

"RESURRECTION"
Easter April 16, 1995
I Corinthians 15:1-34
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Sometime ago I read part of the script for the not recommended movie called City Slickers.

In it comedian Billy Crystal plays the role of a bored baby boomer advertising representative who is invited to his son's school to tell the children about his job.

Feeling at that moment that his life is rather pointless he lets loose with a monologue that bewilders the children but describes very well life for so many.

"Value this time in your life kids," he began, "because this is the time in your life when you still have your choices. It goes by so fast.

When you're a teenager, you think you can do anything and you do.

Your twenties are a blur.

In your Thirties you raise your family, you make a little money, and you think to yourself, what happened to my twenties.

In your Forties you grow a little pot belly and you grow another chin. The music starts to get too loud and one of your old girlfriends from high school becomes a grandmother.

In your Fifties, you have minor surgery- you call it a procedure but it's surgery.

In your Sixties, you'll have a major surgery, the music is still too loud but it doesn't matter because you can't hear it anyway.

In your Seventies you and your wife retire to Ft Lauderdale. You start eating dinner at 2:00 in the afternoon, you have lunch around 10:00 and breakfast the night before. You spend most of the time wandering around malls looking for the ultimate soft yogurt and muttering, "I wonder why the kids don't call."

In your Eighties, you'll have a major stroke and you end up babbling to some Jamaican nurse who your wife can't stand but who you call mama.

Any questions kids? (from Colson [The Body](#) p168-9)

There's just enough truth to that description of life that it's funny.

But there are many people for whom life is fairly much like how Billy Crystal described it.

The only part he left out was the end: Death - Life's hard and then you die.

The middle years of this century taught us to view life that way.

It was a philosophy of life called "materialism".

Oh, most people never spoke of their "philosophy of life" but they had one nonetheless.

Materialism was the belief that life is nothing but material.

What you see is what you get.

There is no supernatural, there are no miracles, there is no God.

We were taught that we came from nothing.

Loren Eiseley wrote: Man is the cosmic orphan. "Who am I!" he shouts. And some science answers: You are the product of evolution and you are ever changing. Your hands are made-over fins, your lungs come from a creature gasping in a swamp, your femur has been twisted upright. Your foot is a reworked climbing pad. You are rag doll sewn from the skins of extinct animals."

Not only were we taught that we came from nothing but we were taught that death is the end.

The Humanist Manifesto declares, "There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body."

Our teachers and professors taught us to question, if not in fact reject, any belief in the immortality of the soul.

And because we are simply the product of random biology we can't actually believe in a soul.

Historian Stewart Easton wrote, "Thus man is (trapped) within his earthly world; his life began with a birth before which there was nothing and will end with a death after which there will be nothing..."

"Death marks the end of all the life he will ever know...(from William Craig The Son Rises)

No wonder Billy Crystal and many others are cynical.

While some may enjoy a few pleasures in this life - it is all pointless and it all ends in death.

And in the materialist's cynicism the very ideas of Easter and resurrection are laughable.

Weren't we taught to sneer at such antiquated myths?

Weren't we taught to believe only in what we could verify with the scientific method.

A resurrection would be a miracle and since there are no miracles there can be no resurrection.

Easter and resurrection are simply human attempts at convincing ourselves of our immortality when the truth is there is no immortality -we are the product of chance and we end - that's it.

Robin Williams in the motion picture "Dead Poets Society" shouts the cry of modern man and woman - Carpe Diem "Seize the Day" -

They have nothing else to seize since they believe this life is all there is.

R.C. Sproul wrote, people today, are "betting their lives that this is it, and that there is no judgment and that there is no eternity." (Colson THE Body p 165)

But it is now apparent that materialism is short-lived as far as philosophies go.

There is even in our own country, as there has been in the rest of the world all along, a growing acceptance of something beyond merely the material - there is a spiritual.

In spite of all of our materialist teachers, 90% or more of Americans believe in a god.

Popular books talk about angels and most Americans believe in them.

Popular movies present intelligent life-forms doing the supernatural with regularity.

Business consultants and education specialists teach us how to tap into the unseen powers within and without.

All of life is viewed much more holistically - as a blend of the spiritual and the material that are inextricably woven together so that we can't even tell where one ends and the other begins.

God is not anything other than us - he is part of the whole.

We are not differentiated from God - we are god - as much as everything is God and God is everything.

Let me remind you of a current and popular expression of this kind of thinking: It's the movie "The Lion King".

Many of you have probably seen it.

The recurring theme song is "The circle of life".

In the movie the animals are humanized - made to act and sound like humans.

So what we learn of the Lion King we learn about ourselves.

The Baboon in the movie is depicted as the source of wisdom - He is sitting in Hindu lotus position meditating and then he informs the lion and us about truth - about how life and death work.

And the message is that life goes on in a circle -

the older die off and the younger take their place BUT in ways the older live on.

They live on as a memory in the minds of the younger.

And they live on in a mystical sense as well becoming stars that look down, or come down in visions, to give guidance when needed.

We are taught that the older don't really exist after death except as they live on in the younger.

And the young and the old are all part of a larger whole as well.

For the lion father says to his young son that lions eat the zebras, then the lions eventually die, and they fertilize the grass which the new zebras eat.

And what are we taught?

Plants, animals and people, as well, are all part of a whole - "The circle of life"

It sounds so harmless, so efficient, so right - but it is so wrong and while it appears to offer so much more than materialism with it's "death ends all" - the modern spiritualism really offers nothing more.

Is that all we have to look forward to?

Immortality is nothing more than living on in someone else's memory or living on in their genes?

At best are we spirits without bodies consigned to an ethereal world in which our only purpose is to mysteriously influence the real action which is taking place here on earth millennium after millennium, world without end?

And how does the modern spiritualist respond to Easter and resurrection?

Oh yes, Jesus rose again, just as all things do.

His spirit lives on.

And he circles again through the circle of life.

But to the modern spiritualist we say, Easter is not simply a poetic way of describing the unending cosmic circle of life.

And to the materialist we say, Easter is not simply humanity's futile psychological quest for immortality.

The real Easter is radically different than both materialism and spiritualism.

At Easter we see God proving beyond reasonable doubt that in contrast to materialism, this life is not all there is.

Materialism views life in linear fashion that starts nowhere and ends nowhere.

They view life as a closed system with no God in or outside of the system.

At Easter we also see God proving that in contrast to the spiritualists we do not live in an endless circle.

They also view life as a closed system.

While they have a god within the circle they have none outside of it.

And the god within is nothing more than the sum of all that is.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand."

Like Paul, I want to paint for you a mental picture this morning.

I want you to see this life and the one to come as it truly is and not as the philosophers of this age would paint it.

We are not dealing here with philosophical trivialities.

Paul said that what he wished to remind them of was "of first importance"!

These are not minor points of difference between the ways people see life.

This is bedrock foundational truth that makes all the difference in the world as to what you believe and how you live.

The materialist, Bertrand Russell, once said nobody can sit by the bed of a dying child and believe in God.

So what would that materialist say to that dying child and his parents?

Too bad? Sorry? That's life?

What else do they have to say?

For that matter what would the modern spiritualist say?

Better luck next time?

The risen Jesus sits by that same bedside and says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies..."

Paul lays it out so clearly.

The picture I want you to see is one of a God who is there.

A God who has always existed.

A God who, in history past, created everything else including us.

But he created us as distinctly human - and distinctly different than all the rest of creation - created in his image.

I want you to see from history that all men and women have refused the will of God in their lives in some or many ways and thereby have rebelled against the God of creation.

That sinful rebellion deserves only one response from God - death - separation from God and everything good that God has created.

But at just the right time (according to God's plan) God the Father send God the Son to this earth, born into the world as a human being (the infinite Son of God also became mortal man).

His purpose for coming was simple but profound:
He came to pay the penalty for our rebellion against God.

And two thousand years ago, in the time of Pilate and Herod and the Roman government, on a little hill just outside of Jerusalem, Jesus, the God/man was hung on a cross to die. But the Scriptures make it clear - he was neither a martyr nor a victim - he wilfully gave his own life - for us.

And though he was dead he rose from the grave -
he was resurrected - he came back to life -
fully alive and physically alive -
not just a ghost or an apparition or a spirit or a figment of someone imagination -
but fully and physically alive.

His resurrection disproves the entire philosophical system of the materialists -
A man can be truly dead (not "near death experiences" - not almost dead) but truly and completely dead and come back to life - Jesus did it.

And Jesus' resurrection disproves the entire philosophical system of the modern spiritualists -
When Jesus came back to life he was not merely a disembodied spirit - he was not an apparition, a vision, a psychological projection - He was there.
He was touched, he stayed with them, he ate with them.

This resurrection was physical, literal and real.

And having conquered death's grip on him he offers that same death- conquering life to us.

And the picture is completed when we see in the future that that same Jesus comed back.

And look at what he does: I Corinthians 15:22-26

All those who have believed in Jesus will be resurrected from the dead.
All those who in this life trusted him, received his gift of life, will be raised from the dead and as certainly as Jesus stood before his disciples with a physical, recognizable, real body so we will stand before him and each other as fully alive.

And then Jesus will mop up whatever resistance remains and with all his enemies, including death itself, finally destroyed - he will give all his followers to the Father to be with Him forever.

That's the Jesus who now comforts the parents of a fatally ill child with "I am the resurrection and the life - he who believes in me will live even though he dies."

Some of you have limped along through life with a strange mixture of belief and disbelief. You have accepted the old world's materialism and lived most days as if there was no God or at least lived as if it didn't matter if there was a God or not. Practically speaking you have lived like a materialistic atheist.

When pressed however, you have acknowledged a belief in some vague idea of God -

kind of a force for good that somehow intersects with you in the crisis times of life such as at death -
a belief that brings kind of foggy good feeling that not all is lost -that somehow life goes on - it's not quite all over.

Folks we are not talking about a life that ends in death and that's all.

We are not talking about life that is just a vague endless circle.

We are talking about life, real life, physical life in the presence of each other and the Lord for eternity.

And that life is available to us because Jesus is truly alive.

Doris Miller, his teacher, was often exasperated with him.

Jeremy was born with a twisted body and slow mind and even though he was 12 years old he would sit in the classroom squirming in his seat, drooling and making grunting noises.

But at other times he would speak clearly and distinctly as if some light had come on inside.

Nevertheless, Doris couldn't imagine keeping him in the classroom any longer and so had a meeting with his parents to tell them that he would have to be removed from the school.

Jeremy's parent pleaded with her to keep him since there was no other school nearby to which he could go.

As Doris pondered the situation she agreed that she would try to keep him and she prayed for patience.

Spring came and the children looked forward excitedly to Easter. Doris told them of Jesus and the new life that comes from Jesus resurrection.

Then to emphasize new life springing forth she gave each child a large plastic egg and said to them, "Take this home and tomorrow bring it back with something inside that shows life. Do you understand?"

The children responded enthusiastically, all except Jeremy - he just watched her intently. Had he understood?

Should she call his parents and explain the project.

That evening Doris's got so busy with things that she completely forgot to call them.

The next day 18 other children and Jeremy came to school laughing and talking excitedly as they placed their eggs in the basket.

By the second hour it was time to open the eggs.

In the first one she chose Doris found a flower. The little girl who brought it waved her hand with pride and Doris made some comment about the flower showing life.

The second egg contained a plastic butterfly and Doris talked about the caterpillar changing.

Then Doris opened the third egg. She gasped. It was empty. Surely this egg belonged to Jeremy and he didn't understand. If only she had not forgotten to call his parents.

She set the egg aside not wanting to embarrass him but Jeremy raised his hand and called out "Miss Miller, aren't you going to talk about my egg?"

Doris was so flustered that she blurted out, "But Jeremy your egg is empty."

At that Jeremy looked into her eyes and said softly, "Yes, but Jesus' tomb was empty too."

Time seemed to stop for Doris. When she could speak again she asked, "Do you know why it was empty?"

"Oh, yes" Jeremy said, "Jesus died and was put in there. Then his Father raised Him up."

In this true story, Jeremy died three months later.

On his casket were 19 plastic eggs - all of them empty.

What philosophy, or better yet what person, were those children and those parents trusting?

Because Jesus rose from the dead, those who are trusting in Him will rise also.

For your sins he died.
For your eternal life he rose again.

Have you bet your life on Him.
Are you trusting in Jesus and only in Jesus today?

The Jesus who rose from the dead is calling you to himself today.
He will work as powerfully in your life as he worked in Peter's or Paul's or Will's or Karen's lives.

He will forgive you for your sin.
He will grant you everlasting life.

If you are ready to respond to him and give up on the dead end or endless philosophies of this world - I invite you to Jesus.

Please talk with me or a trusted Christian friend after this service.
Let us introduce you to the risen Lord.