

EASTER 2017
The Gamble
1 Corinthians 15:1-23

So, how would YOU respond if that happened to you? That is a tough story to hear! Buddy and Jeanna are very good friends of mine, and this is a very difficult thing for them (and us!) to walk through these days. We are praying for God to HEAL Buddy completely of cancer. And we believe God can do that! **But even if he does heal Buddy, there is a heavy reality that we have to ACCEPT: Buddy will STILL have to die . . . ONE DAY.** We don't know that day, and we don't want it to be anytime soon. But it WILL come. BAD NEWS: Death is a fact that YOU will also face ONE DAY. That is a SURE BET.

Now, aren't you glad you came to church today? What a welcome! "HI, my name is Rick Sayger and I am the Sr. Pastor at CHC. Today I want to tell you that you are ALL GOING TO DIE!" Happy Easter, everyone!

Thankfully, I am not here just to tell you BAD NEWS. In fact, I have some GOOD NEWS for you today. There is ONE MAN in all of history who actually BEAT THE ODDS and conquered death. He was horribly beaten, nailed to a cross, died, and was then put in a borrowed grave. But he ROSE AGAIN! His story is why we can freely talk about death and eternity without fear. His story is a story of LIFE! Jesus not only cleared a path through death so that we can live for an eternity beyond the grave, he also paved the way for us to live a life of abundance here on earth! His story is an incredible, death-defying, life-changing, almost unbelievable story! **Some of you here today really believe this; others, not so much!**

So today, for the first time in CHC history, I am preaching from a POKER TABLE! Because really - if you think about it - ALL OF LIFE is a big BET! I mean, you gambled when you DROVE here today (especially considering the way SOME people drive!) You gambled when you chose your career. Remember, some people chose to be in construction in 2008! You certainly made a big bet when you got MARRIED! You waited on the BEST HAND you thought you could find, and then you laid down your cards and took the plunge! **Certainly, the biggest bet of all is over what you choose to believe about the MYSTERY of ETERNITY, and YOUR LIFE, your SOUL, and your POSSESSIONS are the CHIPS. You see, the truth is, every one of us is BETTING in some way on what will (Or won't!) happen to us after we die. It's ALL a matter of FAITH.** Some of you are betting on the belief that NOTHING happens after you die. It's just over. So, you are putting all of your money on making life as good as possible on THIS SIDE of the grave. Others of you think that there MIGHT be something to the idea of life beyond the grave. So, you are putting SOME of your CHIPS on RELIGION as some kind of INSURANCE POLICY for eternity. The truth is, some of you who attend church here at CHC may come here as a matter of TRADITION. You may just have a CULTURAL religion that only PARTIALLY BETS on the FACTS about Jesus. You only PUT A FEW LIFE CHIPS [a little time, a little money, a few prayers, etc.] on Jesus, while also still choosing to

live like there is NO TOMORROW when not in church! **That is called HEDGING YOUR BETS, and it means that you have NOT REALLY put your faith completely on Jesus!** On the other hand, some here today are a part of that group of strange, wonderful people who actually DO BELIEVE this story, and they have BET EVERYTHING in their life on Jesus and his resurrection. **They are ALL IN. So, are YOU betting that there is no such thing as eternal life? Or, are you BETTING EVERYTHING in your life on Jesus Christ? I mean: Are you REALLY "ALL IN?" Luke 9:23 NLT**

If any man desires to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Jesus said that you have to forsake every other source and PUT ALL YOUR CHIPS ON HIM if you want to spend eternity in heaven with God. In other words, are you willing to put aside, or DIE TO, your self-centered, self righteous, personal will and simply FOLLOW Jesus? That's a HUGE BET. If you are going to choose to bet your life this way, then I know that you will want to know that it is a SOLID BET! SO, WHY WOULD I TELL YOU THAT CHRIST IS A GREAT BET? **Let's look at the cards that Christians hold in their hands.**

*First, please understand that Christians are under NO ILLUSIONS about the Gospel. If it is NOT true, then we know that we are the biggest FOOLS on the planet! It is a clear FAITH RISK! **1 Corinthians 15:14-19 NLT**

14 And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. 15 And we apostles would all be lying about God--for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. 16 And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. 18 In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! 19 And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

*If Christ is not risen, then FAITH is POINTLESS and WORTHLESS. **BAD BET!**

*If Christ is not risen, then all PREACHING is an EMPTY LIE.

*If Christ is not risen, then all of us are still GUILTY and LOST in our SINS.

*If Christ is not risen, then Christians are more to be PITIED than all other people.

-We are just deluded fools who are pacified by placebos.

*Heaven is just a nice idea that helps us face grief better. It's not REAL!

-We would be better off to just PARTY till we drop because tomorrow we die!

BUT . . . Paul puts the RESURRECTION of Christ in the category of historical facts that CAN be KNOWN! He is CERTAIN of it. He has NO DOUBT. **1 Corinthians 15:20**

20 But in fact, Christ HAS been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

Paul has GOOD REASONS for his confidence in the resurrection. He wrote a letter in the first century (just a few years after Jesus died and was raised) to a mixed group of people, some of whom believed in the resurrection, while others doubted it. Here is what he wrote to them: **1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NLT**

3 I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, **just as the Scriptures said**. **4** He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, **just as the Scriptures said**. **5** He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. **6** After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. **7** Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. **8** Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.

*The SCRIPTURES MAPPED OUT the details of what Christ would do in ADVANCE!

*Jesus appeared to PETER: The one that DENIED him at his trial and deserted him at his crucifixion. Peter became a CHAMPION of the faith and ultimately DIED for Jesus by hanging UPSIDE DOWN on a cross! [His transformation came only because of the FACT that Peter was CONVINCED that Jesus had risen!]

*Jesus appeared to OVER 500 FOLLOWERS at one time!

- They were the CORE GROUP of witnesses who all testified to this fact!
- These followers were STILL ALIVE when Paul wrote this letter!
- They were free to CHECK PAUL'S FACTS with eyewitnesses. **[Josh McDowell]**

*Jesus appeared to JAMES.

- James was one of Jesus's half-brothers. **[James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas]**
- James DID NOT BELIEVE that Jesus was the Messiah during his life/ministry.
- In fact, James said that Jesus (and his momma) was CRAZY! **John 7:5**
- Only AFTER the resurrection does James believe, and he eventually DIED for his FAITH in Christ!

*Last, Jesus appeared to PAUL. (The writer of this letter)

- Paul was a HATER of those who followed Christ.
- He was a RELIGIOUS LEADER who had every reason to stay in his ELITE crowd.
- Paul saw himself as the LOWEST of the followers of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10a NLT

9 For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church. **10** But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me.

Maybe YOU feel like a failure who could never be accepted by God. Maybe you are so ashamed of your past that you don't think that God would ever WANT you. You are WRONG! Jesus died just FOR you, so that you would not have to stay STUCK in

your SINS. You don't have to fear death, and you can actually begin to really live a God-honoring, joyful life!

IN FACT, one of the great truths about betting on Christ is that he makes all other bets better. He improves your chips as he asks you to bet them on him!

Many years ago, Buddy and Jeanna Murdock bet their lives on Jesus and entered into a living relationship with the Living God.

Now, because of Jesus, they have a sense of undiminished purpose in serving him in every aspect of life.

Their marriage has held together and they have encouraged many other couples to stay intimate with God and with one another.

Because of Jesus, they have maintained a JOY in life that is infectious and a genuine transparency that is disarming and instructive. They have REAL FAITH.

In the midst of this great storm that they are currently enduring, they not only have a constant sense of HOPE, they have helped others to find hope as well. And with their eyes wide open to the reality that they are facing, they have a PEACE that passes understanding . . . all because of Jesus. He makes life better, and turns death into a temporary nap. They have made a GOOD BET, and they CANNOT LOSE!

What about YOU? Like it or not, your TIME is running out. You have the option today of putting ALL YOUR CHIPS on Jesus by CHOOSING HIM before your days come to an end. **But once your time is up, no more bets can be made. You will simply have to SHOW the HAND that you are HOLDING!**

I hope and pray that you will go ALL IN, and that the HAND that you will be holding is HIS! That's the only sure bet!

Let's pray.