

I Too Shall Live **1 Corinthians 15:19-26**

Christ is Risen.
He is Risen Indeed.
Alleluia!

Easter Sunday what a day of joy and gladness! Many will say that Easter is the most joyful event, the happiest festival of the church year. It was certainly a happy day for the followers of Jesus almost 2,000 years ago. The fact of Christ's resurrection from death had a great impact on them. They were changed people after they saw the resurrected Christ. They went from being a tearful and fearful band of disappointed disciples to bold ambassadors of Jesus' message willing to face persecution and death without fear. That's how much Easter affected the followers of Christ.

Easter had an effect on the early Christian Church during the first and second centuries. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday morning is one of the main reasons Christians chose Sunday as their day of worship. Easter was far and away the first and the greatest festival observed by the early Christian church. In fact some scholars say the very early Christians celebrated Easter every Sunday. Imagine having 52 Easters a year! But that's how great an impact Easter had on them.

What about you? What is the impact of Easter on your life? I mean besides Easter eggs and jelly beans and chocolate Easter bunnies and, in some cases, a few days off from work or school. Is the spiritual message of Easter relevant to you at all in the year of our Lord 2009? Does it impact your life at all?

The Apostle Paul found it necessary to remind the Christians at Corinth that Easter was still relevant to them and in so doing, he answered a serious question, a question about death itself that had developed in their congregation. He gives to you and me the same message today. But his starting point may surprise you, unless you remember that the glorious, magnificent joy of Easter rises out of the grim, stark reality of death.

Now you may be thinking to yourself, "This is Easter. Easter is a celebration of life. Why's this guy talking about death for cryin' out loud?" Well, I've got to tell you, in order for you to understand the full impact and relevance of Easter for you, you've got to first face the grim, stark reality of your own mortality, the reality of your own impending death. Death is going to come to you sooner or later.

Anyone here today think you're not mortal? Anybody here today think you can escape death? If you are so deluded, listen again to verse 22. *In Adam all die.* The word 'all' means everybody...the word 'all' means you. Romans 5:12 *...sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all... because all sinned.* Death comes to all. Life has a 100% mortality rate. Death is universal, and death is a powerful preacher.

Death is the most powerful and effective preacher the children of this world have. There are many people who avoid church except maybe on Christmas and Easter. There are many people who avoid all preachers of God's word. Yet there is one preacher they are compelled to hear, DEATH. Death's pulpit is the deathbed, the casket, the tombstone. And death preaches the same sermons to everyone. "It is appointed for you to die." "This life you cherish will not continue forever." Someday you will leave this world." When you're young you don't hear death's sermons as clearly. Even when you're old, many try to avoid the thought of death. Many try to evade death's sermon.

For several weeks after her husband, Prince Albert of England died, it is reported that Queen Victoria still had his clothes laid out in the customary manner and still had a fresh basin of water brought to his room daily. She refused to accept the fact that he had died.

But death's message eventually prevails. Is there anyone who can escape death? Death looks like the end. That's the problem the Apostle Paul was addressing in his letter to the Christians in Corinth. Death was preaching such a powerful sermon they began to believe 'death is the end of the line' - 'death is the ultimate victor.'

If you are tempted to think this way, if death is preaching loudly to you right now, if you are doubting what you've been taught about death, if you're really wondering what's in store for you when this life is over, listen carefully.

The Apostle Paul draws a parallel between the present REALITY of death and the future REALITY of resurrection. Just as physical death is a certainty for everyone, it is equally certain that those who believe in Jesus will live even though they die and they will rise from death on the last day. You see, the simplest meaning of Easter is that you are living in a world in which God has the last word, NOT DEATH.

On Friday, Good Friday, at sundown it appeared to all that death was the master, that death was the conqueror of life. The holiest one who ever lived was dead in his tomb, crucified by order of the Roman governor. A wooden cross, three iron spikes, six hours of agony and it was all over. A quick spear thrust into the body verified it was a lifeless corpse. Those hours when Jesus' voice was stilled, when Jesus body was lifeless, were the most distressing hours of human history because it appeared that death was the master, the conqueror of life.

Then came Easter morning and the glorious word, “HE IS RISEN!” What incredible news! Death is NOT the ultimate victor. Life has conquered death. Welcome to the empty tomb. At the open tomb, the empty tomb of Jesus God says, “I have accepted the sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross to pay for the sins of the world.” Romans 4:25, *He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* At the empty tomb of Jesus God says, “I have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus to pay for YOUR sins.” 1 John 2:2, *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

That’s the first impact that the message of Easter should have on you. Because Jesus rose from the dead, you can be absolutely certain that your sins are paid for in full. Let’s personalize this. Because he lives, my sins are paid for. I want to hear you say that. Repeat after me. **Because He lives, my sins are paid for.**

Jesus not only left the tomb wide open for all the world to see. He also opened the gates of heaven for all the world to enter. You see, this is what the resurrection is all about. Death is swallowed up in victory. Sins are paid for in full. And Christ has become the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” That’s a curious term, ‘firstfruits.’ What it means is this: Jesus was the first one (firstfruits) to go through the process of physical death and bodily resurrection to eternal life. He was the first but he won’t be the last. What happened first to Jesus, physical death and bodily resurrection, will happen someday to all believers in Christ. It will happen someday to you.

The resurrection of Jesus from the grave ties it all together and gives us a wonderful, comforting sense of assurance. Verse 22, *For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.* Jesus once said it this way, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die*” John 11:25-26.

Same question as before...Anyone here today think you’re not mortal? Anybody here today think you can escape death? Jesus said, “*Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*” Oh yes, your body is mortal. Your body will undergo death, but your soul is immortal. At death, when your soul leaves your body, you do not cease to exist. No, you *live even though you die* through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Corinthian Christians needed to hear again what you already know. The souls of believers ascend to heaven at the moment of death. And then on the Last Day, on Judgment Day your body will rise from the grave just as Jesus’ body rose from the grave. Your soul and body will be reunited and your body will be glorified, perfected, made free of all defects and disease and frailty. With that soul and glorified body you, the believer in Jesus, will live forever in heaven with Jesus.

How do I know this is true? Isn't this just theological theory or an unproven Christian hypothesis? No, you have proof. Just as the process of physical death is due to your connection with Adam (you're a member of the human race), so also the coming event of your resurrection is due to your connection with Christ through faith. "...*whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

This is the second glorious assurance of Easter. This is how Easter affects you personally. Because He lives, I too shall live. Say it out loud with me. **Because He lives, I too shall live.** And because he lives death is a defeated foe. Death is a vanquished enemy. "*Death has been swallowed up in victory*" because the sting of death, the fear of death has been removed for all believers. Oh, death can still seem like an awful, fearful foe as death preaches to you. But you know that ultimately death is only your doorway, your passage way into eternal life.

The victory over death which is now yours will not be fully revealed until death is forever abolished. When your body is raised from the grave on Judgment Day, when your body is raised to eternal life in heaven, death itself will be gone. Death itself will no longer exist. Verse 26 *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

What impact does the message of Easter, the message of a Risen Savior have on you? **Because He lives, my sins are paid for.** Since you are certain that your sins are paid for, you can live differently...not under the burden of guilt, not in fear of an angry God, but joyfully, confidently living the message of forgiveness...sharing the message of forgiveness .

What impact does the message of Easter, the message of a Risen Savior have on you? **Because He lives, I too shall live.** Since you are certain that you will live, even though you die, you can live differently now...not in fear of death, not full of doubt about the "great beyond," but joyfully, confidently living like one who possesses eternal life...sharing the message that whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life.

Let us pray.

Gracious Lord Heavenly Father,

With joy-filled hearts we acclaim 'He is Risen, He is Risen Indeed.' We give our thanks to you for providing your Son to be our Savior. We are also truly grateful for the assurance His resurrection gives to us who believe in His name. Because He lives, our sins are paid for and we too shall live. Help us to be joyful witnesses of this good news to the whole world. In Jesus' name we ask this. Amen.