

Introduction

Almost 2000 years ago, a Roman philosopher named Seneca taught something that captures part of the Easter message. That something is this and I quote him, **"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end."** Or to say it more simply, **"Every ending is a new beginning."** That is part of the Easter message and what I'm going to preach about today. Let's examine Luke 23:44-46 and 24:1-7.

Every Ending

I begin with 23:46. This verse reveals that last statement Jesus made from the cross. First century Jewish mothers taught their children a prayer to say just before going to sleep. It was verbatim from Psalm 31:5, **"Into your hands I commit my spirit."** Jesus took that prayer and added the affectionate term **"Father"** to it to say, **"Father, into your hands I commit My spirit."** After He said that, verse 46 recounts that He then **"breathed His last."**

Notice what we have here in verse 46. It's two things. One is the last word that Jesus spoke. There was a first word that He spoke during His earthly life, somewhere in the time frame of Luke 1:80. It was probably **"mommy" or "daddy."** Now, we have the last word, **"spirit."** The other thing we have is the last breath He took during His earthly life. After He spoke what He spoke in verse 46, He then took the very last breath His earthly body would ever take.

Verse 46 illustrates an inexorable principle that governs our lives on earth. There is a last time for everything. When it comes to the most basic things we experience and do, they all come to pass not to stay. I remember the first time I kissed my wife, in the hallway of a Malone College dormitory. But I know there will be a last time I kiss her, probably within the next 20 years. Transience is built into the very fabric of our everyday existence. There will be a last word we speak, a last class we attend, a last meal we eat, a last worship service we attend,

a last day we work, a last step we take, and so on. There's no debating it. When it comes to the most basic things we experience and do, there is a last time for each and every one of them.

Our lives, in other words, are filled with what Seneca called "**endings.**" Our lives aren't static. They're dynamic. Things in them are constantly shifting, changing, moving. They are, as a result, filled with countless endings, big and small. Graduation, marriage, divorce, bankruptcy, moving, retirement, illness, injury, an empty nest, and a business belly up are just a small sampling of what I mean.

Is a New Beginning

Now let's move to the second text we read, 24:1-7. When a person died, 1st century Jewish custom was to anoint the body with spices and perfumes. But there wasn't time to do that with the body of Jesus. He was removed from the cross and immediately placed in a caved tomb on Friday. So, according to 23:55, a group of women left the cross to prepare spices and perfumes. After waiting for the Sabbath Day to end, they then went to Jesus' tomb at early dawn on Sunday to anoint Him. But the stone was rolled away from the tomb and His body was gone. As they were pondering the implications of that, two men in dazzling cloth (angels) suddenly appeared and uttered the three most affecting words in human history in verse 6, "**He has risen.**" Jesus was alive and well, in other words, in a glorified and resurrected body.

Now, notice the contrast between 23:46 and 24:6. 23:46: "**He breathed His last.**" 24:6: "**He has risen.**" Paul's terminology in 2 Corinthians 5:17 helps explain that, "**the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**" The old reality, Jesus' earthly body, passed away. A new reality, His resurrection body, came. That illustrates a second inexorable principle that governs our lives on earth. Seneca knew it and so do we. Last times always lead to first times. Whenever old things pass away, new things come. Every ending is a new beginning. Old ways of life end; new ways of life begin. Old

opportunities end; new opportunities begin. Old relationships end; new relationships begin. Old traditions end; new traditions begin. Old experiences end, new experiences begin. And on it goes.

Take the empty nest, for instance. There are few endings in life more difficult than that. Both of my sons graduated and left home the same summer. My wife Jill and I had a profound sense of sadness for several months after they did. I felt almost as if they had died. It was a significant loss: everyday and detailed interaction with our sons. But the ending was a new beginning for Jill and me. Much of the time and energy we had directed to our sons, we began directing to each other. We gained a focus in our relationship with each other that we didn't have before. We lost an old way of life with our sons but gained a new way of life with each other.

What's the ending you're facing today? Maybe you've been disabled. Or your business has gone belly up. Or your children have left home. Or you're retiring. Or you've become chronically ill. Or you're graduating from high school or college. Whatever it is, never forget it. Last times always lead to first times. Every ending is a new beginning.

Mourning and Welcoming

So, welcome them. Welcome the new beginnings in your life.

Most people don't you know. They mourn the endings instead. Everyone dislikes losing what is valued or enjoyed. Consequently, they absorb themselves with what they've lost and ignore what they've gained. That in turn deflates their spirit. It robs them of peace and joy. They end up defeated, miserable, and sad.

A long established Christian was an active and energetic man. He had a full time job and his own little farm on the side that he enjoyed working. Tragically, he had an automobile accident that left him a paraplegic, paralyzed from just below the chest down. It was a dramatic ending for him and he mourned it. He focused on the fact that he had taken his last step, planted his last field, ridden his last horse, and so

on. That in turn deeply depressed him, which he expressed by routinely declaring, **"I want to die."**

Don't do what he did. Don't mourn the endings in your life, not longer or not more than you should at least. Welcome, with open arms, the new beginnings instead. Get caught up in the new things that have come instead of the old things that have passed away. Absorb yourself with what you've gained instead of what you've lost. Your spirit will be inflated, filled with peace and joy, if you do.

Lets go back to the Christian paraplegic. At the behest of his wife, their pastor confronted him. He told him it was time to snap out of it, to get his act together, for the sake of God and His family if not for his. He reminded him of something he was upset about a year before. He had actually come to see the pastor about it. He didn't know the Bible and didn't pray as he should and sincerely wanted to but just didn't have the time. **"Well, now you have the time,"** the pastor said, **"You have an opportunity to study and know the Bible and to pray that most people don't. Take advantage of it. Your walking and working are over, but your life with God can grow deeper and stronger."** After getting over the initial anger he felt, he realized his pastor was right. So, he took his advice. He changed his focus from what he had lost to what he had gained. When he died some years later, he was known as the man who knew the Bible and prayed. Those were his defining qualities, both of which he used to influence many people for God.

No matter what it is, you and I need to do what that paraplegic eventually did. Don't focus on what we've lost and mourn the ending. Focus on what we've gained and welcome the new beginning instead.

Death as Ending

Now, what I've preached about today has an ultimate application. It's to the final earthly experience of us all, death. I read about a fun loving funeral director who always signed his correspondence, **"Eventually yours."** That's true. Everyone will eventually be his. A

physician informed a patient of his that he had inoperable cancer. He then bluntly said, **"You're going to die."** To which the patient calmly replied, **"You too, Doc."** He was right. You and I are going to die. It's a mathematical certainty. One out of one people do. Unless were alive when Jesus comes again, our chances of dying are 100%.

But what is death? Erwin Lutzer wrote a book titled *One Minute After You Die*. That's worth contemplating. What about one minute after we die? What will our condition or state be?

Before his conversion, G. Gordon Liddy was on *The David Letterman Show*. Letterman asked him, **"What happens when we die?"** Liddy answered, **"We're food for the worms."** **"That's all,"** Letterman queried. **"That's all,"** Liddy replied. Albert Einstein agreed. He wrote, **"Neither can I nor would I want to conceive of an individual that survives his physical death."**

Many people view death just as Einstein and Liddy did. We take our last breath and that's it. We cease to exist. Death, in other words, is an ultimate ending, for which there is no new beginning.

Death as a New Beginning

But they're dead wrong! If we do the math, if we gather the evidence and apply good logic to it, we can know that Jesus rose from the dead. But so what? What does it mean to us that He did? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:22, **"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all (who are Christ's) will be made alive."** That verse reveals our fate if we follow Jesus. Every ending is a new beginning. When our old earthly life ends, our new full life with God begins.

I often tell this story at funeral services. Friends visited the 19th century evangelist Dwight L. Moody, who was on his deathbed. As they were leaving him, he declared, **"You will soon hear that I am dead. But don't you believe it. I will then be alive as never before."** That is in fact the case if we follow Jesus. The very moment we take our last breath on earth, we become alive as never before.

I wish I had the time to explain "**alive as never before**" particularly, in detail, but I don't. It would take several hours. So, I'll explain it generally in the most basic terms – consciousness and activity. Those are the core elements of aliveness. Consciousness means knowledge and awareness, grasping the reality around us. Activity means engaging and experiencing the reality around us.

A young preacher was conducting a funeral service. Using what he thought was a good analogy, he pointed to the lifeless body and dramatically declared, "**The shell is here but the nut is gone.**"

The analogy wasn't so good but the sentiment was. When people see the lifeless corpse of a so-called "dead Christian," most conclude that the person *ceased* being conscious and active. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is that at death, he or she *became* conscious and active *as never before*. That is a crucial point. At death, Christians don't *cease* being conscious and active. They actually *become* conscious and active as they never were before.

Consider the consciousness and activity of a fish worm. Of what is it aware? What can it do? Almost nothing. Well, imagine a fish worm suddenly becoming a human being. Of what is it aware? What can it do? It can read, enjoy music, do mathematics, play, travel, love, and so on. The increase in its levels of consciousness and activity would be staggering. Now compare that with a Christian dying and entering into his or her full life with God. The increase in the Christian's levels of consciousness and activity are far greater than the increase in the fish worm's levels. Moody said it well. They're alive as never before.

Conclusion

I close with an observation. If you aren't following Jesus, you have every reason to fear death. If you are following Him, you have no reason at all to fear it. So, follow Jesus. Make and carry out the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says. The ultimate ending, death, will be the ultimate new beginning, eternal life, if you do.