

“LINK: FOR NEW LIFE”
Matthew 28:1-10

Lessons By The Lake Summer Series
August 26, 2012
Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

Well known author, pastor and professor, Tony Campolo, tells the story of the Buddhist monk he met one time. He told Tony, “You know as a Christian you teach your children to pray all wrong. You teach them to pray, ‘If I should die before I wake.’ It would be better,” he continued, “if you taught them to pray, ‘If I should wake before I die.’”

That is the problem with so many people today. They are not fully awake and alive before they die. They are not filled with new life and hope, and are rather more in a state of a living coma. There are many today who are seeking ways to escape from life; ways to medicate their pains and hurts; ways to wallow in their search for meaning that they are pretty dead in their existence.

Now I know that messages of the resurrection are often times when the church has told people to just hang on in their suffering and pain; for because of Jesus’ resurrection when your life is over, and you die physically, if you live by faith you will live with Jesus forever in heaven. The message is that if you endure through this life relief will come someday in heaven.

And that is true. Jesus died and rose again so that each person who commits their life to him by faith will be resurrected when they die. Each person who walks with Jesus by faith, who denies themselves and takes up their cross daily and follows him, will be saved eternally.

And the good news is that in that resurrection—in that heavenly mansion God has prepared for us—there will be as Revelation states, “*no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*” It is a wonderful hope and assurance for all believers.

And yet this is not the whole picture or meaning of Jesus and the resurrection. It is not a message that is to be celebrated only once a year on Easter or only spoken of and remembered when there is a death or a funeral.

Jesus died and rose again not only to give us life after death but to give us life each day in our present life. Jesus rose again so that we can totally wake up before we die and can live resurrected, and new lives, each and every day.

Jesus said in John 10:10, “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*” Jesus’ will for your life and mine is that we find healing and victory over whatever is taking life out of us. Jesus’ will is that no matter what hurt, addiction or failure that in him there is new life.

These past weeks at Messiah our messages have focused on some “Links” we can turn to. We have looked at some important Bible passages we can click on, and link to, when we are facing various issues. And today we will click to some verses where Jesus promises new life.

In our Gospel passage from Matthew 28:1-10, we have that important link that reminds us of the true story of Easter morning. The women came to the tomb early in the morning where Jesus’ body was placed after his death on the cross. A violent earthquake happened, the stone is rolled back, and an angel appeared to them as white as snow.

The angel said to the women, *“Do not be afraid, for I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, he has risen just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell the disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.’”*

And then it says that Jesus met them in person as they were running to tell the others. They clasped his feet and worshipped him. He was risen in the flesh. And then Jesus said to them, *“Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”*

I have often stated that if you want certain and solid evidence that Jesus did rise from the dead just look at the historical evidence of the disciples. This group of fearful, defeated, grief stricken people hiding away in an upper room, became such bold and courageous witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection that they literally changed the whole course of history.

This group of ragtag fishermen were so filled by the power of the Holy Spirit, and were so credible in the witness of their lives, that they helped bring thousands of people to a living faith in Jesus. They didn’t just sit back, endure the stresses of life and wait for heaven.

No, the resurrection of Jesus raised them to new life. It brought them out of their fear and despair, and gave them a whole new vision of themselves and what life is meant to be. The truth of Jesus transformed them so amazingly that each one was put to death for their faith.

And the amazing resurrection proof this brings is that none of them changed their message, or recanted their message, when faced with death. Not one of the 12, nor the women and children, fudged on the facts. No one would be so bold to die for a lie or made up tale.

These people saw the resurrected Jesus. They touched his wounded hands and feet. And their lives were so radically changed that they became totally new people. Even though they had failed many times they knew God’s forgiveness, healing and new life. A miracle of God.

A few years ago there was a popular movie titled “The Bucket List.” It tells the story of two terminally ill men—played by Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman—who take a road trip to do the things they always wanted to do before they “kicked the bucket.” It turns out to be quite an escapade of things like sky diving, driving a race car, seeing an estranged family member, etc.

It is an interesting plot that many of us may also think about from time to time. If you knew you were going to die in a few months what would you hope you could do? So often we think of things like traveling to Hawaii or visiting our ancestral home in Europe.

Some of us may also think that if we knew our time was nearing the end that we would want to spend more time with family and friends. We may think in our minds and hope that we could possibly heal some hurts in certain relationships or find reconciliation with some estranged people. It is common to think of making amends if we know the end is near.

And then there are some if they would know the end is near think that they will want to get their life right with God. So many hope they will have some time like this so they can go to church more, can clean up their life or can confess and say they are sorry for their sins.

Many people, even people who claim to not be religious, often wish for a time like this to somehow get their life in order because they are afraid of what happens after death. Those who think church and the Bible are silly are still afraid in their hearts of what is on the other side.

Jack Nicholson, the star of “The Bucket List,” said in a Parade Magazine article, “We all want to go on forever, don’t we? We fear the unknown. Everybody goes to the wall, yet nobody knows what’s on the other side. That’s why we fear death.”

The good news of Jesus’ resurrection, my friends, is not only do we need not fear death but we have new life and purpose right now. The good news is that we should never keep a bucket list of good intentions for the end but rather that we are to live abundant and full lives everyday.

The good news of Jesus is that you can find healing and new life right now in whatever you are going through. Whether it is a broken relationship, a deep depression, a harmful addiction, a troubled child Jesus assures us that there is healing and new life right now. Jesus is there to walk with us no matter what we are facing and he can give you new life.

The good news of Jesus is that through his resurrection you can have new meaning and purpose for your life right now. With Jesus in your heart and life you will know that your life has a higher calling. You will know that true life is found in loving and serving others.

With Jesus in your heart you know the joy of love and of being loved. You know the joy of forgiving and of being forgiven. You know the wonder of prayer and of being prayed for. You know the wonder of knowing others and of being known. It is a life cradled in God’s arms.

And yes as you live this new life right now; as you worship and live for God each day you also have the assurance of eternal life in heaven when you die. You can live this new life each day knowing, as the Apostle Paul says, that whether you live or die you are the Lord’s.

This morning we’re going to take a few moments to reflect on the new life that Jesus brings. I know that all of us are at different points in our spiritual journey. Some of you aren’t sure if you know this Jesus and this new life he gives. Some of you may at one time have felt close to Jesus, but lately you have been drifting on your own.

Some of you may be worried about your health, some life challenges you are going through or about what life after death will mean for you. Some of you need to say “yes” to Christ, to promise to follow him, while others of you need to get back on the road of living for him.

This morning I’m going to ask you to close your eyes in a time of silence. Nobody is going to ask you to raise your hand or single you out. Perhaps you don’t know this new life in Christ, or don’t have the assurance of eternal life, or simply need to rededicate your life to Jesus today.

Please pray in your heart, “Loving Jesus, I’m saying “yes” to you this day. Please fill me with your new life now and your eternal life when I die. Thank you Jesus for loving me, for dying for me, and for rising on Easter so I may live. Help me to truly live for you each day. Amen.”

My friends, it is my prayer this morning that you will surely “wake up before you die.” May you know the new life and love that Jesus came to give. And may your life be filled with abundance, joy, freedom, meaning and love. God’s blessings to you!