

Date: April 9, 2023

Series: *Holy Week*

Title: *The Day That Has Changed All Others*

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Corinthians 15:12-22. Follow along as I read and if able let's stand in respect for God's Word as it is read.

1 Corinthians 15:12-22

12 - But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 - If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

14 - And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

15 - More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that He raised Christ from the dead. But He did not raise Him if in fact the dead are not raised.

16 - For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.

17 - And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

18 - Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.

19 - If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 - But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

21 - For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a Man.

22 - For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

I'm sure that if you are anywhere near my age---when you look back over your life you see that certain days were "turning point days"---because things happened on those particular days that changed the direction of the rest of your life. For example, I remember the day I became a Christian. I was seven years old. My family lived in Seaford, Delaware where my dad was pastoring a new church start. One Sunday after catching me snacking on left over Lord Supper crackers and grape juice---my Dad spent the afternoon talking to me about the symbolism of that ordinance---and why we should hold it in reverence, and his words helped me to realize my need for Jesus. That afternoon I made a conscious decision to respond to that need by asking Jesus to forgive me of my sin and to lead me through life.

How many of you remember the day you decided to follow Jesus? Wouldn't you call that a "turning point day?"

I remember several other "turning point" days in my life:

- The day Sue and I went on our first date (*SUPERMAN* starring Christopher Reeve),
- Those three days on which each of our children were born,
- Their weddings---
- ---and then a couple years later that day when our first grandchild was born---followed every few years by six others.

By the way, for a nano-second this past Sunday I thought another one of those "turning point days" had dawned because Andrew, Becca's husband, sent us a picture of a pregnancy test that was obviously positive. For that micro-moment I thought YES! ANOTHER ONE! Then I realized it was impossible---Hannah is only a month old---and then I saw the next part of Andrew's text: "April fools!" You know how we used to say, "You can't trust everything you read in the paper?" Well, I would add, "Never trust email pictures you receive on April 1." In any case I am sure you can remember days like these in your own lives---days that have changed all others.

Well, this morning is the day in which we always join with Christians around the world to celebrate THE TURNING POINT DAY OF ALL TURNING POINT DAYS---the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. That day, the first Easter Sunday, has had more impact on humanity than all other "turning point days" combined. I mean, the day Jesus Christ rose from the

dead didn't just change one life, it changed all lives! Today I want us to take a close look at the turning point change of what happened that first Easter Sunday morning---from three perspectives.

(1) The PAST.

Everyone look back---not literally---temporally. When we do we can see that, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead two millennia ago showed that He was not just another one of those numerous mortal religious leaders---who come and go, cluttering the pages of history---people whose deaths silenced their outrageous claims. Jesus' resurrection validated our faith as the one TRUE faith.

- Voltaire, the famous French philosopher once said that the Bible and Christianity would pass within a hundred years. Well, Voltaire died nearly 250 years ago, and the church of Jesus Christ is still here.
- In 1882 Friedrich Nietzsche said, *"God is dead."* He believed the dawn of science would be the doom of the Christian faith. He was obviously very wrong. If anything, TRUE science has validated our faith.
- The Communist dictionary once defined the Bible as, *"A collection of fantastic legends without any scientific support."* Communism is diminishing. The church is thriving.

Max Lucado sums this all up by saying, *"Everyone who has tried to bury the Christian faith has discovered the same thing. It won't stay buried any more than its Founder."* And Lucado is right. The movement Jesus Christ started, the church, is still here because Jesus is still here. His resurrection proved that Jesus is indeed Who He claimed to be, the Son of God, Conqueror of death itself, the Savior of all Who call on Him. And we can look back and see that this fact has impacted all aspects of human history.

Not too long ago, George Weigel wrote an article for the *Wall Street Journal* in which he mentions some of the positive secular outcomes---brought to the ancient world through Christians and their belief in the resurrection:

- New dignity given to women in contrast to culture.
- Self-denying healthcare provided to plague sufferers that led to the invention of the hospital.
- Focus on family health and growth.
- Changing worship from the Sabbath to Sunday
- The willingness of Christians to embrace death as martyrs---because they knew that death did not have the final word in the human story.
- Living as if they knew the outcome of history itself.

Weigel suggests that it's only through, what he calls *"The Easter Effect,"* that these changes make sense. And our Lord had promised change. In Revelation 21:5 He said, ***"Behold, I make all things new."*** And that is exactly what He has done, literally everything Jesus touched He transformed---even time itself.

For a couple thousand years we've designated the year *"B.C." -- "Before Christ"* or *"A.D." --- "Anno Domini"* or *"the year of our Lord"*---the number of years since His birth. In a foolish attempt to keep Jesus out of the measurement of time, these days many have stopped doing that and now instead of *"B.C."* they say *"BCE" -- "Before Common Era"*---and instead of *"A.D"* they say *"CE" -- "Common Era"*---but the number of the years is the same. *"BCE"* still numbers the years before Jesus' birth and *"CE"* still numbers the years since. So, no matter what acronym you use---Jesus' life, death and resurrection still divides time itself. Even the atheist Soviet Union was forced to acknowledge Jesus in its constitution when it said it came into existence in *"the year of our Lord, 1917."*

We can also look back and see that Jesus has also transformed architecture. To take Him out of history, would mean you would have to tear down all the churches and beautiful cathedrals around the world.

Jesus has transformed art and music. Without Jesus there would be no *Last Supper* by Da Vinci, no *Madonna*. Without His life to inspire it, choirs like ours would have nothing to sing about. And I'm not just talking about hymns or praise songs. No---the greatest songs ever written by composers like Handel, Bach, and Beethoven would not exist for they were inspired by our risen Lord.

Jesus' life has inspired the way humanity responds to the needy. Our Lord set the great example of helping the poor, of caring for the poverty-stricken and downtrodden. He bid His followers to go and do likewise. And, as I said earlier, they did, and still do! So, without His life and example there would be no "help" programs like: The Red Cross and Easter Seals and The Salvation Army, World Vision, Send Relief, Samaritan's Purse, or Compassion International.

When Katrina hit the gulf coast back in '05, we sent teams for two years to help with the cleanup and rebuilding. On the fact-finding trip a pastor on the Mississippi coast, told me that Christians were literally re-building his town one home at a time. He said that before FEMA or any other group arrived, Christians were there, providing food, clothing, shelter, medical help, and counseling.

We could go on and on and on listing Jesus' impact on education and civil rights and science and government and economics and basic morality---because it is easy to look BACK over the pages of history and see that Jesus' resurrection has changed everything. As bad as things seem in the world today, no one would want to live in a world in which Easter Sunday never dawned.

This week I came across a cartoon of two Roman soldiers standing by the empty tomb. The stone was rolled away---and ONE soldier was looking very worried because he knew they had failed in their responsibility. But the other one shrugged and said, "*Don't worry about it. A hundred years from now, no one will remember.*" Well, he was wrong wasn't he! The impact of the resurrection of Jesus is has been remembered----felt for 2023 years now---or as current historians put it, 2023 years since BCE ended and CE began.

But that's not all---Jesus' resurrection has also changed:

(2) Our PRESENT.

Everyone look around---side to side. Easter validates the faith that you and I live by right here and right now.

Tim Keller points out that these days Jesus' resurrection is the motivation for all the good that is done on this planet. He writes: "*[On Easter] I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can't believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up in the death of the sun. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? If the resurrection of Jesus happened, however, that means there's infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world.*"

N.T. Wright puts it this way: "*If Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world---news which warms our hearts precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts. Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things---and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement victory of Jesus over them all.*"

Think of the other ways Easter impacts our present:

- It proves that we're not wasting our time worshiping here every week.
- It shows that it is not pointless for us to try to live according to the teachings of the Bible, day in and day out.
- It shows that pastors like me have not wasted their lives preparing sermons.

As a pastor named Vance Havner once said, "*If the Resurrection of Jesus is a myth, then I am MYTHtaken, MYTHstified, and MYTHerable.*" Try to say that three times real fast! Havner was right, as Paul says in our text for today, without the resurrection, the very structure of our Christian faith falls apart and the gospel we proclaim becomes null and void.

Remember Paul's words in verses 14 and 17? "***If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.***" Can you feel the blows of despair that would hit us in the here and now, one after another, if Christ didn't rise from the dead?

But you see, because Jesus did rise from the dead, our faith is verified! Easter proves that Jesus is worthy of our faith, it proves that He is indeed, ***“the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Path to eternal, abundant Life.”*** (John 14:6)

Dr. David Seamands tells of a Muslim who became a Christian in Africa. Some of his friends asked him, *“Why did you become a Christian?”* He answered, *“Well, it’s like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions, and you didn’t know which way to go---and there at the fork of the road were two men: one dead and one alive. Which one would you ask for directions?”*

You know many of the great shakers and movers in history were considered crazy by their peers until they substantiated their claims. And it was no different for Jesus. Before His resurrection, He was ridiculed for the things He had said. Remember? As He hung on the cross bystanders said: ***“So! You Who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save Yourself.”*** They continued to mock Him and said, ***“He saved others, but He can’t save Himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see and believe.”*** (Matthew 27) When He was arrested, even Jesus’ own disciples abandoned Him and fled.

But when He rose again Jesus proved once and for all that He was indeed the Christ. God’s Messiah. Easter morning restored His followers’ faith in Him. They believed that He was indeed ***“the resurrection and the life”*** and that whoever put their faith in Him would live ***“even though he were to die.”*** (John 11:25) Jesus’ resurrection validated their faith and as a result they became bold in their evangelism. They found the answer to their sins in the death of Jesus and the answer to their deaths in His resurrection. And Jesus’ continued living presence with them, even after His ascension, motivated and empowered them to share this wonderful life-changing message with all people. They literally turned the world upside down because Jesus’ resurrection changed faith once and for all. It authenticated it.

Jesus’ living presence in us changes OUR present in the same way. This is why even today whenever I preach. I can hear His voice in my head saying things like, *“Slow down Mark---you’re talking too fast.”* Or *“I had Bill pick that song we sang earlier---this would be a good time to refer to its lyrics!”* Or *“Don’t tell that joke---it doesn’t fit.”* And when I tell it anyway and there is no response, He lovingly says, *“Maybe you’ll listen to Me the next time.”*

This is why Christians all over the world can say as we often sing, *“I serve a RISEN Savior. He’s in the world TODAY. I see His hand of mercy. I hear His voice of cheer. He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way! And just the time I need Him, He’s always near.”*

And do you remember how the song ends? Sing with me: *“You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!”*

Bruce Larson writes, *“The events of Easter cannot be reduced to a creed or a philosophy. We are not asked to believe the doctrine of the resurrection. We are asked to meet this Person raised from the dead. In faith, we move from belief in a doctrine to knowledge of a Person. Ultimate truth is a Person. We met Him. He is alive.”*

Have you met this person? Does He live in your heart? Do you know the Risen Jesus? I do, He’s my closest Companion. He’s the Solid Rock of my life. He’s my Anchor — my Fortress. I couldn’t do anything without His power and presence because He’s not in a tomb. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

And that resurrection power is not only available to pastors---it’s available to all who put their faith in Jesus. This is amazing news because experience has taught us that life is full of problems that we are powerless to solve. Think about it, have you ever felt like your life was out of control, like you were weak and ineffective in some situation---whether it’s trying to break a bad habit or save a relationship or get out of debt or parent your kids or manage your schedule or just to live right? The reason we fail in the difficulties of life is because we were never meant to live this life on our own power. No, we were meant to live life empowered by a relationship with our Creator and Redeemer. That’s what Paul was talking about in 2nd Corinthians 4:7ff when he said,

“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

It is as Sue once told me early in our marriage, *“The secret to success in the Christian life is not IMITATION---It’s INHABITATION.”* No doubt she was inspired by what Paul told the Colossians, ***“It’s not YOU---it’s CHRIST IN YOU. That’s the hope of glory.”*** (Colossians 1:27) And Jesus does just that! Even today this world is being changed by believers INHABITED by the Risen Jesus!

Do you remember this quote from John Stott? In his classic little book, *Basic Christianity*, he said, *“It’s no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it, I can’t. And it’s no good showing me a life like that of Jesus and then telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it, I can’t. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like that. And if the Spirit of Jesus could come and live in me, then I could live a life like that. To have Him as our example is not enough. We need Him [inside us] as our Savior.”*

That’s one reason Jesus came back from the dead---to empower us to live as He lived. I mean, Jesus didn’t die and then rise again just to be studied and oohhed and aahhed over. No. He died and rose again to offer transforming power to live an abundant, successful, fulfilling life.

Do you remember Paul’s words from Ephesians 1:18-20? He says, ***“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead!”***

Paul is reminding us here that the same power that enabled Jesus to rise from the dead 2023 years ago is available to help you and me rise above our problems today. Jesus’ resurrection proves to us once and for all that no problem is too big for God to handle. No situation is hopeless if it is turned over to Him. If God can bring His Son back to life, He can cause a resurrection in any aspect of our lives as well. So, let me ask you, what has died in your life? What dreams; what hopes; what relationship; what vision? Is there a particular sin that has you in its grip? Remember, no situation in life is beyond Jesus’ resurrection power!

So, we can look back and see that Jesus’ resurrection has impacted the past. We can look around and see that it changes our present, Now everyone look forward---

(3) ...because the best news is that Easter changes our FUTURE.

And we need our futures changed because we know that death awaits us all one day. We know that as Ecclesiastes 8:8 says, ***“None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no escaping that obligation, that dark battle.”*** Do you remember how Homer put it? *“What is called life is destroyed by death and none can take away its terror.”* In our text for today Paul referred to this dread when he says in verse 18 that, ***“If Christ has not been raised, then those who have died in Christ have perished.”***

This thought of perishing someday in a future that seems to get closer faster and faster, well it is just too much for us to even consider. Calvin Miller writes, *“Death is a fact more unpleasant than life---but a fact that is just as certain as life. It has a way of catapulting itself into our most unsuspecting moments. It becomes the grim reminder at every New Year’s Eve party that we are not merely watching a CLOCK---we are watching our PASSING.”*

The Message’s paraphrase of Job 21:23-26 puts it like this, ***“Some people die in the prime of life, with everything going for them---fat and sassy. Others die bitter and bereft, never getting a taste of happiness. But they’re both laid out side by side in the cemetery, where the worms can’t tell one from the other.”*** Isn’t that a gruesome thought---a terrifying thought?!

One of my favorite stories on this subject is about a guy who went jogging one night. He went down a road in the dark and he decided to take a short cut through a cemetery. He was jogging along through the gravestones trying not to look down. Well, there was a freshly dug grave there, getting ready for a body the next day, and in the dark this jogger didn't see it and he fell into the hole. It was so deep that he couldn't climb out. He tried jumping out, tried climbing out, called for help. Nobody could hear him. Finally, he decided to spend the night there till somebody came along in the morning. And so he crawled up in the corner, and tried to doze off. A little bit later, another jogger came through the cemetery and fell in the same hole. And this guy started jumping, trying to get out. All of a sudden, the second jogger felt a hand on his shoulder. He froze in his tracks, terrified. And then he heard a voice say, *"You can't get out of here."* But he did!

Well, we all know that in spite of the advances of modern science we can't get out of death.

No matter how fast you run, it is coming to us all. If the Lord tarries, one day each of these aging bodies we all walk around in will be in a grave. This is another reason Easter is a day for celebrating, because on this day we rejoice over the fact that Jesus changed all that. As it says later in 1st Corinthians 15, ***"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."*** And Jesus has defeated it, ***"For God 'has put everything under His feet.'"*** (vs 16-7) Because He is risen---HE IS RISEN INDEED--death isn't scary anymore. Hebrews 2:14-15 says, ***"Since the children have flesh and blood, Jesus shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."*** Jesus has taken the sting out of death by demonstrating that for the Christian, death has no power over us.

As you may know, Rick Warren, recently retired pastor of Saddleback Church and the author of *The Purpose Driven Life*--together with his wife, Kay---went through a devastating loss a few years back when their twenty-seven-year-old son Matthew took his own life after battling depression and mental illness for years. About a year after this tragedy, Rick said, *"I've often been asked, 'How have you made it? How have you kept going in your pain?' And I've often replied, 'The answer is Easter.' You see, the death and the burial and the resurrection of Jesus happened over three days. Friday was the day of suffering and pain and agony. Saturday was the day of doubt and confusion and misery. But Easter---that Sunday---was the day of hope and joy and victory. And here's the fact of life: you will face these three days over and over and over in your lifetime. And when you do, you'll find yourself asking---as I did---three fundamental questions. Number one, 'What do I do in my days of pain?' Two, 'How do I get through my days of doubt and confusion?' Three, 'How do I get to the days of joy and victory?' The answer is Easter. The answer ... is Easter."* Like the Warrens, we rejoice at Easter because we have put our faith in our risen Lord Who promised, ***"he who believes in Me will live even though he dies."***

As I've told you before I hate funerals---I have done well over 50 in my years here and I hated every one. But that's okay because I love the people I bury. Plus, as we just read God calls death, *"our enemy"* and the context tells us this is one enemy we are NOT commanded to love. The only way I have been able to do all the funerals I've done all these decades is because I know these people are NOT dead. Because of their faith in our Risen Lord, I can look down at that casket or urn and say, *"He or She is not here! They have risen!"* Easter gives me the authority to say to the family, *"I know you are hurting now---but one day you'll be reunited."*

As 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18 says, ***"Since we believe that Jesus died and then came back to life again, we can also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with Him all the Christians who have died. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a mighty shout and with the soul-stirring cry of the archangel and the great trumpet-call of God! And we will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with Him forever."***

Words like these from the Scriptures comfort and encourage us because they tell us that death is not the end! In fact for the Christian it is the real beginning of life. It's our entry into a place where we are healed and whole---a place where we will be together again, a place that Our God has been preparing for us for 2000 years!

Many of you sports fans may have may read books by sports writer Bob Buford. I haven't but this week I read his testimony about when his son Ross was tragically killed in a drowning accident in the Rio Grande River. Buford told how he grieved over losing his 21-year-old son. You can imagine how hard that would be. And he said one day in prayer he felt liked God told him, *"Bob, draw a horizontal line on a piece of paper."* Buford said he took pencil and drew a line.

Then God said, *“Now write a number, the largest number you can think of below that line.”* And he did. He wrote a one with all kinds of zeroes across the width of the page. Next God said, *“On top of that line, write 21. Now look at that. You have only spent 21 one trillionths of the time you’re going spend together with your son Ross.”* People, that’s what it means to have a living hope! Because of that happened on Easter, we have the hope of living together forever in the future with God and the loved ones that have gone before us. And our future in Heaven will be wonderful. I can promise you there are no terrorists, there are no school shootings, no stabbings at the Rio, no wars, no racism, no hatred. No taxes! No dentures, no fat grams, no glasses, no hearing aids, no walkers, not artificial limbs, no arthritis. No depression or anxiety. No broken hearts. No nightly competitive news networks telling you THEIR spin on a story! There’s not even a hint of evil in this place for it is a place where the TRUE God will make His dwelling with us. We can throw away our watches and cell phones and laptops and handkerchiefs. It’s going to be a place that’s free from disease, free from fear, free from pain, free from death.

Revelation 21:4 says, ***“God will wipe away every tear from our eyes, there will be no more death, mourning, or crying or pain for the old order of things will have passed away.”*** Well, isn’t it good to look forward from the perspective Easter gives?

This morning if you are here and you are not a Christian, then I want you to know that this future can be yours as well. Today, this day can be your turning point day, as you claim Jesus as your Savior because in that decision, He becomes not just the resurrection and life but your resurrection and life. On this Easter Sunday morning, I invite you to, “confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.” We would love to celebrate this turning point in your life with you so, if you make that decision come and share it with me. Others may have commitments to make public this morning, perhaps God is calling you to join our church, or you’d like to pray about some aspect of your life, but come now as God leads.