

Lake Cities Community Church  
Easter Sunday 4-4-10  
Pastor Craig Schill

## Immortality? Really?

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The relationship between the mortal and immortal fascinates us. In J.R.R. Tolkiens' Epic, "The Lord of the Rings" the beautiful, immortal elf - Arwen falls in love with Aragorn - a human and mortal. But it is a thwarted love - immortality and mortality cannot be together. There are too many obstacles. So the question becomes whether the elf will sacrifice her immortality to be with her mortal love. She says: "I would rather share one lifetime with you than face all the ages of this world alone. I choose a mortal life." Aragorn objects, "You cannot give me this." Arwen responds, "It is mine to give to whom I will. Like my heart." ...It brings a tear to the eye. Such sacrifice! Such love!

A similar dilemma occurs in the popular Twilight vampire series; but this time the vampire Edward is immortal and he loves Bella, a human - and they likewise cannot be together. The question this time is whether Bella will give up her *mortality* and go through the painful process to become a vampire. It is a great sacrifice and Edward, like Aragorn, objects but finally gives in. He says: "I have just one condition if you want me to change you," "What is it?" asks Bella. "[dramatic pause] . He says, "Marry me Bella."

We love these love stories!! We have spent millions of dollars on the books and movies. Sacrificial love. Eternal Life. Immortality. Vampire and Elves. We lose ourselves in these fantasy stories and enjoy them...and then come back to reality...

Because back in the real world... vampire are not immortal. In fact, vampires are not even real (sorry to break the news). Elves with pointy ears do not exist. **We do not live forever.** When 120-year-old Jeanne Calmet was asked what type of future a woman of her age should expect. She responded wisely, "A very short one." (she died at age 122). Groucho Marx did not like having birthday celebrations. When asked why, he observed, "If you keep having birthdays, you eventually die." Squidward, that sage of wisdom, when he first trained Sponge Bob as a fry cook at the Krusty Krab, spoke truly: "Sponge Bob - this is how it works. The customer orders, you make the Krabby Patties, I serve them - we do that for 40 years and then we die." In the real world there is no fountain of youth. Life is life and death is death.

...or is it? Is that really all there is? Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die? I wonder if there is anyone here this morning who still dreams of immortality? Is there someone who still believes in the promise of eternal life? Does anyone dare to hope that in this world, the real world, somehow death might be cheated and life might be full? Does anyone dare to believe that there might somewhere be an immortal God who would set aside his glory and take on mortal flesh - and for the sake of love - face death? Or all the best love stories fiction?

You see, if Jesus was God, and He came to earth, and lived a perfect life, and died on the cross for your sins and was buried, and then *if he rose from the dead*, casting aside death like dirty laundry; then we are forced to reconsider everything we ever believed about life and death. And that is what Easter is all about. This morning we will study the great movement of – the current of Easter – moving from death to life. And in the process we will find death and life radically redefined.

## 1) Death in the Bible – Before the Resurrection

To begin, I would like to make two observations about death. First is this: death entered into the world because of sin. God is life, and to rebel against God - and separate from him – is to leave life and (by definition) to enter death. **Romans 5:12: Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.** Sin promises life and fun and good times – but it really and truly leads only to suffering and death.

The second observation about death I would like to draw from the following surprising Scriptures. See if you can guess the point I am leading toward. You might remember a guy named Enoch in the book of Genesis. We read: **Gen. 5:24 Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.** Genesis five repeats over and over: so-and-so lived and died, lived and died – then – by contrast - Enoch walked with God – and did not die; but was taken by God directly to heaven. Interesting. What happened to death?

Then there was the prophet Elijah who was walking with his disciple Elisha and **2Kings 2:11 ... there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.** Enoch and Elijah did not die. They had no funerals – taken directly to heaven.

Previously, one day Elijah was visiting a widow when the widow's son died. She plead to the prophet to help her. He prayed a bold prayer: **1 Kings 17:21b Elijah called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray You; let this child's life return to him."** **1Kings 17:22 The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived.** The boy, who was dead, was given back to his mother, very much alive.

In the New Testament there was a little 12-year old girl who was very sick and she

died. Jesus goes to her, takes her hand and says [Mark 5:41](#) “Talitha kum!” (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). [Mark 5:42](#) Immediately the girl got up and *began to walk*, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded.

My final example is about Jesus’ friend Lazarus. If you have your Bibles turn with me to John chapter 11. After a period of sickness Lazarus dies, and when Jesus arrives, Lazarus’ sister is not happy, verse 21: [John 11:21](#) Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. [John 11:22](#) “Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” [John 11:23](#) Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” [John 11:24](#) Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Martha assumes that Jesus is referring – (like I do at funerals) - to the end of time, when the dead will be raised.

But that is not what Jesus had in mind. He presses the point, verse 25: [John 11:25](#) Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, [John 11:26](#) and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” When you are in the presence of a grieving family, it is usually best to just be quiet – it is not the time for platitude. They stressed that in my seminary classes. Jesus missed that class. He says: “Hey if you believe in me – you will never die. Do you believe that Martha?” And I imagine Martha was conflicted, both wanting to believe Jesus, whom she knew was from God; yet also wanting to shout, “Hello!! My brother is dead! Why do you rub salt in the wounds?”

But Jesus is doing all of this for a reason. He asks to be taken to the tomb. He grieves there and weeps for his friend, and then says with a loud voice: [John 11:43](#)... “Lazarus,

come forth.” [John 11:44](#) The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

**Summary / Second Observation:** Death comes from sin – that was our first observation about death. The second observation, illustrated by these stories is critical for us to understand, it is a simple but profound theological truth - and it is this: **God is more powerful than death.** God is more powerful than death. Death may be a problem for you, but not for Him! Do you believe that? Death does not constrain God – it is not an obstacle for God. Death does not frighten God. God circumvents death with a wave of his hand. God overcomes death with a simple word. God reverses death with a short prayer. God is more powerful than death.

In Christopher Paolini’s fantasy book *Brisinger*, he toys with the idea of conquering death. In a conversation between the main character Eragon and his cousin Roran, Roran asks, “Can you make someone immortal with magic?” Eragon answers “No. Oh the elves have tried a thousand and one different ways to foil death, but non have proved successful.” Beloved, God has never been foiled by death. He is more powerful than death. And if God’s life is more powerful than sin’s death – that means you and I have hope.

## **LIFE in Christ**

Death comes from sin, but God is more powerful than death. *Let us now move from the topic of death to the topic of life.* I am going to read some verses from Romans chapter

six that speak to the doctrine of Jesus' death and resurrection. And as I read them, listen to the defeat of death and sin, and the introduction of life through Jesus.

Rom. 6:6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; Rom. 6:7 for he who has died is freed from sin. (in other words, our relationship with sin and death has changed. We are freed from having to sin – we have new options on the table) Rom. 6:8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (movement from death to life. Why? Because of the resurrection) Rom. 6:9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. Rom. 6:10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Paul says I want you and I to know a couple things. One – you don't have to sin anymore. You are set free from death-inducing sin. And because of the resurrection – you can live in a relationship with God - which leads to joy in this life and in the next life. Jesus said that he came so that we would have the chance at an abundant life. Victory, life and fulfillment in Christ.

D.L. Moody was a chaplain during the Civil War. He tells the story of a soldier who was just able to crawl to his tent after being shot, and who after a short time died. His fellow soldiers found him lying on his face, his open Bible before him, his hand on his Bible. But the blood of his wounds had dried, and the page of the Bible was literally stuck to his palm. So when they removed his hand from the page the page tore with a page of Scripture being pasted by his own blood to his palm. They went ahead and buried him like that. The Scripture just happened to contain the words of Jesus to Lazarus' sister Martha, John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth Me, though he were dead, yet shall he

live." Easter moves us from death to life. While you are living – you no longer have to sin – you move from death to life. Even when you die – you don't really die – you move immediately from death to life with Christ, forever.

## **Faith**

The movement of Easter is from death to life. Death comes from sin but God is more powerful than death. *The death of Jesus took care of sin and offers life for those who would believe.*

**And that leads to our last point** – faith which is this: “Do you believe any of this?” Does this make sense to you? Or would you put the story of Jesus in the to same genre as Twilight and Lord of the Rings – creative fiction and nothing more.

Turn with me to John chapter 20, where we have the story of doubting Thomas. The rest of the disciples had seen, by this time, with their own eyes the resurrected Jesus, but Thomas somehow missed the event. They try to convince him that Jesus is now very much alive. Pick up the story in verse 25:

John 20:25 So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” John 20:26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace *be* with you.” John 20:27 Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” John 20:28 Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” John 20:29 Jesus said to him, “Because

you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.”  
John 20:31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

Let me give you two observations about the connection of faith and the resurrection from this passage. First, **it is difficult**. Faith is a difficult thing. Thomas had a hard time believing it was true. We need to admit that believing a person was dead and is now alive, is a little bit out there for most people. Thomas, like most of us, was skeptical by nature. He wasn't ready to jump in with both feet.

Alicia Giovanna was married to a wealthy oil merchant for many years, and he recently passed away. Alicia found herself wanting to distribute much of her husband's wealth to charitable causes. But she did not know how to do it. Somehow, providentially, she heard that I, Pastor Craig, was the type of person who could help her with this – she got my e-mail address and told me that she is going to transfer 3.2 million dollars into my checking account... all I need to do is to send her my bank account information. Isn't that amazing? No! I would be a fool to believe that! Acting on a false promise would lead to loss and disappointment.

Maybe that is how you view Christianity in general and the resurrection in particular. I want you to know I understand that. I will not tell you that belief in Jesus is an easy thing. It is not. The question is not it is easy, but is it true? On the back of your handout are some arguments for believing in the resurrection - which I would invite you to consider. Faith in resurrection from the dead; faith in a resurrected Jesus we cannot see – can be very difficult to believe for some.

In fact, the second observation about faith and the resurrection is that in order to believe: **God must reveal himself to you.** How does Thomas move from unbelief to belief? It is not through his enthusiastic friends with their gospel tracts and apologetics training – (though there is nothing wrong with that – we need to share the good news with others). *But it is Jesus revealing himself to Thomas* that moves him from unbelief to belief. And it still works that way. No one comes to Jesus except the Father draws him.

How do you know if you are being drawn by God? Probably you can't get God off your mind. Your spirit becomes more sensitive to the things of God. You begin to see that sin *does* lead to suffering and you are getting so tired of that cycle of destruction. You begin to see that life and fulfillment and happiness are possible – but only through a relationship with God through his son Jesus Christ. God who created life, gives the opportunity of fulfilling life through obedience to Him. So, if God is drawing you – then confess like Thomas did – “My savior and my God.” And let me just encourage you not to wait until you have all the answers. Remember what Jesus said to Thomas? “You believed because you saw me. Great! But blessed are those who believe and have not seen me.” That is you and I.

**Summary:** Death comes from sin – but God is more powerful than death. Through his death he took care of sin, and through his resurrection he offers life to any who will have faith in Him. Faith in the resurrection is difficult – we understand that. I can't show you the hands and side of Christ. But if you let him - God promises to reveal himself to you – he will affirm that the resurrection was not a hoax. And when He does – respond to him by faith – not all your questions will be answered, but enough to confess Jesus is my Lord and my God!

## **Conclusion**

The Lord of the Rings and Twilight are successful love stories, because they tap into a deep human desire to be loved sacrificially and for the mortal to touch the immortal. And this is ultimately the story of Easter. Where God the son set aside His immortality to take on human form and to die for the sake of his bride, the church. And then he offers to his beautiful but frail bride the gift of immortality – the gift of eternal life. That love has inspired the world for 2,000 years.

I would like to close with another story of D.L. Moody. Before he died wrote his own press release. I know that sounds weird. But he had a message he felt was vital to communicate to a world consumed with death and sin. This is what was published the day after his death.

“Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all; gone out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal, a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body like unto his own glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.”