

You must die first, before you can live in Christ

John 12:20-26, Easter Sunday III

April 29, 2007

Beloved of the Lord..... In the Christian faith, one must die first before they can live. No man or woman can come to faith, unless they first realize they are spiritually dead with nothing good to offer God. The Bible says, "Ye were dead in trespasses and sins." Without Christ and without faith, there is nothing whatsoever that is good in us. Without Christ and without faith, all that lives in this body of ours is a dead soul. It is a dead soul because we were born in sin. Spiritually speaking, we were born DEAD. Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

This brings us to one of the most basic teachings in the Bible, Original Sin. When Adam sinned, not only did he bring death into the world, but his children inherited the guilt of his sin. All of us here are the corrupt offspring of Adam and Eve. We are born in sin. Our very body and soul already from birth have the deadly disease of sin. You might say that because of sin, we are genetically programmed for evil. Just as children often inherit certain physical features and traits from their parents, so children inherit a deep-seated spiritual corruption. We are not born with God's image, but we are born with the image of sinful Adam. We are naturally predisposed to sin and do only those things which are evil. By nature, we don't want to do good, though our conscience bears witness to what is good. Nevertheless we are corrupt. We do evil things because it is in our evil nature. We are so evil that we can't even admit we are evil. Evil people will always deny that they are evil people. On the other hand, those who are truly good in God's eyes will readily admit that they are evil.

And so if we are to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin, we must first become dead men. Though our body is alive, we must first realize our soul is dead and we cannot resurrect ourselves to life. If therefore we are to live in Christ, we must die before we can live! Christ Jesus the Lord cannot be the Lord of our heart, until we first realize we are dead. For God cannot bring to life, those who think they are already living. He can only bring to live those who are first dead. Only when we are dead in sins, does He quicken us with Christ. "By grace ye are saved"

I. Christ first had to die so that we might live. In our lesson we see that certain Greeks came to see Jesus. They were in Jerusalem to worship at the Passover feast. Being Greeks, they were yet uncircumcised Gentiles in the process of adopting the Jewish faith. The Jews called them "proselytes of the gate." They were not yet

full members of the Jewish church, nevertheless they believed that the God of Israel was the True God, and that He would send His Messiah to save the people. With a sincere and earnest desire they approached the disciple Philip saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus." They didn't just want to physically see Him, like Zacchaeus who climbed a tree, but they wanted to talk with Jesus and see if He was the Messiah their hearts longed for.

In the manner and way they sought to speak to Jesus, we first notice humility. There is no pride in their words....there is no demand to see Jesus as if that was their right. This is a bit surprising because as a people the Greeks thought themselves a superior race. They were known for their philosophy and culture. The Greeks had developed a whole system of religious beliefs by way of philosophy, reason, and intellect. Yet like the psychologists and counselors of our day, the Greeks knowledge of God was very limited. The Bible says, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him." They couldn't understand nor believe in the grace of God, because they thought themselves to be good people instead of evil. The grace of God was foreign to them, because they thought they were born good rather than evil.

It is no different in our world today. When people have problems, mental anguish or depression, most don't go to the Bible or Christians, nor seek a pastor for help, but they turn to the Greek philosophers of our world today. They turn on the TV or radio and find Oprah Winfrey, or Dr. Phil, or Dr. James Dobson. They go to a psychologist or counselor to discuss their problems. Yet in all these cases what will their council be? To the best of my knowledge, none of these counselors teach that we are totally corrupted by sin. Nor do they teach that man by nature is totally evil and completely dead in trespasses and sin. And so if the foundation of their teaching is in error, won't their solution to man's problems also be in error? Thus, if man cannot admit that he is first dead in trespasses and sin, can man ever find real help to his problems of the soul? Can a doctor prescribe proper medication, if he can not properly diagnose the disease?

The disease that we all have is sin! We are born in sin, we live in sin, and we die because of sin! Sin rules and dominates our nature from birth! It blinds us so completely that we can't even see nor admit that we have the disease! And so God by the law, by the Ten Commandments smites us, and knocks our pride down to the ground until we are so utterly abased and made low that we admit we are spiritually, and totally corrupt and dead! The Bible says, "if one died for all, then were all dead." 2 Cor. 5

When the Greeks came to see Jesus, Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." What does Jesus mean by this? When a farmer plants seeds of wheat in the field, that seed in the ground first must die before the blade of grass pokes out of the ground. Indeed each seed must first die and decompose, before it springs forth in life. In the same way it was necessary for Jesus to surrender His life into death on the cross and be buried in the ground, if He was to break forth in life and give salvation to the world! Jesus first had to enter into death, the very death which Adam brought upon the world by sin. By entering into death, Jesus could provide life for the world, salvation for sin! Speaking of Adam and Christ the Bible says, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Through Christ there is life for the dead! Without Christ there is no life for the dead. If Christ had not paid our price, we would forever be in debt!

II. We too have to die, if we are to live. But He did enter into death, didn't He! It was necessary for Him to die, that the dead may live! Our blessed Lord Jesus did not back down from the bidding of His Father! "I lay down my life for the sheep", Jesus said. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Because He laid down His life for the sheep, He brings forth fruit from that grave! And His fruit is your salvation! On that first Easter morning He broke forth in triumph, rising from the dead, giving life and salvation to the world! There is salvation for all through Christ Jesus! The fruit of Christ's death He freely gives to the world, holding back nothing!

But this fruit which He freely gives to all is to be received by faith! And we cannot receive this fruit unless we first realize that we are dead in trespasses and sins. This is why the theme for our sermon today is: **YOU MUST FIRST DIE, BEFORE YOU CAN LIVE IN CHRIST!** You must first realize that because of your sins you are dead, and the only way you can live is through Christ! For your Christ entered into what should have been your death. He died so that you would live! Dear dead sinner, you are alive through Christ, by faith in Him! We are to accept his life, and receive it in no wise doubting! Firmly believe! For though each and every one of us was born dead into this world, there is perfect and complete life in Christ! Through Him, by Him, we now break forth from the grave in new life, just as if we too rose from the dead on that first Easter morning! For where there is faith in Christ, there is truly a resurrection, a new life! Jesus said, "I am the

resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Jn 11:26

III. If we live in Christ, we will follow Him. Knowing all this, which one of us will love our life in this world more than Him Will we love our sin or be dead to our sin? Will we love this world, or will we break forth from the grave of sin and give our life to the Lord? Jesus said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." This means we ought not love our own sinful life on this earth. For if we love our sinful life, we will lost it and perish. But if we hate our life, that is we hate the sins of our life and the evil that we have done, God will keep and preserve our spiritual life, faith. While this verse does not mean that it is a sin to enjoy life, nor is it a sin to enjoy the blessings God has given us, it does mean that we ought not fall in love with this world and the things of the world. Our true life, our spiritual life, is always in and through Christ and not ourselves. Because Christ gave His life for us and entered into death, so we will gladly give our lives for Him, in His service! Therefore, "He that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal!" When we live in Christ, He keeps our life unto everlasting life in heaven!

Therefore dear redeemed sinner, let us not value our life in this world as being too precious, for it is our life in Christ that counts. By faith we desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Yet our life here does indeed have purpose and meaning. We are here to serve God and neighbor. Jesus said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be." We follow God by faith and not by sight. We hear and follow the voice of our Shepherd, and another voice we will not follow. Let us therefore follow Him each day by faith, and serve Him by true and sincere obedience at heart. Those who love Him will obey, while those who do not obey do not love.

Let us therefore close today by remembering those two Greeks who spoke the true desire of their heart saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Surely Jesus did see them, and spoke with them, and still speaks with them today in heaven. God the Father honors those who honor God the Son. For all who believe in the Son, though they were dead, yet shall they live. The voice of our Good Shepherd calls us forth from the grave, giving us everlasting life! If we but believe in Him, God the Father will honor us as well, and take us to be with Himself in heaven when we die. For we too like Christ, must die first, before we can live in heaven! God grant it so, for every soul that He has quickened here. Amen.