

Fil-Am Community Church

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COME ALIVE THIS EASTER

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The night before Jesus Christ was crucified He made a very strange statement that nobody who heard it understood. He said, *"In a little while the world will no longer see Me. But you're going to see Me because **I am alive and you're about to come alive.**"* What in the world did He mean? They're thinking, "We're already alive. What does He mean when He says, 'You're about to come alive.'"

Easter is about coming alive. Jesus Christ proved He was who He said He was. He said, "I'm God. I'm going to let them kill Me on a cross. I'm going to be buried in the ground for three days then I'm going to bring Myself back to life to prove I am who I say I am." He walked around Jerusalem and ever since that time history has been split into AD and BC.

Almost everybody knows that part of the Easter story. What most people don't know is the second part of the story. That involves you. *"He [talking about Jesus] included everyone in His death so everyone could be included in His life. A far better life than people lived on their own."*

What is this better life?

Here in the US, we know a lot about The Good Life. In fact, you're probably living the Good Life. A lot of us here are immigrants. We came here for the good life. If you've been here long enough you may say you've got a good home, you've got a good family, you've got a good job. You're probably in good health. Though you may have been hit hard by this country's economic problems, you're still having it good compared to the rest of the world.

But what if there was something more? What if beyond the good life there was a better life?

What if you were missing out on something that you didn't even know about? What if God had intended more than just the good life for you but He intended the better life. Wouldn't you want to know about it? Of course you would and so would I.

We often settle for less because we don't know that there's anything better.

When I was a baby my parents fed me Gerber's. It was yummy!!! Because I didn't know any better. Of course today I think it tastes like crummy. From yummy to crummy.

When I came to grade school I learned about nutribun. That was a definite step up from Gerber's. When I became a teenager I learned about Shakey's Pizza. Now we're talking! There is definitely something better in life.

Of course, today I've tasted lots of great foods. From Sizzler to Bennigan's to Aling Anabel's Carenderia. Carenderia is a small eatery in the Philippines. Now, I look like I've tasted a lot! But I would never go back to Gerber's. No way! I have tasted something better.

I believe that God brought you here today to Fil-Am on Easter Sunday so He could let you in on a little secret. There is something better. Good life is ok but there's something way, way better. There's The Better Life.

I've lived in the US for almost 20 years and I've personally talked to hundreds of people. I've discovered that beneath this image of "The Good Life" are three dirty little secrets that nobody likes to talk about.

One, people feel exhausted. They're worn out. And exhaustion always leads to the second thing – Emptiness. You say, "I don't think I've got another thing in me. I couldn't sign up for another thing, I couldn't take on another assignment or project or commitment. I'm stretched to the limit. And I'm empty inside." Then Emptiness leads to what I call Enslavement. I couldn't count the number of times people have said to me, "Rolly, I feel trapped. I feel trapped by my debt. I don't know if I'm every going to get out of it. I feel trapped. I feel trapped in a relationship. I feel trapped by the expectations of other people around me. I feel trapped by guilt. I feel trapped by fear. I feel trapped by my own anger."

Do you ever feel like any of these? Emptiness? Exhaustion? Feeling trapped?

I've got good news for you today. There's an antidote. It's called The Better Life. The reason God brought you here today is so you can learn about the better life. There is something more and you are about to come alive.

What is this better life that Jesus Christ offers us? It's three things.

1. IT'S A LIFE FILLED WITH MEANING.

The greatest tragedy in life is not death. It's to go through your entire life without knowing your purpose. Unfortunately, most people go through life never knowing their purpose, never knowing why God put them on earth.

A lot of people confuse a full life with a meaningful life. They are not the same. Having a full schedule is not the same thing as having a fulfilled life. You need meaning.

So we search for meaning in all kinds of different ways. We think if I just get more possessions then that will add meaning to my life. Or if I accomplish certain things then my life will have meaning. So we search for meaning through all kinds of things – through hobbies or sports or travel, through relationships, through food. These are all good things. There's nothing wrong with these things. It's just they don't last. And when the experience is over, where do you get your meaning in those down times? You need something that gives you constant meaning, eternal meaning.

Where do you get that? There's only one place. From the God who created you. The Bible says this. ***“Christ gives meaning to your life.”*** You were made by God. You didn't make yourself. He made you for a purpose. And until you understand you were made by God and for God, life's not going to make sense. And until you understand the purpose He put you on earth for, you can't step up from the good life to the better life.

The Bible says this *“Because Jesus was raised from the dead [that's what Easter is all about] we've been given a brand new life. We have everything to live for including a future in heaven and that future starts now.”* This is a very, very important verse in the Bible. I want to point out a couple of things from this verse.

First notice that this better life, whatever it is, is somehow connected to what Jesus Christ did at Easter. Somehow His coming back to life enables me to live a better life. Better than just the good life, whatever that is.

The second thing to notice is the better life is not just an addition to your old life, something you just tack on. It's a whole new deal. It's brand new. Have you heard of the word Mulligan? It's a golf term. It means when you take your first shot and it's such a stinking shot – it hits the tree and bounces off your partner's head – that they give you a second shot. This shot is free and they don't count the first one against you.

Jesus Christ wants to give you a Mulligan for your life. He says, "You know all those stupid things you've done in the past and you regret and wish you had done differently? Dumb decisions, bad mistakes, sins, faults, failures, whatever you want to call them. Let's just erase those and start over. I'll just say let's begin a brand new life. Step up from the good life to the better life. We'll wipe out all that other stuff and you can just begin again. What a deal! No more guilt. No more guilty conscience. Wiped out. Begin again. Start over.

You say, "That sounds pretty good. How do I get it?" You don't earn it. You can't work for the better life. In fact it says in that verse, "*We've been given a brand new life.*" It's a gift. You don't earn it.

Let me summarize the whole Bible for you in about five sentences. You were made by God to have a relationship with Him. God knows and loves you and He wants you to know and love Him. I'm not talking about religion. God couldn't care less about religion. God is more interested in a relationship with you. There's only one problem. God is perfect and you're not. And neither am I. So here's a big gap between me and God and between you and God. Obviously I can't overcome that gap. God said, I'll figure that out. I'll come to earth. And He did that about 2000 years ago in the form of a person named Jesus Christ.

He said, "I'll die for all the sins of the world, pay for everything that's been done wrong so you don't have to pay for it, so that you don't have to make up for it. I'll give you a mulligan on your life and I'll let you start over brand new."

I read in the papers about a wealthy businessman who committed suicide. That's always tragic when somebody takes their life. We ask, "Why? Why did they do that?" I'm sure the loved ones of this man were saying, "He had so much to live for!" Evidently not. There's a big difference between having something to live for and having something to live on. He had a lot to live on. He was quite wealthy. But he had nothing to live for. It doesn't matter how much you have to live on if you don't have anything to live for. What you live on is the good life. What you live for is the better life.

The world won't tell you this because the world won't be honest with you. But I'm going to tell you the truth right now. You will never be happy living for yourself. You weren't made to live for yourself. In fact, I could give you hundreds of examples that show the more selfish you are, the more self-centered you are, the more miserable you are. You were not made to live for you. You were made to live for God. When you start living for

God that's when you discover real happiness, real meaning, real significance, real purpose, real value to your life.

Then God says, Let me tell you why I have a purpose for your life. And then you start enjoying it. The Bible says this, *"He died [Jesus] so we would no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died for us and was raised to life for our sake."* God says, You weren't made to live for you. You were made to live for Me. When you live for God, you're plugged in to God. That gives you meaning. That gives you real wealth. That's priceless."

Ken and C. J. are a wonderful Christian couple. They live in Bodaga Bay, a little town north of San Francisco. They run a deli in a store up there. Bodaga Bay has one homeless man, a town tramp named Garland. Garland dressed poorly and acted a little strange and slept in the city park. But being Christians, Ken and C.J. befriended Garland and offered him food and kind words. When their store was broken into everyone in town accused Garland. But Ken and C.J. knew it couldn't have been their friend. In fact, they prepared a very expensive gift basket for Garland and gave it to him. The next morning the police showed up with Garland, the expensive gift basket and certain they had caught the burglar of their store. Ken and C.J. to protect Garland from embarrassment said, "Oh, Garland! Thank you for bringing your basket back. We forgot to put some stuff in it we wanted to put in it. And by the way, here's the change I forgot to give you." And Ken made up a number \$38.67. In front of the police he opened the cash register and gave him \$38.67 to this homeless guy. The police let Garland go without saying a word. A few mornings later Garland died in the park in his sleep. Ken and C.J. were called to the attorney's office. They were told that Garland had made them the sole heir in his will. He wrote "The entire contents of my travel bag are entirely yours." Inside the bag was a bag of birdseed, a Bible and a bankbook. The names on the savings account were Garland and Ken and C.J. The last entry in the savings account was yesterday for \$38.67 bringing the balance to well over three million dollars. The bankbook had been used as a bookmark in the Bible. Garland had put it in the Bible in a unique place and the Bible lay open to Matthew 25:35 and the verse was underlined. *"I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home and you invited me into your house. Jesus said, 'When you did it for the least of these My people, you also did it for Me.'"* Garland had hidden wealth that nobody knew about.

When Jesus Christ hung on the cross with His arms outstretched almost nobody standing there at the base of that cross knew how wealthy He was. He was God. He was the creator of the universe and He owned everything. He owned the universe. He owned the

world. He owned the people standing around the across who were crucifying Him because He had made them. He owned the hill He was on. He even owned the wood and the nails they used to crucify Him.

Why did He do that? Jesus left heaven and gave up His eternal wealth to come to earth so we could live the better life. We become rich by His death. That's what the Bible says. *"Jesus Christ was kind enough to give up all His riches and become poor so you could become rich."* He's not talking here about money. He's talking about true wealth, *meaning* not money. Jesus Christ could have saved Himself from the cross but then He could not have saved you. He gave up everything so you could have everything. He died so you could live forever. He said when you plug into Me I'll teach you your purpose and then your life will start to have real meaning.

This better life is not just a life filled with meaning...

2. It is a life freed by grace.

What does that mean? The Bible says this, *"We're free to live a new life in the freedom of God."* It all comes by grace. We're freed to live a new life, freedom of God but it comes by grace. What is grace? Grace is when God gives you what you need, not what you deserve. That's grace. Everything you have in your life is because of God's grace. The next breath you take – that's a gift of grace. If God didn't want you to take it, your heart would have stopped a long time ago. Your whole life you owe to the grace of God. You have nothing if God hadn't decided to make you. So grace is saying, I love you. I forgive you even though you can't earn it. Grace is saying, I'm not mad at you. I'm not holding a grudge because Jesus Christ has taken your sin on the cross.

Grace is God saying, I'm going to give you a second chance and a third and fifth and a twenty-fifth and a hundred and twenty-fifty. Grace is the road to freedom.

Does God like you? You may be unsure about that if you don't understand grace. Some of you were raised in a religious home. Some of you were raised in a very strict religion. Every religion in the world can be summarized in one of two words – "do" or "done". All the religions in the world basically say this, "Here's what you must do to get God to like you." Then they have their own different lists. One will say these things, another will say those things, a third will say it's a little bit of this and a little bit of that. If you do all these things then God will smile and say you're cool!

Jesus Christ came to earth to say “That’s all wrong. That’s not it. I’m not into religion. I want you to have a relationship with Me. And I’ve already done it all for you. You don’t have to do. You just have to accept what I’ve already done on the cross.” That’s called grace.

There are two paths you can choose in life. One is to spend the rest of your life trying to earn God’s approval by your effort, doing certain things. The other is to enjoy God’s approval by accepting what Jesus Christ has already done for you. You just accept that gift.

The first way doesn’t work. It never had worked, it never will work. In fact, God says it doesn’t work. The Bible says it doesn’t work, that you can’t earn God’s approval by things you do. *“The old system [that old system of trying to earn by works God’s approval and love] was canceled because it didn’t work. It was weak and useless for saving people. It never made anyone really right with God but now we have a far better hope. For Christ makes us acceptable to God.”* He said, I just canceled the old system. When a TV program doesn’t work what do they do with it? They cancel it. When a product doesn’t work, what do they do? They cancel it. They take it off the shelf. God canceled the idea of you trying to earn your own way into heaven because it doesn’t work. Heaven is perfect and as I’ve already pointed out, you’re not. There’s no way you’re ever going to earn your way into heaven. You may as well forget that one. It doesn’t work. God canceled that plan a long time ago. He said, there’s only one way to get into heaven and there’s only one way to get the better life. That is to accept My grace, My gift, My love and what Jesus has done for you.

The better life is a gift and it’s a free gift. It’s certainly not cheap. It’s free but it’s not cheap. Somebody had to pay for it. It was a very expensive gift. You know who paid for it? Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ paid for your salvation. He paid so you could live the better life. He paid for your freedom. The Bible says this *“He gave His life to purchase freedom for everyone.”*

That is exactly what Jesus Christ wants to do for you. He on the cross paid to buy your freedom so you’re no longer a slave to guilt, to worry, to fear, to bitterness, to the pressures of the past, to the expectations of the future and all those other things. He paid to set you free.

There’s a word for this that we don’t hear about much any more. It’s the word called “redemption”. To be redeemed means to have your freedom paid for. The reason we

don't use this word is because it's a word that came out of the slave-trading years. In the slave-trading years people would intentionally buy slaves in order to set them free. Those people were called redeemers. They would redeem a slave. Someone would say, "Slavery is wrong. It's evil. This person deserves to be set free." So they would buy that person's freedom and then let them go. They were redeemed.

Jesus Christ came to redeem you, to set you free from all things that keep you hung up, all the things that entrap you.

Habits, hurts, hangups, all the things that mess up your life. He says, "I want to set you free from it and I want to give you a new life of real freedom."

This better life is filled with meaning and it's freed by grace but it's also...

3. Full of energy.

Do you ever get tired just thinking about all the stuff you have to do? Have you noticed that when you are low on energy little problems become big problems? Have you noticed that when you don't have a whole lot of patience because your energy level is low, the littlest, tiny things just ticks you off?

You get this feeling because you're running on your own energy and your battery is about to go out. You were never meant to live on your own power. It's no wonder you're tired all the time. God meant for you to be plugged into His power, not go through life just living on your own energy.

The Bible says *"Those who feel tired and worn out will find new life and energy."* And then in Zechariah 4:6 *"You will not succeed of your own strength or power but by My Spirit says the Lord."* God wants you to plug into His power.

Here's the good news. The same power that He demonstrated when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead when He came back to life to prove He was God, that same power is available to you on a day by day basis. *"Once the Spirit lives within you He will bring to your whole being new strength and vitality."* God wants to give you a life full of energy.

You've got a choice. You can go through the rest of your life living the good life, disconnected from God's power or you can live the better life plugged into God's power. It's your choice.

Whichever one you choose you're still going to have problems. Because life is a series of problems. The difference is with God in your life, with Christ in your life you have energy that you didn't have on your own power. He gives it to you on a day by day basis. The Bible says this. *"Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without His unfolding grace."*

You may have come to Easter service today a little tired, a little worn out. You may be on the edge. You may have felt like giving up. Maybe you're in a relationship and you feel like breaking it up with your boyfriend or girlfriend. You feel like giving up on your marriage. Or you may feel like giving up on your job. Or maybe you feel like giving up on your school.

Or maybe you feel like giving up on your health because you're just not getting any better. Or you feel like giving up on that kid who's headed in the wrong direction. Or maybe you feel like giving up on your goals, your dreams, your ambitions.

Don't do it. Don't give up. Look up. Look up to God. Don't give up, give in. Give in to Christ and say, "Christ, I'm going to start living for You and not for me." He'll give you new power and new energy to do the things that He put you on this earth to do. He'll give it to you on a daily basis. Not a day goes by without His unfolding grace.

Has God been trying to get your attention? I think so. I think that's why He brought you here to Fil-Am on Easter Sunday, 2011, so He could say to you, "The good life is not good enough. I want you to step up to the better life. The life you were intended to live from the beginning."

You say, "It sounds good. How do I get it? How do I get this life of meaning and energy and purpose and freedom?" Again, you can't earn it. You just accept it. It's a gift. You have faith and you believe and you receive.

The Bible says *"Everybody comes alive in Christ."* It's in a relationship to Jesus that you get this better life. You don't get it through religion or going to church. You get it through a relationship with God. In fact, Jesus said this in the book of John *"I came so you can have real and eternal life, a better life than you ever dreamed of."* That's why He came. Instead of feeling empty and enslaved and exhausted He says I want you to have meaning and freedom and energy. This is what Easter is about. It's not about crowds. It's about personally getting to know God.

I'm going to close today with a prayer you can pray to begin the better life. It's like the prayer I prayed many years ago. I haven't always been a believer. There was a day in my life when I said, The good life is not good enough.

I want to start living the way God intended for me to live. I stepped across the line. You don't have to pray this prayer aloud. God knows your heart. He knows the very thoughts you're thinking right now. In fact, He's seen every thought you've ever had. So you don't have to pray out loud. In fact, you don't even have to say these words aren't magical or mystical or anything. It's really the attitude of your heart. Say, God, me too. I want to start living for You instead of living for me."