

Luke 23:50-56 (NIV) Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, {51} who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. {52} Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. {53} Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. {54} It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. {55} The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. {56} Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

24:1-8 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. {2} They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, {3} but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. {4} While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. {5} In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? {6} He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: {7} 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" {8} Then they remembered his words.

42-23-04-Trading Preservation for Immortality
Easter, survival, death, decay, materialism, eternal life, resurrection
Luke 23:50-24:8
Instead of just lasting a little longer, God wants us to last forever.

INTRODUCTION: (text as Scripture reading)

–“*Christ is risen!*” Yes, *He’s risen indeed*, and His destiny is now ours!
–*All living things* have a built-in will to survive. This *survival instinct* reflects the will of God as the Creator and Preserver of life. But God’s ultimate plan for a creation subject to *deterioration, decay* and *death* isn’t preservation but resurrection. To accomplish that, the Son of God entered this dying creation by *incarnation* and left it by *resurrection*.
–In the face of mortality, the *survival instinct* seeks preservation. The human reaction is to seek *to last a little longer*. But, **HOM.idea**.

I. How Do We Handle the Problem of Our Mortality?

A. *Every culture* always has some form of response:

1. In our text, the social custom demonstrated a desire to preserve:
 - a. Joseph of Arimathea, in v.52-53, *asked* [Pilate] *for Jesus body.... took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.* (Joined by Nicodemus in John 19:40. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.)
 - b. In v.55-56, *The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes.*
2. In today’s context, we also have social customs for preserving:
 - a. embalming the body (slows down the *decay process*)
 - b. the use of a coffin (keeps it from mixing back into the *soil*)
 - c. cremation urns (speeds up disintegration but preserves a token)

B. Our plan is to preserve, but God has a better one: to resurrect. (On Easter morning, the women *found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.*)

TRANS: It’s good to preserve. Food goes bad, if we don’t. We call the fruit we process to keep from spoiling “preserves.” We brush teeth to prevent *tooth decay*. We treat wood to prevent *rotting*. We paint cars to stop *rusting*. In this world of decay, we focus on preservation. It’s our

habit, a built-in reflex that expresses a longing for a world where death and decay are no longer the destiny of human flesh. We are dreaming of **resurrection! We want to last forever, not just a little longer.**

II. Why Is Faith in the Resurrection Not Popular Today?

A. Many people put their trust in a doctrine of materialism.

1. It says: “All that exists in the universe is matter and energy, and the energy is decaying.”] They teach this, but *nobody lives that way!* Why?
2. Materialism reduces *personality, emotions and virtues* (honesty, compassion, justice) to mere *chemical and electrical activity*.
3. Materialists believe there’s no hope or stopping or reversing the decay process. They call us *foolish to believe in resurrection!*

B. Even some ministers doubt Christ’s Resurrection, because they think the NT account is unreliable. (But when their sermons cast suspicion on the empty tomb, they are preaching against a strong current of hope flowing from a survival instinct in people’s hearts.)

C. Others do believe in Christ’s Resurrection but ignore its impact on human destiny. (Many are in this group, and so was I!) In contrast to materialism, they say, “*The material world isn’t important. Just the spiritual life counts.*” [One of my favorite songs used to be, “*This world is not my home, I’m just a-passin’ through.*”] But “***This is my father’s world...***” is a better song, because...

1. **we are servant-leaders of a creation** that also longs to be free from *death and decay*— Rom 8:19-23. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Creation awaits our resurrection, because our renewed fleshly bodies share a destiny with creation!)
2. **God’s voice speaks in nature’s voice.** (Nature’s *survival instinct* or *preservation reflex* maintains a biological balance. By human carelessness and neglect, we can break God’s rules of ecology, speeding up decay and increasing creation’s *groaning*. (We can increase the *groaning* of *our own bodies*, by not heeding nature’s prescriptions for living healthy lifestyles.)

TRANS: Again, preservation is a good thing! Trying to keep the *body* and the *natural environment* healthy and strong are worthwhile goals. But that’s where some people stop. They fail to hear an intrinsic hope echoing from our *survival instinct*. **Easter** is a reminder of that *hope*. **Instead of just lasting a little longer, God wants us to last forever.**

III. How Can We Trade Preservation for Immortality?

- A. Martha lost her brother Lazarus through sickness. Jesus arrived too late to heal him— John 11:21-27, “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” (Martha believed in Jesus’ power to heal, to make ***life last a little longer***. But Jesus wanted to expand her faith, so that she could discover in Him the *resurrection* and *eternal life* that she was really waiting for.)
- B. The women went to the tomb with preservation on their mind. They left it with the testimony of resurrection on their lips. The angels said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” **Then they remembered his words.**

CONCLUSION:

—It’s Easter: a day to *remember His words*. This is a day, in our long year of efforts at preservation, to focus *our thinking* and *our faith* on the fact that **instead of just lasting a little longer, God wants us to last forever**. Christ’s Resurrection alone makes this possible.

—“*Christ is risen!*” Yes, *He’s risen indeed*, and His destiny is now ours!