

## “NEVERTHELESS”

(Narnia 15 – Easter)

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

The Witch bared her arms as she had bared them the previous night when it had been Edmund instead of Aslan... Then, just before she gave the blow, she stooped down and said in a quivering voice, “*And now who has won? Fool, did you think that by all this you would save the human traitor? Now I will kill you instead of him as our pact was and so the Deep Magic will be appeased. But when you are dead what will prevent me from killing him as well? And who will take him out of my hand then? Understand that you have given me Narnia forever, you have lost your own life and you have not saved his. In that knowledge despair and die.*” The children did not see the actual moment of the killing. They couldn’t bear to look and had covered their eyes.

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” – Chapter 15

I have three words right from God for you to consider this Easter morning, and the first word is “**Yes.**” In our lesson today Paul writes, “*No matter how many promises God has made they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.*” If you have ever wondered if life is worth the struggle – if you have ever asked yourself, “Is my own life worth it?” – God’s resounding answer in Christ is “**Yes!**”

God has been saying “Yes” to us from the start. The Bible makes it clear that when God created the world and everything in it, he said, “*This is good!*” And then he ordered us to enjoy it. The first question posed by the Westminster Catechism is, “*What is the chief end of man?*” (That is, “*Why did God put us here?*”) And the answer is: “*To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.*” God wants us to embrace and enjoy the life he’s given us. The first word from God that I want you to consider this Easter is his “Yes.”

There’s another word from God we should bear in mind, and that word is “**No.**” Although God has clearly said “Yes” to us from the very beginning, we dare not assume that he was thereby giving us license to do anything we want with the world he has committed to our care. Karl Barth, one of the great Christian minds of the last century, noted that a curious thing about God’s “Yes” is that it always has a “No” in it.

Parents understand that. Sometimes they have to say “No” to their children. Sometimes it’s spoken gently and sometimes shouted urgently. I think of the little boy who, when asked his name, replied, “*My name is ‘John, DON’T!’*” We parents may regret having to say “No” as often as we do; but sometimes it’s for

our children's survival that we do it. If we didn't say "No" they might be run down by cars or drowned or injured. This "No" of ours can be a saving "No." And some of our children are alive today because of it.

The same need applies to God's grown up children. God placed a tree in the garden and then, for their own good, he said to the couple, "No – not that one." Their story is repeated in every last of us. We are defined not only by what we do, but also by what we will not do. G. K. Chesterton put it so well: "*Art and morality have this in common: that they both know where to draw the line.*"

There's a good kind of "No" that is implicit in God's "Yes." But there's another kind of "No" that can be devastating. Those of us whose lives have been threatened – perhaps in an accident or a serious illness or a frightening diagnosis, or who know the emptiness of losing someone dear – are aware of how very fragile life is. We understand that there is a sense in which the worst sort of "No" is the "No" of death. Some folks will try to soften or disguise the hard reality of death by intellectualizing or anesthetizing or poeticizing it away; but none of those really works. There is a "No" that marks the limit of everything and beyond which we can see nothing.

There you have two simple yet powerful words: "Yes" and "No." But there is one more word. And as you might have suspected, I saved the best for last. That greatest Easter word from God is "**Nevertheless.**" Some of us heard that word whispered to our hearts very early this morning. Karl Barth says that what makes God's "Yes" unique is that it always has a "No" in it. But what makes God's "Yes" the most gracious word in any language is that it also contains his "*Nevertheless.*" And Barth tells us why.

Jesus came affirming life – saying, "Yes" to people who had lived a lifetime of nothing but "No." But those in power, fearing God's "Yes," put him away. They nailed him to a cross; and when he was good and dead, they said, "*No more!*" But they were wrong! Very early that first Easter morning an angel rolled the stone away, Jesus came out and said, "*Nevertheless...*"

It was because Jesus was willing to embrace life and death – to say "Yes" to God's "Yes" – and by some mysterious transaction to say "Yes" to God's "No" – that we now know him as the Lord of life and Lord of death and Lord of life-after-death. And what is true of Jesus is just as true of his people. If our faith is to mean anything permanent, it has to include a "*Nevertheless.*" It won't do for us to just say "Yes" and "No" – because neither a "Yes" nor a "No" can cover our sin and our failure and our death. Only a "*Nevertheless*" can do that.

Every life needs a "*nevertheless.*" St. Paul needed one. That man had personally hunted down the followers of Jesus – men, women and children – and presided over their imprisonment and execution. That's more of a burden than most of us could imagine carrying. And yet, after meeting his risen Lord, that

same redeemed Apostle Paul would write: *“Nevertheless, by the grace of God, I am what I am.”* It was the risen Lord Jesus saying *“nevertheless”* to him that transformed his life – and his world.

Every life needs a *“nevertheless.”* There is something in your life that only an Easter *“nevertheless”* can redeem. What is it about which you need to hear the risen Jesus say *“nevertheless”* in your career – in your relationships – in your character? Every last one of us faces times when we can make ourselves feel like a failure in everything. And only a *“nevertheless”* can pull us back from the edge of despair.

There’s one more thing. We need to be able to hear the risen Jesus say *“Nevertheless”* about our dear ones whom we have lost. We may have let them go and acknowledged: *“From dust you came and to dust you shall return.”* But if we cannot hear that *“Nevertheless,”* then we of all people are most pitiable. The Scottish physician, Sir James Simpson, discovered chloroform. He also lost his little girl, who is buried there in Edinburgh, with a lump of granite to mark the spot. And on that stone: her name is there, and her dates, and one word: *“Nevertheless!”*

And if someone were to be so bold as to offer an *“Amen”* to that, I would reply in the words of Paul: *“It is through the risen Jesus Christ that the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”*

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