

(1986 Prairie Series) 2 - Message of the Early Church

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas emphasizes the transformative message of the early church centered on the resurrection of Christ and the believer's shared life with Him.

Duration: 55:58

Topics: "Prairie Series"

Description

In this sermon on Acts chapter 5, the speaker emphasizes the message that the early church was entrusted to proclaim: 'all the words of this life.' This life refers to the life that believers can have through repentance and faith in Christ, where every aspect of their being comes under his jurisdiction. The sermon highlights the demonstration of this life through the healing of a lame man at the temple gate. The early church boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus and the power of God was evident in their witness. The speaker also emphasizes that eternal life is not just a destination, but a person - Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Sure we all appreciate that immensely. Jesus paid it all. The one who knows the worst about us and loves us just the same.

There's only one who loves like that and Jesus is his name. Jesus is the sweetest name I know and he's just the same as his holy name. And that's the reason why we love him so.

Incorrigibly happy, utterly unafraid, nearly always in trouble. Men who knew what they believed believed what they knew and acted on the assumption that it was true and let God prove it. And he did.

They were sent and went. And as those who were sent and went, they were put. And knowing who sent them, they knew who put them.

And as it was God who sent and God who put, nothing could frighten them. The early church. Those who had discovered what it really meant to be a Christian.

To be added to the Lord. To share his life on earth. As that humanity with which the Lord Jesus would clothe his divine activity and continue to do and continue to preach and teach the things that once he began to do, teach and preach.

In that body the father first gave him born at Bethlehem. This, the new body. The second body.

The church which is his body. That fellowship of forgiven sinners out of every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue whose names are recorded in the Lamb's book of life. So we'll turn back to the fifth chapter of the book of the Acts.

Acts and chapter 5. Releasing them from jail, said the angel to the apostles, go stand speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. That beautiful description that we discussed last evening given by the angel there to the message that God had entrusted them to proclaim. All the words of this life.

That any boy, girl, man or woman who in true repentance toward God, recognizing their deep need would turn in faith to Christ. Recognizing the absolute right that he had to reinvade their humanity and establish his sovereignty in every area of their being. Body, soul, spirit, mind, emotion and will to come under his total jurisdiction as those who added to the Lord to become members in particular of that corporate body the Father God had given his Son on earth.

This was the message. Life. This life.

Not just the life to come. That life that is to be yours and mine by virtue of the fact that he risen from the dead comes by his Holy Spirit to reinvade our humanity and in life abolish death and bring that life and immortality to light. But what we do and say and are so that it becomes demonstrably obvious to the world in which we live who it is that is in residence and who it is that reigns.

But what we do say and are representing his mind, his will, his purpose. That was the message entrusted to them. Not simply that our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world as indeed he did through the shedding of his own precious blood to reconcile us to a holy God so that we knowing that our sins are forgiven.

He God for his dear sake who took our place saying without doing violence to his own righteousness I will remember your sins no more. No more. Not just that.

Magnificent as that indeed is and for which we cannot but be profoundly thankful. But that isn't really why the Father God sent his Son into this world but supremely to get God back out of heaven into men. Because that's what it takes to be a man.

He made us that way. That's why it takes Christ, not his teachings, not his example, himself to be a Christian. Because Christ in the Christian puts God back into the man.

All the words of this life. Paul puts it magnificently in the last the fifth chapter of his first epistle to the Thessalonians where he says God hasn't appointed us to judgment he's appointed us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. But then he goes on in the tenth verse of that fifth chapter to make absolutely certain that those to whom he addresses himself don't take a narrow emaciated view of what it means to be saved.

Not a change of destination. God hasn't appointed us to judgment but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us. There's the redemptive act.

But who died for us, he continues, that whether we wake or sleep, whether we're physically alive or dead, whether we're still on earth or already in heaven, whether it's in time or eternity, whether it's here or now or been. Totally irrelevant. He died for us that whether we wake or sleep we shall live together with him.

That's salvation. Living together with Christ. God back in the man.

The creator within the creature who so engineered us that the presence of the creator within the creatures indispensable to our humanity. So that man in normality is to be distinguished from the animal kingdom only by a quality of life and behavior that cannot possibly be explained apart from the creator within the creature. God in the man.

Living together with Christ. Eternal life isn't a place. It isn't a destination.

It isn't just a geographical location. Eternal life is a person. Said the Lord Jesus, I am the way, the truth and the life.

I'm the truth about how the way, the way how to become a Christian but essentially I'm the truth how to be the Christian you become. I'm the one who gives you what it takes. That's why we need not only what he did because he died because of what we've done.

We need who he is to take the place of what we are. Because so it's only what he is in us that enables us in the process of time to be moment by moment. What by his atoning death upon the cross he gives us the right to become in the crisis of that moment.

This was the message of life. A person, Christ, reinvading the redeemed humanity of forgiven sinners by his divine presence imparting to them all the divine dynamic. As the one who essentially in man must be the origin of his own image.

The source of his own activity. The dynamic of his own demands. And at all times and exclusively the cause of his own effect.

And therefore he's the only one to be congratulated. That's eternal life. It's Christ clothing his deity with our redeemed humanity.

So that you and I should get so accustomed to sharing his life on earth. In that it's that life alone that we shall continue to enjoy in heaven. We won't even know we've arrived.

We'll simply look around and say I don't think I've been here before. That's about the only impression that you and I should get when we get to heaven. Because the life that we will enjoy there forever is precisely and exactly that life that you and I receive in the moment of regeneration when he our risen Lord comes in the person of his other self the comfort of the Holy Spirit to share that life with us on earth.

On the way to heaven. Fantastic. That's good news.

Little wonder the angel got excited when he said go to the temple and tell every boy, girl, man, or woman they can come alive. Tell them all the words of this life. And when they heard that, verse 21 of the fifth chapter of the book of the Acts, they entered into the temple early in the morning and taught evangelism.

They taught. What some of us have discussed in the morning is a teaching priest. They taught and the high priest came and they that were with him and they called the council together and all the Senate of the children of Israel and they sent to the prison to have them brought.

But when the officers came and found them not in the prison they returned and breathlessly entering into the presence of the Sanhedrin they said they've gone but the prison's empty. And the high priest and the

captain of the temple nearly had a heart attack. The truly truly said they the prison found we shut with all safety the keepers standing without before the doors but when we had opened we found no man within.

And when the captain of the temple and the high priest heard these things they doubted of them. Where unto this would grow. The situation was getting totally out of hand.

And before they'd got over the shock somebody else came in and said breathlessly behold the men whom you put in prison they're standing in the temple and they're teaching the people. And there was a bigger panic. So then when the captain with the officers and brought them without violence for remember last evening the common people couldn't help but respect them hold them in the highest possible regard.

For they themselves feared that they might be stoned. And when they brought them set them before the council and the high priest asked them and this was the charge. Did not we straightly command you that you should not teach in this name? And behold you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Guilty or not guilty? Well of course they were delighted to plead guilty. They were guilty men. What was the charge? They had filled the city of Jerusalem with their doctrine.

What was the doctrine with which they filled the city of Jerusalem? Well we might piously suppose that they went around telling everybody that the Lord Jesus was crucified. That he died. But that wasn't the doctrine with which they filled the city of Jerusalem.

Though die he did. It was to that end he was born. It was for that cause he came into this world to lay down his life.

A ransom for many. No man said the Lord Jesus taketh my life from me. I lay it down.

That's why when the Roman soldiers came to smash his legs as they had done the legs of the two malefactors they suddenly as they were just about to break his legs one said, he's dead. Don't be so stupid to the others. He can't be dead.

Nobody's dead that soon. Not by crucifixion. But they looked again and he was dead.

That's why instead of smashing his legs they pierced his side. For in the twenty-sixth verse of the twelfth chapter of the book of Exodus of the unblemished lamb, a male, the blood of which was to be painted upon the doorpost and of the lintel, the Passover, God said not a bone of his body must be broken. But Zechariah tells us they pierced his side because he died on schedule, dead on time.

He had to die that we might be forgiven. But that wasn't the message with which the city of Jerusalem was then ringing. You see nothing would have served the best interests of the Sanhedrin, the high priest, captain of the temple, more than if the disciples of the Lord Jesus had gone everywhere telling everybody Jesus is dead.

That wouldn't have scared them. After all they engineered it. And nothing would have delighted them more than that his disciples should confirm the fact.

Furthermore, there was nobody in the city of Jerusalem who didn't know that Jesus was crucified. They were there when it happened. You may remember in the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke's gospel the two disciples heading for home because they thought the curtain had dropped, the show was over, Jesus was

dead, they'd buried him.

And then the Lord Jesus encountered them but they didn't recognize him. You don't expect to see somebody around whom you bury. He was dead.

And said the Lord Jesus why so sad? What's your problem? And you'll remember they began to tell their risen Lord about their dead Jesus. And said he to them, fools, fools to be so slow to believe all the prophets have spoken. And beginning where God began with Moses in the five books of the Pentateuch, all the way through the scriptures and the prophets and later to the disciples in the upper room the Psalms, he expounded unto them the things concerning himself.

For you see when he said to them what's your problem? Said they to him, are you the only stranger in Jerusalem that hasn't heard? And rather innocently, if you may remember, Luke 24 said he to them, what things? I think the Lord Jesus knew quite a lot about what had been happening in Jerusalem. He was there when it happened. It was through his hands, through his feet.

They drove the nails. It was upon his head they put the crown of thorns. It was into his side they thrust the spear.

It was down his cheeks there trickled the spittle and the blood. He knew. So you see for two good reasons that Jesus was dead was not the message with which the whole city of Jerusalem was then buzzing.

The message with which they filled the city of Jerusalem was this. This Jesus whom you crucified, God has raised from the dead. Jesus our Lord is alive.

Peter and the other apostles answered and said verse 29, we ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a Savior for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

And we are his witnesses of these things and not we alone. So is also the Holy Spirit whom God has given to them that obey him. Because he lives we live.

For by his indwelling Holy Spirit now we participate in his resurrection. You couldn't kill him and you can't kill us. That's why you don't frighten us.

You see you can't frighten men who don't know how to die because they're eternally alive. And that's what it means to be a Christian. All the words of this life for a Christian is somebody who cannot happen apart from Jesus Christ.

Alive again, sharing his life with them on earth on the way to heaven. You see that's what scared the high priest and the captain of the temple, the members of the Sanhedrin, the theological leaders of his day who had engineered his death. That the whole city was agog with the news that the one whom they crucified, God, had raised from the dead.

Have you ever been tempted to shoot somebody between the eyes? I have on quite a number of occasions and in my judgment on each occasion with considerable justification. But I'm happy to tell you that to date I have resisted the temptation. But could you imagine on some occasion you failing to resist the temptation and together with a friend and with his connivance, you shoot a man between the eyes and he drops dead at your feet.

You take the body and with the assistance of your companion you go to a lonely wood and dig a hole and you bury the body and you cover it up and make it look as undisturbed as possible with leaves and twigs. I imagine you wouldn't sleep too well that night. Every police car that you would see would give you a start and your heart would thump a little louder.

Any footfall in the yard outside would alarm you. And then three days later while you're in your home the door double bolted and double locked and a chain and then you hear footfalls outside and you peep through the curtain and it's your friend. He's coming towards the door and he's looking very serious.

So you thrust back the bolts, undo the door, remove the chain, let him in, shut it, put back the bolts, double lock and replace the chain. And then you say, what's wrong? He says, you know the man you killed? Well, yes. Do you remember where we buried him? Well, yes.

Well, I've just been there and the hole is empty. But not only that, I just met him downtown and he's coming this way. Say, wouldn't that give you the creeps? Well, now you know.

You see what the high priest and the captain of the temple felt like and those who were their co-conspirators. For this Jesus, the whole city was alive with the news that Jesus, whom they had crucified, God raised from the dead and he's alive now. And I'll tell you something just in case you don't know.

He's on his way. He's on his way. Far, far sooner in all probability than any one of us would dare tonight to admit or believe.

For I believe us to be on the very threshold of that momentous event, the return of our risen Lord for his people. You see, the message of the early church was resurrection. Not Jesus is dead, though crucified indeed he had been, but the one whom they had crucified was alive again.

Alive again. And that was the good news. All the words of this life.

Not simply that he had accomplished the redemptive act and God had raised him from the dead and he had gone to heaven. There simply to prepare a place for us as indeed he has. For said he in my father's house are many mansions if it were not so I would have told you.

I go to prepare a place for you and if I do that I'll come again that where I am there you may be also gloriously true. And the Apostle tells us that I hath not seen nor heard neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But the Lord Jesus didn't simply go to heaven there to peep through the clouds and watch you and watch me on earth sweated out and do our best for Jesus.

Until at last we crawl into heaven on our hands and knees covered with dust and blisters and he thumps us on the back and said well done my good and faithful servant. You made it. That isn't the Christian life.

That isn't the Christian life. Sweating it out for God. The Christian life may involve suffering, persecution, death, jail.

All those things. All that we might live in comfort and prosper. Paul says I've learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.

To have much and abound or have nothing or little. He says that's totally irrelevant. Because my privilege on earth is simply to make my humanity available to him whose life I share until he no longer has anything to accomplish through me on earth.

For to me to live is Christ. To die, gain. Absent from the body, present with the Lord.

So says he I'm here only and I recognize the fact that I become expendable to the one who inhabits my humanity. That I might be, this is the way he puts it in the first chapter of his epistle to the Philippians, that I might be to the furtherance of your faith and the furtherance of your joy. And so long as my Lord Jesus has something to accomplish that will be to the furtherance of the faith of my fellow human beings and their joy on earth in a restored relationship as creature to the Creator, I'm happy to hang around.

But the moment the Lord Jesus ceases to have any intelligent purpose to accomplish through me on earth, I'm off. And I'm going to where I belong which is far better. Great.

The glorious hilarious liberty of being expendable to the Lord Jesus in time or eternity knowing that you've been redeemed by what he did upon the cross to live together with him on earth in time and in eternity in heaven forever. Marvelous. And so the message of the early church was life, God's gift to forgiven sinners.

Not a sensation, not just an exotic experience, but somebody in somebody. Christ himself living, actually president and resident within your heart. You're only an exclusive hope.

Not of getting to heaven, though it is, but that isn't what the Apostle there says. It's our only hope of being restored to image, glory, restored to our true function, to become man again. So that by what we do and say and are, we reflect the image and likeness of our maker.

You look in the first chapter of the book of the Acts. Finally convinced of his resurrection, Peter stands, verse 16, and he gives a very excellent exegesis from the 69th and the 109th Messianic Psalms. Something of course that before the Lord Jesus had been crucified and risen from the dead and before he taught them for some 40 days the things concerning the kingdom, something Peter before then could not have done.

Because he was one who didn't want the cross nor believe in the resurrection, but something has happened. And so he now takes those two Messianic Psalms and expounds them concerning the betrayal of the Lord Jesus by one of his closest devotees, a man named to be an Apostle, Judas Iscariot. It is written in the book of the Psalms, verse 20, let his habitation be desolate, let no man dwell therein, and his bishopric, his apostolic office, let another take.

Wherefore said he, if these men who have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John and to that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained. Now his motive was good, their method was bad, they committed a boob. Because the one whom they finally selected was never approved by God, never heard of again.

Because they made a fundamental error in their selection that we won't take time out now to discuss. But his motive was good, and what he had to say was valid. Must one be ordained, said he, verse 22, to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

Of his resurrection. Not of his crucifixion, his resurrection. Said Peter, the supreme criterion of one, whoever he may be, who is to assume the office that has been vacated by Judas Iscariot, who fell, must be that he stand shoulder to shoulder with us and bear testimony to the fact that this Jesus, whom they crucified, God raised from the dead, Jesus, is alive.

That was the criterion. Acts chapter 1, convinced of the truth of it. And then Acts chapter 2, they entered into the good of it.

You men of Israel, verse 22 of the second chapter of the book of Acts, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs and miraculous quality of life, all these things which God did by him. In the midst of you all, as you yourselves also know, him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you've taken by wicked hands of crucified and slain, whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. This Jesus, verse raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

Chapter 1, convinced of the truth of it. Chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, entering into the good of it. Witnesses to the resurrection.

Entering into the good of it. Because on that day, the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, came in the person of the Holy Spirit to invade their humanity, and it was on that day they were added. One hundred and twenty, there at Christ's command, to be added as the first individual members in particular of that new body corporate, to which were added, before nightfall, three thousand others.

And what was the great discovery that Peter made on the day of Pentecost, when he entered into the good of all that for which the Lord Jesus came, who said, I'm come that you might have life. Well, the great discovery that Peter made was that the Lord Jesus, now indwelling them by his Holy Spirit, was to be to them as God, all that the Lord Jesus, as man, allowed his Father to be to him, indwelling his humanity by the same Holy Spirit, to be to him. As my father sent me, I'm going to send you.

And Peter, there we're told in the 22nd verse, suddenly recognized, having already acclaimed his deity, thou art the Son of God, the Christ. Now he says, Jesus of Nazareth, a man, but a God-approved man, that man alone, of all mankind, that God could approve as he walked this earth, in the sinlessness of that humanity that was incarnate, fashioned in the borrowed womb of a virgin girl, conceived of the Holy Ghost. Therefore said the angel Gabriel to Mary, shall that holy thing that shall be born of thee be called the Son of God.

But Peter, on the day of Pentecost, recognized the sheer humanity of our Lord Jesus, who emptied himself, humbled himself, made himself nothing, and was born a human being. And suddenly he realizes it, a man approved of God by miracle signs and wonders, a quality of life that had no possible explanation but the activity of his father as God in the man, which God did by him. I understand now what he was trying to teach us, that if only we would enter into the good of his atoning death, then he, having presented us to the Father, accepted in the Beloved, would come in the person of his Holy Spirit, that he might invade our souls, occupying our human spirits, gain control of our minds, our emotions, and our wills, and so direct our humanity, that he as God in us might be all that the Father as God had been allowed by him to be.

Not making us God, just the creature only, but inhabited by the Creator, just the earth and vessel in which the treasure would reside, that the excellence in the power might be of God. Peter, with the others, on that

day has entered into the good of it, and they recognize it stems not only from his atoning death that reconciles guilty sinners to a holy God, but from his triumphant resurrection that allows them on earth to share his life on the way to heaven. The good news of the gospel.

Chapter 3, convinced of the truth of it, entering into the good of it, in chapter 3 they demonstrate the fact of it. Do you remember how that man, blind or rather lame from his mother's womb, was brought daily and laid at the temple, at the gate that was called beautiful. A man, a story of whom you are well familiar with, who asked for arms and got legs.

Silver and gold, said Peter, have I none such as I have I give thee, invoking all that he is, releasing his divine energy in the name of Jesus. Rise and walk. And he was marvelously healed.

And as the lame man, we're told verse 11, which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon, greatly wondering. And when Peter saw it, he laughed at them. He said to the people, you men of Israel, why marvel you at this? Why do you look so earnestly on us, as though by our own power, by our own holiness, we made this man to walk? Don't be so stupid, said Peter then.

Neither I nor John are that holy, nor do we have that kind of power. All that has happened is that the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his son Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied him in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go. You denied the Holy One and the just.

You desire a murder to be granted unto you. And you killed the Prince of Light, whom God hath raised from the dead. Whereof we are witnesses.

Chapter 1, convinced of the truth of it. A witness to the resurrection. Chapter 2, entering into the good of it.

A witness to the resurrection. Chapter 3, demonstrating the fact of it. A witness to the resurrection.

Chapter 4, only 28 chapters, don't get discouraged. As they spake unto the people, verse 1, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being grieved, grieved that they taught the people and preached. What do you think they were preaching? They preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Not, of course, just that physical resurrection to which we all look forward with eager anticipation, save the Lord Jesus comes before then, then we which are alive and remain will be changed in a moment, anatomic, atomically, and this corruption is going to put on incorruption. Gloriously true, and we shall be clothed upon with our house from heaven. But that spiritual resurrection that comprises that spiritual new birth whereby on the grounds of redemption God restores to man by the gift of the Holy Spirit that life that was lost in Adam, regenerate, and added thereby to the Lord.

Being thrown into jail, being forbidden to teach or preach in the name of Jesus, finally being let go, verse 23 of chapter four, they went to their own company, reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them, and when they heard that they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and they had a fantastic prayer meeting, and the place was shaken, verse 31 tells us, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. That simply means that with one heart they made themselves available truly to the Lord Jesus as the one who inhabited their humanity, so that he could be who he was in action, God in the man. And they spake the word of God with boldness, and verse 33, with great power, gave the Apostles witness of the

resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Tell me, what was the message of the early church? To what were they bearing witness? There could of course have been no resurrection apart from his atoning death upon the cross, but what mattered was that Jesus was alive again. That's why Paul puts it this way, first of his two epistles, the 15th chapter and the 14th verse, if Christ be not risen again from the dead, my preaching is vain, and your faith is vain. No matter what I tell you about the cross, no matter the tears trickled down your cheeks at the thought of his agony there on a Roman gallows, if that Jesus whom I preach isn't alive again, my preaching is an exercise in futility, and your faith is in vain, you're still in your sins.

So what's the heart of the gospel? If apart from the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, no matter what we may say about the cross, our preaching is vain, and we leave those to whom we minister in their sins, what's the heart of the gospel? That Jesus, our Lord, is alive again. Not just to go to heaven and wait for our arrival, but on earth to share his life and give us what it takes to get there. To me, to live is Christ.

Commenced to the truth of it, entering into the good of it, demonstrating the fact of it, preaching in the power of it. Little wonder that a reign before the high priest Peter, back in chapter 5, and the other apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men. You don't frighten us.

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We are his witnesses of these things.

Jesus is alive, and here we are to testify to that fact, reinforced by the one who has the right to authenticate our message, the Holy Spirit whom God has given to them that obey him. And when they heard that, they were cut to the heart. Took counsel to slay them, imagining falsely, as others have done, as we have discussed in our morning sessions, that if only they could be silenced, that would silence God.

But there stood up one in the council of the Pharisees. He was a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel, a very fine gentleman, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people. The common people respected him.

One who I'm absolutely convinced finally found his way to the Lord Jesus and put his trust in him to be redeemed and be numbered amongst those whose names are written in heaven. I'm convinced of that because he was that intelligent. I mean, a man as intelligent and with as much insight as was possessed then by Dr. Gamaliel couldn't help but get saved.

He commanded to put the Apostles forth a little space, and then he turned to his colleagues on the Sanhedrin. He said in so many words, why don't you grow up? Why are you behaving, panicking, like a bunch of small kids? He says, you men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do as touching these men. Before these days rose up Theodos, said Gamaliel, boasting himself to be somebody to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves, who was slain.

He's dead! And all as many as obeyed him was scattered and brought to nothing, said Dr. Gamaliel. Theodos is dead. Does he frighten you? All who followed him was scattered.

And not only that, said Dr. Gamaliel, verse 37, but after this man rose up, Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, he drew away much people after him. He also perished, and all even as many as obeyed him dispersed. Theodos said, Dr. Gamaliel is dead.

And Judas is dead. And they don't frighten you. All who followed Theodos scattered.

All who followed Judas scattered. And Jesus is dead. Theodos is dead.

Judas is dead. And Jesus is dead. And as all who followed Theodos scattered, as all who followed Judas scattered, so will all who followed Jesus scatter.

I say unto you, refrain from these men. Let them alone. If this counsel or this work be of men, it'll come to nothing.

Jesus is dead. And his followers will scatter if he's dead, said Dr. Gamaliel, if he's dead. But if it be of God and this Jesus is alive, you cannot overthrow it, lest happily you be found even to fight against God.

And of course Dr. Gamaliel was right. Theodos is dead. And Judas is dead.

And all who followed them long since have scattered. They're dead too. But Jesus, our Lord Jesus is alive.

That's why we're here tonight, 2,000 years later. With countless millions of others that circle the globe out of every nation and kindred and tribe and tongue, who know by his gracious presence through the Holy Spirit within their hearts that Jesus is alive. His Holy Spirit that bears witness with their spirit that they have become the children of God.

To him they agreed. And when they had called the apostles and beaten them because they couldn't deny themselves that luxury, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing.

Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Convinced of the truth of it, entering into the good of it, demonstrating the fact of it, preaching in the power of it, they lived in the joy of it. And daily in the temple, from house to house, face to face, man to man, they cease not to teach and preach that Jesus was the Christ.

Teaching and preaching. You see, teaching is an intelligent exposition of the facts. Preaching is simply an exhortation now to mix those facts with faith.

That's evangelism. If you just teach, of course, and don't exhort anybody to act upon what they know, all you produce is a bunch of academic eggheads. If you only exhort, preach without teaching, you don't produce men of faith, you produce men of froth.

But when you teach and preach, exhorting those who are the recipients of God's Word to mix with faith that which they've come to understand by his divine revelation, then you produce men and women of God who'll enter into the good of all that God had in mind when he sent his Son, not only to reconcile us to a holy God, cleansing us from our sins, but that we might become the recipients of his divine indwelling and share his resurrection on earth, on the way to heaven. In these concluding few moments, see how Peter later presented the message and the claims of our risen Lord. In the first chapter of his second epistle, he addresses himself to those who have obtained like precious faith with us.

In other words, those who've learned to look to Christ. And by that disposition within our hearts that recognize that he alone can redeem them and they could never redeem themselves, invoke that redemptive activity so that he, the Lord Jesus, can move in and present them as his blood-bought property in the presence of a father God who's pledged his name, his honor, and his glory to accept us for his dear

sake who died in our place. Those who have obtained like precious faith.

According, he says, verse three, this is the lovely way he puts it, for this is the message of life. According as his divine power, and Peter indicates that that's exactly what it took for God to do it, all the release of the divine energy. According as God's divine power has given to us, can never be earned, can never be merited, given to us as his free gift for the wages of our sin is death.

But the gift of God is eternal life. But it took all the divine energy released in raising first his dear son from the dead that we too with him might share his resurrection. According as God's divine power has given to us all things that pertain to being alive.

What would you say it is that pertains to being alive? Well, life. For only life abolishes death. That's why the Lord Jesus said, I'm come that you might have just what dead men need.

Because it's the only cure for death. The gift of life, and that's resurrection. Not physical life, that we have by natural animal birth.

As the Lord Jesus explains so clearly to Nicodemus, reputed to be the third richest man in Jerusalem, member of the Sanhedrin, and the senior theologian of his day in the city. He said, that which is born of the flesh is flesh. Nicodemus, that only born of the Holy Spirit is spirit.

Marvel not that I say to you, you must be born twice. That was baffling to a theologian. He said, how could a man be born twice? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? And immediately advertised the fact that he only knew that quality of life that a man receives by animal birth from animal parents.

That which is born of the flesh. But in that spiritual new birth, the forgiven sinner is re-inhabited by his maker. And the Creator is once more within the creature.

And by his divine indwelling, he gives us all that pertains to being spiritually alive. But Peter doesn't stop there. We don't congratulate ourselves that we're on our way to heaven.

He says, that life that pertains to being alive, and we know what that light is, because John tells us in the fifth chapter of his first epistle, this is the record that God has given to his eternal life. And that life, which alone is eternal that he's given to us, is in his Son. He that has the Son has life.

He that doesn't have the Son of God doesn't have life. So a Christian is somebody in somebody, Christ, indwelling your humanity and mine, whose presence in life abolishes death. But, says Peter, that life that pertains to being alive is that life, continuing in the same third verse, is that which pertains to God-likeness.

For the moment the Lord Jesus comes to take up residence within your humanity, then you have in him the one of whom alone are those fruits of righteousness that Paul describes. Eleventh verse of his first chapter to the Philippians. The fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.

The fruits of his Spirit, that are to replace the ugly works of the flesh, so that if any man be in Christ, that which demonstrates the fact is that Christ is in him. And he becomes a new creation. Old things are passed away and everything has become new.

Because, says Peter, in the same chapter there in the fourth verse, by these exceeding great and precious promises, we are made partakers of the divine nature. Hold your breath when you read that. Partakers of the divine nature.

In this common clay of our humanity, that we are to be inhabited, re-inhabited, by our risen Lord, who as God made man to share the life of his maker. Marvelous. And Paul picks up the chorus.

Let me leave you with these two beautiful verses. Magnificently rendered out of the Amplified New Testament in the third chapter of his epistle to the Philippians. His supreme concern for himself, and that which inevitably was his supreme concern for those whom he had had the privilege of leading redemptively into a relationship to their once crucified but now risen Lord.

Said he this, verse 10 of the third chapter of his epistle to the Philippians. My determined purpose is that I may know him. That I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with him.

Perceiving, recognizing, understanding the wonders of his person more strongly and more clearly. That I may in that same way come to know the power flowing out from his resurrection, which it exerts over believers. That I may so share his sufferings, be willingly identified with him in his death.

That I may be continually transformed in spirit into his likeness. His likeness. So that others in me will see who it is that is in residence.

That if possible, listen to this magnificent 11th verse, that if possible I may attain to that spiritual and moral resurrection that lifts me out from among the dead even while still in the body. That's it. That's what it means to be a Christian.

To enjoy that spiritual resurrection that puts God back into the man that cannot but inevitably lead of its genuine to a moral resurrection. But a moral resurrection that will change my character, change my walk, change my behavior. The life that leads to godliness.

It'll become demonstrably obvious as one who has enjoyed a spiritual resurrection that leads to that moral resurrection that I've been lifted out from among those who were born dead even while still in the body. Still in that humanity on earth that you recognize once inhabited by Saul of Tarsus. But now I'm Paul the Apostle, crucified with Christ.

Knowing that I deserve no more nor less than what occurred in the one who took my place, sentenced, executed, and buried. But nevertheless, please don't get me wrong, I live. Yet not I. Christ lives in me.

And the only reason that he can live in me now who died for me then is that God raised him from the dead. So what's the heart of the gospel? That which was the message of the early church, Jesus our Lord is alive. Waiting to take up residence within the redeemed humanity of a forgiven sinner.

To show himself strong on their behalf. That God is big enough for the job. Paganini, the great violinist on one occasion, was billed to give a concert.

Placards announced the coming of this fantastic musician with his priceless instrument. He'd produced the whining of the wind in the trees and the cooing of the dove and the trickling of water down the mountain stream. Great crowds came to hear him play.

And finally there was a deathly hush as he stepped through the curtain and came right to the edge of the platform over the footlights. And then lifting up his violin in his hand, with his thumb he plucked out a string and plucked out a second and plucked out a third until only one remained. And then staring almost like a madman into the faces who were somewhat shocked as they waited, he said, ladies and gentlemen, one string! And Paganini.

And he began to play on the one remaining string. And they heard the whining of the wind in the trees and the cooing of the dove. The sound of water trickling down the mountain stream.

Just one string. And the master player. Just an empty box and a piece of catgut.

But in the hands of Paganini. That's what Paul means. Lifted out from among the dead.

Just an empty earthen box and one string. All that I am, available to all that he is. And the perfect harmony of a life in tune with his Maker.

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