

THE MAN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD - PART 7**“I Am The Resurrection And The Life”****Dr. John Allan Lavender****John 11:18-26**

In one of his stories, Robert Louis Stevenson tells of a boy who was shipwrecked on a tiny island just off the coast of Scotland. Through the mist which hung over the churning waters, he could see the faint outline of the mainland. Occasionally the haze would lift for a moment, and he would catch a glimpse of the neat farm houses and white barns laying just out of reach. And then, once again, the clouds would lower. The angry sea would hurl its mighty waves at the rocky shore on the tiny isle, isolating the frightened boy from any hope of help or home and he was filled with terror.

But, in the morning, when the storm had passed and the rising sun shone brightly in the sky, the lad discovered the water which separated him from life and home was, at low tide, little more than ankle deep. He could actually wade across to safety. In the words of Stevenson, “The boy discovered terror was only make believe.”

That's what Jesus was saying to Martha, as He sought to comfort her following the death of her brother. Like all good Jews, she believed in a resurrection “sometime” and a future life “somewhere”. But this vague, impersonal notion seemed terribly inadequate in her moment of grief. In despair she turned to Jesus.

Was death the end? Could one be sure if he died he would live again? How the questions must have tumbled from her lips like the waters of a swollen river cascading over a dam. They were not new questions. People had asked them before, and would go on asking them as long as death roamed the earth unconquered. Indeed, there had always been questions but never had there been an answer. That is, never until now. For when Jesus spoke to Martha, He made the most startling statement ever heard,

I am the resurrection and the life, He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Martha, for those who trust in Me, even in death “the terror is only make believe.”

For the past seven weeks we have walked the roads which Jesus walked. We have seen the world in which Jesus lived and have discovered its needs were very much like our own. We have met the people Jesus met and have felt a kinship with them. We have found that, with all our gaudy gadgets symbolic of what we call progress, we still need God's grace even as they did 2000 years ago.

If we've learned anything at all in our study of the incredible self-claims of Christ, it's that The Man Who Changed The World of that day can also change the world of this day. Jesus is, as the scriptures say, “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb.13:8).

As we've listened to the astounding claims Christ made for Himself, we have been impressed again and again by the ring of relevancy in His words. It seems as if they were meant especially for us. And, indeed, they were. Perhaps no one has profited more, or enjoyed greater blessings, from this series than your Pastor. As I've studied, worked, thought and prayed over these great “I Am's” of Jesus, they have spoken to my heart-need in a most wonderful and intensely personal way.

“I Am The Way, The Truth And The Life”

DI hope you were as blest as I to hear Jesus say,

I am the way, walk Me.

I am the truth, believe Me

I am the life, live Me

“I Am The Light Of The World”

Did it stir you to new self-examination, as it did me, to hear Jesus say:

“I am the light of the world”

and learn “light is the agent by which all things are rendered visible”? All things! The inescapable fact of our sin? Yes! But praise God, also the unmistakable fact of our Heavenly Father's forgiving love. Oh, what good news that was!

“I Am The Door”

Did it thrill you, as it thrilled me, to hear Jesus say,

“I am the door”?

A door open to God. A door open on street level. The level of our personal need. For whether we be sinner or sinner-saint, whether we be unsaved sinner or sinner saved by grace, the glorious good news of the Gospel is that help and hope are immediately available to us *as* we are, *where* we are, and all we have to do is go through The Door Named Jesus. A low and narrow door, to be sure, but bless His holy name, an open door! A door open on street level. The level of our need.

“I Am the Bread of Life”

Was your spirit fed, as mine was, by thinking deeply about the meaning of Jesus' words,

“I am the bread of life.”?

For bread is that which sustains life. It is the staff of life. It stands for that without which life cannot go on.

And what life was Jesus speaking about? Life at its highest and best. True life! Life which springs from a living relationship with a living God. A relationship made possible by Jesus. For we learned Jesus not only *is* life...Jesus *gives* life. And because Jesus *is* life, and *gives* life, and is essential *to* life, He is able to give us this beautiful picture of Himself as “bread of life.” For Jesus is that without which *real* life can neither begin nor survive.

How foolish, then, when we spend so much of our time and energy laboring for the bread of this world which can never satisfy our deepest needs. It's as if Jesus said: don't spend your energies trying to get food which will not last. Instead, accept the food which will last unto eternal life.

“I am the bread of life,” he said, “and if you will eat this bread, that is, in the most personal way imaginable, allow me to become a part of you so I can dwell in you and express my life through you, then you will have life for today *and* for eternity as well.”

“I Am The Good Shepherd”

And then, was it as helpful to you, as it was to me, to see the beautifully intimate relationship of the sheep to this One who said,

“I am the Good Shepherd.”

It gave me a wonderful sense of belonging to know that our Shepherd “calls His own sheep by name.” And it gave me a fresh appreciation for the individuality of Christ's ministry to us when I heard Jesus say, “I know My sheep.”

Perhaps you remember the biblical illustrations God gave us! With Thomas, The Good Shepherd ministered to a doubter providing faith. With Mary, He consoled a mourner providing hope. And with Peter, He healed and restored a denier providing love. In each case, Jesus met His troubled sheep on an individual basis, blessing them and freeing them to be the blessing they had been blessed to be.

Thomas, Mary, Peter. “He calleth His own sheep by name.” Faith, Hope, Love. “I know My sheep” and in a very special and personal way I will meet their individual needs. What a beautiful and uplifting thought.

“I Am The Vine”

But I think the most helpful thing God said to me personally through this study of the great “I Am's” of Jesus came in that message on the text,

“I am the true vine.”

In a new and delightfully down-to-earth way, I saw the source of so many of my problems as a preacher as well as a person. My big snafu has been that often I try to be the vine, the originator, the initiator, the producer of the fruit of Christian living.

But I am not the vine. Jesus is! He is also the producer and the originator. I am only a branch, and as a branch, my responsibility is not to *produce* fruit, but to *bear* the fruit which Jesus produces!

If that thought ever grips you as it has gripped me, it will be wonderfully liberating. It will mean the pressure is off and you will no longer have to struggle and strain to be and live like Jesus. Instead, you will relax and let the Holy Spirit, the indwelling pressure of Christ in you, express His life through you.

Jesus not only wants to minister to you, He also wants to minister through you. He wants to get you connected up with Himself so His life is flowing *to* you. Then, He wants to involve you as an extension of Himself by having His life flow through you so you bear the precise kind of spiritual fruit needed to meet the heart hunger of people about you. And the beautiful thing about all this is that the life-giving process of Jesus, the vine, expressing Himself through you and me as branches, comes without any stress or strain or struggle on our part.

Among the wonderful truths we learned is that “abiding” is a two way street. “Abide in Me and I in you”, Jesus said. For you to abide in Him merely means staying in the place God put you when He saved you and grafted you into Jesus, the vine. It's as if Jesus were saying,

If you will abide in Me. If you will dwell, or remain, or continue, where My Heavenly Father put you, if you will abide in Me, then I can abide in you. And all the life God has given Me, I will release through you and, as a result, your life, like mine, will be fruitful and joyful.

“Abide in Me and I in you.” It's a two way street. I am sure that whatever blessing God brought to you through that message was small compared to the release and relief He brought to your pastor!

“I Am The Resurrection And The Life”

We turn now to the last of these great self-claims of Jesus. As we approach this final assertion of

our Savior, it's as if we are making a last assault upon the pinnacle of Mount Everest. For even as that mighty mountain dominates the Himalayas so, too, these words of Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life,” stand out as the unchallenged consummation of this series of Christ's great “I Am's.”

It's impossible to exaggerate the importance of the first clause in this declaration,

“I am the resurrection.”

For if Jesus is wrong in this instance, there is little point in His being right in any of the rest. Here is the crux of the whole matter.

What good are His pronouncements about being “the way, the truth and the life” if He is not triumphant over death? What good are His assertions that He is Light, Bread, Shepherd, Door, Vine, if He is wrong in this greatest of all assertion that He, Himself, is the very principle of life?

But thanks be to God, Jesus was *not* wrong. Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son and his own lonely, empty tomb are proof positive that Jesus Christ alone conquers death.

In the old morality play called “Everyman,” we have an illustration of this unique glory of Jesus, The Man Who Changed The World. “Everyman” finds himself confronted by death who is calling him to meet his Maker. “Everyman” offers Gold to be let alone. But death will not take Gold. So “Everyman” seeks Fellowship to go with him through the dark shadow of death. But Fellowship will only go with him into pleasure, gambling, drinking and the like.

So He calls Kindred Spirit and, like Fellowship, Kindred Spirit makes fair promises, but shrinks back at the crucial test. Then Material Things is called on for help, but “Everyman” is rebuked for loving Material Things already to his near damnation. Fellowship. Kindred Spirit. Material Things. Gold. All forsake him and, in despair, “Everyman” turns to Good Deeds. But again, he finds himself meeting death alone.

In desperation, “Everyman” turns to Strength, Discretion, Beauty, Five-wits, asking each to be his companion in meeting death. But when he comes to the grave, all of his companions flee and he must meet death alone. Finally in his helplessness, he turns to the One Eternal Friend, Christ Jesus, The Man Who Changed The World, and to “Everyman” in his dire necessity, Jesus answers, “I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he be dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.” Thus it is that “Everyman” is able to pass through death and the grave into eternal life through the victory of Jesus Christ.

Hear me, my friend! The Man Who Changed The World took a cross and turned it into a battering ram, breaking open the end of the tomb. Therefore, “Everyman, indeed *any* man, woman or child who trusts in Him is given authority over death and the power to pass on into the light of an Eternal Day.

“He died,” saith the cross. “My very name
Was a hated thing and a word of shame,
But since Christ died on my arms outspread
With nails in His hands and thorns on His head
They do not measure...set high, flung wide...
The measureless love of the crucified.”

“He arose,” saith the tomb. “I was dark and drear,
And the sound of My name wove a spell of fear.
But the Lord of Life in My depths hath lain
To break death's power and rend His chain,
And a light streams forth from my open door,
For the Lord is risen, He dies no more.”

No wonder Paul could say, “Death, where is thy sting; grave, where is thy victory?”

In Christ, the terror is only make believe! In Christ, it is “absent from the body and present with

the Lord” (2 Cor.5:8). While it may seem astonishing at first, and we are inclined to take it with a grain of salt, it is nonetheless true that for Christians, death is an experience which does not really happen. For when Jesus said, “Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die,” He meant it.

What He was saying is that because we have trusted in Him, we have already begun to live a life of eternal quality. Therefore, what we call death is simply a change of place. A change of scene. A change of being through which we pass, coming instantly into a new place. A new scene. A new state of being. Purified from our earthly stains, Praise God for this! but still the active, thinking, loving beings we were on earth. Yes, thank God, Jesus is the resurrection.

I Am The Life

But that is not all of the story. He is also the life and He lives today. Here is where it really gets exciting, and I feel badly that so many people fail to share my excitement.

One of the immeasurable evils inflicted upon Christianity is the crucifix. I say that with great sensitivity for my Catholic brothers and sisters who find the crucifix to be a suitable center of worship. But to me, this constant confronting of the exhausted, suffering, agonizing form of Jesus on the cross in the throes of death puts the focus of our attention in the wrong place.

Instead of shouting to the world that Jesus lives and reigns today, the sight of a wooden Christ upon a wooden cross fastens our attention upon His mortal weaknesses rather than His eternal strength.

But just as the crucifix debilitates our Christian witness, so, too, does a purely academic interest in the empty tomb. If we only see the empty tomb as a mere event in history and fail to recognize that through the resurrection, Jesus has become “the contemporary of all generations,” then we turn Christ into an object of memory. But Jesus is not that at all. He is the resurrection, yes, but He is also the life.

And, as the living Christ, Jesus is the object of our faith. The source of our power. The inspiration of our love. The author of our salvation. The real glory of Christ's victory is not that He is the resurrection, but that He is also the life! That He is living today. That He wants, by His Spirit, to live in each and every one of us.

The resurrection of Jesus was not merely escape from death. If that were so, there would be nothing unique about Him. In the Old Testament we have several incidents in which people escaped death. No! The real significance of Jesus' resurrection was not the escape of death.

Nor was it simply the undoing of death. Again, if that were all His resurrection means, there would be nothing unique about Jesus. In the New Testament we have several occasions when people who were dead were brought back to life again.

The real Glory of Christ's resurrection is that when he conquered death, it was for all time! Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son were all raised from the dead only to face death again. But when Jesus came forth from the grave, His victory was complete. He arose never to die again. And thus He can truly say,

“I am the resurrection,” yes! But what is more, “I am the Life!”

Do you see the wonder of it? Do you feel the excitement of it? This means Jesus is more potent “post-mortem” than He was when He walked the streets of Jerusalem. Or taught in the synagogues of Israel. Jesus is more truly alive today, after the cross and the tomb, than He ever was before!

Millions of men and women, and I number myself among them, have discovered Jesus is not just a heroic figure from the past, but a living reality with spiritual resources upon which we can and do draw today. The real joy of the Christian life is not that we shall live again after death, but that we are given new life here and now—after birth! New birth! For by faith in Jesus, we have already entered into a life experience that shall never end.

Jesus put it plainly when He said in John 3:36--

“He that hath the Son hath.”

It's present tense. It doesn't mean by and by. It doesn't mean when we die. It means right here and right now. So heaven is not a reward for being good. Rather, it is the natural expansion and continuation of a quality of life which has already begun.

But, notice! This promise of life here and now, and this victory over death in the future, is only for those whose inner confidence is in Christ. May God forgive me if I have ever struck a bright and cheery note which has given you the impression that the good, the bad and the indifferent are all going into heaven. That isn't true! Only the woman or man who is in Christ can safely ignore death and look forward with confidence to heaven. For the scripture says bluntly,

“He that hath the Son hath life—but—He that hath
not the Son hath not life.”

As much as we might wish it to be different, we can only believe God's word when it says that to people outside of Jesus, death is a tragic disaster. So I bring this series of sermons to an end on this note, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

If you would live, you must know Christ. You must become the personal friend of The Man Who Changed the World. Church membership is not enough. Baptism will not suffice. Knowledge of religious creeds will never do. In fact, there is a subtle danger in *churchianity*. It provides a ring of respectability and, for the moment, may give a quick burst of moral courage. But the danger lies in its power to dull your appetites for the real thing. Having gone through the motions, you may tend to feel you have tried Christianity and found that it didn't work.

But I say to you this morning, my friend, *churchianity* and *Christianity* are not the same! Religion and a personal relationship with God are not the same! *Churchianity* is just religion. *Christianity* is a personal, life-changing relationship with God, through Christ, which makes a difference in

both time and in eternity.

Just because we talk the “lingo” it does not mean we know the real meaning of the phrases we mouth. In fact, they may refer to thrilling experiences to which we are total strangers.

The other day I came across a bit of poetry which illustrates beautifully what I've just said. It's a story about a girl who works in a travel bureau and tells others of the fascination of far away places...places which she herself has never seen and probably will never see.

“All day long she sits behind a bright brass rail
Planning proud journeyings with words that bring
Far places near...high colored words that sing...
The Taj Mahal at Agra...Kashmir's veil
Spinning wide spaces with clear detail.

Seville or Paris in the Spring.
And through the fjords in June...her words take wing
For she is the minstrel of the great out-trail.

At half-past five she puts her maps away.
Puts on a meek gray hat and braves the sleet
A timid eye on traffic. Dark gray
The house in which she lives sitting on a dark gray street.
The close, sequestered, colorless retreat
Where she was born, where she will always stay.”

It's not enough that you speak of the Christian journey, my friend. You must make it! In the words of Jesus, you must be born again.

The way is simple. First of all, you must realize your need. You must realize that you have

sinned against God, yourself and others, and that you desperately need a savior.

Then you must recognize the sufficiency of Christ to meet your need. If you and I were in a boating accident, I couldn't swim, and you pulled me safely to shore, then you would be my savior. You would have done for me what I could not do myself. By going to a cross and dying in your place, the just for the unjust, and by rising again into everlasting glory, Jesus has qualified Himself to be your savior. He has done for you what you cannot do for yourself.

And then along with realizing your need and recognizing the sufficiency of Christ to meet your need, you must receive Him. You must invite Him into your heart.

Have you ever done that? Would you like to do it now? If so, bow your head and there, within the sanctuary of your own soul, quietly pray this prayer along with me.

Dear God,

I know that I have sinned and need a Savior. I believe Jesus can save me. I now accept Him as my Savior. Help me live a Christian life, so I can lead others to Jesus, too. Amen.