

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

April 23, 2000

Scripture: *II Corinthians 5:1-10*

Sermon: *Do People Die and Come Back and Back?*

When we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord and we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident I say and rather to be away from the body and be home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please Him whether we are at home in the body or whether we are away from it. Charles Schultz is a cartoonist who died last year and left a legacy of wit that will last us for generations. One of the cartoons I liked best was Linus and Lucy, who had just planted a young tree. Lucy turns to Linus and says "I wish we could be here when it gets grown." There is a puzzled look on Linus' face and he says, "Are we going somewhere?" Well, the answer to that question is yes. All of us are going somewhere. Someone has said we will never get out of this life alive. The thing that people have believed all the way through the years is that this life is just one stage of our longer life and that when we leave here, we are going somewhere.

I remember years ago standing in Beirut, Lebanon at the national museum that contains some of the oldest artifacts of human existence. One of them was a large, ceramic jar that was serving as coffins. The reason they used them as coffins was that people could be placed in a fetal position so that they could be ready to be born into the new life. From the very beginning of human kind, people, as they have stood at the face of death, believed that all of us are going somewhere and there is life beyond this life. The big question that we have always had to ask is, "Well, where are we going?" Through history there have been two big answers which have been given. One answer came out of the Middle East and that answer then went west. There was another answer that was always in the Far East but for centuries it remained where it was. Now with travel, now with internet, now with the global economy, the second answer has now come to us and what we are confronted with is that there are two answers now to the question, where are we going? One of the things we need to discover is which one is true.

What I wanted to do this morning is place both of them before you and tell you then what the Bible teaches. One of them which you are the most familiar with says that when you die some of us go into the very presence of God. The Bible says that place is so wonderful that it is impossible to describe in human language. It is far more than a beautiful place, it is a place where you and I will bask in the glory of God and you and I will receive all of the blessings that come to us who put our faith and our trust in Christ. Christians, we believe that when we give our life to Jesus, that He secures for us a place in God's house. I think that it is very important on Easter morning, that we understand why we as Christians, are so insistent upon Jesus. Reason is that we believe that Jesus came from heaven. We believe that Jesus is the very essence of God. We believe that when you look at Jesus, you are looking at an illustration of who God is. Therefore, for us, it is inconceivable that you would dislike Jesus and like God because we understand that the both are exactly alike. When you come to give your life to Him, you have committed your life to God and He secures a place for you in heaven. The great assurance that we as Christians claim is that today we know that Christ has a room prepared for us in heaven. Also that answer says that there are some people who will not go in the presence of God.

When God created the world, one of the greatest risks He never took was that he gave humans the right of choice. What that means is that while God may want you to come live with Him, you can frustrate the plan and purpose of God. You can say I don't like you, I don't love you, I don't want to be with you, I don't want to live like you and you can have the choice of whether you want to go live with Him or not. This is the amazing thing the Bible teaches that if in this life, you determine you don't want to be around Him, you don't like Him, God in the next life is going to honor your choice. He will not make you be in His presence. If you choose that you do not wish to be there, then God has created a place where He chooses not to be where you can be there apart from Him.

There is a second answer, one that is now come out of the Far East. The second answer says this. You don't go to a place, when you die, you come back to the earth. It says earth is permanent and you are recycled. It says life is a big wheel and that when you die, you are on this wheel and it kicks you back to

this life. You live awhile and you die and on that wheel, it kicks you back to this life and that term is called reincarnation. Carnate means flesh and reincarnation means you come back in the flesh. One of the founders of these religions in the far East in the moment of his enlightenment said, "I can remember thousands of times that I was alive." Many people believe you will come back, you may come back as a cow, come back as a monkey, you may come back as your mother-in-law, if you are a male, you may come back as a woman, if you are a woman, you may come back as a male. You never know and all of that is dependent upon how you live in this life. There is an old phrase that I heard when I was growing up. It said, "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." It is not true anymore. Everywhere that we turn, all of the different philosophies and all the theologies of the world are now at your door step. In 1978 only nine percent of Americans said they believed in reincarnation. In 1998, twenty-five per cent said they believe in reincarnation. I don't know if the poll would be adequate this morning, but think about that now. One out of every four people you see walking down the street believe in eastern religion. They believe that there is a big wheel and you get kicked back. It is so prevalent that Time Magazine devoted a whole issue to it not long ago, and it was entitled OHM Sweet OHM. In 1997, there was a film called the *Seventh Years in Tibet* and a construction worker refused to dig a foundation and when asked by his supervisor why he would not do that, he said because he could injure a worm. When carried to its extreme, he could have believed that worm was his mother. The question I wanted to ask you this morning is there are two great issues, two great answers, given to the question, where are we going.? What I wanted to ask you this Easter is, which one is right? You know it is very important who you listen to on very important issues. I love the ad that is on television now about a young man who looks like maybe he was a college young person and he is in a museum. He sees an older man standing by his wife. He goes over to him and he says, "I hope you don't mind but you were in here last week and I heard you over telling somebody about a prime stock tip, a stock you ought to buy. I hope you don't mind but I went out and borrowed lots of money so I could buy the stock." The man said, "No, I don't mind at all. We always have to support those people who are up in Aranius." Then he turns around and leaves. The young man has this look on his face of saying, he is a nut. This is loony tunes and I just went out and borrowed a lot of money on a stock tip he gave me. The point then of the commercial comes and says this. If you are going to buy stock you ought to listen to somebody who knows what they are talking about. If you are going to make a decision about what you believe about life, and what you believe about life to come, then it is very important who you listen to. I want you to understand who you listen to when you listen to the Far Eastern religion. You listen to people. You listen to people who believe first that there are thousands of gods. I hear people who sometimes say to me, "Well, they have their religion and we have ours." Why don't we leave them alone? Have you ever read them?

One of the great religions of the world doesn't even have a word for God. What they are saying is, this is what we think. On the other hand, the Bible says there is one God. God sent his Son so that we would always know what the right answer was. God doesn't want us to guess. God wants us to be clear and that He sent His Son with the authority of God to tell us what the answer is. Then so we would for ever know, He said, "I will do something with Him that nobody had ever seen before and nobody has ever seen since. I will let Him come and teach and then, like everybody else He will die. Like no one else, I will raise Him from the dead." You know what frightens me about Easter. We take it so glibly. *Jesus is alive.* Do we know what we are saying? That is not true of anybody else who has ever lived.

The greatest magician who has ever lived is Houdini. When you say Houdini you almost say magician. Houdini was a great friend of Clarence Darrows, the great American lawyer. He said to Clarence Darrow, "I am getting ready to die but I am going to perform my greatest escape and I want you on May the 10th to go to the city park in Chicago and I am going to escape death." Clarence Darrow and his friend went to city park in Chicago and waited and waited and of course Houdini did not come back. I have news for you. Nobody has ever come back. Except One, and listen to what the scripture said. This I give as proof that what He said is true. I sat down with one of these people and he said to me, "You have your book and I have my book. You believe your book, I believe my book." Only one thing is wrong. The Bible does not prove Jesus. Jesus proves the Bible. The Bible was not written to concoct a person named Jesus. It was written because His life was so wonderful and unique it had to be written to tell the story. It is not book against book, it is person against person. It is a person who is on His way searching to find God and a person who came from God. God raised Him up to say if you want to know what is true I will give

you an example that you will never have to doubt. The good news I want to tell you is that in Jesus Christ you are not recycled, you are redeemed. Does what I say really make any difference. Why don't we just let you believe what you want to believe and I believe what I want to believe. I talked to a man about that one day and that was exactly his answer. He said to me, "If I want to believe that I come back as a giraffe, why can't I believe that and you believe that you go to heaven, why can't you believe that?" Ah. Because there is something tragically wrong with the logic. Listen carefully. It doesn't matter if you think you are coming back as a giraffe or not, you are not coming back as a giraffe. You may believe something, but that doesn't make it true. I can sit here and put my arms like this and I can do the chicken walk until next Easter. Guess what? I will never be a chicken.

I am reminded of a little girl, who on a special day of school, brought a rabbit. Everybody was playing with her little pet rabbit. Somebody asked the question, "What is it, a boy or a girl?" Some little boy in the back said lets vote on it. Do you understand it doesn't matter how you vote? It doesn't change what it is. For a person who comes to try to make a decision about life and death, then it makes all the difference in the world of what you believe. It makes all the difference in the world because you need to understand that before you die, Jesus is interested in your life now. What you are missing if you don't know Jesus, is you are missing life now. Jesus said "I have come that you might have eternal life." **Eternal life is the God kind of life and heaven life. What that** means is that you don't have to wait for heaven until you die, the truth is you can begin to get heaven now. The life of heaven comes into you now and then one day you go to live with God in heaven. The reason every person needs to get right about Jesus is and what He taught is because you can have God kind of life right now. There is a second reason and it makes all the difference in the world. It matters very much where your trust is. You may not know anything about Eastern Religion . Eastern religion says your hope is in you. You didn't know anything about that but you are here on Easter and your hope is in you. You are on a wheel. You are doing your best and you have been climbing and climbing, trying your best to please God. The word of Easter is that is a wheel you can never get off. It is a task you can never accomplish. People come to me sometimes and say I am doing the best I can and I want to put you in a museum because I have never met anyone who is doing the best they can. All of us fail, all of us fall and what our hope is, as Christians, our hope is that forgiveness comes through Jesus Christ. Our hope is in Him.

Some of you will leave out of here today still on the wheel, still hoping in yourself, still maybe I might, I hope I can , perhaps if I do this. Others will walk out of here today with Easter assurance, that in Jesus Christ my sins are forgiven. I can live life to the fullest today and when I start on my next leg of the journey, I go to be in the presence of God. I hope that today that you have that assurance and you can leave this place today knowing that in Christ, He is your hope and you can have an assurance of life now and life to come. I told you what God has done. The next part is what you are going to do. What you have to do to come to Christ is that you have to say, "Lord, I have lived away from you, now I want to turn my life over to you. I want you to forgive me and I want to live my life as you want me to live it." There are some of you here today on this most significant of all Christian Holy Days, who need to say I want to give my life to Jesus Christ.