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Show Me the Way

Easter

1 Corinthians 15:1-19

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Throughout human history people have experienced deep within their souls a sense of longing, a sense that we were made for something different than this—we were made for something more. There is this sense within us that we are unwilling to settle for the world such as it is. Philosophers have described it as man's search for meaning or search for significance but, at the end of the day, something within us cries for something more. What if there is something more? What if it's, for example, heaven? What if we were made for heaven? Wouldn't the logical question be, *"Where is that, and how do I get there, and won't somebody show me the way*?"

Well, what if there was someone who could show us the way? Wouldn't that logically be someone who lives there, who for sure knows the way? Well, what if it was better than that? What if it was someone who lives there, who actually came to this earth to become a man in order to show us the way? When we start reading the Bible, we get to Genesis 2 and 3 and we get a sense of, *"This is what we were made for! We were made to experience a relationship with God in a place that God called Paradise*." But Adam and Eve sinned, and because of that they were expelled from the garden. And I would suggest—from that moment on—deep within the human soul there's always been a longing to go back, a sense there's something that's just not right, something that's missing. In Genesis 3 God gives just the hint of a promise that He would be willing to do something to show us the way back—to *make* a way back. Actually the whole of the Old Testament is the story of what God was willing to do in order to show us the way, in order to make a way back.

When we open up the pages of the New Testament, one of the things that we read is that God actually appointed someone for the sole purpose of announcing that God had fulfilled his promise. He'd actually become flesh and was here to make a way—to show us the way back to Paradise. John the Baptist's job was to point to Jesus and say again and again, "This is the long awaited one; this is the one God promised." John the Baptist announced that Jesus was the Lamb of God that had come to be slain to take away the sin of the world. Jesus Himself would say again and again that He was the long-awaited one; He was the promised Savior. Jesus would demonstrate through His miracles and through His teaching, even through the fulfillment of so many prophesies that had been made hundreds of years before; Jesus would demonstrate that He was indeed the long awaited Savior.

It was the night that Jesus was to be arrested, hours before He was to be crucified, that Jesus was actually having the conversation with His disciples, telling them that He was going to go ahead of them and He was going to prepare a place for them, that they would one day join Him there. Thomas was the one that asked the logical question, "Jesus, how can we do that? We don't even know the way!" Thomas was asking, "Show me the way." That's when Jesus responded in those familiar words, "I am the way, the truth and the life. Nobody gets to the Father but through Me." Of course Jesus was referring to the fact that He would go to a cross, that He would die on a cross for the sins of the world, that having paid for those sins, He could offer salvation freely as a gift, that those who received His gift would have a way to Paradise—they would experience what our souls long for!

Well, if the promise of salvation and the death of Jesus on the cross was the fulfillment of that promise, then the resurrection would be that which gives credibility to those words—that Jesus was, indeed, the long awaited Savior. He was God in the flesh, demonstrated by His ability to rise from the dead and to make a way back to Paradise. If the tomb is empty, then that means Jesus was who He said He was. Jesus has not only made a way, but He has shown us the way to what our souls long for—an intimate relationship with God today, and dwelling with Him forever in Paradise in the world to come. If the tomb is empty, then there is every reason for hope. And *that* is something to celebrate!

I'm sure many of you in the room this morning have experienced the deep pain of losing someone you dearly loved. If you've never been there, it's very hard to describe. I've seen it many times, sitting at the bedside of someone who one moment is drawing the stale breath of earth and the next moment breathing celestial air in the presence of Jesus. It's both a wondrous and mysterious moment.

There are a lot of questions about life after death, but perhaps the most central question would be: "Is it true? Is there actually life after death or is it just wishful thinking to help us emotionally cope with the very difficult moment? And if it is true, how do we know it's true?"

The skeptic might say, "I don't believe in life after death because I'm all about science. You know, it's just about *the facts*." But I would suggest to you there is virtually no science that proves there is no life after death. That isn't science; it's just an assertion. As a matter of fact, I would suggest the hint of science is just the opposite—that there is, within God's creation, the reminder that there is, indeed, life after death. I think when people talk about science, what they're saying is: *Just the facts*. You know, like Joe Friday, "Just the facts, Ma'am!" That, "I can't just take a wild leap of faith! I need some sort of substance, some sort of facts to help me with that belief." I couldn't agree more...which raises the question, "W*hat are the facts?"*

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 15. Different New Testament books are organized in different ways. Corinthians is mostly organized around topics and kind of a question and answer format. The Corinthians had submitted questions to Paul. Paul is responding back to these questions. In Chapter 15 you can see the question in verse 12:

> **Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** (*NASB, 1 Corinthians 15:12)

The question for the Corinthians wasn't really a doubting of the resurrection of Christ. It was, rather, a doubting of their own resurrection. Literally, would there be a physical, literal, bodily resurrection after death? What Paul is doing in verse 12 is connecting the idea of life after death—a literal, physical, bodily resurrection with the resurrection of Christ. In other words, if Christ is literally, physically, bodily raised from the dead, then that is the promise that we, too, shall experience a literal, physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. It would be equally true if Christ is still in the grave. Then there is no hope of life after death.

Now to understand what Paul is talking about, it helps to go back and get a little bit of the context. So let's just go back and pick it up in verse 1:

> **Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel** (the good news) **which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.** (Vs. 1-2)

So Paul is about to put forth the central message of the Christian faith—the *core* of the Christian faith. He says: *This is the good news! This is the message upon which we stand. This is the message by which we believe we are saved.* But he also adds...*unless it's all in vain*...meaning what he's about to share is the core; it's the foundation. And if the foundation is demonstrated to be not true, all of Christianity comes tumbling down. It's all or nothing. So what is that core doctrine? Verse 3:

> **For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,**

Christ is not a name so much as it is a title. He was the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Promised One. He didn't just die; He died for our sins. Because Jesus was God in the flesh—the perfect Lamb of God—He had no sins of His own for which He must atone. Therefore He could be the atonement sacrifice for us. So **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, reminding us that this was not a plan that had gone badly. This was *the* plan—that from the beginning God had made a promise that He would send a Messiah, a Christ, a Savior—that God Himself would become flesh and pay the penalty to make atonement for sin, to make a way back to Paradise. Paul goes on and says:

> **… and that He was buried, …** (Vs. 4a)

Buried is included as a reminder that He, indeed, *died*. He didn't swoon; He didn't faint; He *died*. The Romans knew what death was. He died and they placed Him in a tomb.

> **… and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,** (Vs. 4)

The reason the Romans put guards at the entrance of the tomb was because the Scriptures predicted that on the third day Jesus would, indeed, rise from the dead, giving credibility to His statement that He was, indeed, the Savior who had conquered sin and death once and for all. That was the plan.

> **… and that He appeared to Cephas,** (that would be Peter) **then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.** (Vs. 5-8)

The reference to a resurrected Savior is not a vague religious reference to a Savior that arose from the dead *somewhere*, at *some time*. It is rooted in historical fact. In Jerusalem, before many witnesses, the resurrected Christ *appeared to Peter and to the twelve*. Men, based on their conviction, having seen the resurrected Christ, would ultimately be executed because of their belief in a resurrected Savior. **He appeared to over five hundred at one time**, removing the possibility that it was some sort of a hallucination or vision that they saw the resurrected Christ. Five hundred people don't have the same hallucination at the same time. To demonstrate the credibility of the resurrection to skeptics, James, the half-brother of Jesus, the Scriptures tell us, did not believe that Jesus was, indeed, the Christ until he encountered the resurrected Christ. And Paul, on the road to Damascus, encountered the resurrected Christ and virtually overnight went from Christian-hater to a missionary of the gospel.

The claim, then, is that the Christian faith has at its core, a belief that God became flesh and died for our sins, was buried, and rose—literally, physically, bodily—on the third day, and appeared to many witnesses. As a matter of fact, Paul reminds us that these witnesses were still alive at the time of the writing. He is basically inviting the skeptics and the doubters to investigate for themselves, because most of these eye witnesses are still alive.

It's helpful to understand the book of Corinthians was written only about twenty years after the event of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. This was not religious stuff that came about hundreds of years later, but rather well within the lifetime of the eye witnesses of the events in Jerusalem, the claim was made of a crucified, buried and risen Savior. But we can actually do better than that.

It's evident that what Paul was referencing as the core doctrine of the Christian faith was a Christian *creed*—meaning this was the core—the creed, the belief—of the New Testament church. Paul uses creedal language when he says, "This is something that I received and passed on." He is clearly saying he did not originate this, but rather he received it and passed it on (which we would understand to be creedal language). Also, if you look in the Greek text, what you find is this part of the text is in a creed template. In other words, it's pulled out and isolated in a template that would tell the reader this was a creed. Paul says *he* received it. We can date that back to somewhere around two years after the resurrection of Christ, when Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus, was taught by God Himself, and received this creed—this core doctrine of the Christian faith —the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In other words, this wasn't some sort of religious legend or fable that grew over time. Pretty much all experts agree, for a legend or a fable to take root, it takes four-to-five-hundred years after the event. We're saying that at least within two years of the event, it is clear that the creed of the Christian church was the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In other words, the church did not create the resurrection of Christ; the resurrection of Christ created the church.

Hundreds and hundreds of people would be martyred and go to their death because of their belief in a resurrected Savior. Was the tomb empty? In first century Jerusalem, the hometown where the events of the death, burial and resurrection took place, almost overnight there was a massive response to the message of a resurrected Savior. Skeptics like James, the Pharisees, priests—people who only days before had called out for the crucifixion of the Christ—were so convinced by the evidence that they turned to believe in a resurrected Savior. As a matter of fact, within just a matter of months, over ten thousand people in Jerusalem alone embraced the dangerous message of a resurrected Savior. People two-thousand years ago can have all kinds of theories about what happened, but the credibility goes back to the first century and the people living in Jerusalem that had every opportunity to inspect the tomb, every opportunity to investigate the witnesses, and this beginning of a movement that would spread like wildfire. There were plenty of opponents to Christianity in the first century. Paul puts it on the table: *"If you want to stop Christianity, produce a body, because, the empty tomb is the evidence that's at the core of the Christian faith."* The fact that Christianity grew like wildfire throughout the area is evidence that no one could refute the evidence of a resurrected Savior. All of that, then, precedes the discussion starting in verse 12:

> **Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are**

> **not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.** (Vs. 12-19)

Basically the argument is saying that if there is no life after death, if there is no literal, physical, bodily resurrection, then Jesus Himself did not rise from the dead. The two are linked together. If Jesus arose from the dead—literally, physically, bodily rose from the dead—then He conquered sin and death. Therefore, then, there *is* life after death. So life after death is linked to the resurrection of Christ. It is interesting that only twenty years after the event, Paul is so bold that he is actually saying, *"This is the core of the Christian faith, that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our preaching is worthless! We're actually liars and deceivers for saying that Jesus arose from the dead. Our faith is empty; it has no value. We are still in our sin and shame; there is no forgiveness. Our loved ones who have died have merely perished; they are gone forever. And we are, of all people, most to be pitied."* Some would say that religious truth is really just manufactured in order to create something to help us emotionally deal with the difficult times of life. Paul just said if that's true, we are a pitiful people.

Why is the resurrection of Christ so linked to the idea of life after death? The logic goes like this: From Genesis 2 God said that sin brings forth death. For Adam and Eve, "If you sin, you die." Adam and Eve chose to sin against God, and sin brought forth death. The argument of Romans 5 is, then all of us are subject to death because all of us are sinners. People can argue all day long whether they're sinners or not, but according to the Bible, if you are subject to death, that is proof positive you are a sinner. That's the way that God has explained it. Therefore, if Jesus died *for* sin —if Jesus paid the debt of sin on the cross—then once and for all Jesus *conquered* sin. But how do we know that Jesus actually conquered sin? How do we know that's true? The logic would be: If Jesus conquered sin, then that also means He conquered the consequence of sin, which is death. So the evidence that Jesus did, indeed, conquer sin on the cross would be that He conquered death once and for all, which would be evidenced by His resurrection. So if Jesus arose from the dead, it would be evidence that He conquered death, which would be evidence that He conquered sin once and for all. You actually see it in verse 12 when the text says: **Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead...**the word **the** actually isn't in the Greek text. The Greek text literally reads that He was raised *from death*. It carries much more the idea of the state of death than just, "He rose from the dead". He rose from the state of death, conquering death once and for all by conquering sin. It's the same statement used for us—that we, experiencing Jesus as Savior, enter into that victory and we, too, experience victory over the state of death.

What Paul is saying (if you just reverse the statements that were made) is: If Jesus rose from the dead (and I would suggest that the historical evidence is overwhelming in favor of that belief), then that means that Jesus conquered sin, which means that now our preaching is *not* in vain, but rather it *is* the proclamation of truth. We are not liars and deceivers, but we are proclaiming the good news of Christ. Our faith is not empty, but actually it has great value as we experience God's salvation—that we are not in our sin; we are not in our shame, but we have actually experienced the forgiveness of our sins and we stand in the righteousness of Christ. Our loved ones who have died in Christ have not perished, but have everlasting life. And rather than a people to be pitied, we are a people filled with hope.

How do we know that there is life beyond the grave? Answer: Because Jesus conquered sin and death once and for all, He offers that salvation to us freely as a gift of His grace to those who would believe, by faith, that Jesus died for my sin, that He conquered my sin once and for all, and has

promised me life now and life eternal in Paradise—the place that my soul longs for. He offers that to us freely as a gift. Jesus said it Himself. *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall not die."* Jesus claimed to be the resurrection and the life.

Regardless of your story, regardless if you've been wildly successful or if you've been a life-long struggler, regardless of what you've done or what has been done to you, God offers His salvation freely as a gift of His grace to be received by faith, the forgiveness of your sin, a relationship with God, and a promise of an eternity beyond the grave that is more wondrous than you can begin to imagine. No matter how difficult, no matter how painful, no matter how hard this life gets, for those who put their faith in Christ, your future is more wondrous and more glorious than words could ever describe. Because the tomb is empty, my life does not have to be. God has made a way. Because the tomb is empty, we, this morning, are a people *filled with hope*!

> *Father, we celebrate this morning the message of the resurrected Christ, Lord, not just some religious theory, but our belief that Jesus conquered sin, evidenced by His conquering death through the resurrection, and that Jesus offers us life eternal, life beyond the grave—the Paradise that our souls long for—freely as a gift to those who receive it. God, we celebrate, our hearts filled with hope this morning because of the resurrected Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

(Video Testimony)

I grew up in a family of five kids. It wasn't a Christian home. It was, I would say, extremely virtuous. We knew the difference between right and wrong and were expected to do the right thing. But, as a kid growing up, I never heard anything about grace.

When I was a junior in high school, I got pregnant. I knew that was going to be something in my family that was, of course, unacceptable, and so I hid my pregnancy for a really long time. The night before the first day of school, my Mom came into my bedroom. I asked her, "Mom, what would you do if I was pregnant?" And she said, "Why? Are you?" And I said, "I am." And she came over and put her hand on my stomach and just started crying. I knew it was going to be really, really hard from that point on. Mom told Dad, and he just quit talking to me. That's why I hid it for so long, because I knew that was going to be how that news was going to be received.

I knew right away that I was going to give my baby up for adoption. I got to hold her and I got to feed her for a few days. When it came time to actually sign those papers, the bottom dropped out. It was just a loss. It was an absolute loss. It was like somebody had died. But then it was really difficult because I went back home and I didn't feel like I could share those feelings with anybody.

After Morgan was born and adopted, things were different for me. I had met some new friends who were believers, and I had gone to *Young Life*. One night they had given us these rocks as a reminder that Jesus is a foundation that you can build your life upon. I just didn't feel like I had a foundation at that time. I felt like everything had just dropped out from underneath me. I went home that night and sat out in my car and gave my life to Christ.

I met my husband when I was nineteen. We got married when I was twenty. We moved to Kansas. We had three kids together and I became a teacher. We joined a church, a small church, and I poured my heart into it. I started teaching Sunday school; I directed Bible school, and then I

became an Elder. But, in nineteen years of going to that same church, I never heard anything about grace. I kept feeling, "There's got to be more...there's got to be more."

At home my husband and I were growing apart. I poured myself into the kids and teaching, and he poured himself into the office. When the kids were older and didn't need me as much, I sat back and looked at everything. We had just become roommates; there just wasn't a relationship. Things just kind of fell apart. On Sundays, we all looked pretty good. I got the kids up, got them dressed appropriately, and got their hair combed. That was a huge piece of going to church, the appearance part. When we started having trouble in our marriage, that got a little more difficult to do. I can't go to church and present myself as this person who's got it all together, because I just don't.

My family lived here in Lincoln, so I wanted to move back to where my family was and where there'd be some opportunities for the kids to move on. I had been humbled through the whole divorce. I came in feeling pretty broken. Going to Berean, I really enjoyed the messages and I really enjoyed the music. Then I was sitting back and—wait a second—did I hear that right? I'm hearing something that I've not heard before. I found out I'm loved by God no matter what—on your best days and on your worst days! I heard it so many times in church, and I was thinking, "You know, I've had some really awful days, and He still loves me, and He still cherishes me!" You know, all those things that I'd been saying: "There's got to be more...there's got to be more," I found it—because what else could you ever hope for!

Understanding what grace is has had a huge impact on me. It has made me a better teacher. There are kids I interact with every single day who have lives that I can't imagine. They need someone to love them; they need to be accepted, and they need to be in a place where it's safe and, sometimes, school is that place. Not only has God helped me understand grace better, but He's shown it to me in ways I couldn't have imagined.

I finally got to meet my daughter Morgan when she was twelve. She's been a huge blessing in my life and even in my kids' lives ever since. When I was pregnant with Morgan, I went to huge lengths to hide all of my "stuff" from everyone. Even when I was going through my divorce, I went through huge lengths to stay away from everyone and not put my "stuff" out there. I think that there's so much freedom in saying, "You know what? This happened to me. I made some bad choices, and it's okay, because I'm still loved by Christ; I don't have to show up shiny and perfect."

What grace does is set you free from that and you can move on. I would say that it makes you new and gives you the opportunity to be renewed. …Linda

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