

YOU CAN LIVE LIFE FULLY NOW**COLOSSIANS 3:1-4**

Two men traveling for business reasons met for breakfast in a hotel dining room. They were greeted by a bubbly, gracious waitress who made them feel at home. She served them a delicious breakfast, and when they were finished, she walked them to the door and said, "Have a wonderful day! And, gentlemen, live alive all day." As they walked to their separate cars, these two men talked about the waitress' unusual comment: Live alive all day. They were so intrigued they decided to meet at the same hotel the next morning for breakfast and ask the waitress to explain her comment. The next morning, the very same waitress – again, friendly and outgoing – welcomed them. As they were being seated, one of the men said, "You know, yesterday, when we left, you told us to 'live alive all day.' We thought that was a pretty marvelous philosophy of life you have there." The waitress replied, "That isn't a philosophy of life. It's Jesus. He's my answer. He brought me out alive from all kinds of sickness, darkness, and trouble. When I found Him – Jesus – I found life."

For seven Sundays we've been taking a journey through a series of messages entitled "Why The Resurrection Is The Great Essential." The Bible makes it very clear that if Jesus didn't rise bodily, physically, and literally on the third day after His death on the cross, then Christianity itself is a farce and following Jesus is a waste of time and effort. The most clear cut statement is this one: "And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17 NLT) But precisely because Jesus did rise again, our faith is built on fact not fantasy, we can be made right with God, death has been defeated, and one day death itself will be destroyed. Without the resurrection, the Christian faith utterly fails and falls apart.

But here's something else. As Christians, we believe the death and resurrection of Jesus is not just supremely impactful on us as followers of Jesus but just as important for any and every person who has ever lived. Well known pastor and author, Tim Keller, put the matter succinctly when he wrote, "If Jesus rose from the dead, you have to accept all he said. If he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about anything he said? If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything." Now, you might question that assertion. After all, history is full of important, interesting events, but how many of them have any real impact on how you live your life today or tomorrow? For example, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas over 55 years ago. Does that event really affect your life or mine today? Probably not. So, how and why should the death of a man named Jesus some 2,000 years ago half way around the world affect your life and mine this morning? And, yes, rising from the dead is certainly unusual. But even if Jesus did rise from the dead, so what? How does that event impact my life and potentially change it this Easter day - or any other day - for that matter?

About 30-40 years after Jesus died and rose again, the great Christian leader, Paul, addressed that question in a letter he wrote to a group of fellow Christians living in a city called Colossae. That letter is found in the New Testament. It's called Colossians and I'd like you to follow along as I read the first four verses of chapter three just now. Paul

assumed Jesus' resurrection was more than just an important event or an interesting historical event. Because of it, you and I can live life fully now. Paul spoke of it in such a way that made it clear he believed it was an event that continues to affect human lives profoundly today and tomorrow. We can live a very different kind of life because of it. I want you to know this Easter day that...

LIVING A FULL LIFE NOW IS BUILT ON FACTS.

Followers of Jesus base our lives on facts. Jesus, a man who was and is also God, died on a cross and then rose again physically, literally, and bodily three days later. Yes, there are some so-called Christians who might hem and haw at this very point. They might suggest Jesus' spirit rose again while His body remained in the tomb or that He continues to live among us by providing an inspiring example of a noble life. My friends, that simply will not do. You can't explain the continued influence of Jesus over 20 centuries, the existence of the worldwide Church, the impact of Christianity on the world over 2,000 years, or the personal and spiritual transformation of countless people, if you think of Jesus' resurrection as an inspiring fable rather than an historical event based on eyewitness accounts. If Easter is little more than just recognizing a noble man who is still dead, specifically, or celebrating the human spirit, generally, then – frankly – I'd prefer to have just slept in today and read the paper than be here. If Jesus is just a good role model or an inspiring example, who needs to worship or follow Him?

I can tell you very little about the exact details of Jesus' resurrection. I certainly wasn't there to witness it personally. But I can proclaim to you and celebrate with you a fact Christians have proclaimed and celebrated with great joy for 20 centuries. Jesus, God clothed in human flesh, just got up on the first Easter Day! He was as dead as dead can be, but somehow life came back into Him and He got up. He walked out of a tomb. Then, He talked with people, ate food with them, and allowed them to touch Him for a little over a month before He went back to Heaven. If you don't believe in the stone, cold fact of Jesus' resurrection, OK, but then don't consider yourself in any meaningful way, a Christian. Unless you live your life based on that fact, you will never live life fully. This is the one and only historical fact that has ultimate relevance and significance for how each us can live life every day. Paul obviously believed Jesus literally rose again, and what he said in the verses we read a moment ago points out how the resurrection brings full life to our living now.

“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ.” (Col. 3:1 NLT) Paul pointed to a second fact that's just as real and important as the first one we discussed. He said here and elsewhere that followers of Jesus died on the cross and rose again, too. What does that mean? Obviously, none of Jesus disciples back then literally died or rose again with Jesus. Nor can we die and rise with Jesus physically or literally. The Bible says Jesus died and was raised to life for us. That was an act of substitution. He died in our place taking upon Himself the penalty of sin which is death. His resurrection was proof that God, His Father, accepted Jesus' act of substitution. But, the Bible also says each and every follower of Jesus died on the cross with Him and has been raised to a

new life in Him. Not literally, but spiritually. That's identification. How did we die with Jesus? We died to sin's penalty which is death. We're no longer destined to eternal damnation. We also died to sin's power. Now, the Holy Spirit lives in us and gradually transforms our attitudes and behavior to be like that of Jesus. How did we rise with Jesus? We've been made right with God because our sins are now forgiven. We can enjoy a living, growing relationship with Him in this life. And when we do die physically, death isn't the end anymore. Instead, it's now a doorway into God's presence and - one day - we will be raised back to life in a new physical body just like Jesus.

When does this death and resurrection – this spiritual act of identification with Jesus - happen to a person? It happens the moment you put your full trust in the risen Jesus to be made right with God. People describe that moment differently: getting saved, being born again, or making a personal commitment to Jesus. Here's the marvelous truth we need to know and remember today. Your spiritual death and resurrection with Jesus is every bit as much a fact this Easter morning as the physical, literal death and resurrection of Jesus. Some years ago now, a woman by the name of Shelby Jean White was found guilty of murder in the first degree in Boone, NC. She had murdered a woman, buried the body, and then took on the woman's identity. For several months, she pretended to be the woman she'd killed – writing checks in her name, using her name when she answered the phone – while carefully hiding her own identity. The ruse was up when family members of the woman she'd killed concluded the voice on the telephone didn't belong to their relative. Paul didn't say he stole Jesus' identity when he wrote, "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20 NLT). Nevertheless, there was an exchange in identity spiritually. It was made possible when Jesus took on our identity by dying and rising in our place. We then access that fact personally and spiritually – taking on Jesus' identity by dying and rising with Him – when we put our full trust in Jesus.

Right here in this room today we have represented the most fundamental division in humanity. Male and female, right? No. Rich and poor, old and young, black and white? No. My friend, you are either a person who possesses today the actual resurrection life of Jesus within you or you don't. A person without Jesus' resurrection life is spiritually dead. Yes, of course, you're physically alive, but you're dead to God. You're dead to the greatest spiritual reality this life offers. Unless and until you put your full trust in Jesus – which means you die with Jesus and are raised with Jesus – you're physically alive, but spiritually dead. You're dead to what matters most in this life and eternity. Have you experienced this great fact personally? Did you ever die with Jesus and rise with Jesus? It can happen this Easter Day, if you will put your full faith in Jesus. The great question today is not whether Jesus is alive. Of course, He is! The real question is whether you're really alive. Alive to God. Alive to what matters most. Living a full life now is built on facts. Jesus died for you. You died with Him. Jesus rose for you. You rose with Him. I also want you to know this Easter Day that...

LIVING A FULL NOW IS BASED ON MY DAILY DECISION.

I'm told that if you take a glass jar with air holes in the lid and you put some flies inside the jar, the flies will buzz around frantically trying to get out of the cramped container at first. But if you keep the ventilated jar closed for a long time, something fascinating will happen. When you finally take the lid off, the flies won't escape. Even though the lid is now open, the flies will just stay in the cramped jar. Why? They've been conditioned into believing they're trapped. They live as if their limitations are still true. They've lost the ability to make a different decision based on new facts.

When Jesus died and rose again, He took the top off the jar of your life and mine. We no longer have to live ungodly, weak, defeated, anxious, hopeless lives. Instead, we can choose to live a cleansed life, a new life, a victorious life, and a meaningful life. Unlike those flies, you and I have the capacity to make a decision to fly up, out, and beyond a limited life. In other words, like that waitress discovered, because of Jesus we can now live alive all day. We can live life fully now. That's what Paul was talking about in the Scripture we read earlier. "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:1-3 NLT)

Here's a frightening reality. A person can become a follower of Jesus, but – for a variety of reasons – fail to live life fully. How does that happen? The most obvious way is to allow yourself to get enslaved to some sinful attitude or behavior. You excuse it or rationalize it rather than abandoning it. Or, limited living can happen when you allow troubles and heartache to so impact your life that you get and stay disappointed with God. Or, perhaps you get preoccupied with what our culture says is most important – pursuing wealth, possessions, or a great career – and put pursuing a relationship with God on the back burner of your life. When you and I possess the resurrection life of Jesus within us spiritually, we still need to make a daily decision – a daily choice – to access it. You're not a robot. God gives us the ability to decide to live alive all day.

What can we say about this daily decision to live life fully now? Let me mention, first of all, what it doesn't mean. It's not a once and done decision. No, it needs to be made consciously over and over again – daily, maybe even several times a day. Even the verb tense of the verses we read point to that truth. They can be rendered, "Habitually and continually set your heart on things above; habitually and continually set your mind on things above." Do it continually. Nor is this decision about being so heavenly-minded, you're no earthly good! The Bible never encourages anyone to withdraw from life – its work, its activities, its people, or its problems – and just contemplate eternity in Heaven with God. It's been said – and I fully agree – that followers of Jesus who are most likely to make the strongest and best impact on this life and this world are the same ones who think most about God and Heaven.

That leads us right into thinking about what this decision does mean. It means looking at all of life from a new and different perspective. It's as if you sit with the risen Jesus in Heaven looking down now upon your life. It's like hiking in the mountains. It's a lot

easier to see where you've been and where you're going at the top than when you're stuck down in some valley. When you live your life from this new perspective, your goals and ambitions change from being self-centered to being God-centered. What matters to God becomes more important than what matters to you. What Jesus loves and cares about becomes what you love and care about. Your decisions in life, your choices, your values, your priorities, how you do relationships with other people – they will all change and be different if you truly want to live alive all day – to live life fully now.

This decision means Jesus will increasingly become the central focus of your life. What is life, after all? Is it just the breath in your bodies? Is it being able to do what you want when you want? The Bible says, in the end, real life is a person and that person is Jesus. Don't overlook what Paul said in what we read today. "And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory." (Col. 3:4 NLT) Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Jo. 10:10 NIV) That life is Jesus Himself. And about Jesus, Scripture says, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life." (1 Jo. 5:12 NLT)

Sometimes when a person thinks someone else is approaching life in a limited way, he or she will say, "Get a life!" A few years ago, Air New Zealand picked up on that phrase and chose phone numbers for its vacation packages that spelt out G-E-T-A-L-I-F-E. New Zealand is apparently a grand place to visit, but there is only one place to get resurrection life, God's life. It's only in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. No one gets to the Father but through Him. If you want life as God intended, it's found in Jesus.

This decision will change everything about your past, present, and future. How can it change your past? No, you can't change the events in your past, but Jesus can change the impact of those past events on you. He can forgive what needs to be forgiven. You don't have to drag around guilt and shame for past sins and failures. You don't have to live your life feeling dirty and defeated. He can separate you from your sins as far as the east is from the west. Jesus can also heal you from the effects of being sinned against. Abuse. Dysfunction. Neglect. Betrayal. What's in your past that has left an open wound in the middle of your life? Psychologists talk about learning how to cope. God doesn't ask you to cope. In Jesus, He offers wholeness, wellness, and healing.

How can this decision change your present? Jesus constantly provides three wonderful gifts that allow you and me to live life fully. They are His peace, power, and presence. When Jesus is your life, you have a peace that passes human understanding. Anxiety and worry don't control your every waking moment. The more you set your heart and mind on things above, the more you receive Jesus' power. I don't need more instructions or suggestions on how to live. I just need the power to live the way God wants me to live. That comes in and through Jesus who will give me the ability to face both life's joys and life's sorrows, both life's ups and life's downs, and both life's triumphs and life's tragedies in Jesus' power. His peace and power are available to me because of Jesus' presence in my life every moment of every day. God said something

to Moses in the Old Testament that is true for every follower of Jesus this day and every day, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Ex. 33:14 NIV)

How can this decision change your future? Yes, it will change what you want for yourself in the future in terms of your goals and ambitions. True enough. But it will also change forever what happens to you after you die. You will be in the presence of Jesus immediately. “Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:8 NLT) And then one great, grand day, when Jesus returns to this Earth again, your spirit will be joined to your new, resurrected body for eternity. “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout.... First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.” (1 Th. 4:16-17 NLT) For a Christian, the best is always yet to come.

A Christian woman was diagnosed with a terminal disease and told she had three months to live. She called her pastor and asked him to come to her home to discuss some of her final wishes. She told him what songs she wanted sung at her memorial service, what Scriptures she wanted read, and even what dress she wanted to be buried in. She also wanted to be buried with her favorite Bible in her left hand. The pastor took down careful notes and was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered one final request that was very important to her. “Just one more thing, Pastor,” she said. “Sure. What is it,” he said. “I want to be buried holding a fork in my right hand.” The pastor just looked at her - at a complete loss for words.

Seeing his confusion, the woman said, “That surprises you, doesn’t it? You see, Pastor, in all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I remember that when the dishes were being cleared away after the main course, someone would always lean over to me and say, ‘Keep your fork.’ Oh, I loved that because I knew that something wonderful was coming – the best part of the whole meal. Something like a velvety chocolate cake or a deep-dish apple pie. So, I just want people to see me lying there in my casket with a fork in my hand. I want them to wonder, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them, Pastor, to keep their forks, because the best is yet to come.” The pastor’s eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged his friend good-bye for a while.

At the woman’s funeral, everyone that walked by her casket saw her the beautiful dress that covered her body. They saw her favorite Bible in her left hand. And, yes, they saw that fork in her right hand. Just as she had hoped, many asked the pastor, “Why is she holding a fork?” During his message, he explained to them what it meant to their friend and what it should mean to them. Because of Jesus, because of His mighty resurrection from the dead on Easter Day, the best is yet to come for every one of His followers. So keep your fork!

Have you ever heard the expression, “Life is whatever you are alive to”? It’s interesting to observe what people are alive to. Money. Things. Career. Social media. Success.

Sports. Other people. A Christian is simply a person who – first and foremost – is alive to Jesus. Not just Jesus as my Savior. Not just Jesus as my Friend. But alive to Jesus as my LIFE. And not just back when you were baptized. Not just when you come to church. Not just when you get into some kind of trouble and you call out to God for help. Christian, are you truly alive to Jesus this Easter Day and every other day? The question isn't if Jesus is fully alive. Of course, He is! The real question is whether you're fully alive. May you truly have a joy-filled, Jesus-filled Easter. They go together! But, more importantly, may you truly have a joy-filled, Jesus-filled life. Live life fully now, Christian. Live alive all day.