

THE RESCUE SWIMMER

John 10:10

At times language can actually be an obstacle to communication. When Laurie and I were in Mississippi a few months ago visiting our daughter and son in law we went to the local Outback restaurant. When we walked into the restaurant the hostess, a pleasant and smiling young woman, said something to us. She was speaking English I assume, but I didn't understand anything she said. Michael and Carissa walked over to a waiting area so we went with them. On the way I said to Laurie, "Did you understand what she said?" "Not a word." We sat down to wait and told Michael and Carissa that we hadn't understood the young lady at all. Michael said, "After you've been here a while you begin to understand what they're saying." The southern accent was so thick we couldn't understand the lady. When you deal with different languages it gets worse. We all know that getting instructions that have been written by non-English speakers can create some chuckles. Translating English terms into other languages also can create some unfortunate results. In China names of American movies at times get mangled. For instance, the Chinese title of *The Sixth Sense* was *He's A Ghost*, which kind of gives away the plot. Oddly the Chinese title of *The Shawshank Redemption* was *Excitement 1995*. Don't ask me why. One of the oddest was *Twister*, which became *Run! Run! Cloudzilla*.

A similar problem has happened with American product names. When Coca Cola was first taken to China its name was rendered Ke-kou-ke-la. Unfortunately it was only after they had printed up signs for the massive ad campaign that they discovered that phrase actually meant "bite the wax tadpole." Pepsi also had a problem when they took their product to Taiwan. At the time they were using the slogan "Come alive with the Pepsi generation." However, in the language of Taiwan it came out "Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead."

If that's true I'd like my kids to drink Pepsi when I'm gone. Obviously that is not going to help, but the meaning of Easter will help. We have some strange holiday customs, don't we? At Halloween we train our kids to use extortion, threatening to create trouble if they're not given candy. At Christmas we get a tree that has been chopped down and we put it in our house. Then we decorate it and say, "It's for Jesus." But Easter has to take the cake. This is the time we commemorate Jesus being put on a cross, dying and rising from the dead. "Great, we'll have the kids hunt for eggs." What does that have to do with Jesus? "Uh, well, all right, we'll dye the eggs and make them colorful." That still has nothing to do with Jesus. "It's okay, there's a bunny." Easter isn't about colorful eggs and bunnies. What it is

about is life. Today we will consider one verse, John 10:10, and see how its message relates to Easter.

THE RESURRECTION WAS ESSENTIAL TO JESUS' WORK

We're going to look at what Jesus said was his purpose on earth, but before we do that we need to understand that what we celebrate today, Jesus' resurrection, was necessary for him to complete his task. In Luke 24:44-46 Jesus told his disciples that all that had been written about him in the Old Testament had to be fulfilled by his rising from the dead on the third day. Had he not died and risen from the dead he would not have fulfilled what was prophesied nor would he have accomplished what he came to do.

Wait, Jesus was dead and then alive again? Wow, he was undead? The undead are hot right now so he would have been really popular. No, Jesus was not a zombie. He conquered death, never to die again. Well who can believe that? We looked at the "blood moon" last week. It was really creepy. I could see how ancient superstitious people might see something ominous in it. Such people might buy stories of a man rising from the dead. But who could believe such a thing today?

My goal today is not to argue that case, but to think about the implications of Jesus rising from the dead. However, there are excellent reasons for believing that against all odds Jesus did, in fact, do the impossible and rise from the dead. I recommend books such as Lee Strobel's *The Case For Christ* and J. Warner Wallace's *Cold Case Christianity* as sources for examination of the evidence. Today I will just give some food for thought.

Randall Collins, professor of sociology at the Ivy League school the University of Pennsylvania, is the undisputed leading researcher in the sociology of philosophical knowledge. He wrote a book entitled *The Sociology of Philosophies*. This is a book that is not for the faint of heart. It is, by all reports, an excellent treatment for insomnia. In the book Collins discusses how philosophical and cultural shifts occur. He says such movements are incremental. Societies don't make radical leaps from one belief to a wildly different one. It takes at least a generation to make such changes.

First century Jewish people had great reverence for God. They were so full of reverence that they would not even pronounce the Hebrew name for God. It was too holy for human lips to use it. It was viewed as a heinous sin to worship anything other than the one true, holy God, and one must never worship an idol or a human. In Luke 24:52 we read of Jesus' followers, "They worshiped him and

returned to Jerusalem with great joy.” They worshiped him. Jewish people worshiped him, in the weeks following his crucifixion.

History tells us this was not an isolated event. An entire group of Jewish people, thousands of them, were worshipping the man, Jesus, within weeks of his death. How could that have happened? There wasn’t time for some sort of sociological cultural shift. It was, in historical terms, instant change. Something happened to provoke such a radical shift. The Bible says Jesus rose from the dead. Had he not done so this could not have happened. The church would never have existed without the resurrection.

In his book, *Scaling The Secular City* (p. 161), J. P. Moreland wrote, “the resurrection was preached in Jerusalem just a few weeks after the crucifixion (of Jesus). If the tomb had not been empty, such preaching could not have occurred. The body of Jesus could have been produced... As Wolfhart Pannenberg has said, ‘Without having a reliable testimony for the emptiness of Jesus’ tomb, the early Christian community could not have survived in Jerusalem proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus.’” In other words without the resurrection there is no explanation for the way the church of Jesus Christ suddenly burst on the scene. So let’s assume for the moment that he did rise from the dead. What was the point?

JESUS’ WORK WAS TO GIVE PEOPLE LIFE

In John 10:10 Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Jesus said he came for one big reason. He came so that we might have life and have it in fully. He wants us to have the fullest possible life.

It is possible to live, but to have that life be merely an existence, a life filled with regret, fear, anxiety, disappointment, restlessness, frustration, emptiness, hopelessness and bitterness. That is not anyone’s idea of the fullest possible life. That was not Jesus’ idea of life for us.

Jesus’ life was about us having true, full life. It was the reason for his existence on earth. Jesus’ purpose wasn’t to rein in everyone’s fun, to make people feel guilty, to condemn people or to make a way for people to be religious. His purpose was to bring fullness of life to us. But what is fullness of life? Does it mean having more money than you could ever spend, having every pleasure your mind can conceive of, having enough power to control what happens around you? There have been people who have had none of those things yet have had rich, full lives. And there are people who have had all of those things and have been miserable and empty.

That means those things absolutely cannot be what brings fullness of life. I believe the following things are necessary components to a full life, and the resurrection is crucial for them.

Love and forgiveness

Our need for love is obvious. One only need think of the word “lonely” to see this. Does anyone feel life is full when they are lonely? Lonely is terrible, not full. Even if you are on top and all is going your way if there is no one to share it with life is not what it should be. No matter how wonderful something is, no matter how great a triumph may be, if a person has no one to share it with it will feel empty.

The one thing that most distorts and devastates the human heart is the absence of love. In his book, *Sociology: The Study of Society*, James B. McKee reported on a study done by Rene Spitz. It showed that infants who are deprived of love and affection are devastated by it. One third of those studied died within 2 years, all the rest suffered retarded mental development. Studies of adults reveal the same thing. Those who experience a lack of love are hospitalized for mental health issues at a rate anywhere from 5 to 10 times greater than the general population. The only thing that brings healing to wounded souls is love. Love is the greatest joy we experience, and in order for us to have a full life we must experience fullness of joy. We need both to receive and to give love in order for us to have full life.

We might think if we could win applause, if we could be noticed and viewed as beautiful, successful, smart, talented, then our lives would be full. But many people who have been acknowledged as the most beautiful, the smartest, the most talented attest to the fact that all of that leaves them with a big need in their hearts. Actress Penelope Cruz said in an article in *Parade* magazine, “Without someone to share life with you are nothing.” Julia Roberts said much the same. These women are famous, rich and beautiful, yet they know life is empty without love.

Curiously we can be loved by people and still feel like something is missing, something is wrong. That’s because we deeply, viscerally, at the core of who we are, need to be loved by God. And that’s where we encounter a problem. All of us go through life with a sense of guilt, for some only a vague sort of background thing, for others an acute painful thing. We feel guilty and unworthy of God’s love.

We feel guilty and unworthy before God because we are. We don’t even meet our own standards for ourselves, so how could we ever hope to measure up to the standards of a holy and righteous God? We can’t and don’t. We fail and we know it, so we carry around this sense of unworthiness and guilt.

The most freeing, peaceful words guilty people can imagine are “I forgive you.” I heard an interview with Steve Elliott, who ten years ago was part of an Army Ranger team deployed in Afghanistan. The team broke up into two groups on one particular mission. Through a series of errors Elliott’s team mistook the other part of the Ranger team for the enemy and began firing on them. One member of the team was killed in the friendly fire incident. It was Pat Tillman, former NFL football player. No one knows who actually shot Tillman. But Elliott has carried around a huge burden of guilt ever since. It nearly destroyed him. He tried to drown the guilt and became an alcoholic. Eventually it was only finding faith in Christ that saved him. But still to this day what he longs for is to have Tillman’s family forgive him.

What we need is for God to declare us forgiven. And that is why Jesus died on that cross. He took our guilt upon himself and paid for all of it. However, the resurrection was an essential part of that. Jesus was just one man. He could only pay for the guilt of one other man...unless he was more than a man. The resurrection demonstrated that he is the infinite Son of God, thus could take on himself all the guilt of all of us.

We are forgiven by God and loved by him. We are loved infinitely and unconditionally by God, a gift gained for us by Jesus when he died on the cross. Romans 8:38-39 says, “For I am convinced that... nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is what you and I long for, to be forgiven and accepted and loved by God. To be loved without limit, unconditionally. Without that life will never be full. But with it we are free to live without fear.

Meaning

We live in a world that tells us life has no meaning. We are the products of an absurdly long chain of fortuitous accidents, nothing more. The idea that there is a spiritual realm and there is a spiritual part of us is illusion. There is only matter. Since our existence is an accident it has no meaning, nor can it possibly ever have a meaning.

Recently while brushing my teeth I managed to spill toothpaste on my shirt. It made a spot. I took the shirt off, laid it on the bed and studied that spot. For a long time I pondered the meaning of that spot. What was the cosmic significance of it? Do you believe that? I hope you don’t. I’d have to be dumber than a rock to sit around pondering the meaning of a spot on my shirt. It was an accident and it had

no meaning whatsoever. Accidents are just accidents. They don't have some cosmic significance. And at the end of the day if we are just accidents then we have no significance either. It is utterly foolish to look for some meaning to our existence. There is none.

That's what our world tells us about ourselves. We are an accident, a badly mutated one celled creature with an overdeveloped sense of its importance. Unfortunately we seem to be wired for meaning. The idea that our lives are devoid of meaning is death to our souls. A recent Barna Research poll found that 90% of the millennial generation deeply are searching for some meaning in their lives. The other 10% will eventually find out they are too. Our hearts scream in protest against the idea that our lives are pointless. This becomes even more of a problem when we realize that real passion in life comes from our purpose. Who can do anything with eagerness and enthusiasm when there is no point in it whatsoever? None of us can.

Have you ever considered how many sports leagues there are? There are youth leagues, school leagues, intramural leagues, college leagues, adult recreation leagues and of course professional leagues. There are leagues in so many sports, baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, hockey, football, volleyball, water polo, lacrosse, and the list goes on. Why do people form leagues? Why not just go play whatever game it is? It is because somehow competing for a league championship makes it mean more. It is not enough to play the game. Somehow it becomes more fun and more passionate when it means something. That's how we're wired. Without meaning life is listless, pointless. Why even bother?

I noticed the guy driving the garbage truck as he came by and picked up our trash. I suppose a young kid might think that's a cool job because you get to drive that truck and operate those arms that pick up the trash barrels and dump their contents into the truck. But I wouldn't like that job. All day long every day just dumping trash into that truck. What's the point? Sure, it keeps the city clean, but what a deadly routine. How is what that guy going to have any meaning in his life?

How is what anybody does any different? Oh you can make up some big meaning for your life. I'm amassing an empire to prove I'm important. Who cares if you're important? Well I'm helping mankind, or I'm saving the planet? What does that matter? If we're accidents in the universe and mankind ceases to exist or our planet dies, so what? The universe will just continue on without noticing. None of it means anything!

In recognition that this is intolerable to the human soul the typical response of moderns is that we must make up our own meaning. In the face of our meaninglessness we must bravely create some sense of meaning out of the emptiness of our lives. But I have a problem with that. My problem is that if I have to make up a meaning, somewhere down inside my soul I know very well that it is just something I made up. In other words, it is a pretend meaning. This is going to eventually sap the life out of me. All a pretend meaning can produce is pretend passion.

Jesus' resurrection proves that God exists. The Creator, the one who designed and made you, is real. It shows that he cares so much about you that he sent his Son into this world to rescue you and give you hope for eternity. His resurrection from the dead means that God has a point to your existence. It means something. When we make something it is for a reason. That God is real and made us, proven by Christ's resurrection, tells us that God means something. He produced us for a reason. There is meaning to our lives.

1 Peter 2:9 says we are a holy people, set apart to declare his praises. That's what holy means, set apart. Designed for a set purpose. We have real meaning in our lives. Jesus said your purpose is to love God and to love people, that's how we declare God's praise. He said that purpose will resonate eternally. It has true cosmic significance. And that infuses meaning into every moment of our lives. I can love God by trying to honor him in everything I do. I can love people at every moment of my life. No one can stop me. Even the most mundane thing I do has meaning. I can drive my car with the goal of honoring God and loving other people. I can take out the trash as a way of expressing love to my wife. I can speak to people at church with words of affirmation and encouragement. Everything we do has meaning, the resurrection of Jesus was the thing that established it.

Hope

Everyone needs hope. Management professor James Avery led a team that studied 100 engineers at a Fortune 100 high tech firm. Working with the HR department they interviewed the employees and classified them into high hope and low hope categories. They tracked them over the course of a year. They learned that the high hope people missed an average of 20 hours due to sick leave during the year, or less than 3 work days. The low hope employees averaged more than 10 days during the year. They cost the firm nearly 4 times as much as high hope colleagues in lost productivity. No other measure, including satisfaction, commitment to the company, confidence in the job, counted as much in determining their consistency in showing up.

I was watching a Padre game recently. They were losing 2-1. It was still a close game. They are offensively offensive, as in they can't hit at all. Along about the 5th inning the opposing team got runners on 2nd and 3rd with 2 men out. I knew it was imperative that those runners not score because the Padres were not going to score 5 runs to win the game. The pitcher made a dumb mistake and boom, base hit, both runs scored. It was 4-1. I turned it off. There was no hope the Padres were going to win. I wasn't going to watch it play out to its inevitable conclusion. When you have no hope you quit.

Hope is huge for us because we all face the daunting reality of death. Researchers have created two psychological measures, the Death Anxiety Scale and the Hoelter Multidimensional Fear of Death Scale to chart fear of death. Here's the thing: no one, no matter what they say, is off the chart. Some are more anxious than others about it, but we all fear it, whether we admit it to ourselves or not.

People want hope in the face of death. The movie *Transcendence* is out this week. The makers say experts in the field say the technology to download a person's consciousness into computers is 25 to 30 years away. People hope for such things. The movie *Heaven Is For Real* is out right now also reminding us that people want desperately to know that heaven is, in fact, for real. Perhaps you saw the news that trials on some life extension drugs are about to begin. They target an enzyme called SIRT1. In *Forrest Gump* as he remembered the death of his love Jenny Forrest said, "Mama always said death is a part of life. I sure wish it wasn't."

The implications of Jesus' resurrection for hope are obvious. Jesus proved that there is life after death, real life. He proved that by putting our faith in him we can know that as he conquered death and lives today so we can conquer death and live eternally. 1 Thessalonians 4: 14 says, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." The man who wrote that believed Jesus rose because he saw him.

In Acts 5:31 Peter is quoted as saying of Jesus, "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior." The Greek word translated "prince" there is an interesting one. It is *archegos*. It can mean prince, originator, leader, one who goes before. There was an interesting specific use of it that I love. Crews of boats in that day would have one man who was the strongest swimmer. At times a boat might be unable to come on shore because of heavy surf. It would anchor just outside the breakers. The *archegos* would take a rope and dive into the water. He would swim ashore and tie the rope to a stable object. He didn't do that just so he could reach

the shore safely himself. He did it to prove that others could get ashore and to make it possible. They could hang onto the rope to get ashore. He made a way for them. So in a way the archegos was like a rescue swimmer today. He has gone through the heavy surf to show we can get safely to the other side, but more than that, to make it possible for us to go there.

That is our hope. Two days ago we went to the funeral of my Uncle Merle, by far my favorite uncle. He was a wonderful man, a wounded veteran of World War II, a man who impacted so many lives. The funeral was so sad...but not hopeless. Death is awful, but it is not final. We have not seen the last of Uncle Merle, or my father, or my son Joel. They are with Jesus in his kingdom. And some day we will see them again. This is not wishful thinking. It is the result of Jesus defeating death in the real world, on this planet. We have hope, and that changes everything.

CONCLUSION

RECEIVE JESUS

If you do not know that you have eternal life, you can know. Jesus has conquered death on your behalf. Put your faith in him. Invite him to come into your heart as your Lord and Savior. Let him rule and experience the life he has for you.

REJOICE

If you believe in Jesus never lose sight of this incredible gift you have been given. Nothing could ever compare with the gift of eternal life. So whatever may happen, keep rejoicing in this most precious of gifts.

LIVE OUT THE PURPOSE

You have a reason to live. God created you and has you on the planet for a reason. If you live today, it is because God wants you here. He wants you to do something eternally significant. Live to honor him and live to love others. So today, and every day, fill your heart and your life with that purpose.

Laurie wanted to plant flowers for Easter. We bought some and when we got them home she went out and started digging in the dirt to plant them. This was my day off. I didn't really want to spend the day putting flowers in dirt. I don't really enjoy it and when I get too close to living plants I get all kind of interesting allergy issues. But I realized it was important to Laurie and she could use some help. This was a way I could express love to her, as God has commanded me to do. So there I was, digging through the dirt and the worms, and as I did so I thought about how what I was doing was actually honoring God. This seemingly insignificant act had eternal importance. It meant something!

Nothing can stop us from pursuing that meaning every single day. Even the most menial tasks become full of meaning. So I could be a trash collector and what I do would be immeasurably significant. So as you go through your days thank God for the meaning of your life.