

WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT JESUS

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My Easter message today is simply titled “What Everyone Should Know About Jesus.” There are five things all of us should know about Jesus.

The first is this: he lived.

The word “lived” has two meanings. One is simply to exist. And the other is to really live. Some people only exist. They have never lived or maybe have forgotten how to live. In living we know Jesus existed. Existed like any other figure in human history. We know his place of birth – Bethlehem, Israel. The approximate date – 4 B.C. Raised in Nazareth of Galilee. Traversed his native country and ministry. Died in Jerusalem, crucified – the approximate year 29A.D..

No thinking person disputes any of those facts about Jesus’ existence. Jesus is no legend like the Easter Bunny or Santa Clause or Little Red Riding Hood or Paul Bunyon. He existed in real time and space. But he did more than exist. He lived.

A story was told of an old man in the Middle West who was known in his town as a man who really loved others, who tirelessly gave himself for others almost to the point of wearing out in what he was doing for others. But he so enjoyed it. He had an infectious zeal about living. When he died the doctor present at his passing gave us the reason for this good man’s death – he died from an overdose of life.

Jesus lived with an overdose of life. An overdose he wants us also to have. He says in the gospel of John 10:10 “I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.” How can a person be fully alive? Simply watch how Jesus lived and take the life of Jesus into yourself and live his life.

As I look at Jesus’ life I find some characteristic of a person who really lives.

I find the first essential characteristic of a person who really lives is that that person has a purpose for being alive. Jesus had a purpose. “My nourishment [he says] comes from doing the will of God who sent me and from finishing his work.” John 4:34.

On the eve of his crucifixion he states that purpose again. In John 17:4 he prays “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.” Jesus had a purpose. It was to do the work God gave him to do. No one is ever really fully alive unless they have a purpose for living. A purpose that flows out of God’s plan for your life.

What is it? This Easter Sunday morning when I ask you this, what is it that God has put you on earth for? Do you know why you’re here?

The great catechisms of the church have asked the question, What is the purpose of man? The answer is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

How do we glorify God and enjoy him forever? We find a purpose in our living.

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A second essential ingredient of really being alive is that Jesus not only had a purpose, he had a plan. His purpose and plan was to save humanity from eternal separation from God. That plan of his, to fulfill his purpose involved laying down his life as a sacrifice for our sins.

When you read through the gospels you can carefully see how Jesus made this plan gradually aware to the disciples. Only when they confessed him as Lord, he began to tell them, I must go to Jerusalem and there lay down my life and after three days rise. That was his plan to save the world.

Every life that has meaning not only has a purpose but has a plan to fit that purpose and to bring that purpose to pass.

A story was shared at the service last Sunday night. It's a true story about a little 5 or 6 year old girl from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania named Hattie. Hattie had a plan. It was in the days when girls wore black patent leather shoes that buttoned up on the sides. Hattie had a pair of shoes like that. Whenever she dressed up and went out she had with her a bright little red purse. One day a friend of Hattie's asked her to go to a Sunday school where a great civil war hero pastored a Baptist church. So Hattie began to work on her mother as little kids sometimes are prone to do to let her go. Finally the mother said yes. So Hattie on that great Sunday buttoned up her little black shoes, got out her little red purse, and started off to Sunday school.

But the building was crowded and the fire marshal had barred the door and said no one else could enter. They stood there barring the door. Hattie was broken-hearted she came home weeping and said to her mother, "They shut the door on me. But I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to make myself a million dollars and I'm going to buy myself a Sunday school and they'll never shut the door on me again."

So little Hattie, 5 or 6 years old started to work and to save. She began to wash dishes, sweep the front porch, rake the leaves, do the chores. Every time little Hattie got a penny or a nickel or a dime it went into that little red purse.

But that fall Hattie got desperately ill. With the kind of presence a little child may have she knew she was going to die. So she said to her mother, "Do you remember the day you let me go to Sunday school and I said I was going to buy myself a Sunday school? I've been putting all my money in my little red purse. I know there must be at least a million dollars in there by now. When I'm gone to be with Jesus, will you send for the preacher and take that million dollars and have him buy a Sunday school large enough so the boys and girls of Philadelphia will never be shut out again." And Hattie died.

After a couple weeks of sorrow her mother called the preacher. She told him the story of Hattie then together they opened the little red purse and shook the coins out on the table. Together they counted the money. There was 57 cents in that little red purse. The next Sunday morning the preacher stood before his great congregation and told them the true story I've just told you, the story of Hattie. He poured out the 57 cents on the altar. All over that building God began to move and people came forward from their seats and put their money and watches and their jewelry on the altar. On that one Sunday over a hundred thousand dollars was raised. They bought a lot in Philadelphia and began to build the great Baptist Temple later known as Temple Baptist church of Philadelphia. Later known as Temple University in Philadelphia. All because

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of the power of one little girl who had a plan. I'm going to buy myself a church and nobody will ever keep me out again. Hattie was gripped by a plan.

He lived to go for it.

Jesus was gripped by a plan. His plan was to save the world. But unlike little Hattie he had the resources to do it.

Are you alive with some great plan in your life? It may be a great plan in term of really being a mother or father or a terrific child. Or doing something for God and for others. But are you alive with a plan? Something in your life you must do for Christ and for his kingdom.

Jesus not only had a purpose and a plan but third he had resources to draw upon to fulfill them. If we're going to live life greatly we need resources. Jesus had resources that came from his living moment by moment with the Father. He began his days early before the breaking of the day with time with the Father in prayer. He closed his days in communion with the Father. He would tell fatigued disciples when they wondered where his source of supply was coming from in terms of stamina and energy and strength, I have food to eat, which you know nothing about. If we want to do more than exist then we must start feeding and drinking of the resources Jesus use – the scripture, prayer, the work God gives us to do. Resources.

The fourth great mark of living is that a really alive person needs motivation.

You can have a great purpose but be sitting on it. You can have a great plan but it can be gathering dust. You can have resources and be spending them all on yourself and not getting anywhere with them. But Jesus lived with motivation.

What was his motivation? Success or wealth or power? None of these things really. Just before laying down his life Jesus gives us a glimpse into his motivation by letting us hear him pray. John 17. His motivation is revealed in this phrase: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." John 17:5.

The striking thing about this is that Jesus in asking for something of himself the only real prayer request that I can find that he asks something for himself other than "Let this cup pass from me." it's this one. What's he asking for? That when he returns to heaven he'll have the same glory he had when he left heaven to come to earth as our savior.

The striking thing about this is that he asks for no greater glory as the result of his coming. He simply asks for the same glory that he had before he came. This is a breathtaking revelation for it shows us that Jesus sought nothing for himself as a reward for what he did for us. He needed no new title. He was the Son of God before creation. He is the Son of God after redemption. He owned all things before he came and he owns all things after he came. He holds all power before creation. He holds all power after he saved us. Nothing has accrued to him as the result of his life and death for us. Nothing. Except this.

His motivation was to love. Love for us. The only thing that Jesus gets for all of his labors and dying for all of his tears and woundings, is us. His love motivated him.

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What motivates you? What motivates me? Is it our need for security? Is it pursuit of money? Is it power and prestige? Is it recognition? All these things in the last analysis are empty, unsatisfying idols. These motivations never give you power to live. The only motivation that really gives you power to live is love. When love is our motivating driving force in life we'll be fully alive.

A fifth key to living is courage. Jesus had courage.

We'll never be alive unless like him we have a purpose, a plan, resources to carry that plan out, motivation, and courage to stay the course and to keep with it until what we have set out to do is accomplished.

My New Testament professor said some marvelous words about the courage of Jesus. It took courage for the Son of the carpenter to leave his village and launch out upon his ministry without the help of family or friends. It took courage to accept baptism from John and thus the risk of being thought of as a needy sinner. It took courage to face the rigors of the temptation alone in the wilderness. It took courage to oppose the traditions of men that had obscured or even contradicted the word of God. It took courage to tell men they were evil and to expose their sins so relentlessly that they were left without a cloak for those sins. It took courage to refuse the demand of the people that he consent to be made their king. It took courage to set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. It took courage to cleanse the temple. It took courage to accept the cup from the Father's hand. It took courage to face the venom of his accusers and the brutality of his crucifiers. It was one long trail of courage from beginning to end. The courage of conviction and consecration. Courage. Be of good courage, Jesus says, I have overcome the world.

Jesus promised us because I live you shall live also. That means that his living on earth gave us a pattern for living. Even as he had a purpose, we may have a purpose. Even as he had a plan, we may have a plan. Even as he drew upon resources, we may feed from those same resources, even as his motivation was to love, our motivation may be to love and we may have his courage to speak for him, to stand up for him, and to live life as he's wanted us to live it. Jesus lived. He had an overdose of life.

What's the state of your living? This little grid of the five things that mark a person who is really alive will be a blessing to you as you use it. Jesus lived.

The problem when I prepare a sermon is I get so excited on my first point I hardly have time for any other points. I just finished my first point. So we could be here for long time today.

Jesus lived. That's what everybody should know about Jesus. But the second thing that everyone should know about Jesus is that he died.

At the Third International Congress of Catholic Doctors in June of 1947 a paper was presented entitled "How Our Lord Died." Based on a medical interpretation of the event that John 19 describes when the soldier stabs the side of Jesus with the spear, here is an excerpt from the paper:

The soldier was a Roman. He would be well trained, proficient and would know his duty. He would know which part of the body to pierce in order that he might obtain a speedily fatal result or insure that the victim was undeniably dead. He would thrust through the left side of the chest

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a little below the center. Here he would penetrate the heart and the great blood vessels at the origin and also the lung on the side. The soldier standing below our crucified Lord as he hung on the cross would thrust upwards under the left ribs. The broad clean cutting two edged spear head would enter the left side of the upper abdomen, would open the greatly extended stomach, would pierce the diaphragm, would cut wide open the heart and great blood vessels, arteries and veins now fully extended with blood – a considerable portion of all the blood in the body – and would lacerate the lung. The wound would be large enough to permit the open hand to be thrust into it. Blood from the greatly engorged veins pulmonary vessel and dilated right side of the heart together with the water from the acutely dilated stomach would flow forth in abundance. The whole event as described by Saint John must indeed have happened. For no writer could have presented in such coherent detail so recognizable an event unless he or someone had actually witnessed its occurrence. Jesus died.

All persons who have ever lived have died. A few have died by means of crucifixion. But no one has ever died the kind of death Jesus died. For he died not for himself but for us. He died the death of a victim. He died the death of a vicar. And he died the death of a victor.

He died the death of victim – he was innocent he did not deserve to be crucified, to be pushed off the world on the end of a bloody stick. There is an old tradition that Jesus spoke an eighth word from the cross to the soldier who pierced him, “Friend, there is a shorter road to my heart than that.” Jesus was a victim of man’s inhumanity to man. And man’s rebellion against God.

Jesus died the death of vicar. A vicar is a substitute for an agent. Jesus died a vicarious death. He died for us in our place. He laid his life down as a ransom for us. He took upon himself our death knowing that we all face two deaths, which is physical death where we are separated from others. And second death or spiritual death when we are separated from God. Jesus came that we might never need die the second death. He died that for us.

And he died the death of a victor. He won our redemption at the cross. He broke the hold of sin. And the back of Satan when he bore our sins in his body on the tree.

Some look at the chaos in the world today and the terrible ramped nature of evil and say, How can you as a Christian, as a minister, glibly say that Jesus won a victory on the cross when there is so much evil yet in the world? I think I would have to point you to Oscar Kuhlman’s story of World War II to describe how we understand the victory on the cross.

Kuhlman points to the fact that if you ask an audience of people that were alive during World War II “Do you remember when D Day was?” Most everybody in the audience will raise their hand and identify the date of D Day when the allies successfully landed on Normandy beaches. June 6, 1944. But if you ask that same audience of people that were alive during World War II “Do you remember when VE day was?” Victory in Europe day? A very few people know the answer to that. May 8, 1945.

Why is it that everybody knows the date of D Day that was alive then and very few know the date of VE Day? VE Day was the actual ending of the war in Europe. From that time on the war was over. But D Day was only the beginning of the Allied invasion. But yet when people look back on World War II they say that was when World War II was won. It was won at D Day. In fact people describe the war as won from that point on because Eisenhower’s landing was

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successful on D Day. Yet the statistics show us that there were more casualties in World War II between D Day and VE Day than any other comparable period of the war. More devastation physically and more devastation to human life between D Day and VE Day. Yet looking back historically we say from D Day and the war was won.

Everything after D Day was moping up operations. VE Day was guaranteed because D Day was successful.

That's exactly what the cross of Jesus Christ is all about. The cross is God's D Day. It's when God on the earth landed with all of his power of love to break the back of the devil and sin and the grave and death. VE Day, the reign of Christ universally all over the world has not yet occurred. But it is coming. Because D Day has happened.

Jesus is the victor in his death. And everyone should know that Jesus lived and died.

The third thing that everyone should know about Jesus is that he rose up from the dead. There's a fascinating phrase used by Jesus to describe himself in the book of Revelation (2:8). It's simply this. "The words of the first and the last who died and came to life." Everyone else has to say that they came to life and then died. Jesus is the only one who can say first that he died and then that he came to life. The obituaries in the newspaper will say that such a such a person lived and then died. Died is the tag line. It's the last thing said.

Not so with Jesus. He died and came to life.

I gained a new appreciation for death and the awesome accomplishment of Jesus over death in my first year as pastor of this church, 13 years ago. A mortician in the congregation took me with him one evening to witness him doing an embalming. As I watched him do that embalming I became profoundly aware of the finality of life. That the dead body is indeed very, very dead. There is only one doctor who has power over death. And that's Doctor Jesus. He makes his resurrection life available to anyone who will lay their sin at his cross. He is alive.

Several years ago at the height of the God is dead theology somebody came to Billy Graham and asked him, What do you think of the God is dead theology? Billy Graham replied, "I'm sorry that their god is dead. My God is alive. I just talked to him this morning."

Jesus rose up from the dead.

A fourth thing that everybody should know about Jesus is that he ascended into heaven. He went up after 40 days. He went up. The federal government reported this week that it was spending 130 million dollars in conjunction with the space shuttle program to see once and for all if Albert Einstein was right when he said that gravity can bend time in space. The reason for this project was to find out whether an astronaut can leave if they can find out if time does indeed does bend in space and design a space machine that will travel about the speed of light. They are trying to now conduct a series of study as to whether an astronaut leaving could actually go to a distant planet outside of our solar system and return in his lifetime. Meanwhile hundreds of years would go by on earth. You know that kind of scenario.

Now 130 million dollars is being spent by the US government to test out whether that is true. That theory is true. If Einstein is right and such a space vehicle can be developed for astronauts

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they will be able however to step only outside of time. They will not be able to step outside of space.

At Jesus' ascension into heaven without the aid of the 5.3 million pounds of solid rocket fuel boosters as has the space shuttle, Jesus simply in one moment stepped both outside of time and space into heaven where he is today.

What's Jesus doing today? He's preparing a place for us. I like the fact that Jesus was a carpenter. It would suggest the place he's preparing is rather good. He is interceding for us. He has entered into heaven with his own blood to secure for us eternal redemption. He is working with us. While he remains in the position of authority and power seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. He ascended.

Jesus lived, Jesus has died, Jesus rose again, Jesus ascended. And the fifth great thing that everyone should know about Jesus is that he is coming again.

It's his promise. "When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also." Jesus is true to his word. He is returning to deliver us.

McClaren the great Scottish preacher declared that the early church thought more about the second coming of Jesus Christ than about death or heaven. They were not looking for a cleft in the ground called the grave. But for a cleavage in the sky called glory. They were not looking for the undertaker but for the uppertaker. Jesus is returning. He is returning for us his people. He's returning to judge the nations. He is returning to rule the earth. He is returning to complete God's purposes on the earth.

One of the unique aspects of Christ's return is the teaching in Revelation 20 that he is going to set up on earth an earthly kingdom for a period of 1000 years. During which his resurrected saints will reign with him. When that period is over the devil will again be loosed on earth. The final rebellion will take place and the earth will be destroyed.

I was thinking about that aspect of Christ's reign on earth with his resurrected saints this past week because it was just 6 weeks ago tomorrow that I stood in this pulpit and my father's body was right in front of me in this sanctuary and we had his memorial service. The earth, the world would say that's the end. That's the end. But the Christian knows different. That's not the end. Christ returns. And if Christ returns soon. One of the neat things that's going to happen in this sanctuary is one day dad and I are going to come back into this place and we're going to stand here and we're going to laugh! We're going to look back at our sorrow and we're going to say that life in Jesus was stronger than death.

We're going to do that with everybody who has ever known the Lord. Because the saints are going to rule and reign with Christ. What a rule and a reign! It's not going to be like a people that rule with problems and have all these responsibilities and have got to have millions of secret service people to protect them. We're going to reign and we're going to enjoy it to the hilt! We're going to laugh and we're going to skip and we're going to dance and we're going to have a marvelous time. Because we're going to realize once and for all in our life in our experience what the liberation Christ has brought has accomplished for us.

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We as Christ's people are people that have the upward look, the onward look. Because we can look outward, upward and onward we can look inward and thank God for what Jesus means to us.

It's no good simply knowing that Jesus lived, died, rose again, ascended into heaven and is returning. You must add one additional phrase to that. He lives for me. He lives in me. He died for me he rose for me he rose in me. He ascended for me and he's returning for me.

Our Father, on this glorious Easter day we thank you for the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of your Son, our Savior, Christ Jesus, the Lord. You, Lord Jesus, make the difference in our living and in our dying and in our eternal existence. Everything has changed because you have come. Let this Easter day be a day of resurrection and life in all of our hearts. Help us to live the way you lived. For those in this sanctuary today that are struggling with life, may this Easter day witness you coming into their hearts and giving them the only kind of life that counts – your life. Because you live, we live also. In your name we pray. Amen.