New Life (Easter 2025 Jn. 20:1-18)

*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (I Cor 15:19)*

* "At the death of Nikita Khrushchev, the former leader of the Soviet Union many years ago, a humorous story circulated in political circles. The Communist party that had cast Mr. Khrushchev aside was uncomfortable with the idea of burying his body on Soviet soil.
* They first called the President of the United States, Richard Nixon, and asked if the U.S. would take Khrushchev’s corpse. Nixon had his own problems at the time and declined.
* Then the Soviet leaders tried Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel. Mrs. Meir was agreeable but she added a note of caution. “***I must warn you***,” she said, “***that this country has the world’s highest resurrection rate***.”
* Well, she was right—Israel does have the world’s highest resurrection rate.
* In case you’re curious—the world’s highest resurrection rate is one person,

2

Jesus of Nazareth.

* The world’s highest resurrection rate is indeed one person and that is why we are here today.
* We are here and we can celebrate today because, while Jesus Christ is the only one to have been resurrected from the dead, we have the promise of the same thing - We too will be resurrected from the dead.
* The word that the Bible uses is *firstfruits*.
* We just read in 1 Corinthians: “***But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have***

***fallen asleep***.” (1 Cor 15-21)

* What first-fruits means is that there is more to come – Jesus was the first.
* Many Christians, simply accept what the Bible says that if we believe in Jesus we will have eternal life.
* That is absolutely true, but there is sometimes a reluctance to pursue the matter any further because it sounds so complex and can be challenging.

3

* But today, as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, I am going to present you, with solid food rather than just milk. (Heb 4:14)
* A man to who helped me in understanding such solid food was N. T. Wright who is a bishop, a New Testament professor, a theologian and an author who has written more than 70 books including several commentaries on the NT.
* Currently he is probably the one of the world’s leading authority on the New Testament.
* At first I thought his teachings were a bit challenging, but as I followed through on his teachings, I found that many questions that I had, were answered.
* They were not answered by introducing any new ideas or theology but rather by expounding on solid Biblical teachings - what the Bible actually says.
* I have also been intrigued by several books I read that looked at NDE’s and how some people who had experienced

4

such a NDE were able to recall things that simply would be impossible for that person to know except for having an encounter with the afterlife through this NDE.

* What does the Bible teach about resurrection and the afterlife?
* When we have God’s word that tells us something, we should study and explore just what God may be saying to us.
* When does resurrection happen?
* In our creed we say: “*We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.*”
* And in the Lord’s Prayer, that Jesus taught us we say: “*Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven*.”
* Now, both the creed and the Lord’s Prayer are totally scriptural, but I think possibly that we may pass over these lines too quickly.
* Most Christians would say ‘we die and then we go to heaven’, (or somewhere else).

5

* But when you think about these lines in the creed and the Lord’s Prayer - there is obviously a connection between the resurrection of the dead and the world to come, and there is a time when God’s kingdom will come on earth
* *Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.*
* The Bible is very clear that there will be a time when Jesus will return to the earth and it is at this time when the dead will be raised or resurrected. We will be raised.
* St. Paul speaks to this in 1 Corinthians. He calls it the mystery of the resurrection. He says: “*Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound , the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.*”
* In other words we will be given a new

6

body that is imperishable meaning that it will not be a body like our present body that decays.

* Also, we will be clothed with immortality – it will be for eternity.
* This future event when Jesus returns will be a coming together of heaven and earth – *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*.
* This is a future event, but what happens today when we die?
* All the people who have experienced a NDE were not brought to some future event. It was very much a present thing.
* There are several clues in the Bible that very clearly point to what happens today when we die.
* I’ll just point out two:
* 1. When Jesus was crucified and the thief on the cross beside him said; “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*.”, Jesus didn’t refer to some future time. He said: “*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*” (Lk 23:42-43)

7

* 2. When Jesus was comforting his apostles, he said these words: “*In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you*.” (Jn 14:2)
* In the original Greek the word that is translated in English as ‘rooms’ (mansions) actually means a place of rest while on a journey.
* God’s promise of eternal life will be fulfilled in time, and at that time, we will be given resurrection bodies that will not ever decay.
* While in the meantime we go to a place called paradise.
* That is a place that is described by people who have experienced NDE’s as a place they did not want to leave.
* NT Wright describes it this way. He refers to the resurrection as ‘*life after life after death*’
* When we die, the people we leave behind mourn with grief for us and that is very natural because they are limited

8

by their understanding of our present and broken world.

* They want to cling on to what is known and what is comforting to their understanding of life.
* But just as Jesus told Mary, “*Do not hold on to me.*”
* Our true comfort is when we can let go of our past hurts and understanding and can look with great expectation to the future and the fulfillment of all of God’s promises.
* Today we shout loudly: “*He is risen and He is alive*”, but that is really just a taste of what God has planned for us.
* He is risen indeed.