

Life in Himself

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, folks. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. My name is Aaron. If you're visiting with us, welcome.

It's wonderful to have you here. Come and say hi afterwards. I'd love to meet you. We broke up the Gospel of John. We are preaching through the Gospel of John. When we broke it up, we made sure that this passage was the reading for Easter Sunday because it's about life and death and resurrection.

Now, let's just crack on and just get straight into it, all right? It's a wonderful passage, and it begins with a very bold claim that Jesus makes. He says this. He says, The dead will hear my voice and live.

The dead will hear my voice and live. Now, who is he talking to? Who are the dead? Why are they dead? Why use the word dead? Because it's a big word, dead. Right? Dead. It's like somebody says to you, You're dead to me.

That's not very kind. That's not nice. So it's like when you use it as a metaphor, it's like it's a really gutsy word. Why is Christ using this word here? In Luke 9, there's a story. You know the story, right?

[1 : 1 1] A guy comes up to Jesus and says, I will follow you. And then he says, But first let me go home and bury my parents. And Jesus has this kind of cryptic line, kind of a troubling line.

And, you know, but he says, Let the dead bury their dead. And it sounds harsh because doesn't a guy just want to go home? Isn't his parents just died and he wants to go home and bury his parents? No, that's not the case. His parents are alive and well.

What he's actually saying is, he's saying, Jesus, I really want to follow you. But more than that, more than my desire to follow you, I actually want to go home and just kick around until my parents have died. Because I don't want to miss out on the inheritance.

And Jesus' response to that attitude is, Let the dead bury the dead. Now the first dead in that sentence, the last dead is obviously the physically dead. The first dead in that sentence, it can't be the physically dead because dead people don't dig holes.

In my medical opinion. I googled it. I googled it. So Jesus is basically saying, If you're not following me, you're spiritually dead.

[2 : 1 4] You're spiritually dead. And this is the death that Jesus is talking about here in John. The dead will hear my voice and live. Why does he use that word?

I mean, it's a word that conjures up separation. It means to be separated from God, blind and sensitive to the reality of who Jesus is. You know, it's in a separation from God that can happen in a number of different ways.

It can happen through success. You know, like the religious leaders. You know, Jesus is talking to them and they think they've got it all together. Because they're at the top of the pile in terms of that community.

But they're spiritually dead. It's spiritual smugness that's caused their death. But separation also happens when we think we're a complete failure when they're at the bottom of the pile.

When we believe there's too many barriers between us and God. You know, the woman at the well is probably a good example of that before she came to faith. She was a religious and ethnic and moral outcast. Now, 2,000 years.

[3 : 14] Those examples are 2,000 years old. Today, I think that dynamic exists. You know, like very respectable people. The insiders in society who live really good lives, regard themselves as spiritual.

They can be spiritually dead because they reject Jesus. Even though on the outside, their lives look fabulous and kind. And sometimes those are on the margins. Sometimes they're complete outsiders.

Through terrible luck. Through just catastrophic misfortune. And through bad decisions. You know, think the gap between them and God is just too large to overcome.

And they can reject God also. They can reject Jesus also. And be spiritually dead. Now, that all sounds a bit depressing, I know. But it's good to hear the bad news before we hear the good news.

So Jesus says, these people who are spiritually dead, for whatever reason they're spiritually dead, you know, some of these guys are going to hear my voice and they'll live.

[4 : 13] That's a big theme in this gospel. Jesus is in the business of making dead people live. Now, what is this life that Jesus wants to give us?

What is he talking about here? There's three Greek words for life. The Bible, New Testament, was written in Greek. And the first word, don't worry about it.

It's more like a personal pronoun. But the big ones are bios, the Greek word bios, and the Greek word zoe. Bios is like physical life. It's like where we get the word biology from.

It's like, you know, animated life, so to speak. Zoe is life which is a gift from God. Where we get the word zoology from, for example. And in our passage, when Jesus says the dead will live, this life that's the zoe word.

So it's important to understand the difference between the zoe life that God wants to give us and the bios life that we already have. So bios life, that's created life. It has a beginning. It has an ending.

[5 : 18] But it needs resources to sustain it. It's like, you know, water and internet and air and food and stuff, right? Bios life's a wonderful gift. It's a wonderful gift. You should appreciate it.

It's fantastic. But it does decay. It does wind down. We say in the Anglican funeral service, the graveside service, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. That's what happens to bios life.

It disappears. It fades away. It ends. But zoe life that Jesus wants to give you, that doesn't decay. That doesn't decay. It's infinite life. It can't decay because it's the life that God has in him.

The passage says that in verse 26. The father has zoe life in himself. The son's got it as well. Now, don't make the mistake of thinking, you know, okay, zoe life, it's like bios life, but it's just eternal.

No, it's not. It's not like we have now but forever. Zoe life is not eternal existence. It's a quality of life as well. It's a passionate life.

[6 : 19] It's a thrilling life. It's a buoyant life. It's a bouncy life. It's a life that has radically different priorities.

Zoe life is the quality of God's life that Jesus wants to give you. And when it happens, we're swept up into the life of the Trinity and our desires change.

We hunger for peace, purity, and holiness. We hunger for growth and change. At the end of our reading today, there's a passage, a verse that can be a bit confusing, but it explains what I'm talking about here.

It's talking about Christian's eternal destiny. So verse 28, right, it says, Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. So this is talking about, so in the passage, I probably should have said this, there's like, there's two resurrections in the passage.

There's resurrections from spiritual death to spiritual life, and then there's resurrections from physical death to physical life. At the end, it's talking about physical death, physical life. Okay, verse 29, they'll come out.

[7 : 26] But those who have done good to the resurrection of life, those who have done good, eternal life with God, those who have done evil, resurrection of judgment. Now it says that Jesus will fulfill the role as, I'm coming to Easter, by the way.

Okay, I'm coming to Easter. Jesus will fulfill the role as judge, and some will be eternally with God, and some will be eternally without God. But it's that bit in 29, right, I think you can throw people.

Because it sounds like it's saying, if you do good things, you're going to be okay with Jesus in the end. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life. So how does that sort of work with like grace and kind of what we mostly think in Christianity?

How does that gel with that? Well, it's not saying you are saved and you're eternally with God because you do nice things. That's not what it's saying. It's referring to the idea that our deeds, what we do, are an index to our heart.

Fruit trees produce fruit, and the kind of fruit on the tree tells you what kind of tree it is. Those saved on judgment day. It's not just those who say they believe.

[8 : 39] It's those whose life reveals that they have the life of God in them. That it's a changed life. Right, press pause.

Pause. Where are we in the sermon? Because I haven't really given you any structure. Where are we in the sermon? Christ wants to give the spiritually dead life, zoe life, the quality of God's life.

A life that shows itself in profound change now, and that goes on for eternity. As we mentioned last week though, the mandate, the job, the role that God the Father has given the Son, is not just a life giver.

It's also the judge. So let me talk about the judge. Verse 27. Jesus has authority to judge.

And what we just said, don't marvel at this. You know, hour is coming when the dead will rise, and those have come out who have done good. Resurrection of life. Resurrection to judgment. Jesus is going to do the sorting here.

[9 : 46] You know, everyone who's ever lived will stand before Christ, and they will have to respond to his voice. Even those who ignored his voice in this world.

All will be resurrected, some to life, some to judgment. Now, for many... That's my son, he's fine. Many, many... Welcome to our world.

That's the constant sound of choking children. So... You know, I kind of mentioned this.

I talk about Jesus being the judge. It's a big part of the passage, right? Jesus the judge. I'm talking about this at Easter. It's not very nice, you might think. This idea of the God, the judging God, and judging Jesus.

He was supposed to be the nice one, you know. Judging Jesus. I think for many people, they think this idea here is, at best, it's primitive. It's ignorant.

[10 : 50] At worst, it's a dangerous idea. But, but, interestingly, at the same time, I think the same people who think this idea of biblical judgment is silly or dangerous, at the same time, they have a deep desire for justice.

I mean, don't we read about tyrants who live these long, pleasurable lives, living in opulence off their ill-gotten gain, right?

We read about this. We read about Robert Mugabe, whose country, Zimbabwe, has one of the highest infant mortality rates in Africa, one of the highest inflation rates of the country, when it was actually going really well.

He's destroyed the place. He just had his 90th birthday. This country is starving, and he spent a million dollars on his birthday party. Don't we read about these people, and we go, God, where's the justice? Where's justice in this?

Where is justice? And we read about good people, who've stood up to evil, and have been crushed by the machine.

[11 : 56] Crushed. So the world says, there must be justice. And yet, strangely, the same people who go, I don't like the idea of God as judge, at the same time, we have this deep desire for justice.

We want vindication, but we don't want a judge. We want justice, but we don't want a righteous ruler. And why is that? Because our hearts don't want anything that will impede our personal freedoms, which we treasure so much.

So if you're in that situation, where do you put your hope? Where does the person who is without faith put their hope in this situation? I think probably in something like, it's a belief that human history just keeps going, and eventually humankind will pull itself together, and we will grow out of evil.

We will morally evolve. We will evolve out of racism. We will evolve out of violence into good thinking and acting well. Well, history contradicts that, doesn't it? That is not happening.

We certainly know more than we've ever known in the world, but the capacity for evil seems to be growing at the same time. Now, passage here says the world doesn't just keep going. History isn't just one thing after another for eternity.

[13 : 12] The Bible says history stops at some point, and Jesus the judge will bring a reckoning, and no one will get away with anything, and there will be justice. And that should give us great comfort and probably great distress at the same time.

Now, a very reasonable response to all this, though, is this. Why would I trust Jesus with this job? If he's got the job of the judge, why should I trust him?

Who is this guy to say he will judge the whole world? Why would I trust Jesus with this? Well, the answer has everything to do with Easter.

Folks, Jesus is worthy to be the judge because he came to take the judgment. I'll say it again. Jesus is worthy to be the judge because he came to take the judgment.

That's what the cross is about. The cross is not the story of how the Pharisees finally caught up with Jesus. No, Jesus allowed himself to be caught and tortured and crucified.

[14 : 16] And why did he do that? Because God is just, and there must be punishment for evil. But instead of the punishment falling on us, it was poured out on Jesus. Jesus took the curse for us.

He took the anger and righteous judgment of God on himself, and he did that for us. But don't make the mistake of thinking, you know, it's just like, it was just the physical torture of the cross that was the big deal.

That was much more than that. Remember at the start I said, we talked about spiritual death. What's spiritual death? It's separation. Separation from God. And let me do like a sort of an extended quote from Keller.

Tim Keller, he's very good on this. We read a quote that helps explain what was going on on the cross there. And it's talking about judgment helpfully here. It says, Unless we come to grips with a doctrine of judgment, we will never begin to understand the depths of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

His body was being destroyed in the worst possible way. But that was a flea bite compared to what was happening to his soul. Consider the relationship he lost. If a mild acquaintance denounces you and rejects you, that hurts.

[15 : 25] If a good friend does the same, that hurts far worse. However, if your spouse walks out and you're saying, I never want to see you again, that's far more devastating still.

The longer, deeper and more intimate the relationship, the more torturous is the separation. But the son's relationship with the father was beginningless and infinitely greater than the most intimate and passionate human relationship.

When Jesus was cut off from God, he went into the deepest pit and the most powerful furnace beyond all imagining. He experienced the full wrath of the father and he did it voluntarily for us.

End of quote. Do you see what this means? See the implications of this? You keep thinking this through. This means that the fact that Jesus had to endure total hell for us and the fact that he did it willingly says two things.

It says you are more wicked than you realize. And you are more loved than you can possibly imagine. Of course the end of the Easter story is not the cross though, is it?

[16 : 34] It's the resurrection. Jesus rose from the grave. What does that mean? You know when a criminal does time and is released, he's satisfied the sentence, right?

He's free and the courts have no hold over him. When Jesus rose from the dead, God is saying the penalty for our sins has been paid. Nothing more is needed.

The wrath has been satisfied. So when Jesus rose from the dead, God stamped on history paid in full. Your sins have been paid for. He did that so we can be free people.

Free from punishment. Free from guilt. Why are you still carrying guilt? We're free from that. So we can have life.

The life of God in you. The life of Jesus in you. And bodily resurrection and eternity with God.

[17 : 34] This is what Easter is about. This is the Easter story. It's about Jesus who went through hell so we can have life now. Starts now and forever. Folks, whether you're a Christian here or not, let me finish by saying this.

This Jesus we've been talking about who did this for us. Don't you think you can trust this guy with your life? Whether you're a Christian or not, don't you think you can trust this guy? Don't you think you can give your life to this guy?

Now I have about three minutes left in my sermon time. And I'd like to yield that to somebody else. As we continue our journey to the Lord's table and remember what Jesus has accomplished on the cross.

And celebrate that. I want our hearts to be completely focused on Jesus. And to help us do that, we're going to play in just a moment three minutes from a very famous sermon.

Three minutes from a very famous sermon that was preached 40 years ago by an African-American Baptist preacher called Dr. S.M. Lockridge.

[18 : 42] It's all about how amazing this Christ is. This Christ that died for us. Who went through hell for us. So that we can have life. And at the end of that, we'll stand and we'll respond to this Christ by singing.

So, take it away now. The Bible says my king is the king of the Jews. He's the king of Israel. He's the king of righteousness.

He's the king of the ages. He's the king of heaven. He's the king of glory. He's the king of kings. And he's the Lord of lords. That's my king.

I wonder do you know him. My king is a sovereign king. No means of measure can define his limitless love. He's enduringly strong.

He's entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast. He's immortally graceful. He's empirically powerful. He's impartially merciful.

[19 : 45] Do you know him? He's the greatest phenomenon that has ever crossed the horizon of this world. He's God's son. He's a sinner's savior.

He's the centerpiece of civilization. He's unparalleled. He's unprecedented. He is the loftiest idea in literature. He's the highest personality in philosophy.

He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology. He's the only one qualified to be an all-sufficient savior. I wonder if you know him today.

He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and he saves. He strengthens and sustains.

He guards and he guides. He heals the sick. He cleanses the lepers. He forgives sinners. He discharges debtors.

[20 : 42] He delivers the captives. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young. He serves the unfortunate. He regards the age. He rewards the diligent.

And he beautifies the meek. I wonder if you know him. He's the key to knowledge. He's the wellspring of wisdom. He's the doorway of deliverance.

He's the pathway of peace. He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness. He's the gateway of glory. Do you know him?

Well, his life is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His word is enough.

His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. And his yoke is easy. And his burden is light. I wish I could describe him to you.

[21 : 39] He's indescribable. He's incomprehensible. He's invincible. He's irresistible. Well, you can't get him out of your mind.

You can't get him off of your hands. You can't outlive him. And you can't live without him. Well, the Pharisees couldn't stand him. But they found out they couldn't stop him.

Pilate couldn't find any fault in him. Herod couldn't kill him. Death couldn't handle him. And the grave couldn't hold him. Yeah! That's mocking.

That's mocking. Yeah!