

"How to have a Living Faith"

John 11:26-27

March 27, 2016 - Easter Service, 11:00 AM -Dr. Jack Graham

[Dr. Graham, message, "How to have a Living Faith"]

Today on this Easter Sunday morning we are beginning a message series called DARE TO BELIEVE. And the challenge of today, of course, on this day of days is to speak of this living faith that we have in Jesus Christ. So I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to John's Gospel, chapter 11. And I'm calling this message "How to have a Living Faith."

Or on the other side I thought a good title for this message on the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the resurrection of Jesus as well, I would say a good title would be "Hello from the other side." Lazarus experienced it before Adele sang it! I don't know, that song just gets in my head. [mimics singing] "Hello, it's me" [laughter] "Hello from the other side". Well, this Easter we want to think about this side and the other side.

Of course, it's an appropriate time to preach a message of hope because once again the world has been staggered... stunned by a terrorist attack and danger and death stalks the earth, and it strikes at the most unpredictable times because death for all of us is unpredictable for the most part, and certainly, however, inevitable. We may deny it; we may delay it, but ultimately we all come face to face with the reality of death. We've seen the dark side of humanity once again, and on this Easter we are reminded that evil certainly exists. But most of all we realize that what is real and what is for real and forever is the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. And my message today is built on this truth: that we can rejoice in this hope and that Jesus invites us... He invites us up to face sin and sorrow and death with confident hope and expectation when we believe in Him!

Jesus made some outlandish statements, if you will. For example, Jesus said, [John 14:6] "*I am the way, the truth, the life! And no one comes to the Father except by Me.*" That's a bold statement. He also said, [John 10:30] "*I and the Father (God) are one!*" But on a funeral day... a day in which Jesus attended a funeral of His friend, Lazarus... (And by the way, you always want Jesus to attend your funeral!) On that day, looking at the face of death, sorrow, Jesus made this incredible statement.

25) ... "*I am (verse 25) the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26) and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. (And here's the question that Jesus asked then and now on this Easter that everyone of us must answer.) Do you believe this?"*

It's a pressing and personal question. Do - you - believe - this? [strike] Because this is the claim of Christ that sets Him apart from all others; puts Him in a category that is different than anyone else who has walked on the earth. "*I am the resurrection and the life!*" This is the fundamental truth of the Christian faith, that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Before there was a resurrection, there was a Savior, a risen Lord. And if Jesus is not Lord of all, He's not Lord at all! "*I am the resurrection and the life!*"

People get... Some people get uncomfortable with that truth. It's okay to think that Jesus is a powerful prophet or an anticipated Messiah; that Jesus was a winsome and wonderful friend and teacher, compassionate and loving and merciful. Even the cross, an example of martyrdom and suffering. But when you begin to claim, as Jesus claimed, "*I am the resurrection and the life!*" That's what separates the men from the boys, because that is the one truth that is essential to Easter, but beyond this day, essential for every day, and your destiny.

He made this statement facing the problem of death, and as noted, death is a problem. A little background here. As I mentioned Lazarus is a friend of Jesus... a good friend. Jesus spent a lot of time with this man and this man's sisters, Mary and Martha. And His friend has died. In fact, four days entombed before Jesus arrived at this man's funeral service. [It] Reminds us that generation after generation after generation has come and gone, and each generation has buried its dead. There is no escaping death. Death does not discriminate! Death is the most democratic experience in life. We all die; we all participate generation after generation.

I have a... I have Sirius radio in my car and I listen to a lot of different kinds of music. And you have... In Sirius radio when you stream down the dial, you know, you've got the fifties... music from the fifties... that's channel 5, and then 6 is the sixties, and then 7 is the... seventies (thank you very much) and then 8 is representative of the worse music of any generation, the eighties. [laughter] You just go right past the eighties, okay. Don't stay there long. And then there's the nineties. And I was thinking the other day as I was looking at these generation... the fifties, the sixties, the seventies... I've lived in all of those decades! I've listened to all that music! And the fact is if you're out of the nineties, the nineties are now oldies on the radio! True!

And from generation to generation, from decade to decade, from life to life we have this problem, and it's a problem that medical science can't solve. We can improve life, but we can't change the fact of death. It's an issue that psychology can't settle, philosophy cannot solve. And the reason is because the ultimate problem is the problem of sin. Not a popular subject, but doesn't lessen the reality and the impact of sin. And in the Bible death is linked to sin. Because of sin, death comes, and with death comes sorrow and suffering. Had there been no sin, there would have been no death. [Romans 6:23] "*The wages of sin is death*": the consequences of sin is death, and therefore we all die. And not just physically, but we are dead...

spiritually dead in our trespasses and sin. That means that we're all born separated from God. We all are disconnected from God, and ultimately this leads to physical death.

Now Jesus understands our pain and our sorrow. In fact, when Jesus arrives at this little village, Bethany, outside of Jerusalem, when the sisters tell Him that Lazarus has died, Jesus wept. Tears puddle up in our Savior's eyes and began to trickle down His face. He wept openly. He didn't try to hide His tears because, you know, they say big boys don't cry. He unashamedly, openly wept because He was brokenhearted by the reality of death. It wasn't supposed to be this way. The fact that people that He loved were suffering, and He wept with them and He weeps with us... He grieves with us! He shows up in our pain and in our suffering, and in the presence of the "Great I AM", the risen One, death has to flee.

If your marriage is dead, invite Jesus into your marriage and it will come alive again. If your dreams, your career, your future seems dead, invite Jesus into your life, into your world! I've observed over the years if a church is dead, welcome Jesus into His own church and that church will come alive! What we are sharing together today as a church, is the presence of the living God, Jesus Christ! He is alive! And therefore we are alive in Him! The problem of death... the stark reality of death!

But then there is the beautiful promise of life, the promise that Jesus gave here. *"I am the resurrection and the life."* If you die, you will live again when you believe in Me. I AM! Now I AM is a name: it is in fact the name of Almighty God, the Great I AM! It is the... it is the personal name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush... I AM! And Jesus often took that name unto His own, unto Himself. And here when He says "I am the resurrection and the life", it reminds us to say that Easter is more than an experience, certainly more than an emotion. The resurrection is a fact, but before it is a fact, the primary truth of the resurrection is that the resurrection is a Person. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the one who lives! His name is Jesus. The hope of the resurrection is not a dream, it is not a fantasy, it is not wishful thinking. It is the reality of a living Savior who says I'm making all things new. I AM! What does it mean? It means that He is eternally past, present and future. It means because He is the resurrection and the life, He is not the I was; He is the [chuckle] I AM!

And it means, therefore, that our past can be forgiven. This is good news because we all have a past! We all have a past! Do you ever want a do-over? For all you golfers, a mulligan? Yeah, we... we often look back and we have mistakes and regrets and defeats and choices that we have made that have not honored God, and we look at our lives, and sometimes we... we are just covered with guilt and shame. And as one person put it to me, "I just feel like I'm going to spend the rest of my life in the penalty box." And there are people who could be transformed by the resurrection but they think they are forever stuck in their past. Like spinning your wheels in mud, you just can't get passed your past. And then you wonder why you're not happy.

The fact is... the good news is that we can have a new life because of Jesus and His resurrection! It's not religion that we are preaching, but the resurrection, the risen One. You say, "Pastor, are you telling me that I need to get a little more religion in my life?" Absolutely not! Most people need to stop enduring religion and start enjoying Jesus in their lives! [applause]

You don't need a little more religion; you need a lot more Jesus! We all do! Religion ends where the resurrection begins! And that's in the reality of a Savior who came, who voluntarily, vicariously laid His life down on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus paid the price for our sin! He died so that we could be forgiven and he rose again so that we can be live again. And I mean really alive! Life with a capital "L". Our Lord said, [John 10:10] *"I've come that you might have life... life, and more abundantly!"*

And so you can, if you know the risen One... if you believe, you can be forgiven of your past, your present, your future. You can be free of the chains and the addictions [tap] and the habits [tap] that hold you back. You can be set free, for He is the truth that will set you free. It'll be a brand new day and a brand new destiny. The Bible says in Romans 5:1, *"There is no condemnation [strike] to those who are in Jesus Christ."* No condemnation! No more curse!

And you can walk out of here today, I promise you...! Because of what God has said in His word, you can walk out of here with every sin in your life... every mistake, every... every failure deleted! When you delete something, where does it go? I don't know! Somewhere I guess. But I know this, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. He deletes it totally! And we have now right standing before God! We stand in His righteousness. We stand in the resurrection! And so that means regarding the past, our sins are forgiven.

It also means because we now can live with power in the present... power in the present. You need, I need a power greater than ourselves. And it's not more willpower. How's that willpower working for you? It works for a while... a few days, a few weeks, maybe a few months. And then we find ourselves back doing the same things that we were doing before. Willpower's not working. Trying to change your own life is impossible. If you could change yourself, it would have already happened. And you can't, so it won't happen. And there's no amount of self-help... reading books, talking with a friend, taking pills... None of that will enable you to experience genuine change in your life. There's some good things that help us to make better decisions and... I'm not against programs and counseling and all of that.

But ultimately only Jesus Christ can change the human heart. And the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart! And Christ and Christ alone can change us when we have a living faith in Him! When you build your life on the solid rock of the resurrection... when you build your life on the resolve of the resurrection. Because the rock rolled, and the

tomb was empty, and Jesus now is alive in us! And that's the promise of the New Testament! That's the promise of the Bible! That the same power... (heads up!) the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us! Resurrection power!

No wonder the Apostle Paul said, [Philippians 3:10] "*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection!*" Ephesians 1 tells us about this power; it speaks of the immeasurable infinite power of God! This is not some Mickey Mouse power here; this is the power of God! It is the power of the resurrection that brought Jesus out of the tomb! He walked out of the tomb! And that same power is promised in us. His Spirit is alive in us.

And therefore we are ready for any circumstance in life in any situation. We're going to have problems. We're going to face difficulty. We're going to have trials and even tragedies in our lives. But the Apostle Paul said, [Philippians 4:13] "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" He said in other words, "I'm ready for anything that comes my way because of the power [tap] of Jesus [tap] Christ [tap] in my life [tap]!" "*I am the resurrection and the life.*"

One last thing: Not only is our past forgiven and our present is empowered, but now we have a hope and a future. Our future is secure because of the resurrection.

Do you think much about the afterlife? I do. Most people do. I read an interesting study... a survey that was done in America regarding belief in God, church, truths of the Bible, and so. Interesting thing... the Millennial generation, 18 to 25 basically- a little older... Fewer and fewer of these say they believe in God. But more and more of them say they believe in an afterlife. Huh? "I don't believe in God, but I believe in an afterlife." You think about that.

Lazarus came back from beyond... "Hello, it's me." [laughter] ... to say "I've been there and back." In some ways I... I feel bad for Lazarus because he died, he went to be with the Lord, and the Lord called him back. But when he got back he was different. How could you ever be the same if you came back from beyond?

There's a play written by Eugene O'Neill, who was not a believer by the way, but he wrote a play called Lazarus Laughed. And it is a fictional story about Lazarus... the Lazarus of the Bible. After the resurrection he went everywhere telling the story of the resurrection and of his own resurrection. He went to Athens according to the... to the script, and then to Rome. And when he was in Rome they told him to shut up, and don't speak of this resurrection. And a Roman soldier put a sword to his neck and said, "If you keep talking about this resurrection, we're going to kill you." [Pastor laughs out] And Lazarus laughed! He laughed, because, you see, if you know the risen Savior, death's not a big deal. Physical death is not that big a deal.

Jesus said that Lazarus was sleeping... He said he's sleeping. Think of it as a nap. Now I have to admit in this decade of my life, I like naps a lot. [chuckle] [laughter] I mean I don't sleep a lot but, you know, a five - ten minute nap in the afternoon... especially after lunch is... is really a welcomed thing. And... Or you can go long and hard like, you know, what I call a slobber knocker, you know, on a Sunday afternoon. Really go deep.

Naps are good! In fact, Google it! Look it up. It's good for your health, good for your heart, good for your well-being. Naps are good for you. So I don't feel guilty. It's a good thing. And when you take a nap, you look forward to it. When you go to sleep, you look forward to it. It's rest. You wake up and feel refreshed.

Jesus is saying it's like sleeping, it's like taking a nap. Not that death is the soul sleeping, because the Scripture says [2 Corinthians 5:8] *"to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord"* immediately, instantaneously. But Jesus is giving us a picture here. Lazarus is sleeping. Don't be afraid of death. It's like a wonderful rest for your soul. And you will wake up in His presence in heaven.

Heaven is a real place. It's not a state of mind, not somewhere out there, but very real. You wonder what heaven is like? What is this earth like? Think of all the good things you enjoy in this life. The pleasures... your family, your friends, the beauty of nature, creation, enjoying a great meal, laughing, lingering long enough to talk, exercising... whatever you enjoy: think of that. Then multiply that times eternity. Because heaven is not going to be some way off distant thing. In fact in the end when Jesus comes again, the new heavens and the new earth will be one! He's bringing heaven to earth! And we will enjoy life as God always planned it. Paradise forever!

So again, heaven is a very real but perfect place where there are no more tears and no more terrorists and no more suffering and no more crying and no more pain and no more death! Because now our future is secure and we know that we're going to spend eternity in heaven with Him. Not because of anything that we've done, but because of what He has done for us, and because we have believed and staked [tap] our [tap] very [tap] lives [tap] and future upon Jesus Christ.

So let me ask you... this is like final exams. This question of all questions. "Do you believe this?" Jesus asked it and He's asking it today. "Do you believe this?" Those of you who are watching on television, those of you watching on the webcast online, everyone right now in this room-zero in. Do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? And to believe in Him is to never, ever die but to live forever.

You don't get this truth... you don't get this reality in your life by promising to live a better life because you can't. Or promising not to do certain things because you will. Not comparing yourself to other people.

"Well, you know, I'm certainly not as... as bad as so and so." You know it's not by subtraction, it's not by addition, it's not by comparison, it's not by sincerity. We don't go to heaven because we're sincere in what we think or what we believe. Jesus said, "Do you believe this... do you believe this? That I am the resurrection and the life."

The only way to know that you're going to heaven, that your sins are forgiven, that Christ is living in you, is to believe, truly believe. And that means to commit your life to Him. To put your trust totally in Him and Him alone for your eternal life and salvation. To have the resurrection and the life is tantamount to salvation. That's what it means to be saved; is to have the living God, Jesus living in you.