**Saving Your Life (Easter, 2020)**

**Intro –** Easter is one of the two greatest days in Christianity. It celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His departure out of the world soon after. The other is Christmas, which celebrates the coming of Jesus into the world. This Easter is a significant one, as the whole world is suffering under the widespread coronavirus pandemic. The weeks of isolation and the disruption of our normal life routines have given us time to examine our own lives, the life of our church, as well as the life of the entire church on the earth. What are we here for? Are we fulfilling God’s destiny? These are good questions to ask ourselves, because God is probably asking these of all Christians and all churches across the planet right now. He has good news for us, as always: He is in absolute control of the pandemic. It will pass. This morning we’ll examine a topic very important, personally, to all of us with the pandemic as a backdrop: the saving of our own lives. We wholeheartedly follow our president’s and governor’s call to separate ourselves during this time. Some of the recommendations in this teaching will obviously have to wait until it is safe to meet again.

**Matthew 28:1-20** – *Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. 2 Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. 3 His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. 5 Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. 7 And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you." 8 The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. 9 And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there." 11 As the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and told the leading priests what had happened. 12 A meeting with the elders was called, and they decided to give the soldiers a large bribe. 13 They told the soldiers, "You must say, 'Jesus' disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole his body.' 14 If the governor hears about it, we'll stand up for you so you won't get in trouble." 15 So the guards accepted the bribe and said what they were told to say. Their story spread widely among the Jews, and they still tell it today. 16 Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! 18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* NLT

After His grisly execution on Friday by Roman soldiers, Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning. This is a feat no other person has ever done. After the fall of Adam, mankind began to experience aging and death. No other person ever, in any age, died and then came back to life by His own power. It was a great victory, a real motivator, to know that one of us humans (Jesus) did it. The Bible predicts that we will all do the same. (**1 Corinthians 15:20**) This is a marvelous promise! Great as it is, however, we all start life with an innate fear of dying. Fear was the first reaction Adam and Eve had after they had sinned in the Garden of Eden. Jesus’ rising from the dead has the immediate benefit to us of removing the fear of death. The coronavirus has brought all of us a little closer to that potential reality. People have actually died from it. “Will I be next?” many people quietly ask themselves. (C’mon, be truthful! 😊)

**Heb 2:14-15** - Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. 15 Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. NLT

Our real purpose for being here is found Matthew 28:19-20. We usually talk about it as a separate part of this chapter, but it is primarily connected to His rising from the dead. It was so important that it was the very first thing Jesus told His disciples when they saw Him after His resurrection. Consider the purposes that Jesus could have mentioned, but didn’t: *“Go and have a great life.” “Enjoy all things richly.” “Name and claim all of God’s promises” “Don’t worry, be happy” “Make yourselves financially secure” “Get a great education” “Keep the 10 commandments” “Be as perfect as you can; don’t do anything I wouldn’t do” “Read and memorize the Bible, it’s the most important thing” “Love your wife and family” “Let go and let God.” “Be fruitful and multiply; spend time with your kids.”* *“Build an estate and leave something for your kids.”* You can add many more good-sounding proverbial statements which all sound appropriate. **Our purpose, as individual Christians and as a church, is to “make disciples.”** This is the purpose of the believer’s life. Search no further for another purpose for your life. This is it!!

The common perception out there in the modern Christian world is that, now that the resurrection has happened, the Christian’s main purpose is to be blessed by Jesus. He is, after defeating death, hell, satan, sin, and the grave, like a steroid for my natural life. Maybe I have some problems, but He has come to *take away my life’s inflammations* and to *enlarge and amplify* *the plans that I have for my life*. My highest purpose is to let Him bless me. He will, if I have enough faith, cause me to have no problems, never be inconvenienced, silence my enemies, cause me to be healthy always, make me rich (so I can give to the poor, of course) let me live to a ripe old age, die comfortably in my sleep, and have a great funeral. He requires nothing of me at all! Grace makes it all free! No wonder Easter is such a holiday to rejoice over! The most wonderful thing of all is that my life will be basically MY PLAN which will simply be polished up and made to work by Jesus! MY interests, MY investments, MY money, MY relationships, MY wisdom, MY use of my body, MY hobbies, MY priorities!! Isn’t something wrong with this picture?

**John 12:23-26 -** 23 Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. 25 Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. 26 Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honor anyone who serves me. NLT

**Jesus’ instruction for the saving of your life is that you “lose” it, or “care nothing” for it as the NLT says.**  He was our best example of caring nothing for his life. This didn’t mean that He was a sluggard, or careless about His earthly life. Jesus would have been a model son and a model Jew. He certainly kept His word, dealt honestly, shared what He did have, honored His mother and father, and obeyed the Law. In his growing up years, He would have attended school, listened to the rabbis, worked hard at the family carpentry business, etc. Notably absent from His life were the long-term passions we Westerners live for: security, investment growth, health protection, an estate, wealth, some kind of reputation for being shrewd and successful. Maybe your goals are lower: pay basic rent and utilities, have cable TV, have a few cheap electronics, maybe a car; bail your kids out of their legal problems, get some kind of job, pay a co-pay for your medicine, have a little money for cheap celebrations of the holidays (a ham, a couple presents, a turkey). Both the person who has some money and the person who has little money can be in love with their life and serve it. You can spot it very easily. *They are not involved with Jesus’ people*. Something else is the center of their life. It may even be their family! Jesus said it was possible for us to love our earthly families more than Him. Loving our families is recommended! Having no interest at all in Jesus’ work is not. Jesus is only a far-away good luck charm to them, someone who they call upon to help find the right employer, or get a new car.

**The person who cares nothing for His life has a very different outlook.** He sees the Body of Christ as his main social group. Busy or not so busy, young or old, he is a connected part of a team which invites a newcomer over for a meal at someone’s home. The newcomer is coming to a casual meal, not a dress-up religious ceremony. The small group member is in contact with the people in his small group through the week as they share prayer needs with each other. He calls the newcomer to see how he’s doing, maybe dropping off some fresh produce, or finding out when the newcomer’s son plays his next basketball game at school. He meets with his small group on their appointed night. Sometimes he can’t make it. Sometimes the connections are telephonic rather than in-person. When he can get there, he takes his turn at facilitating the group or leading a discussion. The whole group is involved in welcoming the newcomer, effortlessly watching a disciple being made while enjoying a cut-up hoagie together. Somehow, things in the small group member’s life just work out. He has a stable place to live, a stable income, and his family’s needs are met. Occasional shortfalls of cash (unexpected car repair, replace a refrigerator, etc.) are shared easily by the group. The small group circle grows as the newcomer brings others. They begin to experience the love of God. This is how disciples are made! It is a team effort. You were not meant to make disciples by yourself. **This is what the Lord wants the church to do!!**

**Phil 4:10-14** - *10 How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. 11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. 13 For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.* NLT

The person who cares nothing for his life always has enough. It is not because he is always rich with goods; it is because he is no longer a slave to his appetite. By definition, he is always satisfied. The Lord (the Lord’s people, really) insure that everyone in the group has a survivable provision. Paul was in jail as he wrote these verses. Even there, the effect of the Body of believers was sustaining him. This person finds out that his life is rich and full, and that he has all he could want. *In this way, he effectively saves his life.* The person who chases after his own dreams will never realize them. Even if he gets close, they evaporate, because they are never good enough. He cannot enjoy them, even though he has them in his grasp. *In this way, he effectively loses his life.* Jesus spoke this principle in the gospels six times!

 **Concl.** The pandemic will end at God’s appointed time. All the plagues in history ended. Scientists are corroborating each day now what the simple studies God showed to our church said a month ago: the virus is temperature sensitive and humidity sensitive. Keep your nasal passages warm and humidified and you’ll do well. Right now, in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, God is asking the church and Christians to attend to his interests, to get back to church as he intended. He has frequently reached humans in this way to cause repentance. Some Christians feel that God Himself permanently changed under the New Covenant and that He now only does acts of love. They will not be able to realize that God is trying to reach His church *right now* as well as the 4.8 billion people on the earth who reject and hate Him. The question of why God, who is good, would allow or even be involved in something evil, like coronavirus, is called *theodicy* (thee-OD-is-see). Abundant evidence is found in the Old Testament accounts of His dealings with Israel, His chosen people, in which He punished them through plagues for their disobedience (**Numbers 11:33, 14:37, 16:46, 25:18, 31:16, etc.**). In the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead after withholding offerings and lying (**Acts 5:5,10**). Herod was stricken with worms and died after accepting praise as a god from delegates of the people of Tyre and Sidon (**Acts 12:23**). We cannot reduce God to our childish sense of right and wrong. It would be like a 3 year old telling a loving parent that he was wrong for disciplining him. God is not evil; He is holy. In this coronavirus pandemic, His holiness is vindicated. It is not a culprit. We must realize that God is actively talking to the church. We should repent and stop worshipping our worship, or worshipping the prosperous Christian life, and do our job of making disciples. We should have a distinct sense that His work is our top priority and that certain dreams we have had have been nailed to the cross. This is a healthy, holy, voluntary loss. Jesus never had any affluence. If we have a completely trouble-free, pleasant, no-pressure, pleasure-filled Christian life we need to be asking ourselves “If our boss, Jesus, got crucified, what are we doing wrong?”