

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Easter 2016**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just I thank you that we celebrate today, we're just incredibly amazed at what it is you've given to us and we are amazed that we can celebrate your resurrection this day. Lord, up from the ground you arose and that's what saves each and every one of us and we are so incredibly grateful for what you've done. Father, this morning, I just pray again as we open up your book and we look a little deeper into what it is that you've done for us through the cross and through the resurrection, I pray that your Holy Spirit would be here, that you'd be guiding us as we open this book up and that you would be again enabling us to make it of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, one of the best selling movie franchises of all time as most of you know is *Star Wars*. And it all started with one very basic plot line. The Imperial forces under the evil Darth Vader hold Princess Leia hostage until Hans Solo and his companions are able to rescue her and restore freedom and justice to the galaxy. It is obviously the most popular fairy tale of our time. Now, there is a

reason why some fairy tales and fantasies succeed, and I believe they do because they touch on the ultimate fairy tale. I think it was C.S. Lewis who made this connection first, and basically what he suggested is that we are living out right now the ultimate fairy tale, and Easter is about the battle that took place within that ultimate fairy tale. You see, there really was a good king who was a ruler over everything and there really was an evil prince who rebelled against that king and there really was an actual rebellion that took place long ago in a kingdom far, far away. The Bible even records it in *Revelation 12:7*. It says this: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

See, it was C.S. Lewis who suggested that the reason why fairy tales and fantasies are so popular and enduring is because every one of us has within us the traces of the ultimate fairy tale that is still being played out every single day. Our adversary is not named Darth Vader. His name is Satan. And according to the Bible, he attempted a coup against God himself. He fought for and lost the rulership of the entire universe and then was thrust out of

heaven. And according to the Bible he and a third of all of his angels were thrust out of heaven and unfortunately they landed right here on earth.

I've often made the statement that we are in a proxy war, and a proxy war is basically a battle between two major powers who take up the sides of very minor powers. The forces of light and the forces of darkness are at war and at the epicenter of that war is you and me. And when you understand the history of mankind in terms of this fairy tale, well, you realize that what took place in the Garden of Eden was far more than a simple act of disobedience on the part of two people. These were no ordinary people. They were the very first created human beings. They were the only ones made in the image of God. They were the progenitors of the race that you and I come from. And the dark prince, that is Satan, knew that if he could get the very fountainhead of the human race to fall, then he would then pollute the entire race that flowed from him. A flawed Adam and Eve by their very nature would be incapable of producing perfect offspring. And because God's essence is absolute perfection, it would have alienated every subsequent child of the entire race. That's why the stakes were so high in that garden. I mean, Adam and Eve were perfect and if Satan to get them to join in his rebellion, they would embrace him, they would lose their perfection and forever be enslaved to the dark side. So

Satan assumes the form of a serpent and we all know the rest of the story. He seduces Adam and Eve, telling them that the real reason why God has forbidden them to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil is because they would become just like God. See, the dark prince knows something. The dark prince knows that as soon as they eat that fruit, they too will be fallen and sinful like him. And so Satan succeeds in getting them to think that God's motive was evil and therefore this one rule that he established, it needs to be ignored. And so they eat the fruit. And they eat it thinking that they're now going to be like God only to realize that everything about them that was like God is now ceasing. Their perfection is gone. Their relationship with a holy, perfect God has been shattered and they've been cast out of the Garden of Eden. You know, the story goes from bad to worse as their offspring Cain and Abel become the victim and the perpetrator of the very first murder. And from the standpoint of a fairy tale, it certainly looks like the dark side has won. The evil prince has succeeded in destroying the one thing that would enable the creatures made in God's image to have fellowship with their creator, and that's their perfection. I mean the still perfect God has now been separated from his now fallen and imperfect creation.

Well, things go from bad to worse. In *Genesis 6:5-6*, it says: *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and*

*that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So God finally destroys the entire planet with a worldwide flood leaving only one family to repopulate the entire earth. Well, Noah and his offspring do just that. They do that and eventually it seems like there's a success but eventually the sin and the brokenness that is now inherent in human nature reasserts itself at the Tower of Babel. Genesis 11:5 says this: And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.*

Now in all of this, God still had a plan to rescue mankind, but it had to focus on the one thing that separated mankind from his creator, and that's this issue of sin. You see, a God who was perfection itself cannot have fellowship with imperfection without

becoming imperfect himself. And so the evil prince had successfully caused the entire race of mankind to tumble into imperfection and they in turn took the whole of creation with them. I mean we know that all of creation groans this day in the pangs of death. And the life that we all live today was never the life that God originally intended for man. Now for one, we were never intended to die. I mean, we treat death as something that's completely normal and natural. It's just a normal part of living. But it's not. I mean the Bible says that death was the inevitable result of our fall in Adam. In *Romans 5:12* it says: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

Now, I'm saying that this life is not the one originally intended for us by God, but that's not to say that God was taken by surprise. He knew full well that we would mess up terribly in the Garden of Eden, that we would again side with the evil prince against him and that we, too, would become fallen like the evil king and so we'd have no hope unless there was a good prince who would come and rescue us. Isn't it amazing how much like a fairy tale the gospel reads? But that's not where the fairy tale ends. You know, there's usually some kind of epic battle in a fairy tale that where good comes up against evil and good finally wins and the people live on happily ever after. Well again, that sounds exactly

like the gospel. I mean, Jesus is not only the good prince, he's also the good shepherd and this is what he says to his sheep about living happily ever after, he says this in John 10, he says: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand."*

You see, Jesus is the good prince and he does give his sheep the ability to live on happily ever after, but in this case it's a real ever after. It's not the musings of a fairy tale. And so we say, okay, well, how is it that the good prince is able to do that? I mean, in fairy tales, it's an incredibly easy thing to do, the good prince just waves his magic wand or he gives somebody a magic potion or he does some other magical kind of thing, but we're not talking about fairy tales any more. What we're talking about here is ultimate reality. If what truly separates us from God is our imperfection, then how could even an all powerful prince make us perfect if we no longer are? Well, there's two different ways to become perfect. I mean the first is to be absolutely transcendentally flawless. That's the perfection that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the garden. That's what they had. And because of that perfection, they enjoyed unbroken fellowship between themselves and

their God, their creator. Genesis describes what that was like, it says this, it says: *The LORD God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* Then the LORD God said, *"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."* Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, *"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."* Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Now this is a description of Adam and Eve who were absolutely



unique, they alone knew what it was like to live on this planet with their creator and to live in a state of absolute perfection. I mean, we can't tell from the scripture how long they lived in this state, it could have been brief, it could have been longer. We don't really know. What we do know though is that the serpent, that is the evil prince, successfully tempted them into trading in their perfection for imperfection by tricking them into thinking that they could become like God. I mean some people actually believe that God was caught by surprise by Adam's fall and that the cross was kind of -- and Jesus's death is kind of like plan B that God devised after Adam had rebelled. Nothing could be further from the truth. You see, from the start God knew that to give Adam the freedom to choose also required the freedom to choose badly. And knowing that he would make that choice, God was willing to pay the price of that choice. That required God himself to leave heaven itself and enter into our world as God in the flesh. We celebrate that by Christmas. And you know, 2,000 years, more or less, 2,000 years ago, a second Adam walked on this planet. And ,you know, in some ways he was like the original Adam and in many ways he was not. He was like Adam in that he, too, was a man of flesh and blood but there were differences as well. I mean Adam was made out of the dust of earth. Jesus was God in the flesh, eternally existent and now born of Mary in a barn in Bethlehem. Adam's perfection was untested, it was untried, and when it was truly

tested by an adherence to a simple test of obedience, it failed and it failed miserably. Jesus' perfection was something that he had always had and from the start of his public ministry, it was a perfection that was repeatedly tested. Like in all good fairy tales, the good prince passed the test. Do you remember what happened at the very beginning of Jesus's public ministry? I mean this happened right after his baptism. This is *Mark 1:11*, it says this: *And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.*

Now just compare the two Adams. Our progenitor, our Adam is given every single thing a human being could possibly ever want including his companion Eve, and he has one restriction placed on him, that he does not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Well, that temptation proves too much. Adam succumbs to it. Jesus on the other hand is driven by the Holy Spirit out into the desert completely alone save for the demons and these other fallen entities that haunt that awful place. *Matthew 4* describes it, it says: *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If*

*you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.*

You know, it was Russell Moore who summed up Jesus's temptations by noting that Jesus was tempted with consumption, he was tempted with security, and he was tempted with status. And he went on to point out that Jesus was tempted really the same way that Adam was, to provide for himself, to protect himself, and to exalt himself. We know Adam failed terribly. But we also know that Jesus responded to each of his temptations by saying, "It is written," "It is

written," "It is written." "It is written," Jesus said, to the temptation he had for consumption. Again we compare them to the other Adam. Adam is surrounded by every single food that could ever please man, he has access to an abundance of food that is literally heavenly. It's all free for the taking. But he doesn't want that food. The only food he really wanted was the forbidden fruit. Jesus didn't even experience his first formal temptation until he had gone forty days and forty nights eating nothing. I mean his temptation wasn't for delicacies he had never tasted before. It was to stave off the starvation that is now attacking his body. But even starvation is not enough to get Jesus to fall. Jesus responds to the temptation by saying, "*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*"

Well, it is written, Jesus also said, to the temptation for security. Again we look at Adam. Adam is surrounded in this garden that he's working with his father God, and he's working it and he's literally in Eden. There's no strife, there's no conflict, there's no danger, there's no threat, I mean, all of life is unfallen. All of it is pristine. It's a fairy tale existence. Jesus, however, he is literally in a God-forsaken desert and he's all alone and he's tempted by Satan himself who knows how to quote scripture as he tempts Jesus to prove that he's the Son of God by

leaping off the temple peak. Jesus responds by saying, "Again it is written, "'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

And finally Satan tempts to get Jesus to throw his lot in with him. He offers him up all of the kingdoms of the world. Luke 4 says this: *And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."* Well, Matthew's gospel says Jesus said: *"Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"* Then the devil left him and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

I think it's fascinating that Jesus doesn't dispute Satan's claim that all the kingdoms of the world had been given to him. Interesting, because later on when Jesus knew that the timetable for his sacrifice had actually arrived, he would again refer to Satan as the ruler of this world, but listen very carefully to how Jesus expressed it. This is what he said in *John 14*. He said: *"I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me."* See, in that one final sentence *"He has no claim on me,"* Jesus points out why he is the good prince who has come to rescue his people. And we see why the gospel looks

for all intents and purposes like the ultimate fairy tale. You see, there really was an evil prince who enslaved the entire world and there really was a good prince who came down to rescue his own from the clutches of the evil prince who Jesus calls the ruler of this world. It is how the good prince went about rescuing his people that we want to focus on this morning because that's what Easter is all about.

See, it's about the grand battle in a war that's been going on for all time between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. It's about a very, very public stage, a Roman place of execution known as Golgotha or the place of the skull. And there on full display not just for the citizens of Rome and Jerusalem to see but also before the principalities and the powers and the authorities of the dark side, for them to see was the good prince laying out his sacrifice to pay for our sin. *Romans 3:23* says this, it says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

See, here's why the good prince had to sacrifice himself for us. You know, Newton's law, it is an inviolable law, it said that for any action there is an equal opposite reaction. It's a fixed law of physics. There are moral laws that govern the universe as well and they are far, far more unbendable. The most unbendable law in the universe is the law of retributive justice and it governs the entire universe and it says for every sin ever committed there will be a cry for retribution to balance the cosmic scales of divine justice. In essence, for every sin committed there is a corresponding outpouring of the wrath of God. I mean that's not to say that God stands there with steam pouring out of his ears 'cause he's furious about our sins. That's the way man reacts to wrath. That's not God. You see, the wrath of God is the absolute appropriate response of perfect holiness to sin. I mean, we see the wrath of God as perfectly appropriate but only in certain select circumstances. You know, if God were to wink at the murders in Brussels this week and ignore the agony that those suicide bombers produced, we would be right in saying there's something wrong with this God of no wrath. See, God's wrath is expected at outrages. God's wrath is expected at ISIS, it's expected at Hitler, it's expected at sex slave trafficking and the like, but what I think we don't understand at all is that a perfect God has got to express his perfect wrath not only at outrageous sins but at every single violation of his perfection. You know, a suicide

bombing or a lustful thought, I mean, they both differ greatly in their wickedness, but there's something they both have in common. They are both violations of God's perfection, therefore they are both sins. *Romans 3* says: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* and because all of us have sinned, all of us are sinners, and all of us, every one of us has incurred the wrath of God. Every single child of Adam is under the wrath of God. That's why *Ephesians* describes us as being *by nature children of wrath*. But God's answer is in *Romans 3* and it says that Jesus was put forward by God as a propitiation. I know that's a fifty cent word and I know when you hear that you say what the heck is that? What is a propitiation? Well, it's a technical term and what it means is a sacrifice that does what? It's a sacrifice that removes wrath. Now Jesus went to the cross for the express purpose of dying, and by his death to remove the wrath of God from us. God goes on to say in that verse: *Because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins*. And what God is saying there is that rather than pour out his wrath on each of us the second we sinned, we'd never survive. Rather than pour that wrath out on us, he passed over those sins storing up the wrath of them until such time when he could publicly display it, not on us but on the one who would be a propitiation for us, on the good prince. On the Lord Jesus Christ. God speaks specifically to this idea that every single sin we commit stores up wrath for us in *Romans 2:5*. He



says: *Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.*

Now there's really two different places where this wrath goes on display. One of them's already taken place, another one is yet to come, and the one that is to come is the final judgment when God will reveal that in the day of wrath. But the other one, as I said, the other one's already taken place. The wrath of God was on complete display 2,016 years ago in Jerusalem at Golgotha. And that wrath was not poured out on us, it was poured out on the good prince. It was poured out on the one who was bearing that wrath for us. You see, the Son of God on the most public of stages was going into battle against the ultimate Darth Vader whose name was Satan. And it would start in the garden of Gethsemane. And here we have to mark a fundamental difference between the way much of the world looks at the cross and the way the scriptures do. You see, there are many who see the cross as primarily a physical expression of God's love for man and horror for sin. And it is certainly that, but it is far, far more. And as horrifying as the cross was, I believe it's nothing compared to what Jesus actually underwent for us. You see, as excruciating as the cross is, it is a punishment that is really common to man. If you look at history and if you look all about it, it's been undertaken thousands and

thousands of times. In fact to our horror we learned last week that there's a real possibility that ISIS routinely crucifies Christians when they find out they're Christians. You see, the battle really hasn't changed. You know, it's thousands of years later and there still is an evil empire that's fighting against the forces of light, and evil empire's hatred is still centered around what? The cross. But not for reasons of physical pain. You see, as awful as that pain was, it was the spiritual pain that Jesus would undergo for us that was unique in all the universe because only Jesus was qualified for the sacrifice he was about to undergo. And it all goes back to that statement that he made to Satan when he said to the ruler of this world: *"He has no claim on me."* He was addressing his primary qualification for entering into the sacrifice of his blood. You see, as the good prince who would come down to rescue his people, he knew the only thing that could restore their lost perfection would be his way of restoring it. The only way to stand before God worthy of his presence is to be transcendentally flawless which none of us, save Jesus, is. The only other way to is to have your flaws, the flaws that you own, to have those flaws paid for by someone else capable of paying it. Jesus alone was the transcendentally flawless one who came to purchase flawlessness for us because Satan had no claim on him. And when we place our faith in Christ's death on the cross, we by faith apply Christ's flawless perfection to our sins. God then justifies us by

seeing us now guiltless before him not because we have no flaws but because we've had those flaws fully paid for in Christ. The law of retributive justice is now satisfied. Easter highlights the center stage where Jesus went through the process of paying that debt. And like I said, it started in the garden of Gethsemane. There's a reason why Jesus sweat blood.

You know, if you were to compare Jesus' response to the upcoming events of the cross, you might be disappointed to think that, well, Jesus appeared to be overwhelmed by this, I mean after all, he begged God to take it away, and he was so overwhelmed at the thought of it, it says that he sweat great drops of blood. We read of other great saints of God who went to equally horrible deaths at least physically and they went with a smile on their face and complete trust in God. But we forget, no human being went through what Jesus went through. The physical horror of the cross, as I said, is something that's been visited on thousands of people. The metaphysical spiritual horror of the cross is something no human being will ever fully appreciate, and here's why. It's found in 2 *Corinthians 5:21*. It says this: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* You need to understand what that scripture is saying. You need to let that sink into your being and your consciousness. 'Cause what God is saying is that Jesus's absolute

perfection began absorbing the imperfection of his sheep until he fully and totally became the sin that we collectively committed. Jesus never went to the cross kind of nobly shouldering our burdens as something external that he had to bear. Instead he went to the cross literally becoming those sins. I've searched and searched for ways to describe it but I haven't been able to find anything better than the statement that Joni Eareckson Tada makes in her book *When God Weeps*. And for years I used to read this passage at Easter and I just recently re-read it and I realized it absolutely bears repetition. This is Joni imagining what is taking place as Jesus is going through the epic battle of the cross as our good prince, and she describes his crucifixion this way starting with the nails and the nailer. She says this:

"'On your back with you!' One raises a mallet to sink the spike. But the soldier's heart must continue pumping as he readies the prisoner's wrist. Someone must sustain the soldier's life minute by minute, for no man has this power on his own. Who supplies breath to his lungs? Who gives energy to his cells? Who holds his molecules together? Only by the Son do 'all things hold together' (Colossians 1:17). The victim wills that the soldier live on. He grants the warriors continued existence. The man swings. As the man swings, the Son recalls how he and the Father first designed the medial nerve in the human forearm, the sensations it would be

capable of. The design proves flawless. The nerves perform exquisitely. 'Up you go!' They lift the cross. God is on display and can scarcely breathe. But these pains are a mere warm-up to his other and growing dread. He begins to feel a foreign sensation. Somewhere during this day an unearthly foul odor began to waft, not around his nose, but his heart. He feels dirty. Human wickedness starts to crawl upon his spotless being -- the living excrement from our souls. The apple of his Father's eye turns brown with rot. His Father, he must face his Father like this! From heaven the Father now rouses himself like a lion disturbed, shakes His mane and roars against the shriveling remnant of a man hanging on a cross. Never has the Son seen the Father look at him so, never felt even the least of his hot breath. But the roar shakes the unseen world and darkens the visible sky. The Son does not recognize these eyes. Son of Man! Why have you behaved so? You have cheated, lusted, stolen, gossiped, murdered, envied, hated, lied. You have cursed, robbed, overspent, overeaten, fornicating, disobeyed, embezzled, and blasphemed. Oh, the duties you have shirked, the children you have abandoned! Who has ever so ignored the poor, so played the coward, so belittled my name? Have you ever held your razor tongue? What a self-righteous, pitiful drunk -- you, who molest young boys, peddle killer drugs, travel in cliques, and mock your parents. Who gave you the boldness to rig elections, foment revolutions, torture

animals, and worship demons? Does the list never end! Splitting families, raping virgins, acting smugly, playing the pimp -- buying politicians, practicing extortion, filming pornography, accepting bribes. You have burnt down buildings, perfected terrorist tactics, founded false religions, traded in slaves -- relishing each morsel and bragging it all. I hate, I loathe these things in you! Disgust for everything about you consumes me! Can you not feel my wrath? Of course the Son is innocent. He is blamelessness itself. The Father knows this. But the divine pair have an agreement, and the unthinkable must now take place. Jesus will be treated as if personally responsible for every sin ever committed. The Father watches as his heart's treasure, the mirror image of himself, sinks drowning into raw, liquid sin. Jehovah's stored rage against humankind from every century explodes in a single direction. *'Father, Father! Why have you forsaken me?!'* But heaven stops its ears. The Son stares up at the one who cannot, who will not reach down or reply. The Trinity had planned it. The Son had endured it. The Spirit enabled him. The Father rejected the Son whom he loved. Jesus, the God-man from Nazareth, perished. The Father accepted his sacrifice for sin and was satisfied. The Rescue was accomplished."

The rescue was accomplished. The ultimate fairy tale is finished. So how do we know that the Father accepted the sacrifice of the

son? I mean, how do we know that the good prince has finally won the final battle with the evil prince? I mean God knew, Christ knew but I don't know that the entire universe knew. My guess is the entire universe stood on tiptoe holding its breath waiting for three days to find out. I also wouldn't be surprised if the enemy, if the evil prince had the wildest party the universe has ever known thinking that in Christ's death he had won. You see, if Christ hadn't gone through this entire battle assuming and becoming our sin perfectly, perfectly, then he would have been a flawed sacrifice. His death would have been meaningless. He would have stayed dead forever and our hope would be absolutely lost. That's why Paul says in *1 Corinthians 15: And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.* But praise God, Paul adds this verse in verse 20: *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* And he said that because three days afterwards after Jesus gave up his Spirit, the stone rolled away and the risen Christ appeared.

There are those who claim that was a ruse, that Christ merely swooned on the cross and in the coolness of the tomb he regained his strength and reappeared as the risen Christ. I just wonder how

desperate do you have to be to believe that a man first covered with a crown of thorns and then flogged to where he's almost unrecognizable, then nailed through his hands and his feet, speared through his side could then rest for three days on a slab in a cave and suddenly come out refreshed enough to trick people into thinking he had risen from the dead and was now worthy of their worship? You know, folks can be tricked into all kinds of things by what they think is the truth, and we saw 19 Saudi Arabian citizens fly planes into buildings thinking that they were giving worship to their God. Just last week two brothers in Brussels blew themselves up in order to murder others thinking that they were doing the same thing. You see, thinking you are on the right track can produce a homicidal or suicidal willingness to give your all because you've convinced yourself that Allah will be pleased. But nobody, nobody is willing to give their lives up for something they know is a fraud. And virtually all of the theories about Christ faking his execution come down to one unavoidable weakness, that is everyone on the inside would have known deep down that Christ was faking it, that the whole thing was a lie. You know, people are willing to go to their deaths as we've seen this past week for what they think, for what they're convinced is the truth. But no one is willing to go to their deaths for what they know is a lie. Every single one of the disciples save John went to their deaths as well as countless others because they knew that Christ was risen. They



had seen him with their own eyes, they had touched him with their own hands, they had experienced the physical presence of the living God, and it was proof enough. Now 2,000 years later, the original band of twelve now numbers in the billions. And the reason is this: That fairy tale is ultimate truth. The good prince really did exist and so did the evil prince and they're both alive here and now today and the battle for both sides is still ongoing. And we know this, we know that the good prince won the ultimate victory at the cross. We also know that it is our task to tell others that their flaws, their sins, those things that make them less than perfect have cast them into the camp of the evil one, have put them into the dark side. But because *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*, he sent the good prince into our world. There really is a good prince whose love for us was so great that he was willing to leave heaven itself, and as the scripture says: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*. That is not a fairy tale. It's the story of Easter. And by faith, it can be your story as well. Let's pray.

*Father God, I just praise you and thank you for the ultimate fairy tale. I thank you, Lord, for the knowledge that there really was an evil prince who enslaved the world and there really was a good*

prince who came down to this world and who at the cost of his own life, paid the price to rescue his sheep. I praise you, I thank you for that tale being truth. I praise you and I thank you for that tale being ultimate truth, and I pray this day and in the future you would give us the ability to share that tale with others who are still on the dark side, who still have their flaws unpaid for. And I pray, Lord, today, if there's anybody in this room, if there's anybody who the Holy Spirit is touching and saying now is the time, now is the opportunity to leave the dark side and come to the side of light, to recognize that your sins can be paid for by placing your faith in the good prince, I pray that you would touch that person right now. And if there's anyone who wishes to have prayer, there are elders up in front, please come forward, please let us share with you. And I pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.