

EASTER SUNDAY Longing for our Resurrection

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 March 2016

Preacher: Mark Chew

- [0 : 0 0] Now, but not yet. Now, but not yet. I wonder whether you've heard this phrase before. Most of you that go to Bible college probably have. Others may have too as well.
- Well, I'm not referring to the time when you've asked your dad, can I buy a new iPhone now, only to be told, not yet. Nor am I talking about dinner later on, when all the hungry guys come up after dinner to the counter asking, can I have seconds now, only to be told, not yet.
- Instead, as many of you would know, I'm referring to God's kingdom, where now but not yet is actually a very common way to explain what Jesus teaches about it. What Jesus teaches, you see, is that the kingdom is both now and not yet.
- So when he says that the kingdom is near, he's emphasizing the now of the kingdom. That is, that the kingdom has arrived in Jesus' coming. But when he then speaks of the kingdom in parables, like that of the wedding banquet, let's say, or of the ten virgins, he's referring to the not yet of the kingdom.
- And so God's kingdom is both inaugurated in Jesus' coming, but not fully consummated, because aspects of it will only be fulfilled when Jesus returns. Now, as a result, we see this now but not yet aspect of the kingdom actually crop up again and again in our Christian life.
- [1 : 2 7] So, for instance, as Christians, we are freed from the punishment of sin now, but not yet from the effects of sin. We're saved now, but as we saw in Philippians, Paul tells us to keep working out our salvation with fear and trembling.
- And so this is the Sunday I want to reflect on the now and not yet of the resurrection. Today, we celebrate and rejoice that Jesus is risen.
- And yet, its impact on us has both now and not yet aspects. Yes, we will be raised with Christ one day, that's not yet, but we also enjoy the benefits of the resurrection now, today.
- And we see both these aspects in our passage tonight. Now, this is quite a long passage, so I'm afraid I'm going to have to fly over parts of it. But the outline, hopefully, will give you a bit of perspective to see where the now and the not yet parts fall out in the passage.
- Now, as I just said, we know that as Christians, one of God's promises to us is that we have eternal life. If and when we die, our soul will live on, and one day we will be raised again and be given a new body.
- [2 : 3 9] The truth is we don't just have eternal life then, we already have it now. Now, many of us will know that, but I think often the picture in our minds is of an earthly life continuing, our earthly lives continuing into eternity.
- That's what eternal life means to us. More of the same, but the same nonetheless. But the Bible actually has a very different and a much richer picture of what our life, eternal life, is all about.
- Because our lives as believers now isn't just a continuation of our own lives. It's actually living the life of the risen Lord Jesus. We share in His resurrection life now.

So we're no longer just like a flickering candle that manages somehow to keep on burning for eternity, like a trick candle. We've actually been transformed, let's say, into a powerful torch that's been plugged in to manes.

Our feeble lives are now turbocharged, if you like, with Jesus' own resurrection life. His life becomes the source of our life. So look with me at verses 10 and 11.

[3 : 57] And this is exactly what Paul says. He says, We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that His life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

Paul repeats himself twice. Can you see? It's Jesus' life, not Paul's, that is revealed in His body. So this then is the now of the resurrection.

Christ has risen and His resurrection life is what we enjoy now. And so there is in us something of the new creation. It's wonderful, isn't it? The new heavens and the new earth are lodged right at the core of our being.

We don't have to wait until we die or until Jesus comes again. This life is ours to enjoy right now. This is the amazing thing that sets us apart as God's people in this world.

That great power that raised Jesus from the dead is right now sustaining each and every one of us, sustaining our new life in Christ. The richest, the most powerful and successful people in the world don't have this unless they're Christians too.

[5 : 13] But if you believe in Jesus, then it's something you have, even though you might be the weakest or the poorest person on this earth. That's wonderful to know, isn't it?

But wonderful as all this sounds, there is a paradox with this life. And you may already have noticed it in verses 10 and 11. And the paradox is this, that this wonderful resurrected life is displayed in us only through death.

Notice what else Paul says. He's always carrying the death of Jesus with him and being given over to death for Jesus' sake in order that Jesus' life might be revealed in his body.

Now what does Paul mean by carrying the death of Jesus with him? Well, I think he means that he's modeling the pattern of Jesus' death in his own life. He's living humbly, sacrificially.

He's dying to himself. And as he does that, the resurrected life of Jesus shines through him. We see clearly how God's power is at work in him as he is living out this death.

[6 : 17] That's why Paul describes himself in verse 7 as a clay jar. Now clay jars, if you're not aware, were the most common of containers in Paul's day. It's probably why archaeologists have been able to have so many of them displayed at museums because they're just ubiquitous.

So imagine today carrying the most sort of expensive perfume. I don't know, is Chanel No. 5 really expensive? Anyway, yes, okay, Chanel No. 5. Imagine carrying that perfume in that bottle like that.

Or the most valuable diamonds, you know, flawless, you know, carrot diamonds in your sort of coarse disposable bag. Well, this is the sort of image that Paul conjures by saying that this treasure is in clay jars.

God has this most glorious message about his son Jesus and all the greatest promises that go with it like eternal life, union with Christ, belonging to the new creation. And what he chooses to do is to pour that message into clay jars, entrust it to messengers like Paul, people who appear at first glance as people unworthy to proclaim the message.

It's in stark contrast to how the world operates. Just look, for instance, at the US presidential candidates. I'm sure some of you are following that.

[7 : 41] People like Trump or Clinton. All these months of campaigning, I don't know, they all talk about policy and all that, but it actually is simply an exercise in projecting power, isn't it?

The last thing any one of those candidates want to look like is a clay jar. They want to look good on the outside to show that they are capable. Any hint of weakness or vulnerability, well, that's a sign of weakness.

That's why you hear Trump make all these big boasts, right? He's a \$10 billion man, you know, US \$10 billion. I think he's only \$4 billion, but you know, he says he's \$10 billion because people remember \$10 billion.

Then he says he's the best and the smartest, you know, whatever Obama did, it's all wrong. I could have done better. He never makes any mistakes. He calls New York my city, not as though he lives in it, but actually because implying that he owns it.

It's all about projecting power and glory, isn't it? By contrast, Paul's unafraid to emit the pressures he's under. Look at verse 8.

[8 : 47] He says he's hard-pressed on every side, although not crushed. He's perplexed, but not in despair. He's persecuted, but not abandoned. Struck down, but not destroyed. He's not ashamed to admit his weaknesses, knowing that at the same time, he's never tested to breaking point because he has the life of Jesus in him.

And so Paul can say in verse 7 that this shows that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. Friends, I'm sure that as a Christian, you too want to have God's all-surpassing power at work in you.

But it's important to realize that this power actually displays itself as we die to ourselves, as we face adversity with dependence on God. The power of the resurrection life is actually most clearly seen as we lay aside our pride and our self-confidence.

Unfortunately, society today conditions us, doesn't it, to seek comfort at all costs, seek advantage at all costs, to make choices that would insulate us from this adversity or suffering.

So much so that, actually, it deprives us, doesn't it, of the very conditions that allows the life of Jesus to shine out from us. But when we step out in faith, when we live sacrificially, whether it's in terms of how we give generously financially or the time we spend serving God and others, when we look after the needs of others before our own, then the life of Jesus will be revealed in us.

[10 : 22] It shines out more clearly because we're depending on God. Now, some of you, on the other hand, may be having a hard time in life. Perhaps you have lived sacrificially or else you're being tested right at the moment.

And you may know exactly how Paul feels about being hard-pressed on every side, persecuted, struck down. Well, Paul goes on to encourage us in these situations. During those times, we may feel drained like that.

If you ask people who are suffering, they don't feel like they have the resurrection life, do they? But in reality, Paul says in verse 16, the opposite is happening. So he says, Do not lose heart, for though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Now, friends, the honest truth is that whether you're suffering or not, whether you're young or old, we're all wasting away. All right? Some of us are doing it faster than others. Some of us are further along than others.

But in reality, to one degree or another, we're all wasting away. I, for one, had a quick look at my wedding photo, and I realized I'll never return to that youthful look again. All that black hair is simply a distant memory.

[11 : 37] Now, some of you might think you're fit right now, right? You're running marathons, you know, I don't know, bench pressing 100 kilos. Is that good? At the gym? But none of this will last.

You ladies with the perfect complexion, well, one day, that will all be gone as well. Now, for the rest of the world, aging and death is a scary prospect. Someone estimated that the world spends about 125 billion US dollars annually on anti-aging products.

And most of it actually doesn't work. But for us who believe in Jesus, then this outward decay shouldn't be scaring us. Paul urges us not to lose heart.

Instead, rejoice at the inner renewal that's occurring in us. Take heart in the resurrection life that's growing within us. Because even though it's unseen, this is where the action is.

This is where God's action is. This is the eternal glory that God's achieving in us. Which is so weighty, Paul says, that the troubles we have are simply light and momentary by comparison.

[12 : 44] Now, what exactly is this inner life and how do we tell it's being renewed? Well, Paul gives us a clue in verse 18. For he says, we are to fix our eyes on what's unseen for what is unseen is eternal.

And so, I think it's things like faith and hope in Jesus. The increasing confidence that we have in him even in the face of growing adversity. For those of us whose bodies are failing, it's the hope that despite this outward wasting away, we're actually headed for glory rather than decay.

Paul tells us not to fix our eyes on temporary things like our earthly ambitions or accomplishments, but rather to fix our eyes on God's work of grace in our lives, on our growing capacity to endure patiently, to persevere, to remain joyful and at peace even in the midst of trials.

All these are true measures of our progress in life. This is the real evidence of Jesus' risen life in us. Now, for us to focus on the inner life, though, doesn't mean we conclude that all physical things are bad.

It's especially possible to swing to the other extreme, to be too spiritual, by thinking, for instance, that since we're wasting away outwardly, then anything that's outward is bad.

[14 : 07] This, after all, is the way of the Eastern mystical religions like Buddhism and New Age thinking. And in Paul's day, there were those that believed the same. They were called Gnostics. I've got a word. It's a silent G.

It means knowledge, people who know things. But this isn't what the Bible teaches, nor is it Paul's view and hope. Instead, we are to put our hope not in this body, but on a new body.

This is the not yet of our resurrection life, to receive a glorious physical body which doesn't decay, which we'll participate with in the new creation. We caught a glimpse of that new creation in our first reading.

So, if you remember Isaiah 65 there, the new heavens and earth were described. But notice how remarkably earthy Isaiah 65 is.

There is work, there's building, there's planting, there's eating, there's feasting. There's an enjoyment of things physical, isn't it? Even working with our hands.

[15 : 12] And so, here in 2 Corinthians, Paul yearns for that future, to be clothed in a new and glorious physical body. Now, a couple of weeks ago, Josie, where's Josie?

Oh, she's there. Josie from the Word Congregation, she went camping with a few friends. Now, many of you would know this because she posted this picture on Facebook. Now, why so glum, you might ask?

Well, it turns out that although they packed their luxurious three-person tent, that's correct, right? They forgot to bring the poles for it. So, instead, they had to make do with this flimsy and squeezezy two-man tent.

And so, I don't know, Josie didn't tell me this, but I imagine them groaning over the weekend, looking longingly and enviously at all the other campers around them, those who had the more glamorous walk-in tents, you know.

Well, Paul does a little of his own groaning in tents as well in this passage, doesn't he? But the earthly tent he talks about in verse 1 and chapter 5 refers to his earthly body.

[16 : 17] It's flimsy and frail as well, but he knows that if this tent fails, God will give him a bigger and better tent. In fact, he calls it his heavenly dwelling in verse 2.

That is his resurrection body, which God will give him from heaven. It will be a body like Jesus, not subject to decay or destruction. And so here we have a tension in our Christian life.

On the one hand, we're not to focus on our earthly body, but on the inner life, which God renews in us daily. And yet, on the other hand, it's okay to groan.

It's okay to groan in our earthly body and to long for our heavenly one. It's okay, you see, to groan as we suffer. We don't actually need to just go through suffering stoically and be unmoved by it.

Why? Because God actually has made us physical beings. Jesus himself became a physical human, so the physical is not to be despised. And as Isaiah 65 affirms, so much of what we enjoy in life is actually physical.

[17 : 21] Just think, you know, but tasting and savoring good food, that's physical. The comfort and exhilaration of physical intimacy, that's physical. Walking along the beach or climbing a mountain and then breathing in the fresh air, that's physical.

Hearing and being moved by beautiful music and singing, all these are profoundly physical activities, aren't they? And God has actually created us to enjoy them.

So it's alright to groan when things are not right. It's alright to groan when we can't enjoy these things. But what we long for is not to somehow cling vainly to this earthly body, which is wasting away.

No, what we long for then is for this new body, which we will have when Christ returns. Now sometimes our groaning and longing can be so strong that we lose all motivation for living this life.

And yet, as we go on, Paul encourages us, even warns us actually, that while we're still physically able, we mustn't do that. That is, we mustn't give up on living this earthly life.

[18 : 32] I imagine Paul himself would be under enormous pressure, don't you think? Probably more so than us. And yet, he says in verse 9, that we are to keep living for Jesus. Because we know what we know about Jesus, because we believe what we believe in Jesus, then our goal is to please Him, he says, in our earthly bodies.

For he says, one day we will appear before His judgment seat. We will all have to give an account of what we've done, receiving what is due, he says in verse 10, for what we've done while in this earthly body, whether good or bad.

And so Paul actually draws a very strong connection, doesn't he, between the resurrection life we have now and the resurrection life we will have then. What we do in this body, now, will actually have a direct impact of what happens to us in the new creation.

In case you're wondering what this good is, well, I don't think it's simply good works, right? It's not moralism. What it's called for is to please the Lord Jesus, he says. And that means to live a life of faith, as he speaks about in verse 7.

The good we do, then, arises from that faith. So I want to urge anyone here today who have not put your faith in Jesus, do that, please.

[19 : 48] For a day of judgment is coming. But if we do believe in Jesus, then let us live to please him by declaring the gospel of his glory to others, by being unafraid to carry his death in our bodies, by being willing to live for others.

Well, let me conclude. This Easter, I think if you ask Christians what they make of Jesus' death, I think many will be able to tell you the death, the impact of the death of Jesus on their lives.

We all know, by his death, our sins are forgiven. Jesus has taken the punishment for us. But ask people what they make of Jesus' resurrection, and I think many people will be a bit less clear.

They may know that it proves that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, but actually, his resurrection means more than that to us, doesn't it? It means that we have the power of his risen life now.

God's all-surpassing power, which is Jesus' resurrected life, shines brightly in our frail and flimsy tent. And it means that even though we are wasting away, we are actually being renewed day by day.

[20 : 59] We will inherit a glorious body. And that hope fuels how we live today, how we will please him, how we will glorify his Father in heaven. Friends, please know today that Jesus is alive, and his life is in you.

Praise God for that. Let's pray. Father, help us to live in a manner that allows the life of Jesus to be revealed in our bodies, to shine forth from this flimsy, groaning tent of ours.

Help us to hope in things eternal, weighty things, things that are unseen right now, and yet gives us sure confidence in our life to come.

Help us to please you by living and walking this life of faith for the glory of Jesus. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. key sounds.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.