

Do You Know What Day It Is?

Easter Sunday

Daniel 9

Dr. Matt Cassidy---- March 31, 2024

Well, good morning, Grace. Happy Easter! Easter is such a fun, happy, bright holiday. There are Easter clothes, the kids are all cleaned up. Some of you really clean up nicely quick. Go out in the lobby and get a picture in front of one of our picture places while everyone is still intact. We have Easter egg hunts and Easter bunnies, all the bright colors. At our house it's not Easter until you watch *Easter Parade*, the musical. And if you've seen it once, it's like you've seen it a thousand times. And I've seen it forty times.

Anyway, for followers of Jesus Christ, it's not Easter; it's Resurrection Sunday, because we celebrate the resurrection of our King and Lord, Jesus Christ. It is the day that changed everything. The resurrection changes everything. It changes history. It changes every human in history. It changes what you live for, it changes the way you change, it changes how you keep score, it changes how you hope. It changes everything.

The resurrection changes how you live and how you die. It's everything.

When I finally got a grasp on the forgiveness that comes through Christianity—Jesus' Christ death and resurrection ... in my early days, I wanted the resurrection to be true, because I needed it to be true. I needed forgiveness. I'd come to the end of my journey, and I was crushed by guilt and shame, and I just wanted all the promises to be true.

And as it turned out later on, I realized that's not how truth works. Truth doesn't care if you need it. Truth doesn't care if you want it. Truth is harsh. It just lays it out there and says, *Take that*. And so, no matter how much I wanted the claims of Jesus Christ to be true or needed them, that resurrection either happened in real time or it did not.

And what I'd like to do today is tell you a little bit about the story of my life in following Jesus Christ as King, and how the facts, the reason of the resurrection, continue to alter my life. It changed everything. And I'm telling you my story because it's like so many other stories. It's just the details that are changed, but it's the common thread in all those who follow Christ.

1. The Resurrection Changed My Career

The resurrection changes everything. It changes what I was living for. It changes my career. Before I understood about Christianity and resurrection Sunday, it was my life, my plan, and it was all about my happiness. Then, because of Jesus paying for my sins and being raised again, it was His life, His plan, and it's about His happiness. So, the whole paradigm changed on me.

And then here I was, twenty years old at the University of Texas, finishing up a business degree my junior year with every intention of going to law school. And I'm taking a business speech class, and the assignment was to go interview someone who's doing the career that you're going to do when you grow up. And then the speech was to come back and report.

Well, since I had changed what I was going to live for, I thought, *Well, I better keep all my options open*. So, I did two interviews. I interviewed an attorney in town, and I interviewed a Catholic priest across the street from the university. That's keeping all your options open. Every career is found in between an attorney and a priest. Rodeo clown, fighter pilot ... everything's open at this point.

And what was significant for me---this was a very big moment in my life, because it was the first time since sixth grade that I had considered any other career outside of law. So, I was really letting things go and doing whatever the Lord would say.

A year later—just for the record, still not sure what I should be doing for my life—a year later I'm in this broken-down, '73 Volkswagen Beetle that could not even get approved by the state, on used tires. I'm driving across three deserts to get to southern California to go to seminary. And I did the driving at night because my car didn't have an air conditioner. It was a full moon, and you could see for miles, but there was nothing to see. And I didn't have a radio, because the car didn't have a radio.

So, here I am. The point is, I'm four hours into a twenty-four-hour road trip with a lot of time. And here's what I'm thinking. *Oh, I hope this is true. Because I hope this* (and “this” being Christianity) *” is real. I hope it happened in real time.* Because my plan was to go to southern California and live in my car until I found a place to live for under \$90 a month. And I know some of you know, but most of you don't, that you can fold down the back seat of those old

Volkswagen Beetles and sleep back there. And it has the comfort of one of those medieval racks that they would torture people on. That was the plan. It's not much of a plan. It's a crazy plan.

And so, with twenty hours left on my journey, I thought, *I need to think through this*. And I started recounting the evidence that I had read about even the security of the tomb itself where Jesus' body was laid—the security itself. Because the people in religious power that framed Jesus and had Him crucified had been told that He was going to be raised from the dead, or that that was the story. And so, they went to extreme lengths and measures to make sure that tomb was secure.

Let me tell you some details. They put a rock over the opening of the cave where Jesus was laid. And don't think rock like a ball; think rock like a disc, about eighteen feet tall, maybe two tons—four thousand pounds. And they didn't just roll it front of the opening. There's a socket that they trench out so that it falls into place and can't roll out of place. It would take six strong men on a good day to move this stone.

And then they required that it be sealed with a Roman seal. With a Roman seal they would attach some kind of cord to each side of the stone and then have some kind of sealant like a wax to hold that in place. And they would put the crest of the governor on that seal. If anyone for any reason broke that seal—death penalty.

If that weren't enough to guard a corpse, they put a Roman guard to make sure no one could meddle with it. Now the word "guard" is singular, but think of in our terms—"platoon." There were as many as sixteen trained soldiers from the Roman army to protect this grave. If that Roman guard were ever to lose somebody in their custody, they would be executed. If they were to fall asleep while on their shift, they'd be executed.

And here's the bigger point. No one, no little band of fishermen with a couple of accounting majors, was able to overcome and overwhelm that Roman guard, and steal and move the rock and steal the body of Jesus. It can't happen. It is the only burial in human history where the corpse for some reason was a flight risk. So, they went to extremes to make sure that couldn't happen.

And the reason I say that is that it shows, therefore, my career plans being altered was not crazy. It's reasonable. If Jesus rose from the dead, it's His life, His plan, for His pleasure. And my story is like other people's stories who followed Jesus Christ. They just want to serve Him in any way they can with their gifts and their talents. And some people make giant career changes

because of their forgiveness in Christ. Some people just change from occupation to vocation without ever moving from their place of work, because now they see that that's a place to do ministry. It's not about their personal happiness; it's about the happiness of their Savior.

2. Resurrection Change: Marriage

The resurrection changes everything. It changes the way you change. Two years after, in graduate school, I was engaged to be married. And while I was in seminary, I was studying the covenants in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And a covenant is a series of promises that you make, and God is your judge. You literally say, "As God is my witness ... as God is my judge ..." And I'm looking at my marriage vows and absolutely panicking. Because the weight of the importance of that covenant was crushing me. And true to myself, I don't worry about things until it's too late. I waited until five days before the wedding, and I called an old friend from college who had been married for some time. I was in absolute terror, and I said, "Listen, I can't do this. I can't swear to God to be this type of husband for the rest of my life. The biggest, longest commitment I've ever made is four years, it was for college, and it was all for me. And to think that I'm going to swear to God for a lifetime for sacrificial love and selfless service ... I can't do that. I would have to be a completely different person to say those vows. I'm not going to make it until noon before I violate them."

And he said, "Matt, just calm down. This isn't up to you. This is what you're committing to. You need to commit to be completely surrendered to the power of the Holy Spirit that will direct and guide your life to help you become like Christ in being a husband. It's all about the power of the Holy Spirit. Did you know that it says in the Bible that it was the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead? And that Spirit lives in you. That Spirit will change you—the Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead will take you from the selfish little thing that you are to a selfless saint."

The resurrection changes everything. It changes the way we change. It's coming to the realization that I'm not needing a tune-up here; I'm needing a complete radical change, and I don't have it within me. I need an alien source of power, the Spirit of God, to alter me, to change me from the inside out.

So, I chose because of the resurrection and the evidence that proved that there was power there. And is it any wonder that no one has ever doubted that the tomb was empty? If you look at the facts about that resurrection, no one doubted the tomb was empty. When those soldiers woke up, they looked inside and said, “Empty.” When Mary and Martha run to the tomb—empty. When Peter and John get to that same tomb, no one was there. Even the Jewish religious leaders, when they went to investigate—nothing. Jesus was gone.

And listen, if someone wanted to propose the idea that these disciples were collectively hallucinating and seeing a resurrected Jesus, or conspiring to lie together and say there’s a resurrected Jesus, how difficult would it be to end that? Two weeks in, when all these people are running around Jerusalem saying, “Oh, I’ve seen a risen Lord Jesus,” the authorities that were in deep hatred toward Jesus would go to the tomb, roll the rock away, bring out the corpse, hang it on the gates of the city of Jerusalem and put up a sign that says “Here is your risen king. He’s just another dead messiah.” In two weeks, the whole thing’s over—if that’s what happened. But He rose from the dead. And there’s plenty of evidence to show that. And for two thousand years Christianity has been thriving. And it’s thriving because of the power of the Spirit in the resurrection story.

So, my story about having to be someone completely different ... appealing to the resurrection, there are a lot of stories. There are men and women in this congregation who were terrified about being a parent, because all they knew was bad parenting, and they wanted to parent without fear or shame, and they’d have to be a different type of person. And they moved forward because they believed in a different type of change. There are hundreds of people in this congregation and millions around the world that have some kind of addiction that’s powerful over them, but not powerful over the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. And they give that higher power a name, because Jesus earned it. So, it’s not a nameless power—it’s Jesus. It’s the Spirit of God. They’re hoping on a radical change from an outside source that changes them from the inside out.

The resurrection changes everything. It changes everything. It changes the way we keep score. It changes the definition of words like “success” and “failure,” whether you’re winning or losing.

3. Resurrection Change in Taking Risks: Moving to Austin

After we graduated from seminary we came to Austin and we loaded up a very small van, because that's all we had, and we came to Austin, Texas, in 1986 to start a church from scratch—just the two of us. We rang on doorbells saying, *Hey, you want to join the church that doesn't exist yet?*

Just to understand the context, 1986 was the single worst economy in the history of Austin since the Great Depression. People were fleeing. There was no place to work here. And we went from poor to broke. We would eat two, sometimes three, nights a week at free happy hours around town. Oh, you know, it was free, but it was still costing us. I'm still digesting some of that food today. (I will not need preservatives after my death.)

After two and a half years of nothing but nothing (except losing what little we had), I went and told Melinda, “This was a terrible mistake. I'm so sorry for dragging us to Austin. This is a failure.”

She said two things. She said, “One, it might have been a mistake to move to Austin. But God is going to make the most out of what's left. And two, that's not how we keep score, Matt. This is how we keep score. This is success. It's just following the way God is leading us. We'll go anywhere at any time and do anything with anyone. And we felt it was coming to Austin, and so that was success. We just did what we felt God was leading us to do.”

That's the true definition of success if there's a resurrection. Because that resurrection changes how we keep score.

It was soon after that conversation that I was asked to join a radio program on KLBJ AM. It's a talk radio station here in Austin. You might have heard some of its sports stuff. Anyway, this show was called “Christian Encounter.” And the format was live call-in question-and-answer. And we would have scholars from all over the world in every field of science, and people would just ask questions. And the theme was how these men and women of great notoriety, I might add, in their fields of study, live a consistent and reasonable faith in all that they know.

And so, there were men and women in hard sciences like biology and chemistry, engineering, astronomy, MIT, NASA, Georgia Tech. And we had the softer sciences like

philosophy and writing and poetry. These men and women were from Boston and San Francisco and Oxford, England.

One of our best guests that we had on the show was a consistent atheist. Because he would come on and just say, “This is nihilism. There is no intrinsic value to the human soul. There is no human soul. There are no absolute values of right and wrong, and there is no meaning and purpose in life.” We thought, *Just keep talking. Tell us what the real alternative is.*

But after almost two years, a year and a half of interviewing and finding these men and women and reading their books and then interviewing them on a secular radio station, I was thinking, *Oh, it really is true! I get it now.* There is profound and substantial evidence in every field of study, where some of the founders of those particular beliefs are hard-and-fast believers in Jesus Christ, and if not the founders of those fields, then there are certainly leaders of those fields who are believers. And there’s adequate proof for the existence of God and the creation story. They all had reasonable proof or absolute morality and meaning and purpose in life, because there’s a God. And He’s made himself known, and He’s sent His Son, and His Son died. But the resurrection proved all His promises.

Faith is reasonable. And it changes the way we keep score. Because now success and failure are defined by our willingness to follow Jesus. And it’s not crazy to go anywhere, anytime, to do anything with anyone. And that’s why people here find themselves cashing in their vacation time and their points and going not on vacation, but on mission trips ... anywhere, anytime, to do anything with anyone. It’s not crazy if the resurrection is true.

4. The Resurrection Changes Our Hope

And the resurrection changes everything. It changes what we do, what we live for. It changes how we change. It changes how we keep score. And this last one: it changes our hope.

One of the better gifts of being a pastor is that I get to be part of some transcendent moments in people’s lives. I still find myself, even after a number of years, being part of the marriage covenant. And I sometimes feel like I’m outside watching it happen, because I know this man and this woman become one in the eyes of God. We’ll be up here and we’ll have baby dedications. These are family dedications. And I know there’s power happening. It’s a sacred moment for our church family and for the families on the stage. It’s a beautiful thing.

Some of the transcendent moments aren't good. They're not nice. They're hard. And it's being part of someone's life when they've lost someone, when someone in their family who's very close to them dies, especially magnified when it's sudden and it's a child.

There was a moment when the proof of the resurrection came to me. Melinda and I had some dear friends who were with child, and she was past due. She went into the hospital with contractions and the doctor sent her home and said, "Not today, but soon." And then that night that little baby died in her womb. And the next day she had to give painful, anxious, and dreadful delivery of that little girl. And that little baby was beautiful. She was perfect. But she was without life. And she was taken from us before she was given to us.

For some reason—I can't remember why—we had the funeral soon, and we just did it at the chapel in the hospital. There were only a handful of us. And I thought for the eulogy I would just inventory all the hopes and dreams that we had had for this little girl and our girls who were going to grow up together and take their first steps and have their first Easter egg hunt and their first day of school together. We were all just concussed. The smallest caskets are the heaviest. So, I got on my funeral clothes, and I got to the car. I was all by myself, and I just couldn't start the car, because I was enraged. I was furious. I was grinding my teeth, hoping I could crack a tooth so that my body would feel the pain that my soul was experiencing. And I thought to myself, *That resurrection had better be true. These promises made by Jesus better happen. It better be real. Because I am tired of seeing death have the final word.*

1 Corinthians 15:24-26

Then the end will come, when Jesus hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed in death.

Death is this bully that somebody needs to beat up and beat to death. Death is our last enemy. And those aren't my words—those are in the Bible. This is the power of the resurrection as it applies to this. In 1 Corinthians it says, "And then the end will come, when Jesus hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all the dominion and all the authority and

all the power.” That’s evil. “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Jesus rose from the dead to prove to us that He put death to death. Jesus rose from the dead to prove that His promises were actually true. Jesus rose from the dead to show us that love is stronger than death. That’s the power of the resurrection.

Listen—God puts His entire reputation as a promise maker and a promise keeper squarely on the calendar of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If He rose from the dead, His promises are true. If He did not, He’s a liar. Just live, somehow.

So, is it any wonder, in light of how God puts all of His credibility on this one event, that He is reckless with the amount of evidence of people seeing firsthand the resurrection of Jesus Christ? There are twelve separate sightings of Jesus. Some are solo. He appears to Mary, He appears to Peter. Sometimes it’s in a small group—He appears to two men on the road to Emmaus. Sometimes He appears in larger groups. He appears to the disciples all at once. And then He appears, it says, to over five hundred people seeing the resurrected Jesus all at one time. This is why God is so reckless with all this evidence. Because He wants you and I to understand and know where to put our hope. Because we might find ourselves sitting in our car in our funeral clothes, too grief-stricken to start the car. And we’ll ask, *It better be true. Is it true? Did You conquer death on that day?*

Jesus promised this. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. And anyone who believes in me, even if they were to die, will live forever.” It’s a reasonable hope.

Matthew 12:38, 40

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to Jesus, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”

⁴⁰ He answered, “For as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth.”

Look what He says: “Then some of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from you about these promises you’re making.’”

“And then He said to them, ‘For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’” *I’m going to tell you what’s going to happen before it happens, and I’ll tell you how I did it after it happens.*

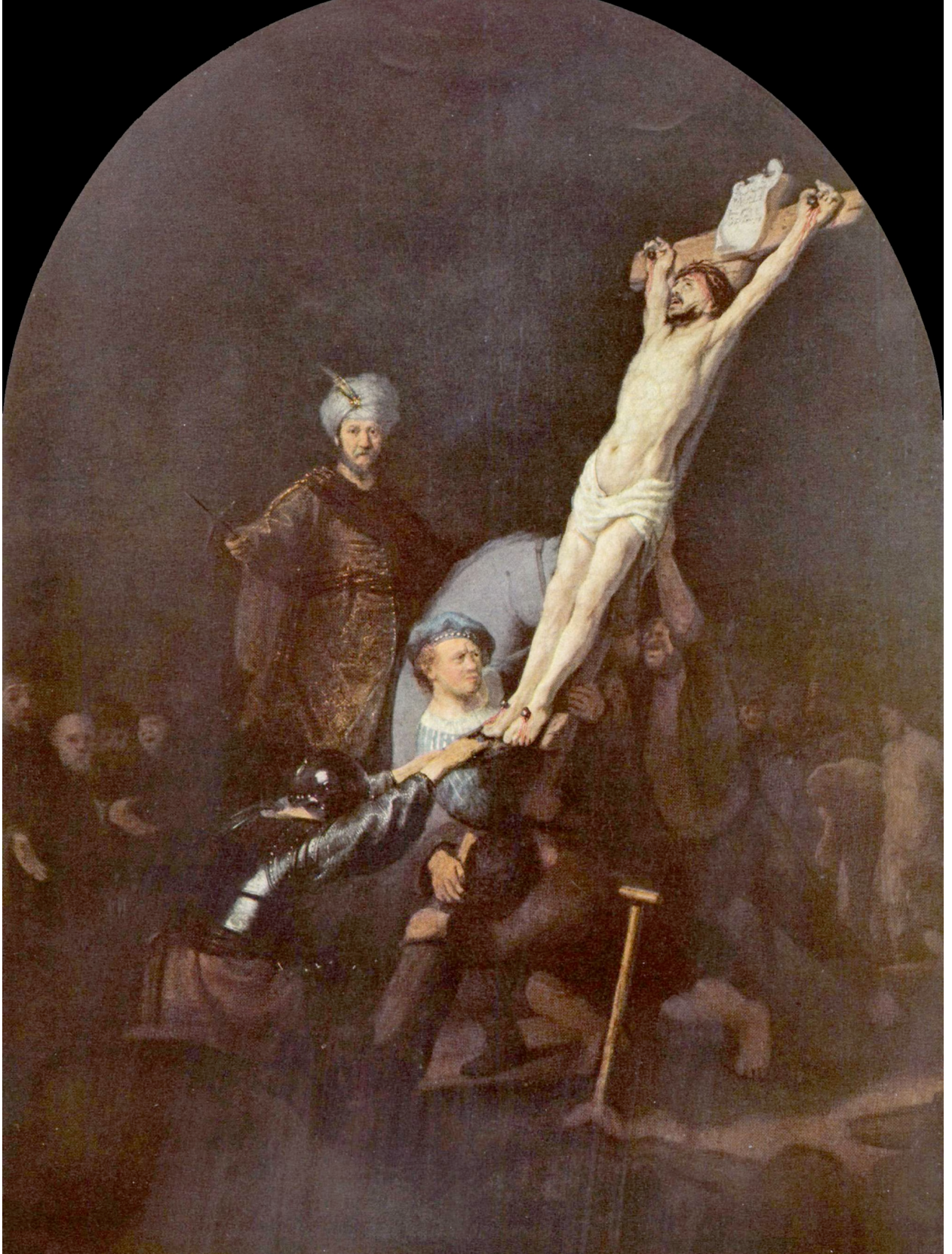
And the theme of this is that you are not crazy to believe in the eternal hope of spending forever in the presence of God. And you are not crazy to believe that death is now part of the solution. It’s not the problem. Death is part of our cure.

So, if you’re wondering how you get in on this death and resurrection and forgiveness of sin that comes to those who believe in Jesus, how to become part of the family of God, how to become a Christian, there are two steps, I would say—two things that have to happen.

The first one is that you have to come to a fullness of your desperation before God. You have to become self-aware to the debt that you owe the holiness of God. Many of us believe this, but if you think you can earn God’s love, that’s an insult to the majestic holiness of God, and it’s an admission that you still don’t understand how bad you have it. You can’t make this right in helping people. Something has to be done for you. You have to feel the debt, the cause, of the death of Jesus.

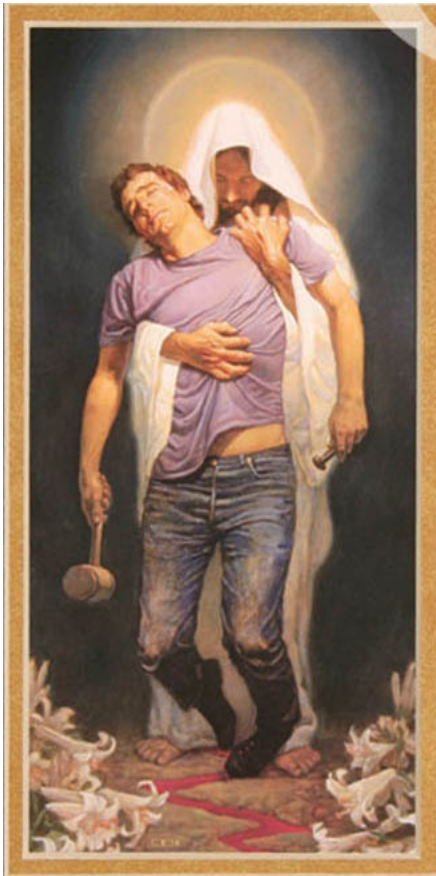
Here's how it happened in my life. And I say that because it’s how it happens in a number of people’s lives. I grew up in a church, regularly attending. It was all there in front of me. I missed it. But one day, it was clear to me that Jesus didn’t just die for all men. Jesus didn’t just die for everyone. Jesus died for me. Jesus died because of me. I have personal responsibility for His death. And after a month of understanding a little bit of what salvation was, I had a nightmare. It was a really bad dream, it was kind of a nightmare. It was actually a vision. And here's what the vision was. I was an eight-year-old boy, and I was the only person who had ever existed. And Jesus was lying down, beaten and bruised, on this cross. And I had nails and a hammer in my hand. And I’m begging Him, “I don’t want to do this. There’s got to be another way.” And He turns and looks at me and says, “Matt, if you don’t, you’ll die. You’ll spend eternity far from me in torment. Someone has to pay, and you can’t afford it. I’ll die for you. But it's because of you and you alone.”

It's not my story. It’s everyone’s story who is a follower of Jesus. It’s not a group discount. It’s their fault. Jesus died for me because of me.



Later on, years later, I'm studying the paintings of Rembrandt and I come across this painting. And I thought, *Well, look at Rembrandt. He thinks himself to be one of the followers of Jesus who are helping Jesus off the cross in time for his burial.*

And then I read the title and the story behind it. It's called *Raising of the Cross*. Rembrandt sees himself as one of the crucifiers. Because Rembrandt knew that Jesus died for Him, because of Him.



Maybe a decade later I'm in a Christian bookstore, and I see this picture of an artist having the same kind of vision. It's called "Forgiven." And this man knew the only way he'd be forgiven is if he picked up the nails and drove them into the hands of Jesus.



And then more recently, when Mel Gibson was making *The Passion of the Christ*, he interrupted the whole production to inject himself into this scene. He said, “I will pierce the hands of Jesus, because I did pierce the hand of Jesus. He died for me; He died because of me.”

That’s the first step—taking a personal inventory of your morality and finding yourself coming up very desperately, impossibly short. I had over a hundred people praying this week that people would have that understanding.

That’s part one. And then part two is the simple reception of the gift of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is by our faith in that gift that we become believers and followers and children of God. There’s a verse in the Bible that literally says that your certificate of death has been nailed to the cross. Your certificate of debt against God has been nailed to the cross. Jesus died for you, because of you. All you need to do is to receive that. You receive the death of Jesus as payment in full, completely. You don’t have to do anything to get it. Just receive it. The rest of your life will radically change from the inside out, not from the outside in. That’s the promise of the resurrection. It’s the promise of God.

And that’s why the resurrection changes everything. It changes everyone who it touches it.

One of the proofs of the resurrection is literally the lives of the disciples. There’s the time before the resurrection: ten of them aren’t even near the crucifixion. They have run for cover, changing their names, and looking for new passports. After the resurrection they boldly proclaim knowing and following Jesus the Christ and will all die in some kind of suffering as martyrs—courageous, bold. Because the resurrection changes everything and everyone it touches. It changes what you do. It changes how you change. It changes how you keep score. It changes

how you hope. It changes how you live, and it changes how you die. That is what resurrection Sunday is all about.

If you want to know more about that, we'd love for you to drop by our visitor's desk if you want and we'll tell you more. We'd love to get connected with you, hear your story, and tell you more about the story of the Bible and how God has sent His only Son, purely out of love, so that you would become the child of God.

When Jesus was speaking and would say, "I am speaking with the authority of God," some of the religious leaders would say, "What? Give us a sign. What authority do you have to be making these kinds of promises and issuing these kinds of decrees?"

And here's what He said. This is the proof. Look for it and watch, putting the very character of the nature of God the Father on this. "When you destroy this temple"—He's talking about His body—"in three days, I'll rebuild it." And so, they did. They destroyed His body. And in three days He did what He would promise. He rose from the dead.

It changes everything. And it changes everyone it touches. He is risen. He is risen indeed. Let's say that again: He is risen. He is risen indeed.

We're going to have some baptisms and a fun song after that. Before, let's pray.

Lord, You are risen, You are risen indeed. As a disciple, a doubting Thomas, I am so grateful that You are reckless with evidence, You are generous with proof; that You have shown us that it's reasonable to completely surrender our lives to do whatever You want us to do, anytime, anywhere, with anyone. It's reasonable. It makes sense. We're not crazy to give time and money to apologize, to seek forgiveness, to walk into suffering, and to hope for eternity. We are grateful that You put all Your integrity on a historic event and then wrapped that event with proof, testimony, verifiable facts; so that in our days of darkness when we feel like it's crazy, Your Spirit can say, No. No, it's crazy not to believe.

So, Lord, we are grateful that You care for us in an area of our lives where we're most vulnerable: in our doubts. Thank You for being that kind of God. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.