

# The Only Event That Matters

*The Resurrection*

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I am so glad that you are here today. I am glad that you are here today because I want to talk to you today about the only independently relevant and important event that has ever taken place in the history of the world. Of everything that has ever happened, only one event stands alone, stands by itself needing nothing else and is important and relevant. And that event is that Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary died, was buried and got up out of the tomb and is alive still today.

As Paul says:

....that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.<sup>1</sup>

Now I am not saying that nothing else important has ever happened in history. A lot of things important have happened in history. Your birthday is important to your history. But your parents' birthday is important to your history. My birthday is important to my history. But only, only ultimately because Jesus was raised from the dead.

Let me explain it like this. When in 1982, a year that stands in the memory for some of us because it was the year we got cable for the first time and had TBS and in 1982 I was watching cable and the Atlanta Braves won the pennant. And they won the pennant in a dramatic way. Dale Murphy who was their perennial MVP hit a game winning homerun against the San Diego Padres in the last game of the season.

Now on the flight home from San Diego he went to every member of that baseball team and he said to them, "Do you remember such and such a time?" And he would list a catch they made in right field or somebody they threw out in the ninth inning or a clutch hit they got at some point in some game during that 160 game season that allowed them

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

to win the game. And he said, “We won that game because of that play. And we won this pennant by one game. You won the pennant for us.”

That was arguably true. But what everybody on that plane knew was that all of those events leading up to the day would have been meaningless if Dale Murphy hadn't hit that game winning homerun.

Yes, there are important events in your life and there are important events in history, but if Jesus Christ does not get out of the grave, if death is the final word, if death is the final word in your life, if death is the final word for the life of humanity, then everything else is irrelevant. Nothing else matters. Death trumps everything.

I want you to understand what we are talking about is very important and it is a very big deal. And we are a church that you can come to as you are and if the way you come to church is unbelieving I am fine with that. And we will be gracious with you.

If you come to us saying, “I can't believe that if I wanted to,” I would absolutely respect that. I don't know why you would bet out of bed on Sunday morning, but I appreciate the effort and I will love you and we will work with that all you want us to work with it. But what we cannot allow, what reason will not tolerate is for you to say, “Whether he got up from the dead or not doesn't really matter.”

For you to come here because it is a tradition, that is not tolerable, because, honestly, if he didn't get up from the dead, this is a dumb tradition. We are celebrating something that didn't happen.

For you to say, “Well, we are going to go and celebrate because it is important that we celebrate Spring and new birth.” And I want you to understand something. Spring is important. It is great, but it is not new birth. It is replacement.

On the day my mother-in-law died, as we were weeping over her body just moments after she died I had in my arms my 10 month old baby. And the nurse trying to say something profound said, “Well, here is the future. Here is where your hope is now.”

And it took a lot of reserve actually and, believe it or not, I do have some reserve. So I didn't say anything, but I honestly wanted to say, “Shut up. My son does not replace my mother-in-law. They are not the same. Death has taken her away.”

We are not here to celebrate replacement. We are not here to celebrate some kind of moral to the story, some kind of fable that says, “Victory or good wins out over evil.” Because if Jesus didn't get out of the grave, guess what? Evil won.

If death is the final word, guys, evil wins. We are here to celebrate Jesus got up from the grave. And you can say you don't believe it and I understand. I have got a lot of tenderness toward people have a hard time believing. But you cannot say it doesn't matter. You cannot say it doesn't matter.

Hope... If you are to have any hope at all, hope demands the resurrection. Without a resurrection there is no hope. Death trumps everything.

As the apostle Paul says, "If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."<sup>2</sup>

As King Solomon said, "Meaningless, meaningless, all is meaningless. What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever."

When I was in college I read a lot of Christian thinkers and I did a lot of history of philosophy and history of thought. And what they taught us was that ideas start in the upper reaches of academia and in science and in philosophy. And over about 100 years or so, 200 years, they trickle down to the pop culture level. And I believe. I studied that. I obviously I still remembered it, but I never believed it. I didn't believe it because I was in philosophy classes studying Nietzsche about how God is dead and there is no hope in the 80s. So in the 80s we would study that in class and then we would come to our dorm room and we would turn on the radio and we would hear Katrina and the Waves singing, "I am walking on sunshine, yeah."

Well, obviously this hopelessness hasn't reached us yet.

It is 2010 now. And it has gotten here. Have you noticed? The hopelessness has gotten here. What the Evolutionist teaches is that the world history is a timeline this big and that mankind in our history is a blip on that line. And we don't matter at all. And we have no long term significance. How much long term significance do dinosaurs lend to your life today? They are fuel. Is that what your contribution is going to be? Your rotting bones are going to be fuel for a future species. Is that enough for you?

The philosophers tell us that there is no truth, they told us in the 1800s. There is no truth. There is no beauty. There is no love. They are all figments of our imagination. There is no value to life because God is dead and we didn't believe it.

High culture tried to recognize it. Shakespeare described life as a... remember what he said?

"Life, it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Well, we were still walking on sunshine. But now pop culture has embraced it. It really has. It is weird.

Have you seen a Cohen brothers' movie? Have you seen *No Country for Old Men* where the hero doesn't get the bad guy, where the hero retires because his own life is the only

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:32.

thing that matters and protecting his life is the only thing that matters? Because your life is it. There is no value in death.

Have you been to a kids' movie lately? I took my kids. This is frightening. This is when I really realized. I had this kind of event, you know, where all that Francis Schaeffer stuff I read 30 years ago went, wow, it actually happened.

I took my kids to see *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, a stupid movie. Don't see it. At the end of the movie there is this rat. Guess what? He is the bad guy. He is a rat. Mr. Fox has to get some information from him to save his nephew. The rat won't give him the information. The fox kills him and his dying breath the fox gives him the information and then he dies and the fox's son comes up and says, "He redeemed himself at death, papa."

And Mr. Fox said these warm encouraging words. "Redemption is nothing. He is still a dead rat on a garbage pile."

A children's movie embracing the absolute stark hopelessness of life without a resurrection.

Life is like that. I spent last week one day, one afternoon last week visiting with a dear friend. She is in her 80s. She has had a great life. There is no possible definition by which you could say she has not had a great life. She had a wonderful marriage. She was married to the same man for 60 plus years. He died 18 months ago. I came by and I said, "I just wanted to tell you... how sorry I am about Dr. Alston."

And she said... she started crying. She said, "I can't stop crying." She said, "We were married too long. I will never recover from this."

All those great memories did nothing but haunt her now. If death is the last word, there is no hope and there is no escape and I will not let you get away from that. If there is no resurrection, there is no hope. And I want you to know that because I know there are some of you in this room who do not believe in the resurrection. I know. And I want to force you off the fence. I want to force you to either deny it or examine it and believe it. But I don't want to allow you just to go, "I don't really believe in the resurrection and I don't care."

You should care. It is a big deal. You need to know whether life is meaningless or not. And I want to begin this way because I think it is a whole lot more likely that you are going to go, "I am just too hungry to think that hard right now. I don't believe in the resurrection, but I also got bills to pay and so I am just going to go do something else right now."

And you are going to just choose to not think about it. That is likely. It is likely that you will choose not to think about it. I have absolutely no fear that you will examine the evidence and reject it. But I have a lot of fear that you are just not going to think it is important enough to care.

I am beginning this way because I want you to believe down to the core of your being that you matter, that your family matters, that life matters, that this world matters, that everything that we do matters, that everything we do for humans matters, because they are eternal and will live forever.

I want you to believe that. I am here to proclaim that to you. I know you already believe it. I know you are unable to hold a child and believe that life is irrelevant. And I want to tell you you are right. You are right. Because life has triumphed over death, because he is the life, because Jesus is the light, because Jesus is the light. And the light has shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overwhelm it.

Hope demands the resurrection and the resurrection is true and reason demands a resurrection.

Now there is a lot of people here. I don't even think I know any... I don't think I know all... any of you. I don't think I know very many of you. But I want you to know that we are not a church that despises questions. And I want to confess to you that I have not always had a firm belief in the resurrection. Everybody has got of kind of their group that they idolize, you know. There is some group out there that you are dying to be part of. I know there are. You may deny it. Some of you really, really, really want to be part of the beautiful people and you spend your money on clothes and hair gel and, you know, you want to look right. And some of you really, really, really want to be part of the rich people. And you spend more money than you have and you go into debt so you can have the right clothes, the right cars or you just kill yourself to pursue the right job so you can get into that group.

I really, really, really, really want to be included by the smart people. That is the group I idolize. And I like smart people Christianity. You know, I like worldview stuff and apologetics. But that rubber meets the road resurrection issue, I just have to close my eyes and clench my fist and go, "Yeah, I believe that."

And it took me a while to be honest enough to go, "Man, my faith on that is weak."

And when I was honest enough to admit that, I began studying it. And I can honestly tell you that I am wildly more, absolutely convinced that the resurrection is the only explanation for the facts of history than I have ever been. The facts demand the resurrection.

And I am not going to try to convince you of that right now because I am terrible at that. That is not what I do. I am not a good convincer. But what I want to convince you of or what I want to show you is that the Lord is gracious towards those who have questions. He is gracious to those who have questions.

There are people who have a hard time believing and he is gracious with them. There are people like Thomas. Thomas wasn't with the disciples when Jesus came and greeted him for the first time. And he looked at all of the disciples just like you are probably doing

today and going, "I don't believe it." He said, "I am going to put my fingers in those scars before I will believe that."

And so Jesus came back and he came to Thomas graciously and patiently and said, "Here they are. See? You want to put your hand in my side? Here it is. It is kind of ugly."

And he said, "Don't go on disbelieving. Believe."

And people like Thomas who are not easily convinced were convinced. People like Jesus' brother James were convinced. And that is weird to me. Think about this. This is an important fact. James, the brother of Jesus, proclaimed that he was the Lord of the universe. Would you say that about your brother? My brother is a state representative. He is a politician. He has his picture on the cover the *Tennessean* last week, one bunch of billions of dollars for the state of Tennessee. He had something to do with it. I mean, he must have. He is on the front of the newspaper. He is a great guy. Everybody in his district thinks he is awesome.

I remember him as the guy who tried to stick my head in toilets. Ok? He is great. He is a good brother. As far as brothers go he is fine. He is not the creator of the universe. He is not sinless. I know better than that.

What would it take to convince you...?

Look. You know, how anthropologists are always real excited looking for new religions. They want new religions to come up to prove all their theories about how religions get started, right? And so some of them are looking at this Elvis cult. There is a little Elvis Presley cult. There is. There his a little klatch of people who think Elvis talks to them.

Ok. You know, I am from Tennessee. I k now these people. But let me tell you who is not part of the Elvis cult. Priscilla Presley is not part of the Elvis cult. She knows he sinned. Lisa Marie Presley, his daughter, ain't part of that cult. She is part of some, but not that one. She knows her dad wasn't perfect. The people who never met the man, they are the ones who believe he is something special.

That would be common, right? I think I could convince some people who have never met me that I am special, too. They exist, actually. They listen to me on the internet. They think, wow, he is cool. And then they meet me and they go, "I was expecting more."

Sorry.

But Jesus convinced his brother, convinced his mom worshipped him as Lord. She knew him. Nothing short of the resurrection is going to cause that. The testimony of the believers is so strong it demands belief. And honestly, and I am going to say to those of you who deny. The denials of those who reject the resurrection are so weak they demand that we reject him.

I honestly... it is just easy to kind of, you know... We don't study rejecters in our culture. We don't study something and go, "That is false. It doesn't hold water." We just go, "Ahh."

But when you really look at it, ok, what are the other options? There is the Muslim option that Jesus never really died. Really?

Many people didn't survive the beating. Hung on a cross for six hours, a professional executor, that is what he did. That was his living, make sure people were dead, drove a spear up under his ribs into his heart. Probably didn't get any infection from that. Blood and water pour out. He is laid into a tomb for three days with no medical care. He gets up and walks off, overpowers some soldiers and appears to a few people.

Really?

That is... I think that is harder to believe than a resurrection. That is unlikely.

You know, the other kind of belief is a lot of folks just kind of think, well, oh, well, back then they believed that kind of thing.

That is what Tim Keller calls chronological arrogance.

Let me tell you something. There is one fact backed up of... with... by 20,000 years of human history it is this. Dead people stay dead.

Everybody who has ever lived has been convinced of the fact that dead people stay dead. You are not the first person to figure that out. It didn't take modern medicine and the little beepy thing on the monitor for us to figure out who was dead and who wasn't.

Dead people have always stayed dead. So don't be so arrogant to think, oh, they just thought that back then. They didn't. The Jews didn't expect it. The Greeks didn't want it. They didn't think it was the body, yuck. They want a spiritual kind of resurrection. They didn't want a body.

You know, the most common thing to believe is just that they just lied.

Now, you know, the disciples just lied. It didn't really happen.

Do you ever lie? I lie. When you lie, do you lie to make yourself look bad? Do your lies contain things like, well, and I didn't believe it and I refuse to believe it and I refuse to believe it and I refuse to believe it and then he appeared and then, ok, I believed it?

Do you lie to get yourself out of trouble or into trouble? Generally when I am caught I lie to get out of trouble. The disciples would have been lying to get themselves killed. You understand that, right? The apostle Paul, whenever he preached the gospel would be

fine. All the Greeks just thought he was so cool, had this new philosophy. And then he started talking about the bodily resurrection and he was beaten and arrested and stoned and left for dead. Is that the kind of lie you tell? Man, I want to be stoned today. Let's lie about it. I want to get beaten up. It makes no sense.

The only thing that explains the facts is the resurrection.

Like I said, I am terrible at convincing you of those things. I would love to sit down with you. If you are a... if you want to go short I have a 60 minute sermon by Mark Driscoll I would love to give you, give you one chapter out of a book by Tim Keller and let you read it. If you want to go long I have got an 800 page book called the resurrection of the Son of God by N T Wright. I would love to set you lose on that bad boy. And you will be overwhelmed.

And I want you to, because I want you to believe it, because the resurrection demands life. The resurrection gives you hope and it is the hope that you need. The resurrection gives you hope for your past. It gives you hope for your past. In the last couple of weeks a friend of mine was counseling someone whose wife has been abused and their entire marriage is under the shadow of this. And I want to tell him... passed on to this man, you are not under the curse of what people have done to you because Jesus is alive, because the resurrection is real, because there is hope, because life has triumphed over death. Nothing is too far gone. No shadows can't be chased away. There is hope. You would not believe the number of people in this church who have been abused in their past. Spousal abuse, parental abuse. And the fact that you wouldn't believe it is a beautiful thing because they are not slaves to what has been done to them, because the resurrection is true. The resurrection is real. It is hope for our past. It means I am not ruined by what I have done. I am not ruined by what I am done. I am not defined by that anymore. And that means great things to those of us who have done bad stuff, man. It is fun to look at somebody who is just absolutely convinced that their life is ruined by the sins of their past. And you can tell them, "In Christ you are new creation."

You are not just forgiven. You are... that person who did those things is dead. You are a new being. You are a new creation. The old is gone.

I was watching a movie last week and people were doing things that I used to do. And I just got up and walked off. It was funny. They were trying to make it look cool. It didn't look cool to me any more. It was encouraging because I just realized that guy is dead. The man who used to do that is dead and I am glad. And I am a new being. I have a new desire. I have a new person. I am not a second class citizen.

You are a son of the King. That means you have hope for your presence, that you are present. You have a hope for presents, too, but that is a Christmas sermon. That is not this one. You have a hope. The resurrection means you have hope for your present. You are not a slave to the sins that you can't stop committing. You can lay them off. You can walk away from them. Your short temper is not going to destroy your children.



We are... we have a hope for this world that is broken. Why are we sending money and people into Haiti? Because there is hope, because Jesus has triumphed over death, because there is truth that these are immortal people who deserve a better today and definitely have a better tomorrow because they matter, because death is not the end for them. And they can be saved. They have hope and their hope is that the sufferings of this present world is not worthy to be compared with the glories that await them.

And we have hope for our past. We have hope for our present. We have hope for our future.

I have got a friend named Doug Wheeler. Doug's wife a few years ago was diagnosed with cancer. It was terrible, a very bad completely just ransacked her body, left her a shadow of what she had been. But she survived and then the year after her survival she was in a car wreck. It snapped her neck. And she survived.

Do you know how Doug spends the first two hours of every day? Getting his wife out of bed and getting her ready. Do you know how he spends the last two hours of every day? Taking his wife to bed and getting her ready. Four hours a day.

If death is the end, then he is a fool. Why would he waste the short time that he has left taking care of someone who will never be able to hug him back, who will never be able to pay him back? He is a fool. He should eat and drink for tomorrow it might be him.

But if Jesus got up out of that grave, if Jesus got up, then he knows it is only a short time left and he will see his wife walk over to him one day and those lifeless legs are going to carry her running and those arms are going to wrap around him and she is going to say, "Thank you."

And she will be alive forever with him because Jesus got out of that grave. And what he is going through now is short. And it will seem like a dream. It will seem like a bad dream that is not true anymore when he wakes up, because we have a hope, because the hope is alive, because the hope is real, because death is not the final word.

And he kisses his wife every night saying, "Good night," because I know one day, I know one day God is going to give you a good morning, because death has no sting and death has no victory, because the sting of death is sin and the sting of the law of sin is the law. We praise God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Please pray with me.

*Father, we thank you. We thank you that our labor is not in vain, because we have a hope, a hope that is real and will not disappoint. And we know because of our hope that every drink of water we give to a child in your name will be rewarded because that child will be alive. And we will be alive. And we know that because Jesus is alive. Father, fill our hearts with the hope of the resurrection we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*