

42-23-04.wpd -- 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)

--The Author of creation is also the Preserver of creation. When death and decay entered the world through sin, something in creation did not die: the survival instinct. In all of life there is a strong will to survive, and it reflects the will of the Creator and Preserver of life. But God's ultimate plan for a deteriorating, decaying, and dying creation was not preservation. It was resurrection. To make resurrection possibly, He Himself entered into the plight of creation in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

--Humans manifest that *survival instinct* in many ways. Our plan is preservation. Our human reaction to mortality is the desire to last a little longer. **HOM.idea.**

I. How Do We Handle the Problem of Mortality?

A. The *cultural* response:

1. In our text, the social custom showed the desire to preserve:
 - a. Joseph of Arimathea (with Nicodemus), v.52-53, Going to Pilate, he asked 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. (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. The women, 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 our context, we have social customs about preservation:
 - a. *embalming* the body (to slow down decay and disintegration)
 - b. the use of *a coffin* (to keep it from going back into the soil)
 - c. cremation urns (speeding up decay, but keeping a token)

B. God has a better plan: we want to preserve, He wants to resurrect.

1. 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: Preservation. We have to do it! Food goes bad, if we don't. We even use the name "*preserves*" for fruit we process to keep from

spoiling. We clean our teeth to prevent *tooth decay*. We treat wood to prevent *rotting*. We paint our cars to stop rusting. In this world, the way it is now, we are focused on preservation. It's a habit, a built-in reflex, and it comes, not from a deteriorating world, but from a longing for a world where death, decay and disintegration are no longer the destiny of human flesh. We dream of **resurrection! We want to last forever, not just a little longer.**

II. Why Is Faith in the Resurrection a Challenge Today?

A. Many people have placed faith in the doctrine of *materialism*

1. **Materialism** says: "*All that exists in the universe is physical matter. All that exists can be explained in terms of matter and the energy generated by it.*" Sounds professional! intelligent! BUT no one lives that way!
2. **WHY?** Because **materialism** reduces our personalities, our emotions, and human virtues (compassion, honesty, justice) to so much chemical and electrical activity.
3. **Scientific materialism** tries to teach us how to slow down the decay process, but it can't give us resurrection!

B. **Some religious teachers** have created *a climate of doubt* around the Resurrection. [It must be hard for them to give Easter sermons. They've already taught or written books that deny the central doctrines of the Christian faith, including the Resurrection. So, on Easter, they must preach against the strong current of hope flowing from the survival instinct in the human heart.]

C. **Another group believes** in the Resurrection, but downplays its implications for human destiny (Many have been in this group, including me.) It's the extreme *opposite of materialism*, and says, "*This world doesn't matter. A better one's coming.*" [my favorite song has been: "*This world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through.*" -- I need to change it to "This Is My Father's World"] **Why should I change it?**

1. Because this thinking downplays the significance of **creation** (We aren't alone in our frustration with 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. (What's it

talking about? **Resurrection!** All creation waits for it, along with our own physical bodies, which share a destiny with creation!)

2. This thinking overlooks God's voice in the "*voice of nature.*" (Nature has a *preservation reflex*, a *survival instinct*, to help it maintain a living balance. Breaking rules of ecology increases "creation's growing," often heard loudest from sick bodies whose owners fail to heed nature's prescriptions for healthy living.)

TRANS: Preservation is not wrong. Attempts to keep the body and the natural environment healthy and strong are good and worthwhile. But that's where some people stop. They fail to see an intrinsic hope built into the built-in preservation reflex. 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 Christ's power to heal, to make life last a little longer. Jesus wanted to expand her faith to believe that He was the way to the resurrection she was 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 morning: a reminder to "remember His words, a day in our long year of efforts at preservation, to take time 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 makes it possible.

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.