

Happy Easter to all of you! I'm glad you are here for this Easter celebration! Easter is such a big deal in Christian churches because everything in Christianity rises or falls on the resurrection of Jesus. Everything Jesus said and did would either be validated as true and authentic...or proven to be false and deceptive.

Two thousand years ago, the Bible claims that because of our imperfections and sin problem, God became flesh in the person of his Son Jesus. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He lived a life without sin...but, took all our sin upon himself, and died on a cross, taking our punishment for our sin so that we could be forgiven and qualified for heaven. Three days later, the Bible says, "He is risen!" Jesus rose from the grave.

The significance of this event for your life and my life is huge. The resurrection of Jesus makes it possible for each one of us to experience the most important "do-over" of our lives.

[Transition] - In a series of messages we have been talking about ways Jesus is "for us," and *Easter means Jesus is for your second chances*. Today I want to give you an example of what I mean. Look at this account of the first Easter from the book of Mark in the New Testament. If you have your Bibles with you, I'll be reading from Mark 16:1-8

Read Mark 16 resurrection passage

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their

way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

*"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. **But go, tell his disciples and Peter,** 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' "*

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

I want to focus on seven words in this account that, at first don't seem like much. But I want you to take another look at the first seven words of verse 7. **"But go, tell his disciples and Peter..."** Why was Peter singled out? Why was it so important for Peter to know that Jesus was alive? Why did the angel single him out?

A little background on Peter -

I don't know how well you know the story, But Peter was an intelligent guy, a leader with, let's just say, a bias for action. Peter was an entrepreneur of sorts; he ran a small fishing business. Whatever Peter did, he did to extremes. Peter's reactions and behavior regularly required Jesus to repeat things so Peter could understand.

At times Peter showed glimpses of true spiritual genius, like he was really getting all of it...but, then he would contradict that understanding in his next action. Peter would lose his temper and blurt out ridiculous things. At one point his well-intentioned advice to Jesus sounded so Satan-like that Jesus had to sternly correct him and tell him to get behind him and get out of his way.

His often-misdirected spiritual passion is classically demonstrated in the events leading up to the crucifixion. We talked about this a few weeks

ago. When the servants of the High Priest came to arrest Jesus on false charges in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was carefully confronting the soldiers and out of nowhere Peter hauls off and whacks one of the soldiers in the head with his sword. The blow manages to whack the soldier's ear off.

With that type of passion to defend and protect Jesus you'd think Peter was a spiritual giant. But, shortly after that, in the early morning hours on Friday as Jesus is getting interrogated. Peter is watching the events from a distance, warming himself by a fire in the courtyard of the high priest.

And three different times, people who thought they recognized Peter as a follower of Jesus, confront him and three times Peter flat out denies ever knowing or being associated with Jesus. And at least once, Jesus is in ear-shot. Talk about a low point. Within hours after this, Jesus was crucified on the cross, died and was buried. And the Bible tells us Peter went out and wept bitterly.

What do you think Peter would have been feeling at this point? Jesus was his friend. Jesus was his teacher, his spiritual director. Peter actually declared Jesus to be the savior of the world.

At times Peter probably thought he had Jesus figured out and then at other times he must have felt like he didn't have a clue about what Jesus was doing. Peter had his ups and downs with Jesus but, now...in his final hours...when he could have used Peter's support, Peter snarks, *"Jesus? Jesus who? I'm not a Jesus follower! I don't know him at all"*

[Illustration] - Have you ever betrayed someone? Thrown them under the bus? Have you ever wounded someone with your words? It's painful when that happens. But the worst thing is when you don't get the chance to ever go back and fix it with them.

We've all heard about the deep regrets that people have when they have a fight with a friend or mistreat a spouse and then something tragic

happens and the person dies. That's the worst because you can't ever go back and apologize or reconcile, and you are forced to live with the gut-wrenching guilt.

Before Easter morning, Peter is stuck in this kind of pain and guilt and heartache. I'm sure Peter is hating life at this point. He's probably hating himself. He's probably thinking to himself; if Jesus does come through on the resurrection thing like he said he would, he is so going to h...a...t...e me. He's not going to want to have anything to do with me. There is no way Jesus, and I will ever be friends again. I've failed him so badly he'll never want to speak to me again.

Now, John's account of Easter morning tells us that having discovered the empty tomb, Mary then ran to Peter and John to tell them the good news. Luke alone says that the women's words sounded like nonsense to the disciples but apparently not so nonsensical to Peter, who, Luke says, ran to the tomb went bursting in to find the grave clothes of Jesus all piled up by themselves. And Luke says that Peter, *"went away, wondering to himself what had happened."*

After all that Jesus had said and taught and promised...do you know what Peter didn't figure on? Peter didn't figure on Easter morning. He didn't figure on the resurrection of Jesus. He didn't really understand the significance of Easter.

On Easter morning the extravagant, limitless, indescribable love of God bursts forth from the grave. He is not here! He is risen! And the angel of God wants all the followers of Jesus to know...ESPECIALLY PETER! Isn't that awesome...Peter...of all people... is on the frontal lobes of the newly risen Jesus.

Bursting forth on Easter morning is a kind of love that you can't figure out. Bursting forth on Easter morning is the Son of God, full of grace and eager to forgive. Bursting forth on Easter morning is Jesus the Savior, the death-defeater...and he's anxious to reconnect with his friends...and... *[listen] especially those who don't always act like friends.* This special

mention of Peter is our first hint that everything between Peter and Jesus will be made right.

You see...the resurrection is the lynch pin of second chances! Without the resurrection real second chances are not possible in life. The angel said, *"He is not here. He is risen! Go tell his disciples and Peter..."*

What wonderful news this must have been for Peter to hear. He must have been tortured with the memory of his disloyalty. He must have played those three denials over and over and over in his head. He must have been dreading to see Jesus. And suddenly there was a message, a message especially for him. "Tell everyone I'm alive...especially Peter!" He of all disciples is singled out. He of all disciples was on the forefront of Jesus' mind. This had to be good. This had to be promising. He had turned his back on Jesus, but Jesus had not turned his back on him. ***The One whom Peter had denied would not deny Peter!***

Do you want to know a fun fact? Peter was first on Jesus' appearance appointment list. 1 Corinthians 15:4-5 says of Jesus, *"He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter, and then by the twelve apostles."*

The Bible doesn't record the details of this meeting between Peter and Jesus but it must have been beautifully redemptive and renewing because according to the 21st chapter of John, the next time Peter sees Jesus, Peter is on his boat and he sees Jesus on the shore and he is so unhindered in his emotion that he instantly throws himself into the lake and swims a hundred yards to shore with wreck-less abandoned just to be by his side. That is the act of a joyfully forgiven man.

Just two words, "...and Peter..." I hope you let them make your heart jump. I think about all that Jesus and Peter had been through and my heart smiles because I think, "There's hope for me!" "There's hope for you."

There's hope and forgiveness and renewal for each of us who may see ourselves in the spiritual hot or cold of Peter's life. Hope for those who feel disconnected from God. Hope for those who feel they have failed God. Hope for those who feel they have denied God...are not worthy of him...or do not matter to him.

You could argue Peter was singled out because he was the disciple who had most failed Jesus and lived to tell about it. All of us have experienced the sense that we have somehow not been faithful to God...that we have let him down...or that we are not worthy since we have failed him.

Think of all the times we have lived as if he doesn't exist or as if we don't know him. You say you believe in God, that he exists and that he is real. But your desires don't track with his desires.

And yet, Jesus essentially says...Go tell his disciples and Peter...especially Peter, the one who betrayed me...the one who feels unworthy...he one who feels there is no way he will ever be close again with me.

Here's what I don't want you to miss today: The angel's message at the tomb speaks to us about new beginnings—it speaks to us about second chances. It is a message of love, grace, and forgiveness available to you today. Though we don't deserve special treatment from God, God in his love acts beyond our deserving.

Just like in Peter's case, with full realization of who you are and what you have done and where you have been...Jesus wants to show himself to you.

- He wants to begin... or renew a relationship with you.
- He wants to forgive all your sin and cleanse your conscience from past offensive behavior.
- He died on the cross for your past and he rose from the grave for your future.

- He wants to give you a new beginning and a fresh start. And the resurrection makes it all possible.

[Illustration] - I'm sure I've shared this before, but video games and I don't get along. I'm horrible. I just don't like dying over and over and over. Me and video games are not friends. And the only thing I hate more than video games is losing. But back in the day when my son lived at home, and I would try to play video games with him because it was something to do together.

My favorite part of the video game was the RESTART button. I am virtually hopeless without the restart button.

- I can't keep my car on the track and am in last place...I need to restart.
- When my player is losing health and about to die...I need a restart.
- When my team is losing in Madden Football, I need to button.

Without the chance for a restart, my efforts are losing efforts.

The reason Easter is a big deal is because the resurrection confirms beyond a shadow of a doubt that a new beginning is really possible. It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done—in Jesus you can begin again. Jesus is for second chances.

I want you to hear this... Jesus never gives up on anybody, not even on close friends who have let him down. In spite of our failure, Jesus never turns his back on us. We may give up on Jesus, but he never gives up on us.

Again, John 21 tells us that after Peter swims to shore to be with Jesus, the other disciples eventually get there too, and Jesus invites them to have a lakeside barbeque breakfast. And it's at that breakfast meeting where the spiritual restart button is officially pushed for Peter.

Three basic things happen at this "restart breakfast." And these three things teach us what's involved in beginning again with Jesus.

1. Beginning again with Jesus involves facing up to our past.

At this lakeside breakfast, three times around the campfire, Jesus questions Peter about his love for him. Most believe this was designed to help remind Peter of his threefold denial around the fire in the courtyard of the high priest a week or so earlier. I'm sure this was an awkward and likely painful moment. But the painful business of owning up to our past is essential if we're going to make a new beginning with Jesus.

We have to admit that we have, in effect, denied Jesus, lived like he wasn't real or didn't matter. We have to own that we have rebelled from him in our hearts, living like we want with no regard for what he wants. Facing up to your past...being willing to admit that there is sin there...is the first step to a new beginning with Jesus. No rationalizations...no justifications...just ownership.

[Transition] - The second step is affirming your love for Jesus.

2. Beginning again with Jesus involves affirming your love for Jesus.

At Peter's "restart" breakfast Peter reaffirms his love for Jesus three times. Beginning again with Jesus starts by being grateful that he gave his life for your life. Then, it's learning to love him more and more as you understand more and more about what he has done for you.

[Transition] - In addition to facing up to your past and affirming your love for Jesus, beginning again with Jesus involves agreeing to follow Jesus.

3. Beginning again with Jesus involves agreeing to follow Jesus.

Three times Jesus calls Peter to allow his love for God to be expressed through obedience. Do you love me Peter? Then follow me and do what I ask, follow my lead, and align your desires with my desires.

- He calls Peter to love as he has been loved.
- He calls Peter to lead by serving.
- He gives Peter a new start...with new meaning and new purpose in life.

As Peter follows Jesus...and grows in his love for him...and walks in obedience to him, Jesus shows Peter what he was built for, and Peter

comes to know real life and he lives it abundantly. Second chances are so awesome!

On that first Easter, when the angel said go tell the disciples and Peter...it's tantamount to saying go tell his disciples and Peter....and "you"...and "me." Go tell his disciples and especially the "one who doesn't live like my disciple...the one who up till now has rejected me...the one who lets me down...the one who isn't faithful.

Go tell them...He is not here! He has risen! And it's time for a new beginning!

Is it time for a new beginning for you this Easter? Like Peter, Maybe you are beginning again with Jesus. Or maybe you are beginning for the very first time with him. I invite you to: **Own your past...affirm your love for Jesus...and agree to follow him.** And make this Easter the time for your new beginning!