April 3/4, 2021

New Life Now

Easter Sunday

Romans 6:3-11

Pastor Ryan Harmon

If you've ever wondered, if you ever find yourself questioning or doubting what God is like, I'd suggest to you that one of the best places to start, maybe the only place to start, is by looking at the events of this week and the realities of this day. When we look at Easter, we see what our God is like. We see His very heart. We just sang about it. He's the God that turns *Graves into Gardens*. Some of you might have known some of the people in that video, but each one of those people represents a story that was broken, that God restored. He redeemed; He brought goodness out of brokenness, because that's who He is. He's the kind of God that takes a curse and turns it into blessing. In the middle of darkness, He brings in overwhelming light. He's the God that takes death and brings life out of it. And so we're gathering together here on Easter morning to celebrate who God is and what He's done. And Easter is a celebration, isn't it? Every time we gather, of course, on Sunday morning, on Saturday night, it is a celebration. We're celebrating who God is, and what He's done in our life. But there's something different about Easter. Every once in a while, there are these times where the celebration is a bit more emphatic, isn't it? I can hear it this morning in your singing. There's a little something extra, some more oomph, because Easter is worthy of celebration—exactly what we should be doing—because I would say to you that in the whole history of the world, there is no day more momentous, no day more significant, no day more important than that very first Easter morning. It's a day that transformed the world. But more than that, it's a day that for each one of us, it has the potential to transform our own personal stories.

In fact, I'd say to you that one of the most important decisions anyone can ever make in their life, the *most* important decision anyone can ever make in their life, is what they will do with the realities of Easter and the resurrection and all that comes with it. Whether they will embrace it or whether they will reject it, the decision one makes concerning those things, will determine whether or not they will enter into what we are calling *new life* or whether they won't—*New Life Now*! The truth is Easter grants us the potential to enter into new life today, and that's what we want to talk about.

In order to talk about that, we're going to look at two different passages of Scripture. We're going to look at Romans 6 and so, if you have your Bibles, turn there. But before we do that, I want to read Matthew's account of that first Easter morning. This is from Matthew 28. I'm going to read it to you out of *The Message*; it's a translation we typically don't read from, but I kind of wanted to maybe strike you a little differently than it typically would. So, Matthew 28, verses 1 to 9:

> **After the Sabbath, as the first light of the new week dawned, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to keep vigil at the tomb. Suddenly the earth reeled and rocked under their feet as God's angel came down from heaven, came right up to where they were standing. He rolled back the stone and then sat on it. Shafts of lightning blazed from him. His garment shimmered snow-white. The guards at the tomb were scared to death. They were so frightened they couldn't move.**

The angel spoke to the women: "There is nothing to fear here. I know you're looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed. Now get on your way and tell his disciples, 'He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' That's the message."

The women, deep in wonder and full of joy, lost no time in leaving the tomb. They ran to tell the disciples. Then Jesus met them, stopping them in their tracks. "Good morning!" he said. They fell to their knees, embraced his feet and worshiped him.

Imagine this scene with me for a moment. I just said that I don't think there's a day in history that's more important, more significant, than that first Easter morning. But I think it's equally true that if that's the most important day in the history of the world, some of the darkest days in the history of the world were the two days that preceded that Easter morning—that Friday of the crucifixion, that long Saturday! See, the glory of the resurrection, the hope of Easter, follows on the heels of the agony of the cross. And so I imagine these two women, walking to the tomb that morning, and I can't imagine a more grief-filled walk. Imagine what they were going through emotionally. They had just witnessed the death of their Lord, the One that they followed for three years, giving up everything to follow Him, and as they are walking to that tomb, they have to be thinking through whether or not it was a lie. Was it a fraud? He said all these things would happen—and they didn't come to pass. And now we're going to His grave because a dead Messiah is no Messiah at all! But they loved Jesus and they wanted to go tend to His body, as was proper. And so they walked to what, in that moment, was a dead Jewish man. I can't imagine the grief; I can't imagine the agony that they felt. Not just that, not just that Sunday morning, but that Saturday, the day before. Imagine the grief of that day—the agony, the mourning, the waiting that they endured—filled with memories of what just occurred the day before, just the most gruesome death one could ever imagine! We said that our God is the good God that turns *graves into gardens*. This is a *grave* moment. This is darkness.

So they're on their way. But then an angel meets them, and into that darkness speaks hope. He says, "There's nothing to fear here. Don't be afraid. I know the One you're seeking. I know you're seeking Jesus. He is not here. He is risen, just as He said He would." Into the midst of that incredible darkness, that incredible grief, comes a word spoken that brings hope, that brings life, that reinterprets all of the events of the past two days. It changes their entire perspective; incredible light breaks forth on the scene! So they turn and run to tell the disciples. And then they're met on the way by their Lord. They're met by Jesus and He greets them. Our translation says, "Good morning." I don't know if that's what He said, but it said He greets them, and they did just what we are doing here this morning—they bowed down; they worshiped Him! The resurrection Easter transforms everything! For those first disciples that transformed the meaning of the cross. See, the cross to them seemed like just the horrible, brutal end of the story of three years. But in light of the resurrection, the cross is the beginning of something brand new! Something was appearing on the scene that was altogether different, and it was demonstrated to them, then, by the very presence of Jesus. Jesus risen—living…walking…breathing…laughing…loving…blessing…reigning…ruling—Jesus was there in their midst and that meant everything was different! That meant that the death that He suffered could not hold Him! That meant the grave could not hold Him! Jesus cannot be stopped! The resurrection transforms everything!

Now it's important that we say all of this is true. He really did rise. He really is alive today. He really is reigning, and, because of that, we come together, and we celebrate, and we worship! But there's something more we call today *New Life Now*. You see the reality is, for those of us that have placed our faith in Jesus, or for those that never have, but are going to do that today, the resurrection means that we get to enter into a brand-new type of life as well. It means that new life begins for us, and it's a different kind of life. It's a transformed life than we were living previously, and it's not something that we have to wait for. Sometimes we think, "Oh, when we die, that will happen." "This is something we put on layaway." It's not something that's coming soon. It's today! Today could be the day that newness of life begins.

That's what Paul talks about in Romans 6. You can turn there if you have that place held in your Bible. Before we do that, I want to give a little context. See, Paul, in chapters one through five, has traced out, in incredible detail, pretty much the history of the world, the history of all of us, because he's laid bare how all of us are guilty of sin. Sin, rebellion against God, breaking the way things are supposed to be. Sin entered the world; each one of us—all of us—have committed it and because of that, death has entered with it—separation from God. It's a tragic tale and it doesn't take very much time to verify that it's true.

We don't have to investigate very long to see sin in the world, do we? Just pick up a newspaper. Turn on the news. Maybe more pointedly, just look inside your own heart. As we look inside, in moments of quietness, so often what we see is anger and envy and bitterness, jealousy, slander, things like that. Judgmentalism. It's not hard to verify that sin is a reality, and it has permeated the world apart from God. But in Romans five, there's a turn, and Paul says that God, through Christ, has justified us and brought reconciliation—and now we have peace with God. And then he continues in Romans 6; we are going to pick it up in verse 3:

> **Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? (**Now Paul, when he talks about baptism in this context, is just talking about placing your faith, placing your confidence in Jesus, becoming a Christian.) *Do you not know that when you became a Christian, you were baptized, you were joined with Him in His death.?* Verse 4:
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> **Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. So we, too, might walk in newness of life. For if we become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly, we shall also *be in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him,* in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died, is freed from sin.** (Vs. 4-7)

What Paul is saying here is that if you have, or if you today place your confidence in Jesus—place your faith in Him—you have been united together with Him, and not only in His death, but also in His life. In that middle section, there's incredible truth that Paul is conveying, but it's pretty complex. What he's saying is that for those of us that are in Christ, for those of us that make that decision today, it is absolutely true that what Jesus did on the cross is something we could not do for ourselves. He went as our substitute, to pay for the sin that we could not pay for…to pay for

the debt that we could not pay. Only He could do that! He went there as our substitute. But Paul is also saying something incredibly mysterious and profound. He's saying, in some way we also have been joined together with Him. He says our old self was crucified with Him, and that in some way, the part of us that lived apart from God, enslaved to sin, joined Him on that cross and died. "Old self dead," Paul says, "Crucified!" In Galatians 2:20 "**I have been crucified with Christ."**

That's good news! That part of us that lives apart from God—the old self—Paul says, "That's been put to death!" Amen! But then he continues, and he says that also there is a part of us that now walks in His life with Him. The life that we now live is marked by resurrection life! We're not just joined together with Him in His death. We're joined together with Him in His life, and then he uses this phrase in verse 4: "**So that we might walk in newness of life."** *New life now*!

What does he mean by **newness of life**? That word **newness** is one that Paul only uses two times—only in the New Testament two times—it's a bit of a rare word. Sometimes when we think of *new*, we think of maybe *refreshed*. You know, you make something kind of new. You restore it, just like new. But that's not what Paul means here. Newness here carries the meaning of something that is altogether different. It's a different type, a different kind of life. In fact, it's God's very life. It's an eternal kind of life—God living in us! When we think of eternal life, we often think of how long it will last, right? It's the duration of the life, and that's absolutely true. For those that have been made alive to God, who have placed their faith in Christ, who maybe would do that today, your life with Him will never end, ever! Even when your body dies, your life will continue with Him, unending. But it also is eternal in quality. It's God's type of life—unperishable, incorruptible, not fading, old self dead, new self-resurrection life—a transformed life!

CS Lewis in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*[1], describes what happens when redemption occurs, and he always describes things so well, so I wanted to share that quote with you. Lewis says, *"For mere improvement, is not redemption, though redemption always improves people, even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine." (Here's the key.) "God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men, (better people) of the old kind, but to produce a new kind of man (person). It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better, but like turning a horse into a winged creature"* …not like teaching a horse to jump better but to turn a horse into a whole different creature! In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul says: "**If anyone is in Christ, a new creation, a new creature has come about**."

So is *newness of life forgiven life*? Absolutely! If you are in Christ, if you place your faith in Christ today for the first time, your sins past, present, future are forgiven…done…paid for—nailed to the cross—debt paid, life with God restored! But is it more than that? Well, Paul suggests it is not just a forgiven life. It's also, through the resurrection, a life that somehow is a freedom from sin kind of life, a no longer enslaved to continue to do the things we once couldn't help but do kind of life. It's a life that is transformed—free to walk with God in a brand new way—now unencumbered by the weight of sinning and sins.

Now, if you're like me, you've been a believer for some time. It's kind of hard to process because you say, "But I still struggle. What do I do with that? Why is it that I still struggle with things that ten years ago I struggled with if this is true?" It's a real question. As I was thinking about that, I

[1] Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. Geoffrey Bles (UK), Macmillan, Harper Collins Publishers, 1952.

was reminded of a story that I just love. It's a story from World War II. I think someone should make a movie about it. There's no movie about this story, but after the war came to an end in 1945, there was a soldier, a Japanese soldier, that just refused to believe the war was over. Every time he heard it was, or somehow he received a kind of message that it was, he thought it was propaganda. Refusing to believe it, he kept his gun loaded, remained in hiding, kept fighting, grenades on his belt, not trusting anyone, on edge all the time…remained fighting a war that was finished. The whole world was moving on, living in peace, stepping into a new type of life. This one soldier kept fighting. What's astounding is he kept fighting for 29 years! In 1974, his commanding officer from World War II finally found him, and came and convinced him the war is over. "You don't need to fight any longer." What a tragedy! Newness of life offered, but instead continuing to fight as if the war is not done.

So this morning, are you fighting a war that Jesus has finished? See, on that cross, that Easter morning, Jesus burst forth from the grave and victory was won! And as believers, we can live in the light of that victory today! A new life is available to us *now*. If you've never placed your confidence in Jesus, today could be the day. Today could be the day your life is marked by peace, that you can step into the newness of life. As Paul closes this passage, he kind of goes through the facts one more time, lays out all the things that are true about us, and then as he closes in verse 11, I want you to listen for it. He kind of gives a charge, an emphatic charge, about what all this means. Verse 8:

> **Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so, (**just as in the same way) **consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.** (Vs. 8-11)

That's a charge! It's an imperative statement! Paul is saying, "Look at the facts." It's almost as if he is saying, "Do the math. Look at all that has been accomplished. Therefore, in light of all that, step into the life that has been made available to you, a with-God kind of life, a life unencumbered by the things that once held us back." He says, "Reckon yourselves as **dead to sin**." Well, that's *new life*.

So how do you find yourself this morning? Do you find yourself weary and tired? Do you find yourself tired of living in the darkness and ready for restoration, ready to step into new life? See, new life now is here for the taking. For some of us, it's just going to mean simply stepping into the life that God has enabled us to step into. He's already made the way. For some of us, it's going to mean placing our faith in Him for the very first time. Today can be the day new life begins now. New Life, it's there for the taking now! All that's required is that we place our confidence, and we live surrendered to Jesus. Jesus, the risen One, the One we celebrate, the One we worship, the One who died, the One who was raised, the One who lives and the One who made a way for us to walk in newness of life!

Will you join me as we pray? As we praise Jesus, let's stand and let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we praise You! You did what we could not do. You died the death that we deserved and now, graciously, You have made a way for us to live the life that You're living. We thank You for that. We praise You for that. Father, help us, help us to step into the life that You've made available to us. Free us from the bondage of sin. Help us to walk in newness of life by the power of Your Spirit and for the glory of Your name. Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

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