

## Sermonette for April 16, 2017 – Easter Sunday

John 14:19 (NIV84)

Theme: Jesus' Resurrection declares believers:

- 1) Alive Now.
- 2) Alive Forever.

[Jesus said:] *Because I live, you also will live.*

Do you know what happened on July 2, 1776? The Second Continental Congress voted to approve a resolution to declare the United States independent from Great Britain. Now some of you might be thinking, “Wait a second pastor, that can’t be right. Why would we Americans celebrate our independence on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July if it happened on the 2<sup>nd</sup>?” Because the actual document explaining what this vote meant – “The Declaration of Independence” – wasn’t approved until July 4<sup>th</sup>. For this reason, even though America’s independence officially took place on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, we celebrate it on the 4<sup>th</sup>, when the document that publicly announced and explained America’s independence was approved.

So why am I bringing up this tidbit of US history? To help explain the importance of Easter in connection with Jesus’ sacrifice only 3 days earlier. The moment Jesus declared from the cross, “It is finished” was the moment our sins had been paid for in full. Sin, death and the devil had been defeated. Our liberty from them had been won!

If that is the case, then why does Christianity put such an emphasis on Easter? For example, why do we Christians worship on Sunday (in remembrance of Christ’s resurrection) instead of on Friday (in remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice)? Because Jesus’ resurrection is God’s public declaration of our forgiveness, life and salvation – showing the world exactly what Jesus accomplished for us through his cross. Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **Jesus’ Resurrection declares believers:** 1) Alive Now. 2) Alive Forever.

### Part One: Alive Now

Jesus once told his disciples: “*Because I live, you also will live.*” What does Jesus mean by this? Well, first of all it means that – without him – we would all be dead. And, apart from Christ, that is exactly what all mankind is: spiritually dead – separated from God and the eternal life for which he created us.

But how did this happen? Sin. And what is sin? It is doing the opposite of what God commands. For this reason, sin separates us from God. And, because our first parents fell into sin, we all have inherited a corrupt, selfish nature – one that desires evil over good and one that follows a master other than God: the devil. Yes, apart from Christ we are all spiritually dead, as the apostle Paul explains in his letter to the Ephesians: *You, too, were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you once followed the ways of this present world and the ruler whose power is in the air, the spirit who is now working in the people who disobey. <sup>3</sup>Among them all of us once lived in our fleshly lusts, doing what our flesh and mind wanted to do, and by nature we, like the others, were people with whom God was angry. But God, Who is rich in mercy, loved us with such a great love. He made us who were dead in sins alive with Christ.<sup>1</sup>*

Yes, God made us alive in Christ! Suffering the wrath and punishment our sins had earned, Jesus made atonement for them through his cross. His suffering and death paid for our sins in full. Want proof? It’s found in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. How so? Because if, as the Bible clearly says, the wages of sin is death, then Jesus’ resurrection from the dead proves that sin has been paid for in full.

And if sin has been paid for in full, then the devil can no longer hold mastery over us. How so? Because, if our sins are forgiven, the devil has nothing to accuse us with before God. Christ's resurrection declares mankind reconciled to God. Through faith in Jesus, we personally receive the benefits of this reconciliation, which are forgiveness, life and eternal salvation.

Jesus said, *"Because I live, you also will live."* As the Bible promises, all who look to Jesus in faith for the forgiveness of sins truly are alive. They are united with Christ in Baptism in such a special way that Christ lives in and with them – guarding, guiding and counseling them by means of the Holy Spirit working through his Word. How do we know this to be true? Because Jesus promised before his ascension: *"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*<sup>ii</sup>

Yes, Jesus' resurrection assures us that all who look to Him in repentance and faith are truly alive, as he himself said: <sup>24</sup> *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."* <sup>25</sup> *I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live."*<sup>iii</sup>

## Part Two: Alive Forever

And that brings me to the next point I want to make about Jesus' resurrection. Because he rose from the dead we can be sure that we believers will also rise to live with him forever, as Jesus once said: *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*<sup>iv</sup>

Do you understand what Jesus means by this? He is the resurrection and life – that is to say, he is not only our creator, but also our Savior. Whoever believes in him - that is to say, whoever turns to him in repentance, trusting in his mercy to fully and freely forgive him all his sins – will live even though he dies. This means that, even though we all physically die, believers will rise from the dead to live with God forever in glory. And why is this the case? Because whoever lives and believes in Jesus never really dies, that is to say – the believer is never separated from God and his love, but always lives at peace with him. Even when the believer dies physically, his soul is still alive – living with God in heaven.

And the believer's body? Well, it rests in the grave - waiting for the day when God will wake it up and reunite it with his soul, as the LORD promises through St. Paul: <sup>13</sup> *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.* <sup>14</sup> *We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.* <sup>15</sup> *According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.* <sup>16</sup> *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* <sup>17</sup> *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*<sup>v</sup>

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Do you now see why we Christians emphasize Easter? Yes, Good Friday was the day when Jesus won our forgiveness and freedom from sin, but Easter Sunday was the day he declared it with power by rising from the dead. Easter Sunday is the day Jesus showed us exactly what he won for us: eternal life, joy, peace and salvation.

Jesus said, *"Because I live, you also will live."* Rejoice in this truth and celebrate the life you have through faith in Christ Jesus. It is a life that assures you that you are forgiven and at peace with God. It is a life that will never end in death, but continue on forever with God in the glorious paradise that he is even now preparing for us, and will bring with him on the Last Day. Alleluia, the LORD is risen. He is risen indeed. Amen.

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- ii Ephesians 2:1-5 AAT
  - ii Matthew 28:20 NIV84
  - iii John 5:24-25 NIV84
  - iv John 11:25-26 NIV84
  - v 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 NIV84