

***I am alive
for ever and ever!***

***His Presence, Pardon,
Promise and Power.***

***Acts 10:34-43
& Luke 24:1-8***

What did Stephen declare at the beginning of this service? ***Christ is risen!*** And what did we reply? ***He is risen indeed!*** What were the words of the angels to the women who came to the tomb? *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!* (Luke 24:5,6) Or rather, *He has been raised!* Peter said it in his speech, ***God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen..*** (Acts 10:40)

This is tremendous! Easter day was like no other since the world began! No-one else has ever been raised from the dead, to die no more! Paul expresses it like this in his letter to the church of Corinth: (1 Cor 15:3-5) ***Christ died for our sins..***The word he uses means it happened once, in the past. *He was buried..* Paul uses the same tense. It happened once, in the past. *He appeared to Peter..* Again the same tense. But when Paul wrote, *He was raised on the third day..* he used a different tense, which means that it not only happened in the past.. *it continues to be true!* As Jesus himself said to John in his vision, ***I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!*** (Rev 1:18)

1. We have the living PRESENCE of Jesus with us always.

What does this mean for us, right now? Think of someone who has died. Julius Caesar perhaps, or even a good person, like Paul, or Mary.. They may not be forgotten – but we cannot talk to them, or ask for their help.. ***God tells us not even to try!*** (Deut 18:11,12; Isa 8:19) To this world they are *dead* – but *Jesus is alive!* We have his **PRESENCE** here, by his Spirit – he is Immanuel, God with us!

But you may say to me, ***I can't see him!*** No, but *he* sees *us*, and he is always ready to help those who come in trust to him. Do you remember that Thomas had said, *Unless I see.. unless I put my finger where the nails were.. I will not believe!* (John 20:15) So, when Thomas did meet the risen Jesus, he was invited to see and touch! For Jesus ***knew*** what Thomas had said – just as he knows ***our*** words, our doubts, our worries and fears, although we cannot see *him!*

To those who love him, Jesus still says, ***I am with you always!*** (Matt 28:20) He knows our circumstances, he understands what it means to be a child – or a grown-up – for he has been one himself. He understands how we feel, for he too has been tempted as we are. But he overcame, and he can help us now, if we ask him. (Heb 4:14-16; Eph 3:12)

2. We have an assured PARDON because God raised Jesus.

But – first of all – ***we need to be set right with God!*** How can we expect God to hear our prayers, or help us, if we know we've done things – for which we've ***not*** been forgiven?! A child knows that if he has disobeyed his father, his father will not be pleased with him. He needs to be forgiven, to be right again with his father, before he makes some request!

How much more this is true for our relationship with God! God longs to be to us our loving heavenly Father. But he cannot be, until we have been put right with him, for whatever we've done wrong. We've all fallen short, we've all departed from what we know is right, gone our own way, pleased ourselves and not put God first in our lives. And God couldn't be upright – if he just ignored our offence!

But the wonderful news is that God loves us nevertheless, and has *himself* met our need. He sent his only Son – Jesus – to die the death our sins deserve, so that we might be spared. ***God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.. Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins..*** (Rom 8:32; 4:25) Because of this, we *may* ask God to forgive us, to put us right with him. We have to ask him – because it's not automatic – and we must be willing to turn from pleasing ourselves to pleasing God. We must put our trust in ***God who raised Jesus from the dead.*** (Rom 4:23,24)

When we go through the check-out in a store – what does the cashier give us when we've paid the money? *She gives us a receipt, doesn't she?* It's a ***proof*** of our purchase – that we've paid the price! Our **PARDON** can't be bought – we can do nothing to deserve it. We can only receive it as ***a free gift.*** God has paid the

price for us – it cost the death of Jesus on the cross. How do we know that? Because God has given us a proof that the price has been paid – ***he raised Jesus from the dead!*** That is the proof that our sins have been paid for! (Rom 4:25)

Will you thank God for loving you so much? Will you thank Jesus for dying for you? Will you ask him for his free gift of forgiveness and eternal life with him?

3. We have the PROMISE that Jesus will raise us from death.

For Jesus has made us a **PROMISE** – to all who have put their trust in him, and asked him to be their Lord. He said, *This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.* (John 6:39,40)

When we're young we don't think much about death – except perhaps if our pet dies, we begin to understand that death is quite final. But even when we're young we can be faced with death – in imagination, or even in reality. I can remember I had, when I was a child, a dream that my father had died – and I was greatly relieved in the morning to find it was only a dream!

But ***death does await us all.*** I can remember there was another occasion when I thought about death. I thought to myself – my parents will be alright – they will go to be with Jesus. And then the thought came to me – ***but what about me? I must die too!*** And I felt lost and afraid. I hadn't yet come to Jesus for myself, to trust him for always. But the resurrection of Jesus gives us a ***certain*** hope, as Peter wrote, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..* (1 Pet 1:3)

Jesus himself said, *Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.* (John 6:37) *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they*

follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:27-28)

He will raise us up from death, give us new and wonderful bodies, like his own, and lead us into a new, wonderfully remade, world where *there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain...* (Rev 21:4) The promise is certain – because God has raised Jesus – and if we belong to Jesus, he will raise us too. (1 Cor 15:23)

Have you ever seen what happens to a caterpillar at the end of its life? When I was a boy I collected caterpillars of a certain kind, fed them on the appropriate leaves, and gave them a place of safety to turn into cocoons. Cocoons appear to be dead things – but there comes a time when they break open, and a wonderful new creature emerges! My hairy caterpillars changed into glorious red-winged tiger moths. Why do I tell you this? Because God is going to change us, to fit us for his new world.

This is the **assurance**, the **PROMISE**, given to every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. *He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Rom 8:11) We know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us..in his presence.* (2 Cor 4:14) God's **ability** to raise us from death is pictured for us in creation. Not just caterpillars and butterflies, but seeds and flowers, and all the renewal of spring, as buds break forth from seemingly dead branches.

4. We are given POWER to live for Jesus.

Now we don't have to wait until we die before we can experience God's resurrection **POWER** in our lives. Here and now God is waiting to break into our lives. Nor do we have to be grown-up, or special people, to experience God's **POWER**. He works in the lives of weak and ordinary people. Indeed, only as we know we are weak and ordinary! If we have a willingness and desire to serve him, **God takes what we offer him – and transforms it for his glory** – like Jesus took the boy's 5 loaves and 2 fishes, and used them to feed a great crowd.

Paul knew all about being weak, as he went about telling people about Jesus. He wrote, *We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Cor 4:7)* These **jars of clay** were the small pottery oil-lamps found in any home of that day; while the **treasure** is *the light of Jesus shining in the hearts of his people.*

Earthenware is cheap and ordinary – and frail – but the good news of Jesus, that we can share, **changes lives by God's all-surpassing power.** That power is at work in the lives of those who have received Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Paul prays, *that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know .. his incomparably great power in us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead.* (Eph 1:18-20)

God is in the business of changing us **to be like Jesus.** (2 Cor 3:18) To that end *he has given us his Spirit to live in us,* to change us from within. Of course, this will not happen without our cooperation and effort, but **God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom 5:5)** And that *love* – as we've been learning – *makes us different* from the way of the world. The world is **self-seeking**, but God's love is not. *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (1 John 4:9)* That is the pattern we are to follow! Thank God his **POWER** is available to help us follow it!

Remember – **Jesus is alive!** – we have his **PRESENCE** with us for ever. Our lives should be full of joy and hope! Our **past** is dealt with – because God raised Jesus from the dead, we know his death atoned for our sins, and God's **PARDON** is available for all who will trust him. Our **future** is assured also – for Jesus' resurrection is the pledge of his **PROMISE** to raise us too, on the last day. And in the **present** can experience God's **POWER** in our lives to change us – and to change others, as we share the Good News of Jesus. *Let us make every effort to live for him who has loved us so much!*

Amen.