

**Text:** The Book of Ecclesiastes and Romans 4:24-25

**Title:** What is Life All About?

**Truth:** The search for meaning is resolved at the cross and resurrection.

**Date/Location:** Resurrection Sunday April 9, 2023 at FBC

## Introduction

In this message, I did not intend to cover in detail the basic facts of Resurrection Sunday, or as most people call it, Easter. Our assistant pastor Jansen laid out much of that detail in his message earlier when he spoke about the historical facts and theological meaning of the resurrection of Christ. The plain fact of the matter is that as Christians, we are not ashamed to say that we are *convinced* that Jesus died by crucifixion around 30 A.D., and on the third day—just as He predicted—He arose from the dead. This happened early on the first day of the week. This great event is why we commemorate “Resurrection Sunday” today and it is why we seek to worship together every first day of the week.

Without the death and resurrection of Christ, the whole of Christianity falls to pieces and becomes nothing more than a bunch of moralistic proverbs to fuel self-improvement efforts or to make you feel good. But without the work of Jesus Christ, there is no *power*, no *relationship*, no substantial *reality*, and ultimately no god in the religion. It would thus reduce to one more among many humanistic efforts to appease a make-believe deity so that we could be “better people” in our limited time on earth. But we are certain, based on sound eyewitness testimony and the writing of God and His Spirit, that the events of Easter are as we just explained, that Jesus miraculously and bodily rose from the dead.

The meaning of this is that Jesus conquered death and the thing which causes death—rebellion against God, what is more commonly called *sin*. He also, in His own death, took our penalty on Himself. He laid down his life for us in an act of selfless substitutionary sacrifice. This is why Christians place so much importance on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is central to the faith.

Instead of focusing further on that set of truths, what I would like to do first is to demonstrate and explain that in every human there is a sense and understanding of something beyond our physical and material existence. We are often focused on the here and now, the this and the that of things and activities and entertainments. But there is far more to what we call *life*. Some of us have had more of sense of this “more” from our youth; others a less refined sense of it until perhaps later in life. This “thing” inside of us leaves us with a sense that we lack a grasp on the ultimate meaning of life and causes us to have a desire for more.

This leads to the second goal for this message, and that is to show that the Christian faith—centering on the resurrection of Jesus—answers this feeling of trying to grasp something of the meaning of what is beyond our present lives.

## **I. There is More to Life**

The ancient sage and king, Solomon, wrote a book 3,000 years ago and we call that book in English by the name *Ecclesiastes*. It has another name: *Qohelet*. The title refers to one who is a preacher, in this case one who calls together an assembly of people to listen to his wisdom. His book is about the true meaning of life. It is a record of his exploration of life’s meaning and about our role in this world and God’s sovereign control of it. He ponders many things that people think about in our modern era as well. Consider some of them:

1. Everything in life is in a cycle (1:4-7, 9-10). As such, life can seem to lack profit (1:3). We are told the best approach is to wisely enjoy the gifts that God has given to us (3:12-13).
2. He commands a simple way of thinking about life, not frustrating ourselves or making ourselves sick by getting too deep into the weeds. In this way, wisdom and knowledge lead to grief (1:18). But folly is even worse!
3. Solomon explains how he tested the theory of pursuing happiness with riches and all other kinds of activities and projects. He found there was an emptiness to all it. He knew those things had all

been done in the past (2:1ff)—so we know for certain we cannot truly do some new pursuit that is going to overcome his theory.

4. He explains there is an appropriate time for all of life's events.
5. But...there is something more to life than the unending cycle of activity. He explains that God has built something called *eternity* into the heart of people, yet along with it comes the somewhat frustrating reality that we cannot figure out all that God is doing in the world. What exactly is this "eternity" in our hearts? It is a sense that there is time long past and time far into the future. It is more than that, however. It is more than simple self-awareness, or the understanding that time is passing. It is a part of the image of God in humankind. That whole image, and particularly the "eternity" idea distinguishes us from the beasts. It is a cognitive capability that allows man to reflect on the arrangement of events in his own life, as well as to go beyond his own time and to consider that *which was*, and that *which will be*. Yet this capacity is limited because we are finite. God does not tell us the future (7:14). Although we can think about the meaning of life, we are unable to come to the conclusion of the matter. It is impossible for us to complete our search for meaning in a fully satisfying way. (Consider not only this idea in terms of *time*, but also of *space*.)
6. The wise preacher continues by reminding us that God will require an accounting of our lives (3:15, 17).
7. He observes that from outward appearances, we seem to be like animals—except for the image of God just mentioned in terms of "eternity in the heart." We have a similar fate as animals—we die and return to the dust. But the wisdom teacher than muses about the spirit—it seems that the spirit of the sons of man goes up, and that of animals goes down. But who knows? (3:18-21). Allow me to call this a somewhat ancient perspective on the matters of life and death. The author does not have the benefit of further information about the matter disclosed by God in the 1,100 years future to his time.
8. It also seems to our sage that the evil in the world is so bad that it would be better to not have come into the world in the first place (4:1-3).

9. Solomon experienced that wealth brings anxiety and trouble (6:2). Most everyone wants wealth, it seems, but few consider the trouble it brings. Then you leave this world with nothing (5:12-13). Simple labor seems better in a lot of ways than pursuit of lots of stuff (5:12).
10. We labor for food and other basics like shelter and clothing, but our soul is not satisfied with this. We inherently recognize that we are more than just a body and there must be more meaning than just labor and provision of sustenance over and over again. There is something, as we have said, beyond the mere physicality of life (6:7).
11. Another serious conundrum: many times in life the outcome for a person is the opposite of what is expected. A good man dies soon while a wicked man lives a long time; or a wicked man receives the reward that a righteous man should (7:15, 8:14). Especially vexing is a young person dies before reaching old age.
12. We also see a common fate for people which seems to make life have a level of meaninglessness. Good or bad, clean or not clean, smart or dumb, fast or slow, religious and irreligious, etc.—all experience things in life like accidents and poverty and cancer and death (9:2, 9:11, 2:15-16, 6:6). Does it really make a difference how you live?
13. Another thing that makes it clear there must be more to life is that there is evil everywhere (7:20, 8:11, 9:3). We have an innate sense that this *simply cannot be right*, and we are correct. If we stop there, we are not encountering all that God has told us.
14. The preacher says that life is better than death. Yet, we ask, how is it that the longest part of our existence seems to be...death? We live only for a short time here, and then we will become like most of our fellow humans, who have been dead for hundreds and thousands of years. I remind myself that these are the musings of an author 3,000 years ago who does not have the benefit of the fuller self-disclosure of God that we enjoy today. He was wise, but not so wise that he could figure out what God is doing! (See 9:4-6.)

15. He noticed that wisdom is better than strength, shouting, or war (7:12, 19, 9:16-18, 10:10).
16. He reminds us that God is our creator. We know this intuitively (12:1).
17. After all is said and done, we become frail and “age out” of this life (12:1-5). The language is very poetic, but that fact does not do much to make old age more kind.
18. After a careful and life-long study of these things, Qohelet taught that the conclusion is this: fear God and keep His commands. God takes care of the “beyond us” stuff. We humble ourselves before God, and live with appropriate wisdom and consumption, and we will be alright. But we still have a feeling that there is something more...

## II. Christ is the More

**Romans 4:23-25** <sup>23</sup> Now it was not written for his [Abraham’s] sake alone that it [faith] was imputed to him [for righteousness], <sup>24</sup> but also for us.

It [faith] shall be imputed to us [for righteousness] who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,

<sup>25</sup> who was delivered up because of our offenses,  
and was raised because of our justification.

- A. This is a very thought-provoking text of Scripture which is a great summary of the theology of Easter weekend.
  1. Jesus the Son of God was delivered up/handed over. This is a passive verb. Who did the “handing over”? It is commonly understood that it was God the Father. It was not the Jewish leaders because they “handed him over because of envy” (Matthew 27:18). They were concerned about their own establishment. God was concerned about the sins of the world.
  2. It was “our offenses” that put Jesus on the cross on Good Friday. Let that sink in. Mine was the guilt. Our sins are the underlying cause or reason for Jesus to be handed over to be killed.

3. The parallel phrase tells us that Jesus was raised from the dead. This is the basic Christian creed according to Romans 10:9-10. Again, *raised* is another “divine” passive. God the Father did it.
4. The “because of our justification” phrase causes us to pause and consider how parallel is this clause to the one above it in the diagram? It has a bit of a different sense. In the first part, offenses were prior to Jesus being delivered up. In this part, justification is *after* Jesus being raised. So, this *because* has a slightly different sense. The first *because* looks back; the second *because* looks forward.
5. The chronological order is like this:

Our sin → God delivers Jesus to be crucified → Jesus rises from the dead → Justification is now secure for those who believe.

- B. This certainty untangles a lot of the problems that Qohelet had in his quest for life’s meaning. It opens an entire new phase of life—the afterlife—in a totally new state—righteousness. Although it is not explained in these few verses, Jesus died not only to save people from their sins, but also to save them *to* His kingdom both on this earth and in the new heavens and earth. In that kingdom, the frustrations that Solomon expressed will be fixed. Oppression will cease. Sin will be greatly reduced in the first phase and eliminated in the second. No injustice will carry the day. Labor will not be fruitless. The cyclical nature of life will not be a drudgery but a delight. “Eternity” will make sense.
- C. A good deal of the un-graspable stuff in life is always going to be that way to some extent. But with the advent of the Lord into human history, and the added wisdom we can learn through His teaching and the records of the apostles called “The New Testament,” we can take a good bite out of the “eternity in the heart” frustration that presents itself when we think about the meaning of life.
- D. Remember that problem of life being better than death, yet death is the longest state of humanity’s existence? Jesus shows us that was short-sighted. He went into the domain of death between the first “Bad Friday” afternoon and Sunday morning, and then *came*

*out!* He knows what He is talking about because He has been there.

- E. We know more now—not everything, but more—so we can make a more accurate assessment of what God is doing in the world. It is a less frustrating assessment than Solomon offers, because the after-life-is-over portion is much more well understood.
- F. For the Christian, the longest period of existence is not death. It is not this life either. It is an ever-lasting length of time after resurrection in which the Christian lives with Jesus (John 14:3).
- G. He promised that He will raise everyone from the dead—bad and good alike (John 5:24-29, 1 Cor. 15:22). He will give light and life to those who are His followers, and darkness and eternal separation from God to those who are not.
- H. On the way to our next home, the Lord has told us that there is judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus is the judge who will evaluate each person and set things right. Those evil who prospered in their wickedness, or those oppressors who oppressed until the end of their lives, will not get away with their evil. Consider several passages: John 5:27, Acts 17:31, 2 Cor. 5:10, Revelation 20:11-12.
- I. There is a reward for believing God and living rightly in this life. Yes, there *is* profit in living. When we look from the ancient standpoint, we see a cyclical life that starts and ends, and starts and ends, and it seems meaningless. But it is most definitely *not* meaningless because of justification and eternal life. Furthermore, the end outcome for everyone is *not* the same. Some are saved, some are not. Some live eternally, and some die eternally. Some are rewarded, and some are paid back their just wages. What you decide and do in this life is therefore *very consequential*.
- J. Job 19:25-27: my redeemer lives. Because you will see Him in the future and will face an inquiry about your conduct in this life, it is most valuable for us to live life the way He directs. And *that* is true even if we do not understand all the details of how He has arranged things. This is why God calls us to have *faith* in Him. Faith is not a leap into the dark or a mystical gap-filler for things we do not know. It is the basis of a personal connection with God where

you trust Him. You trust the doctor when you are asleep on the operating table. You trust your roommate won't hurt you while you rest. You trust your spouse to be faithful and not do you harm. You trust your friends not to betray you but to have your back. You should also trust God to rescue you from sin and death.

K. This theme deserves a lot more thought. For example, we can add that Jesus's work on the cross points us to the ultimate answers for the problems of evil in the world. It helps us understand how to age and die well, and what we look forward to after we die and/or the Lord returns to earth. It tells us why we ought to fear God and keep His commandments. It greatly lessens the pain when a Christian loved one departs at any age, especially a young age. It points us toward the future golden age of the world. His resurrection brings meaning to our work when it is done for the Lord—because we know that our labor is not fruitless in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58).

## Conclusion

Knowing Jesus does not merely *quell* the longing to know the meaning of life. Rather, knowing Him *satisfies* that desire, fills it, informs it. When you become a Christian, a true follower of Jesus, you have a life-giving connection to Him who is the source and sum of all wisdom. He is the fount of all knowledge. He is the giver of all comfort. He is the forgiver of all sin. He is the creator of all people. He is the designer of the entire universe. He is the sustainer of creation. He is the caregiver of all human and sub-human creation. He is the Son of God, and the Son of Man. He is the maker of time and eternity. He is the Savior of all, and He is the judge of all.

We ought to consider life as God has given it to us. Think about it with all humility because we are limited creatures under God. We come at life not with resignation that we cannot understand it, but with the joy that we can—to a certain extent—and that we have more of a grasp of it now that Jesus has shown us the way to the Father. Knowing God and His risen Christ is the way to a joyful life, even as it moves through the obstacle course that we know life is.

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