ibid

⁷ Luke 23:43. Ibid

⁸ Revelation 21:3-4. Ibid.

the world, the Word made flesh. It shouldn't be hard to spot the differences between those hopeful pictures of eternal life and the bleak picture I painted for you at the beginning of this message. Life is good, but eternal life is even better. That's why we celebrate Easter and shout, "He is risen!"

The resurrection of Jesus reminds us that hope is not a thing of the past. We can count on Jesus. Faith in the living Christ is what brings meaning to each day and offers us the hope of restoration and reconciliation of all that is broken.

It's not that Easter suddenly made everything easy for the followers of Jesus. Easter still doesn't do that for us today. But Easter does radically change our orientation, giving us a new framework from which to see our struggles and our futures. Easter reminds us that God's love is trustworthy and strong, even when so many things we've put our trust in seem unreliable and weak. Easter reminds us that death and darkness do not get the final word, but rather life and light. Easter reminds us who this Jesus really is: The light of the world, given selflessly so that we might be called the Children of God, abiding in the abundant love of God and sharing it freely to all who will receive it. "He is risen! He is risen, indeed!"

Please take some time now to reflect on the hope you find in the resurrection life of Jesus.



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