

Life Everlasting

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Pastor Tom Anderson

Lent has come to its end and we are now at the dawn of what we Christians call Holy Week—the week that celebrates the last days of Jesus Christ on earth culminating in his resurrection from the dead. He entered Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday with great fanfare. He went directly to the temple and threw out the moneychangers. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, he taught on the temple stairs, which archeologists have unearthed and are there to see this day. Then on Thursday, he celebrated the Passover with his disciples in the Upper Room and gave them a new commandment that we should love one another as he loves us. He was then arrested while at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was tried and sentenced Friday morning, and he died on the cross on Friday afternoon and was buried. On Easter Sunday he rose and appeared to his disciples. And the world has never been the same since!

We have been reflecting on the Apostles' Creed these last few weeks, and we now come to the final lines: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting, Amen." I pray by now you've committed the creed to your memory and that you use it in your private devotions right alongside the Lord's Prayer.

What is forgiveness? Jesus asked that we preach it and practice it. It is the center of Christian living in this world: "...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations..." (Luke 24:47)

We've already mentioned how the cross takes away our sins. But the focus here is on our calling to forgive each other the wrongs we have done or suffered.

If we do not forgive each other, it means we dwell in the past and our old wounds have power over us. Many people develop elaborate grievance stories that lock them into the negative way some harmful thing affected them in the past. A grievance story paints a picture of a helpless victim in the face of someone else's cruelty. Soon the joy of life is drained from us because we are imprisoned in the past. We have rented out all the space in our hearts to the past and we cannot appreciate any of the blessings of life today.

Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a choice I make to say I am not a victim of my past. Forgiveness is an act of strength, not weakness. It says I believe God yet has things for me to do.

I believe God can redeem any life, even those who've hurt me. I can trust in God's justice for all people.

Forgiveness means accepting life on its own terms. It can happen only when we have told the truth and accepted the truth about what has happened. It means accepting that I don't have control over everything that happens to me and I can't change the past. It means taking inspiration from Christ who forgave us and now calls us to return the favor by extending forgiveness to others.

Forgiveness can be seen as a set of promises I make to God, others and myself:

1. "I will not dwell on this incident."
2. "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
3. "I will not talk to others about this incident."
4. "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."

What is the resurrection of the dead? Again we have already touched on Jesus' resurrection and so what is in view here is our resurrection. The Bible says that both believers and non-believers will be raised from the dead: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2) The Bible does not speculate on the basis of paranormal psychology, crystal balls, psychics or séances. But Christian conviction about the resurrection comes because we have already met the future in Jesus Christ. When Steve Jobs recently unveiled the Apple iPad he audaciously said, "Meet the future of home computing." I'm not sure about that, but I am sure that Jesus Christ is our future. We will all be raised as he was: the good, the bad and the ugly. The Bible says we will be given new bodies and we will stand before him for judgment.

After death, the time for choosing, willing and deciding will be over. We will not have another chance to reverse whatever decision we made about Jesus Christ on earth.

We will all die. But the sting of death has been removed from believers. We look forward to death as our final sanctification when we will be completely purified from all sin and stand before our Savior, spotless, unblemished and clean.

The Bible teaches this sequence of events after our death:

1. The soul is separated from the body. This is our physical death. All our bodily functions cease and the body goes into decay.

2. Our souls go immediately to Christ. This is why Stephen, as he was dying prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Acts 7:59)

3. Our souls are then judged. Romans 2:6 “God, will give to each person according to what he has done.” This should not be taken to mean that we are saved by our works in this life but by faith and the evidence of living faith is a fruitful and obedient life.

4. Then our souls wait for the last day when the last trumpet sounds and the resurrection takes place. Each of us will be fit with new bodies—just as Christ was on Easter Sunday morning. The final separation will occur, the righteous into eternal life and the unbelieving into separation from God—what the book of Revelation calls the “second death.” (Revelation 21:8)

It is important for us to think about death because only those who take death seriously take life seriously. The Christian view of death makes every moment meaningful; every moment is morally significant—how we treat the poor, what we do with our bodies, our time, our talents and our money. The good news about the Biblical teaching on death and resurrection proclaims that life matters.

Everlasting life is the complete and unending enjoyment of God. It is something we already experience, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (I John 5:11-12)

But it is also something we look forward to. Romans 8:23: “...we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” We will see God face to face. His light will fill our lives. Faith will be replaced with knowledge and we will finally be in our true home. Jesus said, “I am going to prepare a place for you...” (John 14:2)

The Apostles creed begins with creation, moves through redemption and ends triumphantly with hope. When you say this creed you make yourself a person of hope.

I stood in intensive care at the bedside of a broken man this week. After the tragic death of his son last week, he had intentionally provoked the police to shoot him. I read to him John 3:16 and I said this, “There is no life that God cannot redeem. God has a plan and a purpose for your life. Tell him your sins, ask for his forgiveness and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe life is worth living and I believe your life is worth living.” This is what the Apostles Creed is all about: creation, redemption and hope—a life worth living in Jesus Christ.