

Life in Himself

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: 05 April 2015

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Well, if you would turn back to page 4, we're going to turn to the Gospel of John. And my understanding is that John was the only one of the 12 guy apostles who was actually there at the cross watching Jesus die.

The women were there, but all the other guys had run away. And he is an eyewitness as well on the day of resurrection. And he tells us a number of eyewitness details on the day Jesus rose from the dead.

And one of the lovely eyewitness details he gives us is that there was a lot of running. There was a lot of sprinting on the day of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene was the first.

She went to the tomb early in the day, found it empty, ran back to the city to tell Peter and John. So Peter and John set off at a run to the tomb. And when they get there, John very humbly tells us that he got there first.

He was obviously the fastest disciple. And when Peter finally makes it, they step inside and they find the linen wrapping cloths without a body in it, folded, neatly, set to one side.

[1 : 13] And John says this, And I think that perfectly describes most of us this morning. We believe Jesus rose from the dead in some way, but we don't really understand.

And that's why I wanted us to look at these words that Jesus spoke from John 5, about a year before his death and resurrection. Because he's explaining the meaning of the resurrection for us. He explains how his resurrection life comes into our experience, how it becomes real to us. And he explains how it affects every single human being.

He didn't die and rise for his own benefit. And we don't come as spectators this morning. We want to understand what the resurrection means for us and what his life means for us and how we receive it.

So there are two points. There are two points. The first is this. What does this resurrection life of Jesus mean for us? What are we all doing here?

[2 : 20] What does it mean for us? And the simple answer is, at the heart of resurrection life for us, is the deep, unchanging, unchallengeable, undeserved love of God.

It is his free acceptance and approval and delight. The resurrection life means that God is saying to us, in Jesus, there is no condemnation for anyone.

And the reason for that is because life and judgment are opposed to each other in this passage.

Now, Jesus uses this word judgment three times, you might have noticed as we read it here.

You can use judgment in a neutral sense, you know, assessing something. But each time Jesus uses it here, he uses it in the negative sense to mean condemnation.

And here is the key, that life and condemnation judgment are two ends of the same pole.

[3 : 28] They are opposite ends of the same pole. So look at verse 29 for a moment, please. The hour is coming when all in the tombs will hear the voice, hear his voice, and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

You see, if Jesus gives me life, I am not going to be condemned. If Jesus gives me condemnation, I am not going to have life. Jesus is responsible for both.

And I am very aware this is not polite dinner conversation. You know, we can talk, you can talk endlessly vague notions of God, but when you start speaking specifically about Jesus in particular, conversation quickly dries up.

And I think part of the reason for that is that as Canadians, we instinctively don't like and cringe at the idea of condemnation and judgment.

We live in a fractured culture. We no longer agree on the big questions, what's right and wrong, what's true and false, what's just and what's not, death and life.

[4 : 42] We want justice. We love justice. But we don't want to judge. We want coexistence, not condemnation.

And you know how to best insult someone? It's to say, you are judgmental. You watch them backtrack if you say that to them. And the reason is, if we're really honest with ourselves, is that what we long for underneath is acceptance and approval and love.

We don't really want just coexistence and tolerance. We want the opposite of condemnation. We want to be appreciated and valued and be regarded as worthwhile.

We want to be secure in the affections of another. And death is living under the condemnation of God. Death mocks our securities.

And death creates in us all sorts of addictions for approval and applause in all the wrong places.

Now, why am I saying this? It's because of this. That here in this passage, Jesus teaches and the rest of the Bible teaches that there are two different kinds of death and there are two different kinds of life.

[5 : 57] Let's call them big life, small life, big death, small death. Small life is our natural biological life that we receive at birth.

It's the physical, organic life which is the very good gift of God. And what a wonderful gift it is. I mean, we treasure it. We fiercely hold on to it. We try and improve it.

And it's measured in duration and vitality and in the quality of our relationships. But even the cleverest people in the world say, they're the first to say, we don't understand a bit of it really.

But there's an inevitable arc to this life, this small life. We're born, we grow and mature, and then we start to decline.

And then we die. Some of us are on this and some of us are at this point on the arc. And as good as our lives are, our natural biological lives in the end will be devastated and destroyed by small death, bodily death.

[7 : 03] Our bodies give out, our minds give out, our breath gives out. And we have this sense that human life has been disrupted and it's been made bitter by its own shortness and uncertainty.

But God created us, and I think we all have a sense of this, God created us for big life as well as small life. And big life is much more than duration and vitality and good relationships.

At the heart of big life is knowing God. It's enjoying the light of his face. It's being in the kind of relationship with him that you are absolutely secure in his love.

It's being known for who I am and utterly, utterly accepted and loved. And that's the picture of how God created us in the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in harmony and security and pure, blameless goodness. And the first temptation comes along, and every temptation comes along and says this, you can't trust the love of God.

[8 : 17] You've got to find other sources of life. You've got to believe in your own independent choices. You've got to take things into your own hands and look elsewhere.

This is the original lie, and that is that blessing and life are found outside of God. And it's always the intention of sin and temptation to separate us from the communion with God and the love of God, and to create a rupture in that relationship.

That's why the snake lies. He says, you will not die. It ain't going to happen. God doesn't really have the power of life and death.

That's, if you step away from him, you'll find you'll have more life and more happiness than you ever had. And that's how death entered our world. Because, you see, death and sin are not so much breaking God's rules as they are breaking away from God.

They're not disobeying God's laws. It's the decision to make my own laws, put myself in the place of God. And do you know what it leads to? I was very interested in the list from the first reading.

[9 : 29] And as I read these words, just think about yourself. It leads to sexual immorality. Impurity. Impurity. Passion.

That's just giving yourself over to something. Evil desire. Covetousness. Wanting more. Idolatry. Anger. Wrath. Malice.

Slander. Talking about other people behind their backs. Obscene talk. And that's to say nothing about violence and abuse and degradation and materialism that plagues our lives.

And it's out of these things that come our nakedness and our shame and our fear of God and our desperate need to find the approval that we so desire in other places and from other people. You see, if big life is fellowship with God, big death is losing access to God. It's turning away from God.

[10:28] It's severing our ties with the one who has life in itself. And what that means is this. It means you can be physically alive but spiritually dead. Do you understand?

You can have small life and big death at the same time. You can have a very full biological life but carry big death in your heart without fellowship with God.

And the proof that we are carrying big death in our hearts is not so much the corruption and greed and exploitation. It is that we are deaf to the voice of God.

That we have removed ourselves from God's approval. And that we fix ourselves on all sorts of other voices and other things and other people for applause and approval.

When I was in high school, I played rugby. And our school had a stadium with a grandstand. And when you played on that field, we had one field with a grandstand.

[11:28] When you played on that field, if you did something on the field and the crowd cheered, you'd do it again. And if you did something on the field and the crowd booed, you wouldn't do it again if you couldn't get away with it.

When my father came to watch, which he rarely did, there was one voice in the grandstand that I really cared about hearing. It was his. It was his.

And we all have stadiums and grandstands. And we all have people that we look to for approval. The first game I ever played that my father came to at that particular stadium, I was knocked out after about two minutes and carried off.

And there was a long silent drive home. And when asked later how it was by someone else in the family, he said it was not an impressive performance.

You see why I am like I am. You see, all our hearts are tuned to different voices for approval.

[12:37] It can be other people. It can be parents, children. It can be co-workers. Or it can be things like success or money or achievement or sex or power. I think if I have that thing, I'll have value.

And the voice that you look to for approval only becomes clear when you don't have the approval, when you have disapproval. And you feel insecure and most in need of that approval because every human heart is seeking a verdict on itself.

The problem with all these voices is that they are completely unable to give us what our hearts long for. They're unstable. They're temporary.

And they come and go. They cannot free us from this condemnation that we live under. They cannot bring us the acceptance of God. I mean, you think about it.

Let's say you're a performer and you stand on stage. You give the performance of your life and you receive a standing ovation on Wednesday. What happens on Thursday?

[13:44] What happens when you wake up in the morning? What happens if you don't get that the next day? All approval is like that. It's temporary. It's untrustworthy. No matter how good your performance is.

You cannot trust the voice of approval of other people. The verdicts are always fickle. They're always manipulative and they never last. And you cannot trust your own voice.

We're being taught in our culture you just have self-confidence. Trust your own voice. The problem with my own voice is that I can lower my standards so I'm very acceptable or I can raise my standards so I've got a negative self-voice.

There's only one voice that can settle the issue of approval and acceptance. It's the voice of the Son of God. There's only one voice that has the right to judge me. There's only one who sees everything.

And there's only one who I can trust to tell me the truth that will last forever. It is the voice of the Son of God. Because in his death and resurrection, what Jesus does is he reverses any condemnation God may have of us.

[14:56] And in the resurrection, God offers us all the approval and delight and acceptance that Jesus himself deserves now in this life and forever.

That's what the resurrection life of Jesus means now. It means we no longer have to depend on other voices or even our own voice for approval. The one voice in the grandstand that really matters

is the voice of God.

And through the resurrection, do you know what that voice is saying? It's saying, I love you. I delight in you. I accept you. Irrespective of your performance.

You could be carried off a thousand times. It doesn't matter. As Jesus takes our condemnation and he brings the approval and acceptance that belongs to him and he gives it to us.

The resurrection brings the applause and approval of God for us. The absolute, unchanging, eternal, deeply rich delight of God.

[16:01] And that is what eternal life is. That's what it is. It is a life that begins now and lasts forever of absolute acceptance and love of God.

Not because of any performance or lack of it or achievement or lack of it in me. It's purely because Jesus gave his eternal life over to death, received condemnation and has risen again and offers us his life.

The wonderful thing about eternal life is that small death has no power of it. So this is the first point. What does Jesus' resurrection life mean for us this morning?

It means the ongoing, ageless, unchanging approval, love and acceptance by God. The reversal of condemnation. And secondly and briefly, how then does this resurrection life come into our experience?

How do we receive it? And the simple answer the passage gives us is through the voice of the Son of God. Well, last week, if you were here at the 11 o'clock, the sound system gave out.

[17:13] You remember? I'd been preaching about three minutes. We were a big group, not as big as this. So I shouted the whole sermon and spat on the first few rows.

I apologize. It was awful. In my experience, preachers shout when what they're saying is weak. So it felt kind of weird. And I went through throat lozenges for a couple of days.

I'm just very aware of the own weakness and squeakiness and patheticness of my own voice. Very easy to switch off. Many of you have switched off already. And last week, when I was shouting away, you could have just gone behind the glass and you would never have heard me.

But the driving emphasis of Jesus here is that new life, resurrection life, comes through his voice.

And you can see how important it is just from the structure. So the second paragraph beginning at 25 and the third paragraph beginning at 28.

Jesus speaks about the fact that it's his voice that gives life now and on the last day at the end of history. Look at verse 25 again, please. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here.

[18:21] He's talking about the now. When the dead, that is those who are physically alive but spiritually dead, will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

And down to 28. Do not marvel at this. I don't know why Jesus says that. For an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs, that is everyone who's died, will hear his voice and come out.

You see, the power of Jesus' voice is such that it can penetrate both small death and big death. It can raise us to new spiritual life and raise us to new physical life on that day.

The same voice through which God gave birth to creation. The Son of God now speaks and gives us new birth to a new creation. And it happens every time someone hears the voice of God and believes and trusts in his love.

And what happens on that last day is a continuation of the work that Jesus has begun. Because those who come out will come out. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life.

[19:36] And those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. In other words, history is not an endless cycle. We're not on a spiral, a wheel of fortune. History, the world hasn't just come from nothing and heading to nothing.

History moves in a straight line from creation to the new creation. And Jesus said that what he has started in his resurrection, he will complete on that day.

The same voice which generates spiritual life in us now will one day raise every human being who's ever lived and died from their graves.

Some to a resurrection of life, some to a resurrection of condemnation. And the reason for that is that when the resurrection life of Jesus enters us, it brings transformation and change.

He accepts us as we are, but he doesn't leave us as we are. It doesn't change your personality, your temperament. You know, you won't change your Myers-Briggs reading.

[20:40] You won't suddenly become an extrovert. But it will change your character. And the reason he's able to give us life is because he gave away his own eternal life.

And I think that's why there's a little oxymoron at the beginning of verse 24. Sorry, 25. He says, an hour is coming and now is.

An hour. An hour. And remember, throughout John's gospel, whenever Jesus speaks of the hour, he is speaking about the hour of his death and resurrection. Because Jesus is saying that someone has to enter into death and dismantle it from the inside.

And someone has to do this. Someone is one of us. Someone who has shared our experiences and our temptations and our suffering. Someone has to bear the condemnation I deserve.

And in the resurrection, Jesus shows both that he is qualified to be the judge and he is also the one who was judged for us. Removing every possible cause for condemnation.

[21 : 50] Every possible reason for judgment God has into himself. Breaking the power of our sin by cancelling it. Setting us free. This is the greatness and glory of our God.

The greatness and the glory of our God is that he is willing to become ungreat. And to be humiliated for our condemnation. You know, we talk about the glory of God.

It's not just flat out awesomeness. It's humility. It's humility touching down in humanity. In the eternal life that Christ has in himself, he offers us, because of his death and resurrection, through his voice.

As we hear. As you are hearing his voice now speaking through what I'm saying. Offering the gift of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. And there's one little point to finish with.

And that is that there's a key difference between the way Jesus' voice operates now and on that last day. At the end of history, did you notice, there's going to be no choice of any human being except to obey and hear the voice.

[23 : 00] He says, all who are in the tombs. All will hear his voice and come out. Though they are deaf and have been dead for centuries, at Jesus' command, they will all come out.

But in the present, it's different. There's a choice as to whether you listen to the voice of God or not. It's not all who are alive physically, but live in spiritual death, who will listen and accept the voice of Jesus.

Verse 25, only those who really hear will receive this life. And I think that's why there's running on that first Easter day.

Because this is urgent. There's a solemn urgency in Jesus' words here. And I think the key thing, you take this passage and read it for yourself and see if you think I'm right.

The key issue is not the astounding claim that Jesus will raise the dead to life on the last day. The key thing is how we hear the words of the Son of God now.

[24 : 06] Whether we're choosing his voice and listening to his voice. Because his voice, this is the way God is with us. Voices bind people together. Voices reveal our hearts to each other.

And Jesus comes as the word made flesh. And the word he speaks to us, every word he speaks to us, is life and spirit. We cannot put off our biological death.

But we can hear the voice of the Son of God and allow him to take our death and to give us big life, big life, big life. Can you hear his voice? Piercing your own deafness.

Reaching into your heart and saying, there is no condemnation. There is no condemnation for those who come to me. There is forgiveness. There is life. There is hope. There is goodness. There is future.

There is eternity. And I think we should run to him. So let's do that as we kneel and pray together.