

Transformed: From Death to Life  
John 5:24-26

Introduction

Good morning and Happy Easter. As you all probably know, Easter is a big deal for Christians and the church. This isn't just the usual Sunday. Everything for Christians hinges on the resurrection. Your belief or non-belief even hinges on what you believe about the resurrection.

I want to read the events of the first Easter morning to you. Listen to how Luke describes that morning from Luke 24:1-12.

1 But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. 3 So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. 5 The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." 8 Then they remembered that he had said this. 9 So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. 11 But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. 12 However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

Isn't it interesting that even the disciples did not know how to respond? For three years, Jesus had told them what he was going to do. He told them what to anticipate. But when it happened, when he died, they scrambled, and then when he rose from the dead, they were dumbfounded. But they had the benefit of just a little bit later encountering Jesus. They were able to see him face to face.

We may not have the same face to face experience today, but we are still left to deal with the resurrection. We must determine, do we believe it or not. Will we believe it or not? Even though you might look at this as nothing more than a historical event, if it happened, it changes everything.

You can't just take a part of what Jesus said and say, "I like that part. I will believe this, not that." As Tim Keller wrote in his book "The Reason for God," "If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept ALL he said; if he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about ANY of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead."...If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything."

Over the years, many have tried to explain away the resurrection to show why or how it couldn't have happened as the Bible says. There have been random theories to try to sweep it under the rug in hopes that it would disappear or that people would forget.

Theories like someone stole the body to make it look like he had risen. But if that were the case, who did it? Would the Jews or Romans have stolen the body? Doubtful. Even if they had stolen the body, wouldn't they have produced the body immediately when Christianity began spreading like wildfire? Wouldn't they have produced the body to stop the rumors of resurrection in its tracks? After all, the message the disciples shared was, "This Jesus you killed is now alive." They would have been thrilled to say, "Not so fast. We have the evidence right here that this didn't happen like they say it did." But that never happened.

And if the disciples had stolen the body, would they have been willing to die, which many of them did, for something they knew to be untrue. Is anyone willing to die for a lie?

With the torture, ridicule, persecution, and death they endured, if they knew it was all a lie, someone would have broken. Someone would have revealed the scheme. But that too didn't happen.

Some even go so far as to say that the disciples had forgotten where they buried him. But how unlikely is that? If you have ever lost someone important to you, have you forgotten where they were buried? Not likely.

And if you land on the side that says it didn't happen, how do you explain the rise of Christianity- The spread of the message of Christ across the world and across time, a message that hasn't diminished over time but has even grown?

As unbelievable as the resurrection might be to us, it was just as incredible to those who witnessed it. They, too, were shocked and surprised. But just because it is miraculous doesn't mean it didn't happen.

The event we celebrate today that happened almost 2,000 years ago is significant. We can't ignore it. We must respond. It demands a response. Because the implications are too far and too wide. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we are all here wasting our time. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, what is the meaning of this life? If he didn't rise from the dead, is there hope for us to experience a full and complete life if this is all there is?

The resurrection of Jesus has far-reaching impact not just in the world in the first century, but a significant impact on you and me today. It is because of the resurrection that we can be transformed.

When we think of being changed or transformed, we usually think of tweaks, small changes. After church today, when I go home and change into more comfortable clothing, I will take off this dress, button-down shirt, and put on a T-shirt. I will change my beautiful dress pants and dress shoes for an even more comfortable pair of shorts and a pair of flip flops.

I will change clothes. But I will replace one shirt for another. And in the end, I will still be wearing a shirt. My shirt doesn't transform into a toaster, or a candy dispenser, even though that would be very cool. But this is how we usually think of change or transformation. Small and insignificant.

But because of the resurrection, it means so much more. A different kind of transformation is now possible because of what Christ has done. And the transformation I am talking about isn't just an "I will make better choices" transformation, or an "I will live a moral life" change, or even a "I will be more religious" modification. The transformation I'm talking about goes way deeper than that. It goes to our very core.

Today, I want to talk about the most significant transformation we can experience because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that is our transformation from death to life.

### The Work of Christ

You see, the resurrection wasn't only about Jesus and his resurrection. In Jesus, when he rose from the dead, we also have the opportunity to be raised to life.

Before the resurrection, during his ministry, Jesus tried to explain this radical change to his disciples and the religious leaders. In John's gospel, he records an interaction with these groups and how Jesus viewed what he had come to do for those who would believe in him.

Look at John 5:24-26. "They have already passed from death to life...". As Jesus makes this statement, there are a couple of things that we have to acknowledge in his statement. Jesus describes two states, two positions in which we can be. We can't be in both, but we will be in one or the other. And we know this because we understand how life works.

Jesus says we will either be dead or we will have life. As I said, we know that you cannot be both of these at the same time. The question is, what makes someone dead or what causes someone to have life? Is Jesus talking about physical life here, or is there more to what he is saying.

Jesus isn't only talking about the physical world here. He is talking about being alive physically and spiritually. But if we want to experience life, we first have to acknowledge that if we don't have Jesus, we are spiritually dead.

### Are We Dead?

Years ago, there was a movie called the Sixth Sense. In the movie, Bruce Willis plays Malcolm, a psychiatrist, and Haley Joel Osment plays Cole, a troubled and traumatized kid. This movie has one of the most recognized movie lines of all time. When Cole looks at Bruce Willis and says, "I see dead people." I'm sure most of us have heard that line before.

But after he utters that now-infamous line, he looks at Malcolm and then says, “And they don’t know they’re dead.” It’s an old movie, so if you haven’t seen it, I’m about to spoil it for you. What we find out, in the end, is that Malcolm was dead pretty much the entire movie, and he didn’t realize it. I missed it the first time. I wasn’t smart enough to figure it out until the movie told me. Looking back, though, it was obvious.

Jesus tells us that there is life, and there is death. Like the line in the movie, many are dead and don’t know it. And if we begin to sense it on occasion, we do anything and everything we can to drown it out, to stop that feeling.

What am I talking about when I say death? Death spiritually is simply separation from God. It doesn’t mean your life is horrible. It doesn’t even mean that you can’t sense God. It means that we were created to live in relationship with God, to know the unconditional love and acceptance of the Father.

To know what Jesus refers to as abundant life or life to the fullest. It means to truly know why we are here and to have meaning and purpose in our lives. But because we don’t know Jesus, because we don’t believe in him, what Jesus is telling us is that we are dead.

And in this state, what we do is we try, and we try to find satisfaction in life. We try to find purpose. We try to find meaning in our existence. When we try to find it in everything the world tells us will bring it, what we see is that it continually evades us. It evaporates like the mist in the morning sun.

We seek and seek for purpose, and we busy ourselves with cause after cause, thinking that will bring meaning and significance, but in the end, we still feel dissatisfied—longing for more.

And we search, and we search, and we run ourselves ragged looking for it, looking for life, and like trying to hold on to dry sand, it slips easily through our fingers, and we find ourselves empty, often wondering what is wrong with me?

We know living for self isn’t it. We know feeling trapped in a life of bondage to our vices doesn’t work. There has to be something more. And Jesus tells us, he invites us to life. He is inviting you to life.

But the problem is some of us don’t feel dead. You look around, and life is good. You’ve got a good job, a nice house, a good looking spouse, kids with straight teeth. We think to ourselves, “My life is pretty good. I don’t see a need for Jesus.”

And maybe you’re right. But like Cole in the movie, is it possible that you are dead and don’t realize it. That all the comfort you have in your life is nothing more than a sharp suit and lipstick on the corpse. Because even the best looking corpse in the funeral home is still a corpse, it is still dead.

What if what you are experiencing and living that you think is the best life has to offer is just subpar and mediocre. And you know what, that is exactly what Jesus is telling us. You can have everything this world has to offer and still miss out on the best things.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We don't have to miss out. We don't have to be dead. Jesus came to bring us life.

### Not Just Life Later, Life Now

For a long time, the church mainly talked about life as it relates to someday—eternal life. Everlasting life. When you physically die. Life after death. And that is important. Don't think it isn't because your eternal destiny is something to which you should give some thought.

But when Jesus says that those who believe “have already passed from death into life,” he is telling us that the life he is inviting us to be a part of is something that can be experienced right here and right now. It isn't just for later. It is life before death.

What is life? What does it look like? It is forgiveness. All the garbage in your life wiped clean. A fresh start. It is acceptance and unconditional love. It is no more, have I done enough to earn my way to God. It is peace, and it is joy.

Where death is separation for God, life is a relationship with God. The one who formed you and knitted you together in your mother's womb. The one who ordered the universes and holds them together. It is knowing him, experiencing him each and every day of your life. It is no matter how much you might have screwed up in the past, this God that loves you saying to you, “You are mine.”

It is knowing that there is meaning and purpose to your life. No longer trapped in the mundane and mediocre. It is knowing that you are a part of something greater than yourself. It is an invitation into the kingdom of God, to be a part of his great work in the world.

And that means working to bring heaven to earth. To eradicate poverty and eliminate sex trafficking and share the life of Jesus Christ with everyone we can.

It means becoming a part of a community of faith, linking arms with others in this same work, joining together, not to be in some social club but to be a part of God's church.

It is living a life of hope, knowing that whatever we experience here, whatever tragedies may come our way, or what tragedies may happen in this world, we know that this isn't the end. We live with hope. Not wishful thinking but expectant hope, knowing that one day, God will put it all back like it is supposed to be. He will make it right again, and we will be with him when he does, and we will be able to enjoy it the way it was supposed to be forever.

And it all comes down to one question, Will you believe?

Will You Believe?

You've listened to the claims of Christ. You hear what he offers. To bring life to those who are dead. Will you hear what he is saying and believe? Do you want to exist, or do you want to experience all God has for you? Do you want to just live, or do you want life?

Conclusion

You know, anyone can die. Many have. Even Jesus died. But only Jesus died and now lives. And the power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that he is inviting you to experience in your life today, to raise you from the dead as well.

Without life, we can't experience anything else that Jesus has for us. When you are dead, your dead. Nothing else matters. And what Christ is offering is more, so much more!

One thing we have to be willing to overcome is comfort. It is easy to understand how someone in crisis or someone in need might come to Jesus. But what about you. I venture to say that most of us here today aren't in much of a crisis. Aren't in some great need.

This may describe you, but I want you to know that even in your comfort and coziness, you need to wrestle with the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. If the resurrection is false, then you have nothing to worry about. But if it is real, if it did happen, then all of what Jesus said is true, including the part that without him, you are dead. You do not have life. But the great and amazing news is that Jesus and the resurrection can change all that. What you cannot do for yourself, Christ has already done for you. When you could not resuscitate yourself, Jesus says, "Don't worry, I will give you life."

And that is the invitation Jesus extends to you today. Will you stay dead in your sin, dead in your meaninglessness, or will you come to him and live? Do you just want to live, or do you want life?